2

Form and Formlessness

The notions of 'form' and 'formlessness' provide two opening metaphors for this chapter, where we dialogue between us, and with influential thinkers, about living, learning, education, formation and transformation in late, post- or liquid modernity. We think about how the latter perspective was framed to capture important and disturbing aspects of the times in which we live. We consider how a metaphor like this plays out in our own lives and those of others. Liquid modernity is the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) leitmotif for our present times and we wonder about its implications for the formation of cohesive selves and understandings of trans-formation. Formation has of course been considered a fundamental aim of education, over millennia. From Plato's *paideia* and other philosophical schools in Ancient Greece; to the German concept of *Bildung,* in the eighteenth century, and the French/Italian *formation/formazione*. Here, the making of citizens entails building self-knowledge, as well as the cultivation of the arts, humanities and sciences as the means to enlightenment and civilisation. *Bildung* focused on the life enhancing qualities of interpretation, understanding and gaining knowledge; a kind of edification of the self by the self

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(Fuhr et al. 2017). For Bauman, however, liquid modernity means that individuals face acute uncertainty and even under-determination. Teaching and learning as well as education become short-term, instrumentalised and superficial, focused on precarious jobs and transient labour markets.

One core argument is that formation, or the capacity for self-edification, require sufficient degrees of stability and certainly—in relationships, families, education, work and wider social interaction. Plus forms of education that take time to mature and draw on inherited and worthwhile knowledge tested in experiential fire. Today, the consensus as to what is worthwhile or valuable has unravelled and we are asked to choose from a bewildering cafe menu of predominantly junk food. Can we learn a humanity in such conditions? (Bauman 2005b). If stability is constitutive of human life and education, we might be in trouble. Both knowledge and the self are contested, in a shifting terrain. The hard-fought struggle for edification has become sacrificed on the altar of immediacy, relevance, material consumption and even questioning as to whether the self exists at all.

For sociologists like Bauman, profound economic, social and cultural change has undermined overly linear, ordered, rational expectations about education and self-formation. The exponential growth of knowledge, for instance, transcends the individual's capacity to assimilate it. (We could of course argue that this was always true, for the majority, who were denied access to higher learning.) Nowadays the divide between a minority with relatively good access to knowledge, of a substantial and imaginative kind, and those instructed in the skills of flexibility and adaptation to the market place, is widening. Many people enter 'a landscape of ignorance, where it is easy to feel lost' (Bauman 2005, p. 25).

This is a world, too, where historic determinants of class or cultural identity have loosened alongside the weakening of the solidarities that made meaningful change, or self-formation, possible. The workers' education movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provide a good example (see Chapter 8). Undoubtedly, more people now have access to information, travel, languages, courses, and digital technology (Nicolaides and Marsick 2016). But, paradoxically, this might increase

disorientation and uncertainty, and compel us to make increasingly unconfident choices. And if there are many more opportunities for marginalised groups, they can seem fragile, even for university graduates. Jobs are precarious, labour is casualised, while the power and wealth of the few increases. The traditional frameworks of adult education for citizenship and collective self-improvement have weakened as the power of organised labour has fractured. Competitive and individualistic survival is the new mantra. We are all hunters now.

Bauman, in these terms, offers a deeply pessimistic reading of the present, in which contingency combines with growing inequality to narrow meaningful educational, occupational and even relational opportunities for the majority. Notions of transformation are also problematised, if formation, in earlier stages of life, is so fragile. We too may conspire in our freneticism, seduced as we may be by an endless quest to change, driven by the fantasy of the new. The constant marketing of 'transformative education' could itself be one example. Institutions proclaim they transform lives, but the reality might be disillusionment and frustration.

Troubling Liquidity: An Outsider's Perspective

Such a perspective on liquid modernity is troubling—the idea that social forms and human relationships melt away faster than new ones are forged, while the seductions and manipulations of consumerism have strengthened, disturbs. Becoming a self is problematic because some stability in our relationships with actual people and in the symbolic world might be essential to biological and psychological flourishing. Notions of life authorship and meaningful, self-generated transformation risk being cut adrift in a kind of cultural and economic tsunami. Even worse, to repeat, we may be responsible for creating some of the formlessness and drift ourselves: in the restless search for the new, fashionable and stimulating. These words are crafted in Milan, a capital of fashion, where we are completing our text. The cultivation of desire and perpetual discontent appears especially seductive in a fashionable city such as this.

Moreover, we are all vulnerable to the dominance of *homo economicus*: our humanity is reduced to a metaphor of rational, highly individualistic, self-aggrandising calculating machines. Within which lurks the power of the mass persuaders, perpetually enticing us towards the pursuit of targeted lifestyles. What is worse, for academic educators, is that new kinds of 'education' might offer no real 'form' at all, but rather easy, quick solutions to problems themselves lacking shelf life. We can become disillusioned, lost in adaptation, excited but perpetually vulnerable to the forces of globalisation, neo-liberalism, unregulated labour markets and digital manipulation. Policy makers claim the necessity of lifelong learning, but this is short-term and technicist. The doctrines of employee responsibility, flexibility and frequent job changes create the new and numerous precariat. Manualisation, deprofessionalisation and fragile employment can be the lot of those like career guidance or social workers who have invested in higher education (Reid and West 2018).

Bauman places these processes into a wider sociological framing. The present time is characterised less by opportunity, he insists, and more by feelings of uncertainty and the privatization of ambivalence (Bauman 2000; Bauman and Raud 2015). It is a kind of chaotic continuation of modernity, where a person shifts from one social position to another in a fluid manner. Nomadism—read by Bauman with concern—is a general trait of the 'liquid modern' person, as s/he flows through life like a tourist, changing places, jobs, spouses, values and without traditional networks of support and cultural embeddedness. Bauman (2005) goes into considerable detail and examines the implications for 'education' and 'formation'.

First, social structures are not given time to solidify, meaning that the fulfillment of any life project becomes illusory. Work is a prime example in processes of casualisation in parts of the 'developed' world; and mass migration to cities, and fragile, exploitative and even dangerous employment in the 'developing' one. The relationships of solidarity and possibilities for collective action via workers' organisations are weak, in the face of the power of globalized capital.

Second, politics and power have become divorced from each other. 'Power now circulates within the politically uncontrolled global space'

(Bauman 2005, p. 303). Political processes once linked individual and public concerns with engendering collective action and resolution, but these processes have weakened, with politicians appearing like marionettes, dancing to the globalised rhythms of elites and powerful corporations. Political institutions, like the Emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's story, are revealed as naked and false, but only for those with the courage or innocence to name them so. Market forces enter the stage, often in capricious ways, as global capital seeks higher rewards, and lower labour costs, everywhere.

Third, there is a withdrawal of 'communal insurance', as welfare states and social solidarities fracture and risk is privatised. A premium is placed on competitive orientation, degrading collaboration and teamwork in the process.

Fourth, and connectedly, there is a collapse of longer term thinking and planning; and of the social (and educational) structures in which thinking, planning and action can be inscribed. The demise of workers' education in the United Kingdom, and other 'developed' and 'democratic' countries, may be thought of in such terms. Once creating collective resources of hope and spaces for collaboration and democratic learning, workers' education is now largely gone or gravely weakened, like other workers' institutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Goldman 1995, 2013; Holford 2015; West 2016, 2017).

Fifth, the future is deemed out of control in a movement from hope to apprehension. Apprehension and uncertainty bring fear: that our jobs will disappear in the play of the speculator's algorithm, or that our individual educational efforts bring little by way of a secure future. There is only impermanence and the perpetual mantra of lifelong learning as a kind of salvation, uttered with a sort of medieval religious fervour to the diverse members of the new international precariat.

Sixth, the burden for dealing with the flotsam and jetsam of our lives is individualised. We must change ourselves and loyalties as and when necessary, almost regardless of the circumstances or consequence for our lives. The idea of risk and insurance against it being collectivised, through the provision of welfare states, because we all experience times of vulnerability and need, is rendered fragile. The only people to

be rescued seem to be the bankers, where profit is privatised and losses socialised, because banks are deemed too big to fail.

Bauman plays with other metaphors in his interrogation of our 'posture towards the world'—of gamekeepers, gardeners or hunters. These are embodied states, that we can interpret as 'perspectives' (see the next chapter). In the pre-modern period, the gamekeeper operated within a social ethic of things being best when not interfered with, that the world was 'a divine chain of being and has its rightful and useful place' (Bauman 2005, p. 306). The preservation of 'natural' balance was the rule. In the earlier modern period, the metaphor of the gardener applied, where the world must be ordered and controlled by attention, effort and nurture. The gardener 'knows best', in this metaphor. We work out what is best for the plots of our lives, or livelihoods, with solutions lying in our own heads. But we can also perceive this to be hubris and excluding: the gardener defines what are the 'weeds' to be uprooted and destroyed; there is no 'natural' or 'divine' order, human kind brings its own order into the garden. The weeds may be the other, those who do not fit the humanly prescribed order of things.

In liquid modernity, Bauman argues, we are hunters, pursuing short term objectives, in loneliness, while the overall balance of things is ignored. The hunter may be vaguely aware of unsustainability, but that is pushed to a distant future, in the pursuit of immediate gratification. Here is a world of fierce competition; the cultures of the gamekeeper and gardener have been disparaged and deregulated in a war of each against the other. These metaphors are powerful: they fuel our imagination and attract or repel us, evoking our own epistemology, our ongoing 'formation'. They entail different understandings of the place and nature of education. It is why dialogue is important; sharing our metaphors, interrogating them, is a revelation of our deepest values, emotions, ideas and differences. We seek to avoid any reification of liquid modernity, or of perspectives, or of other concepts for that matter: perspectives like Bauman's can enhance dialogue, between us and beyond, rather than provoke warfare.

Progress and knowledge, once pillars of solid modernity, have weakened and even imply danger and potential disaster. What matters is survival and living for the moment rather than a lifetime's improvement:

transformation, of any meaningful kind, dissipates under the gaze of immediate pressures. We can be terrified of exclusion, because of our incapacity to learn quickly and consume essential life-style choices. We risk entering an underclass of losers. This is the territory of dystopia, of the consumer-orientated, cultivation of discontent. Upward mobility has ossified in countries like Britain, the United States and Italy, as the threat of moving downwards increases. Bauman (2005a) himself observes, using findings from the US, that 74% of students attending the most prestigious colleges come from the top-income quarter of society, but only 3% from the bottom. In a growing number of countries, the education system has turned into a mechanism for the reproduction of privilege and deprivation (Bauman 2012). The lot of the losers, the poor and marginalised, might include the occasional riot or rebellion but often degenerates into drug addiction or incarceration.

Moreover, the consumerist fantasy of becoming someone else, has replaced the idea of salvation or redemption. We once accused God when things went wrong (and many still do), but now have only ourselves to blame. We can become what we want to, but then are blamed or blame ourselves for failure. Further, consumerism does not appear to have made 'people' any happier, or better. In fact, narcissism, or self-worship, is a new fragile god because we face an infinity of choices without necessarily trusting any. Changing our image and dress and other wrappings is the 'utopia' of the hunters. The search for new appearance becomes seductive, but there is never an end to the pursuit, only impermanence, fleeting satisfaction, and, perhaps, the occasional bliss of a kill.

Lifelong learning might itself be driven by hunters, in search of a quick fix, a new job, a changed lifestyle or set of relationships. Educators, teachers, coaches, counsellors, like ourselves, are pressured to buy into the new dystopia or 'halbbildung'/half education in Adorno's (1972) terms. This is a state of adaptation, and collusion with, rather than challenge to, the hegemonic discourse. The ancient heteronomy of the Church is replaced by that of the market, with acceptance of the world as a given, where there is no alternative (Gaitanidis 2012). The market has invaded the academy as students demand easily assimilated products, especially when paying high fees for the privilege, even if the

outcome is one of dissatisfaction. Bauman (2005a) reminds us of the importance of time in which to create and experiment, using well-tested recipes, in contrast to fast food and small bites that are quickly digested. We can feel empty, dissatisfied and even poisoned because of agri-industry. Education, in Bauman's view, becomes like fast food.

Bauman's biography provides clues as to what may be an overly negative reading of contemporary experience. He was a Polish Jew, born in Poznan in Western Poland, to a family of limited economic means. He held his father in great esteem as a self-made man, an autodidact, who never went to any schools but learnt several languages and was an avid reader (Bunting 2003). Bauman was attracted to Marxism which he studied in the Polish division of the Red Army, in Soviet Russia, as a teenager. A kind of moral critique and angry compassion fuelled his enthusiasm as a young Communist in the 1940s and 1950s, as Poland was rebuilt out of the devastation of the Second World War (Bunting 2003). But he became disillusioned with Soviet Communism when working as an academic at the University of Warsaw. Bauman has been considered, like Kafka and Freud, to be the outsider who illuminates the ambivalence of modernity, from a marginalised perspective. The conviction of perpetual progress in western societies and of a solid core to modernity was a Pyrrhic victory. Like Kafka and Freud, Bauman identified the ambivalence as well as the uncertain fluidity of later modernity.

Bauman emphases the stressful burdens of responsibility that fluid modernity places on the individual—traditional patterns are replaced by self-chosen ones. Entry into the globalized society is open to anyone with their own stance and ability to fund it, or aspiration to a different life style, like travellers in the old-fashioned caravanserai. The result is a new normative, nomadic mindset which emphasises movement rather than staying-on; everything is always provisional, in lieu of permanent (or 'solid') commitment. People can be led astray, trapped in a prison of perpetual movement, in search of new stimulation. We can all be discontented nomads now.

Bauman seeks to document and interpret the alienation of progress, based on false cumulative instability, and a tendency towards creating unbearable human suffering and injustice. The Holocaust in these

terms was, for him, the nadir of a whole tendency rather than an aberration. Late modernity consists of shape shifting movements of capital and labour; but this began in an apparently solid modernity—and here Bauman's Jewishness could be especially pronounced. Modernity sought to eliminate any element, or indeed weeds, that threatened the manicured garden of progress (Lee 2005). There was the urge in modernity's idea of progress to rationally escape from the messiness of the actual lifeworld, 'creating a new, encompassing order', which included the project we call education. The idea that well-planned education could be a main instrument for the creation of the perfect world became in effect pathological, a kind of splitting off what was other and very dangerous in consequence. Jewish people paid a terrible price, in Bauman's view, for modernity's desire to make things rational, 'tidy' and ordered (Bauman 2000). Jews were the 'weeds' to be eradicated in the well-tended manicured garden of progress.

Bauman Meets Bateson: Is It Still Possible to Learn How to Learn?

As researchers in adult education, we owe much to Bauman's reading of the contemporary human condition. We feel, however, that a critical reading of his work is essential, to include his perspective on education (Best 2017). In fact, his contribution to the theory and practice of education is unclear, since he never explained how educators, themselves part of liquid modernity, might encourage questioning and reflexivity in learners. Resistance is possible, he states, and does not abandon the progressive project. 'Quietism' and failure to speak out is the worst crime, he insists. But how to nurture this in the classroom is a big question. Moreover, we wonder if good enough space has ever been ubiquitous, in which to think, feel and speak out? It is the task of education, or at least those who seek to create transformative experiences, to continue to struggle with how best to create diverse questioning, and challenges to oppression, in relatively open, spontaneous and reflexive ways; even when going against the grain.

Bauman's perspective is also sociological, and he takes a grand view of history. Maybe it is overly determinist. 'External' conditions act on

human agents as objective processes, existing out there, uniform and coherent, which is not the case when we look from a closer auto/biographical and embodied perspective. He imposes a narrative of 'liquefaction', and the metaphors of gamekeeping, gardening and hunting on diverse human actions, complex thoughts and emotions. This, paradoxically carries the risk of reinforcing the idea of a powerless and of people barely able to cope. There is a danger that liquid modernity becomes an impenetrable discourse in its own right, a saturated master story, that blinds us to other possibilities and perspectives.

Bauman does not celebrate either liquid or solid modernity and is deeply critical of both. He speaks of the importance of a kind of interregnum between the two, as we struggle to find our way (Best 2017). What is best, he wonders, the Scylla of social engineering and institutionalized education, or the Charybdis of privatized and individualized knowing and learning? Interestingly, Bauman (2003) describes his experience, as a student, when presented with opposing and competing theories (as Laura did, in Chapter 1). The feeling remains, both for Bauman and her, of being rooted in similar overly abstract assumptions: a cognitive urge for satisfaction, bringing the promise of meaning and fuller consciousness. Both learned that form—order, explanation, context, meaning—is necessary to interpret the regularities and patterns of reality. In solid modernity, this essential regularity of the world was not challenged, nor was the possibility of finding solid epistemological ground. Education was considered a product, largely, of (already existing) knowledge, to be delivered to learners, rather than any process of collaborative knowledge making. The transition to liquid modernity and certain features of contemporary epistemology, are in fact redolent with possibility, rather than a source of inevitable doom.

Bauman (2003) reveals his discomfort at how psychologists used animal behaviour to explain human action. Like the experimental rat, students had to learn their position in the world and what was expected of them; they were then rewarded for following predicted paths. Bauman is a man of solid modernity who seeks to understand changing cultures yet cannot escape his own perspectival frame. None of us can. If the gift to humanity we call 'memory', or tradition, is now problematised, could other human capabilities—choice, reflexivity, self-positioning and

the capacity for dialogue—come to the fore. Maybe these are gifts that deserve greater praise and cultivation. This could be a prime focus for contemporary education.

Bauman (2012) himself stresses the imperative of active citizenship and dialogue, to enhance the possibility of reciprocal understanding, co-existence and collaboration with the other. But if we are faced with an 'unending succession of new beginnings, moved more by a swift forgetting of the previously acquired knowledge than by an acquisition of new knowledge' (Bauman 2005b, p. 313), this challenges those of us educated in a relatively solid modernity, to exercise our imaginations and creativity, and to challenge and change our own habits, as well as reframe education's purpose, including the 'ability to disassemble and rearrange' (Bauman 2012, p. 13). More attention might have to be given to emotions, to the unconscious and otherness within, and to cultivation and preservation of wilderness as a place of experimental abundance in which diverse 'weeds' can also thrive.

Bauman refers to Gregory Bateson's work (Bauman 2005a, pp. 312–313). Bateson was a British anthropologist and communicator who developed a theory of learning, some 30 years before Bauman (see Bateson 1942, 1964, 1970). He interrogated the epistemological issues of 'form, substance, and difference' (1970), entailed by biological evolution, as well as through our contact with other cultures, in fulsome communication or pathology. Bateson's ideas inspired Laura's work, and various themes in our book; the meeting of these two men's perspectives can help us develop deeper insight into form, formlessness and transformation. Bauman's interpretation of Bateson is partial: there are insights alongside misunderstanding, due to different epistemologies and backgrounds. Bateson was trained as a natural scientist and driven by curiosity and concern for the delicate equilibrium between biological and cultural evolution (Bateson 1972, 1979). Illuminating the 'pattern which connects' was the main object of his research (Formenti 2018). He was worried about the anti-ecological effects of disorganisation and disconnection, and concerned, like Bauman, at a drift into fragmentation and violence, in societies facing disruptive challenges.

Bauman in fact misinterpreted Bateson's theory of learning, when arguing that the dismantling of previously learned cognitive frames

makes learners weaker, like plankton, tossed hither and thither on random waves. Bateson was more curious and matter-of-fact, than judgmental, when he stressed (1942) that proto-learning (later called by him Learning I) is always accompanied by deutero-learning (or learning to learn, or Learning II): we do not only learn about contents and objects (as in theories learned at university), but we learn—often implicitly—about context, and the meanings of our relationships to objects and knowledge; how in other words we form mental habits, identities, epistemologies, and the meaning of knowing in our lives.

We develop these ideas extensively in Chapter 7; it is sufficient for now to state that first-degree learning is a basic capacity within any organism to adapt to incoming information (it requires an even more fundamental capacity to respond to incoming information, at level 0). Such capacity is necessary for life. Second-degree learning is necessary too—important for our complex nervous system. It has a kind of existential rationale: Deutero-learning gives *form* to the world and ourselves, creating meaning and highlighting assumptions that can then be taken for granted (at least, until new ones impose themselves). Moreover, to learn at this more abstract level, we are not obliged to begin again, by trial and error, from zero, in the face of new experience. Memory *is*, after all, a basis for learning and survival; and homo sapiens, unlike other animals, have the capacity to frame our knowledge, and ways of knowing, and to share it with others as well as augment it technologically. In Bateson's view, deutero-learning is useful as well as binding. It brings order out of potential chaos.

But how then can we change habits of mind when they reveal themselves to be redundant? In fact, if they become too fixed, creativity is blocked, new problems cannot be tackled, and culture dies. So, all cultures and individuals have the capacity to change their assumptions, substituting them with new ones, as and when needed. It is a basic feature of human life. We can learn how to do this, and change, including, in rare cases, the manner, rhythm, and intensity of deutero-learning. We can learn how to change our habits, our subjectivity, our worldview, as well as our relationship to knowing, or epistemology. This is Bateson's Learning III (1964), or what Bauman calls 'tertiary learning'.

Yet, Bauman's warning is real: in a world where we are constantly asked to learn 'how to break the regularity, how to get free from habits […] to rearrange fragmentary experiences into heretofore unfamiliar patterns' (Bauman 2001, p. 125), tertiary learning becomes the rule and can even be 'a pathological growth or a portent of advancing schizophrenia' (2001, p. 127). If it prevails over deutero-learning, our capacity to grasp context and meaning is threatened. So, it is a matter of establishing some re-equilibrium in our lives.

Bateson died in 1980 and his theory was developed in a world where the volatile and brief life of an individual was inscribed in a relatively stable and long-lasting society. The trouble, Bauman insists, is that nowadays such a world has disappeared, and the relationship is reversed. There is the longish life dedicated to survival in frail and volatile settings, through an endless series of new beginnings. Maybe this marks the end of education as we have tended to perceive it, aimed at equipping participants for an unchanging world. Education becomes instead a series of projects, shaped by local situations, needing constant and costly monitoring, in which we endlessly struggle to find completeness or cohesion. Or there can be a different story, another perspective, in which complexity, inside and out there, is managed in new ways; giving it more provisional forms and accepting we do not control anything.

Bateson's theory of learning is not, Laura insists, about people finding secure foundations from which to learn how to learn. It is about learning that there is no 'definitive foundation', or fixed form, not even in ourselves, because we are living organisms, co-evolving with our environments. Such perspectives, building on Bateson, were developed further by second order cybernetics and self-organisation theories (see Chapter 7). His theory entails instability and oscillation, as parts of the processes of formation, which could partly explain why his ideas were not well received in the modernist mainstream. Maybe he was also struggling with the rhythms of life and knowledge creation. He wrote a letter to his daughter Mary Catherine (1977) in which he questioned the possibility of knowing the complexity of ourselves within larger systems, and even of learning to learn; but his answer was not nihilism. But there are, he insisted, structures of repetition and interdependence, in an ever-changing world. There is co-evolution too, based on

interaction between organisms and their environment. This process can stabilize some forms, for a while, or disrupt them; the living can survive or die. New generations perhaps will internalise a different world-view, where shifting forms are the rule not a disaster, and where ecological sensitivity is enhanced. This requires us to be curious about possibilities as well as discontents.

Challenges for Education: Giddens and Morin

Bateson is suspicious of those social scientists who believe their ideas can and should be used to change human behaviour, or whole societies. On the contrary, for a systemic thinker, the only prescription is a continuing curiosity. If a certain idea is anti-ecological, why is it still used and not abandoned? If consumerism is killing our environment, hence ourselves, why do we continue to act in such ways? What is driving our culture to death? Bauman however, could be justified in insisting that information and knowing are too widely offered and consumed in small bites, like fast food. Menus are prepared too rapidly and eaten on the spot, rather than meticulously prepared and laboriously cooked, interspersed with times of rest and savour. Good teaching—and the deep, slow, reflexive digestion of experience, and mediated knowledge—is often replaced by teaching to tests or the supplier/consumer metaphor of the educational shopping mall. But this is not inevitable and can be subverted.

How then might educators and learners walk 'in quicksands' (Bauman 2005b), and subvert the zeitgeist? Maybe by taking care, in new forms of agency and subjective reflexivity, as well as through reciprocity and deepening dialogue. Words like these could offer a new lexicon to guide our thinking and action. We should also learn to welcome difference, to remain open and curious in its wake, and seek to build conversations, as well as consider why we can feel threatened. Deutero-learning, or learning to learn, can enter the lexicon, too, with a focus on relationships as well as on content, emotions as well as cognition, the unconscious as well as consciousness, and the importance of wild, untidy space as well as cultivation.

Solid modernity was based on the fear of cultural and perspectival diversity: the 'gardening state' built strong borders and often eradicated weeds. Best (2017) wonders about the hostility towards difference, and questions how and why some plants get defined as strangers or uninvited guests. This is not only social, but epistemological. Difference in the academy can be refused, the mainstream over praised, and alternative perspectives regarded as a threat or competitors. Cultural and epistemological hybridisation can be a source of inspiration, enrichment, creativity, and imaginative movement rather than terror. If we look around us in academia or the wider world, the dominant emotion towards new ideas has often been indifference, and occasional bursts of outrage. But it need not be so.

There can be new forms of imaginative togetherness—a cultural, academic and psychological 'we' that contains rather than expels otherness; and enhances our ability to engage with each other, including the 'weeds' within ourselves. Such a 'we', both inside and outside ourselves, would probably require new qualities of hybrid space, to sustain the capacity to think beyond existing cultural and psychological frames, and to cross boundaries; of knowledge, language and belief, rigid categories of male and female, hetero or homosexual, caring and questioning, therapy and knowledge, the material and spiritual. The world need not be as we have been taught, and we can learn in creative, collaborative, border crossing, boundary challenging as well as loving ways, in the company of others.

As academics, we struggle to achieve some of the above: we internalise antagonistic, dis-connecting either or polemic; we divide ourselves into sociologists or psychologists, psychoanalysts or systemic thinkers. How can we trust someone who is different, whose knowledge and ideas might challenge our perspective, and the way we hold ourselves and the world together? Dialogue may be desirable but often fails. It seems to require individual and collective understanding of the defences ranged against it. Another difficulty might be cultural disillusionment. Psychoanalysis transformed the world into a text that needed to be interpreted, and it challenged any prohibition to asking questions at all (Lee 2005). Our lot maybe is to feel perpetually disillusioned in the absence of certainty. To create dialogue requires hope, while curiosity

might different to some forms of questioning. It could depend on the nature of the spirit underling the question.

Anthony Giddens (1991, 1999), also a sociologist, offers an optimistic perspective. There is lifelong and lifewide educational possibility in the fracture of the old, as inherited family templates weaken. It demands and encourages reflexive awareness, and the engagement of everyone, in a sort of perpetual life politics. Even those opting out or feeling rejected in the wastelands of neo-liberalism, must decide what to do or think, when there is no confident reference to the past. (Of course, people can sink into depression, the defensiveness of racism or the emojis of Facebook and Twitter.) But there are opportunities for marginalised groups to imagine themselves in new ways. Giddens accepts some of Bauman's characterisations of profound changes in cultural and social life, including heightened superficiality, consumerism, and so on. But the important contrast, for Giddens, is between pre-modern (traditional) culture and modern (post-traditional) culture. Giddens points to the importance of what he calls the democracy of the emotions in cultivating positive change, deeper forms of reflexivity and agency, in diverse 'therapeutic' and educational spaces (Giddens 1999). We, as he has begun to do, will plot more of these spaces and consider how the spirit of equality, fraternity, reciprocity, respectfulness and dialogue are best cultivated.

The French sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin (1999), an advocate of complexity, thinks the Twentieth Century brought the gift of uncertainty to humanity, alongside freedom and choice, which creates new tasks for education. In the West, some of us, at least, are relatively free from older normative pressures of religion, ideology, paternalism, colonialism, and the pervasive structuring forces of class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. We have become nomads in our movement across cultures, sub-cultures and ways of seeing. As academics, nomadism can be liberating and a source of creativity; for others, it is more often a nightmare, like for many African migrants in the city of Milan. Nomadism, of any meaningful kind, is frequently the property of elites, flitting from place to place, and hiding themselves in secure compounds (such as academic conferences); citizens of the world, or nowhere. For the grand majority, the prospect can seem a cruel

delusion. But space can be created for nomadic imaginations in everyday social, political and educational life, as we will chronicle. It includes the capacity to imagine ourselves in the shoes of the other. We chronicle some of this optimism, alongside the pessimism, in succeeding chapters.

Ways Forward

Stephen Frosh (1991), like Giddens, offers hope beyond the pessimistic quagmire. He writes that the construction of a personal, agentic, learning self is an immense act of courage, no less—rather than a given—in the chaotic debris of modern experience. Its realisation requires good enough relational space to weave together, creatively, what is worthwhile from the flotsam and jetsam of contemporary existence. Self-formation, in these terms, like education, may have lost some of its confident moorings, but we can still become authors of our lives, to greater or lesser extents. Liquid modernity is not as monolithic as Bauman suggests. If we are cut adrift, stereotyped and unable to influence large scale political or corporate agendas, there remain spaces in which to make a life on more of our own terms. There are many young people as well as adults, in diverse ecological and social movements, seizing and creating spaces to do precisely this.

Reviewing Bauman's work, Scott McLemee (2012) suggests that things of permanence—friendships, relationships, good literature and aspects of the humanities—can remain of abiding value. Research on the micro and meso-level reveals strong, as well as weak, bonds. Laura has observed, in studying the family, that a longing for safe havens, an encompassing, caring network of relationships is stronger than ever, and people continue to struggle towards this rather than giving up (Formenti 2011b). Linden's research illuminates how non-traditional learners in universities, from the margins of society, find resources of hope in ideas, literature, people and relationships that enable them to exploit some of the possibilities of the liquid world, in courageous ways (West 1996; Finnegan et al. 2014).

So, the composition or formation of selves, in relationship and hybridity, might be one royal road to transformation and a fundamental

challenge to the times in which we live. A challenge too for any lifelong learning worthy of the name; and the means to an end for a reinvigorated, reimagined adult and university education. Survival is constantly threatened by startling forces with the power to turn everything upside down or drown us in an economic and cultural tsunami. But we can learn, with others, to survive the monstrous aggressions of the world, and to take care of ourselves and our planet's fragilities. Especially when we recognise, perhaps, that many of the 'aggressions' and some of the care-less-ness is of our own making. This is the territory of lifelong, lifewide, and profounder forms of learning, which psychoanalysis takes as a prime object of interest, including how and why we defend against it.