4

Critical Perspectives on Transformation

We are left, in the last chapter, with a dilemma: a disorientation, perhaps, on our pilgrimage: around Bateson's deutero-learning and the extent to which, according to Bauman, this fails to provide sufficiently secure anchorage for managing liquid modernity. Zygmunt Bauman portrays a world in which we struggle for a robust subjectivity, in good enough relationships. How much then might Jack Mezirow's ideas on criticality (Mezirow 2000) or those of the Frankfurt School of critical sociology, provide essential resources to face, manage and even transform our condition within a liquid modern landscape? We explore perspectives within 'critical theory' that could illuminate transformations of self and struggles for wider social change. We then move to the recursive idea of criticising 'criticality' itself, since it may have its own blind spots. If criticality is vital to challenging diverse oppressions, and in the practice of education, it may be insufficient for profounder forms of learning. We introduce the idea of self/other recognition in the work of critical theorist Axel Honneth, as one potential solution. But also psychoanalysis, as a prelude to the next chapter, with its insights into the difficulties of thinking. Key critical theorists draw in fact on psychoanalysis in developing and nuancing their perspectives.

L. Formenti and L. West, *Transforming Perspectives in Lifelong Learning and Adult Education*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96388-4_4

There is an established relationship, in the literature, between perspective transformation and critical thinking: it is axiomatic for educated, sceptical Western citizens, including academics, to be critical of notions of truth, reality, and consciousness. Higher education is not simply a temple to intellectuality—pushing us towards clarifying basic assumptions—but also is suspicious of anything common sensical, naïve or beyond definition. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud were the 'masters of suspicion' (Ricoeur 1970), the 'grand destroyers' of certainties. They taught, in different ways, that the 'real intellectual' should distrust consciousness and the simple appearance of things. We return to Plato's myth of the cave, to Descartes, and the dream of Enlightenment. But also to the idea that consciousness—the 'cogito'—and rationality, are the grounds in which we must anchor our struggles for meaning and agentic selves. So, we are educated into truth seeking while challenging truth claims. Our energies are directed towards constant hermeneutic effort, entailing deep analysis of texts, expressions, and phenomena of all kinds. But we wonder where all the effort takes us in terms of human flourishing. Therefore, we interrogate the roots, lights and shadows of critical thinking: its blessings, conceits and shortcomings when thinking about lifelong learning and adult education.

Jack Mezirow distinguishes between a 'subjective reframing'—as in psychotherapy, so he maintains—which commonly involves 'an intensive and difficult emotional struggle as old perspectives become challenged and transformed', and what he calls a 'mindful transformative learning experience' (Mezirow 2000, p. 23). Here the learner makes an informed and reflective decision on an 'infinitely wider range of concepts' and their cognitive, affective and conative dimensions. Psychotherapy involves, as he sees it, a relatively narrower focus on interpersonal relationships in contrast to adult education. The latter addresses 'something bigger', such as cultural orientations in institutions, customs, occupations, and ideologies, and changes in frames of reference in relation to these (Mezirow 2000, p. 24). The distinction troubles us, especially Linden, when we examine transformation through an auto/biographical lens. We use a case study from Linden's auto/biographical narrative research into the experiences of non-traditional learners in universities (Finnegan et al. 2014), to explore how one

person, an asylum seeker, finds his way towards some kind of educational and personal transformation. Criticality has a place, but alongside profoundly relational and loving processes.

Psychoanalysing Critical Theory?

Theodore Adorno, the critical theorist, referred to a 'pre-intellectual' dimension of our humanity, which shapes what and how we think and attempt to philosophise the world (Honneth 2009, p. 81). We can try to make the world rational but there is a problem with the hegemony of reason and rationality in struggles to transform. We may labour, for instance, under the mantle of a deeply entrenched defensiveness, driven by largely unconscious anxiety. We can assume that we fully know the object of our gaze, and desire, and, in effect, don a kind of omniscience. But this may be an illusion and a defence against intellectual and critical inadequacies (Bainbridge and West 2012). Many in the Frankfurt School were confident in their predictions that the proletarian revolution was an inevitable outcome of historical materialism. But critical theory fell short in its predictive power, leading Adorno to argue that we must interrogate the pre-intellectual roots of omniscient fantasy: including the idea that history can be fully known and its processes reduced to predictive theory. Critical theory, in short, required psychoanalysing.

It is worth repeating that people in the academy can be resistant to engaging with the messy world of subjectivity, an aspect of the Enlightenment inheritance. The point of science is to marginalise our inner worlds, even transcend them, via the power of reason and the rigour of the empirical method. Among critical academics and educators of a more sociological bent there can be suspicion towards psychologising experience at all while emphasis is given to cultural and social analysis in challenging oppression (Bainbridge and West 2012; West 1996). Linden, however, insists that psychoanalysis, broadly defined, can be integrated with critical theory, bringing the promise of more nuanced understanding of struggles to transform, grounded in life stories with all their psychic, interpersonal as well as cultural fragments. Laura was once suspicious of psychoanalysis, as a 'talking cure', too concerned to

generate interpretation flying over the heads of 'unknowing' patients. Here again, disembodied theory may inhibit feeling, thinking, and questioning; an omnipotent, hegemonic rational conceit. This is where perception and feelings could rescue us from an excess of criticality. Critical theory, in recent iterations, takes the original wholeness of our humanity seriously and suggests that part of its work must encompass the intimate and interpersonal. To realise, in effect, that we are rooted in rupture from the womb, and from significant (m)others: and dependent absolutely on the other for survival. This can freeze our efforts to engage with the world, for fear of abandonment. Any project of reflexivity or challenge to oppression might be profoundly emotional, embodied and relational in such terms.

We are of course asking how much critical processes are simply cognitive acts? And might common understandings of 'criticality' marginalise emotions, perceptions, the body, psyche, the feminine, the indigenous, and even the magical? Do not trust what you feel, what you see, what your body tells you, what your ancestors taught: criticality may claim to transcend all this. Silence those other voices and feelings, if you seek a critical appraisal of truth, and to achieve the transformation it brings. We are educated, as academics, to distrust other identities and potential ways of seeing.

Many authors, such as Habermas, Mezirow, Cixous, Britzman, Spielrein, Sayers, Luxembourg, Chodorow, Angela Davis, Honneth, Freud, Foucault, Adorno, Bourdieu, Marcuse, Benjamin or bell hooks have made a powerful critical impact on education and social research. They ask us to go beyond givens, or established perspectives, transcending the taken for granted, the self-evident, the apparently transparent quality of life to consider what may be culturally prescribed structures of feeling, and ways of relating and seeing. The prescriptions and inhibition may penetrate to our core and frustrate our humanity. In this kind of view, powerful discourses become internalised; discourse, or forms of language and ways of seeing, are riddled with implicit, often uninterrogated assumptions which shape, even determine, who we are and imagine we might become. Discourses can be impregnated with the assumptions and oppressions of race, class, gender or sexuality, for instance; ones firmly keeping people like us in our place. These

structuring processes, including language, matter in what we can define, for now, at least, to be the critical business of transformation.

Critical theory offers ways to 'think outside the box', and to illuminate and challenge some fundamental constraints to our human potential; constraints acting on and in us, as well as constituting our lifeworld. Ironically, however, the twentieth century casts its dark shadow over our stubborn, enduring resistance to, even terror of, liberation, regardless of changes in the social order. And our enduring capacity for violence despite 'reason'; the history of socialist thought, for instance, has never fully resolved the degeneration of noble ideals—*egalité, liberté et fraternité*—into *The Terror*, and barbaric annihilation of anything that might be other or too close for comfort in the perpetual narcissism of small difference. There may be limits to critical thinking in accounting for barbarity and the degenerations and fractures of progressive movements. We might, in effect, require ways of seeing and being that can heal an excess of criticality, as well as ironically to make it possible. The capacity of the human mind to slice reality into pieces, and to proclaim the truth and nothing but the truth, must be counter-balanced by aesthetic, embodied, psychotherapeutic and spiritual sensibility.

The Frankfurt School

It would be useful to summarise the key ideas of specific thinkers in the Frankfurt School tradition, such as Theodor Adorno. He raised questions about the power of critical thinking to provide a stable base from which to interpret the world (Honneth 2009). Much of this work has to do with how people uncritically internalise ideologies inimical to their own and wider human flourishing. The point of critique is to enable people to become aware of how, for instance, capitalism shapes belief systems and assumptions—what we can call our ideology—then serving to bolster and rationalise economic and political power and inequalities. Ideology lives in us, even when it may work against us. 'Without this element of ideology critique, the process of clarifying and questioning assumptions is reflective but not necessarily critical' (Brookfield 2000,

p. 129). There is a crucial distinction between mere reflection, and the possibility of questioning ours and others' assumptions at more fundamental or ideological levels. However, we argue later in the book, that ideological critique is one important but insufficient path to transformative experience.

Theodor Adorno (Honneth 2013) raised many questions about how we come to know and cultivate the capacity to transform our lives. He asked if there are limitations to reason when seeking to understand and illuminate the prerequisites of human flourishing? What forms does transformation encompass, and what tools are required in projects to change society for the better? The project of critical theory was itself grounded in a critique of capitalism, which included how it contained the seeds of its own destruction. The transformed and transforming consciousness of the proletariat would rend the whole system, and ideological rationale, asunder. History moved in a progressive if often painful direction.

However, Adorno and, later, Axel Honneth, was troubled by the interpretive failure of 'left-Hegelianism'. Adorno, as mentioned, turned to psychoanalysis to understand why people might act against their best interests, as well as why they could resist new ways of knowing. Moreover, he questioned the idea of transcendental knowledge deriving from abstraction alone. To understand the object we scrutinise—self, the other or capitalism—we rely on bringing some higher degree of responsiveness to that object, and to cultivate a sense of differentiation as well as precision. In what he called 'negative dialectics', he became concerned about the deficiencies that could characterise detached conceptual understanding. He challenges the sovereignty of the subject in the process. S/he must become aware of itself as something mediated, constituted, at least in part, in language: subjectivity is always, as mentioned, rooted in the 'pre-intellectual'.

Bringing together Nietzsche and Freud, we can illuminate the presence of a pre-rational layer of feelings, fears, desire and longing; including a primitive longing to know absolutely. The workings of our intellectual achievements dwell in these deeper drives. But as soon as the subject is aware that s/he is in no position to rationally penetrate reality, we can become more open to other ways of knowing. To trust

our own experience as a potential source of transformation, for instance. It becomes important to engage with all the stirrings of the senses, and subjective experience becomes a central medium of knowing (Adorno 2000; Honneth 2009). This, as Honneth maintains, is a truly revolutionary ontological as well as epistemological step for the Frankfurt School project. Cultivating profounder subjective reflexivity—as in psychoanalysis—is essential to build more objective understanding of self and the world, in dialectic relationship.

Troubling Transformative Learning

It is helpful at this point to explain Jack Mezirow's understanding of the role of criticality in transformative learning; and writers like Stephen Brookfield who explicitly relate their perspectives to the critical interrogation of ideologies that imprison us in deeply personal and painful ways. We then use the auto/biographical case study of an asylum seeker to help us to interrogate such views. Jack Mezirow (2000) constantly emphasised the importance of being 'critical', and of critical reflection, in transformative learning. He wrote that 'adult learning emphasises contextual understanding, and *critical* (our emphasis) reflection on assumptions' (Mezirow 2000, p. 3). This properly adult capacity needed to be added to Jerome Bruner's list of 'four modes of making meaning', that is:

> (1) establishing, shaping and maintaining intersubjectivity; (2) relating events, utterances, and behavior to the action taken; (3) construing particulars in a normative context - deals with meaning relative to obligations, standards, conformities, and deviations; (4) making propositions - applying rules of the symbolic, syntactic, and conceptual systems used to achieve decontextualized meanings, including rules of inference and logic and such distinctions as whole-part, object-attribute, and identity-otherness. (Mezirow 2000, p. 4)

Mezirow suggested the list was incomplete and a fifth mode of meaning making needed to be added, about becoming *critically* aware of our tacit

or barely surfaced assumptions. These include what we expect of others, and what others expect of us, and the role of expectations in shaping interpretations. The idea of criticality, as a way to challenge and change our sense of who we are, becomes critical, as it were, to transformation.

Jack Mezirow also describes transformative learning as a theory in progress that must be grounded in dialogue with diverse scholars. It is no finished project. Brookfield (2000) and Brookfield and Holst (2011) argue that Mezirow's work provides a potentially rich hermeneutic for considering the 'transformation in the ways we think, the ways we act towards each other, the ways we organise society and politics, the ways we distribute the resources available to us, and the way we understand the purpose of life' (Brookfield and Holst 2011, p. 33). From the inception of debate on transformative learning, Brookfield (2000) was concerned that the emerging idea of transformative learning risked being evacuated of meaning or becoming overly reified through being detached from the real-life contexts in which transformative processes take place.

Mezirow never intended such detachment, Brookfield observes: development in adulthood is a process of constant meaning making with the potential for people to become subjectively richer and agentic through growing of awareness. But Western, patriarchal, rational thinking is 'double blind' (von Foerster 1973), since it does not grasp that our capacity for seeing is limited. We do not 'see' everything' and are not necessarily aware of this. Neuroscience suggests that consciousness comes after perception or emotion, and that higher cognitive functions follow primitive affective states; even decisions are taken before we can rationalise them (Panksepp and Biven 2012; Hunt 2013). Both the literature of transformative learning, as well as of science, can be psychologically light.

Disorientating dilemmas, then, can be read as unexpected, magical, even amazing moments in life when emotions and rationality are bridged, and we become aware of our stubbornness and myopic predictability. We should remember that the emotions of discontent, embarrassment, loss, sadness, rage, and shame are powerful and ubiquitous, as well as being relational and social. We may look to others, in adult education, for instance, who similarly struggle, and use our social

awareness, feelings and mutual understanding, over time, to integrate new thinking and awareness into a reordered life. This is what Laura terms a *satisfying theory* (of transformative learning), where perceptions, emotions, concepts, values, judgements, and decisions are not separate, but work together, largely unconsciously, to guide us, in the company of others, to create a more integrated understanding of learning. For Brookfield being 'critical' is a 'sacred' idea, rather than something to be thrown about with abandon. It has to do with analysing power and ideology and how these conspire to constrain us (Brookfield 2000, p. 126). And to challenge the big picture of how larger forces, like neo-liberalism, racism or a one-dimensional masculinity may colonise our internal worlds, shaping our intimate reactions. Power, ideology or toxicity serve the interests of others—the corporate world, the advertisers, the money lenders, the hedge fund managers, even religious organisations and certainly racist ones, constraining our humanity. The difficulty is that these forces can then evoke destructive responses. When we 'challenge' an idea too energetically, and use the language of war, we might lack pity and wisdom, and the capacity to appreciate a wider complexity in which we are implicated too. So, a 'sacred' dimension could involve bridging what is out there, supposedly separate, with what lies within.

But it is also helpful to note that the idea of disorientating dilemmas, far from being merely a psychological and individual phenomenon, can be applied to broad economic, social and cultural dynamics, like the 2008 financial crash (Brookfield and Holst 2011); or to the presupposition that capital can be endlessly and ignorantly expanded, without regulation. Dilemmas arrive too in the form of wars, mass migration, or wider political crisis. Our ways of thinking are a 'function' of the way societies work, and the cultures where we live, and, in a circular way, of the ideas we cultivate. Our positioning, in fact, contains and enacts a theory of the world, contributing to making the world as it is, through the relationships that we have.

Brookfield and Holst (2011) use Mezirow to develop a notion that we are products of our 'webs of affiliation', within shared lifeworlds. This notion is neither positive nor negative in itself: we need others, of course, and it is normal that our relationships constrain as well as potentially liberate. Education and learning are a mix of constraints and

possibilities; they shape and may free us, but only partially. The question then is how the dependency of being human creates injustice, subjugation, blindness, and prisons of the heart and mind? Cognition is culturally situated through our positionality, while our habits of mind are structured by class, race, gender, and their intersectionalities, in complex, non-linear ways; by the 'cultural streams' in which we swim, so to speak. These in turn create 'common sense' assumptions. 'It's common sense, isn't it, for people to want to live among their own; too many immigrants cause too much trouble'. But common sense can be shaken by economic and ecological crises, and older systems of thought—individually and collectively—no longer suffice (Brookfield and Holst 2011). Yet we may hang on to these, or prematurely rush to embrace new ones, in ways that indicate the anxieties underlying and inhibiting transformative processes.

We are witnessing many dilemmas around 'common sense', in many of our countries. People can feel wrenched apart by the conflict between welcoming the stranger—rooted in Judaeo-Christian values—and the impetus to build walls, literally and metaphorically, to keep the other out. In Italy, as we work on this chapter, the mayor of a frontier town has invented the 'crime of solidarity': citizens can be prosecuted if they take water or food to migrants, congregating at the border. However, radical shifts are possible when we work among refugees, and listen to their stories; if we understand the interconnectedness between people, regardless of background. The dilemma encompasses warring political and human instincts: a true dilemma, since solutions are not linear or simply rational. Transformations in our thinking and awareness of others can lead us into troubled spaces, to questioning at a collective as well as individual level. It is more common, however, for people to turn the other way, to avoid difficult thoughts and disturbance. Transformation is challenging and troubling work.

Writers like Brookfield bring a much-needed political edge to the debate about transformative learning. Interestingly, Brookfield was criticised by European colleagues for using the word 'critical' without proper reference to the Frankfurt School. We are part of the debate ourselves, as Europeans participating in conferences of the Transformative Learning community in the United States. There is also in Europe

(and elsewhere, in Latin America, for instance) a fear of American colonisation, and an urge to reframe and re-interpret Mezirow's perspectives through a distinctive European lens (Formenti and Dirkx 2014). However, what Brookfield has done (being European himself), through an engagement with critical theory, is to integrate aspects of this European tradition with Mezirow's work, in a way that builds bridges rather than closes down the conversation.

Axel Honneth's theory of recognition (1995, 2007, 2009) is another potential bridge between intersubjective, unconscious as well as social dynamics in the cultivation of critical perspectives. It includes unconscious and deeply embodied processes as well as an imaginative engagement with symbolic objects and significant others (West 2014). Honneth, like Adorno, focuses on what he perceives to be the historical limitations of the Frankfurt School and its predictive failure. He considers new ways to liberate our ideas around the normative basis for building learning communities and social cooperation (Honneth 2009). Mutual processes of recognition and interdisciplinarity are at the core of such bridging work. The following case study from Linden's research helps us to consider the complexity and multiplicity of the struggle for transformation.

Illuminating the 'Critical' in Transformative Learning: Mathew, a Case Study

RANLHE was a European Union financed study of 'non-traditional learners' in 7 European countries (Finnegan et al. 2014; West 2014; see also http://www.ranlhe.dsw.edu.pl). The research teams worked with samples of students and staff in different types of universities (mainly elite, or older, and reform or relatively new institutions) in each country. The term 'non-traditional' was used creatively, critically, developmentally and cautiously (to avoid simplistic labelling), encompassing students from backgrounds normally under-represented in universities. They included students from ethnic minorities, and or working-class backgrounds as well as students who were the first in their family to go

to university; or were disabled or from migrant communities. The study encompassed younger and older learners.

When we (there were two of us in the Canterbury research team) first met Mathew (as we agreed to call him), he told us about being a refugee and now a carer as well as student. He was in his mid-thirties and talked of a very poignant, tragic disorientation resulting from war in Africa and the murder of close relatives: his dilemma was to stay or flee the warzone. He fled, and came to the UK, entered a university, dropped out, and then entered a different institution. He was interviewed four times during three years of a first-degree programme in this second, very multi-cultural London university. We asked questions about what enabled him to keep on keeping on. We wanted to know what was meaningful to him, as the present and past and even the future met in his story telling. This is what auto/biographical narrative research entails (Merrill and West 2009).

He told us some of his life history and the difficulties he experienced as an asylum seeker: an outsider, unrecognised, wrenched from one difficult milieu into a problematic other. He was now living in a materially poor part of London where racism could be rife. He had struggles with academic work, in the elite university, primarily because of limited confidence with English (his fourth language).

So, he dropped out of the elite university, which represented, in Bourdieu's terms, an unfathomable habitus. Sometime later he took an Access to higher education course and made friends with an English couple teaching on the programme in a college of further education. They supported him—at a moment when he risked dropping out once more—because of problems in his asylum status application process. They noticed how he kept missing sessions and asked what was wrong. He found it difficult to say but confided in them. Everything had been made worse by political decisions to force asylum seekers to register at specified centres on a weekly basis, in response to a rising tide of racism in English society (West 2016).

Mathew, like many other students, inhabited a world where boundaries between full and part-time study, work and university, family and student life, were blurred:

> I do work…I used to work for agency but agencies' shifts are not constant, so I joined BUPA (a private health care company) as a healthcare assistant. The rate is £5.90 for an hour… my partner is a nurse works shifts… I would be looking after the kids I have four boys… I've given up sleep lost hours of sleep to attend to the family and then education sometimes. I go to bed by three o'clock I get up by four o'clock five o'clock… I get up… prepare whatever I've got to take into [my] school, eat and shower the boys and leave them to dress by themselves and then go pack their bags/lunch and leave home by 8 o'clock they're supposed to start classes by 8.30 I mean 8.45 I'm supposed to start by 9… I have to drive to drop them to a neighbour who is very close to the school and who can just walk… so it's very much more difficult than people might think.

The two lecturers in the college were highly 'significant others', as Mathew struggled with self-confidence: he forged a close relationship with them, first as a student trying to study using English, and then with his asylum application. The two lecturers mobilised others, including a solicitor, to launch a campaign on Mathew's behalf for citizenship. Five years later, he became a British citizen in a ceremony, and they were there as witnesses. '*They were like good parent figures*', he said, and he felt looked after and understood. He celebrated the ceremony itself, as a moment of transition, a benchmark of achievement and recognition in what could be a fragile world. He worked hard to find supportive others in his new university. Finding a good personal tutor, and other sympathetic staff and students, was central to his progress.

A public healthcare degree appealed because of the shortage of mental health workers in the National Health Service. In a third interview, some 9 months later, he looked back on earlier problems with language and writing:

> It is difficult because when we started in the first year they said to us OK this first year we give you the opportunity and accept your assignment as is… that has been changed because of the stage of second year so you're now needing proof reading and that makes it difficult for people like me considering my background which I'm always constantly worried about how to translate my thoughts my ideas from one language to another,

> from Mende/Kissi/Creole languages, to African English, then to British English is something that makes it difficult for me…

Yet Mathew eventually saw his cultural diversity, and the recognition this brought, as a resource in composing a new identity. He came to recognise the value of his languages, viewing them as opportunities for better understanding of others' worlds:

> Well from my languages from the various languages that I've gone through if you look at health for instance you cannot purely have a disease by itself. In that way you look at the medical models instead of looking at the social… or psychosocial aspect of it for the patient…having got some ideas about the… psychosocial aspect of health, taking it back to my past cultures… without making the connection with the social aspect you cannot treat the patient… so I bring in this system where I realise or begin to understand how I can actually help the sick from different cultures.

He could take more of a critical as well as culturally nuanced stance. In some cultures, he said, mental illness was a spiritual problem, while in others it was transmitted inter-generationally. He was critical of the neglect of the socio-cultural, including poverty, in dominant approaches to health care and medicine. Over time, he became a student advocate and community activist. He served as a representative for overseas students in the university and was a member of important committees. He learned to argue his case with university authorities, finding greater self-respect, self-esteem too, in the process (and in telling stories about it). He critiqued the neglect of minority communities and their experiences of health provision; and the failure to locate health and dis-ease in a wider socio-political context.

Yet, Mathew's is no simple linear tale of transformation. He continued to struggle with written assignments and in both the second and third interviews, the research itself became, for a moment, an explicit counselling space, in which he thought about his options and looked to us for emotional guidance:

> I don't want it to be a sign of weakness if I ask somebody to help me [proof reading my essay], that might make me a weak person… but there are a lot of resources which they call academic skills… I did it once, I've never done it again… but I have to change that because if I want to succeed I have to do that because the system is set up for that.

During the interviews, our dialogue deepened; there were interviews over three years; every interview was transcribed and given back to him, so the conversation and relationships developed over time, including in email discussions. During the penultimate interview he asked what we thought of him and the boundaries between auto/biographical narrative interviewing and educational counselling, past and present, were blurred. His self-confidence was, once again, fragile. My colleague researcher, a woman from a non-European culture, encouraged him to seek more help with his academic writing. He really wanted to know what she thought and began to talk at length. Admitting vulnerability was a dangerous business, he said, for someone like him, and he really valued our meetings. He made a decision to try once more with a difficult assignment.

By the time of the fourth and final interview, he had organised a new pressure group for multi-cultural awareness in health care, building on his insights as a student advocate. Mathew became more of an agent in his life, challenging taken for granted assumptions, and exploiting aspects of his own biography and experience. More of a self, maybe, vulnerable as well as agentic, critical and empathic, playful as well as challenging. We have glimpses of what we can call the dynamics of self/other recognition in transformative learning, building on Honneth's ideas. At a most intimate level, new experiences of self were created in new relationships, when feeling seen and valued, including in the research; at the meso or institutional level, self-respect was forged in real relationships and interactions within the university, that helped him feel part of a community of rights and responsibilities; and at a more macro level, he felt valued as an effective political activist in the university and beyond.

Yet, to repeat, this is no simple, linear transformation. Mathew wrote to us several times afterwards asking for help with assignments

(which we gave). He constantly feared 'failure' in the rituals called academic writing. It remained hard to admit vulnerability and to ask for help. His material illustrates extreme disorientating dilemmas, and of the relationships and context that facilitated transformation. It included insights into finding a critical voice and new ways of seeing in a world of displacement, of a confusing university habitus but one in which some transformation of self was possible.

How Can We Read This Story, Critically?

The RANLHE study played with three different but overlapping 'theoretical sensitising frames' (Finnegan et al. 2014) when working with learner narratives like Mathew's. The frames enabled the research team to gain a subtler, more nuanced view, in their juxtaposition. The concepts were developed by different authors (Bourdieu, Winnicott, Honneth, as well as others) in different disciplinary and or professional contexts: sociology and psychology, research and therapy, education and psychoanalysis. It is in the bridging that the interpretation of Mathew's story comes alive, including using Honneth's theory of self/other recognition (2007, 2009).

Pierre Bourdieu offers a sociological reading of social reproduction when considering learner narratives and why particular students struggle at certain kinds of university (especially older and elite ones). His work includes the concept of habitus, which can be understood as a kind of embodied culture, in which ideas, diverse practices and ways of being are in play (Bourdieu 1992). Such cultures shape how people behave, speak, think and their wider perspectives as well as how they communicate one with another and even deport themselves, as in studies of doctors in a medical training habitus (Sinclair 1997). Bourdieu's notion of disposition complements the idea of habitus and focuses on how people internalise an idea of what is expected of them. They will be more or less confident, depending on for example, their class or ethnic background, with the rituals of communication and language, or with what is required of them in writing, presentations, and assessment; and in a range of professional practice-based settings.

Such expectations and ways of being in the world are often unconsciously internalised, in a previous education or social setting, while the habitus of a bourgeois and white cultural background can be close to the habitus of specific, 'elite' universities. People understand, intuitively, what is expected of them, and of what counts as academic writing or discussion; and of how to engage in the diverse rituals university life involves, including rites of passage or ways of managing anxiety, via drugs, drink and or sex among younger students. Mature working-class students, for instance, can struggle in particular universities, because their social and educational 'capital' feels somewhat removed from what is valued, understood or expressed in the new habitus. They can feel, in effect, in Bourdieu's adaptation of a famous phrase, like 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu 1992).

Chapman Hoult (2012), however, among others, observes that Bourdieu fails sufficiently to engage with how certain students, from a non-traditional habitus and with apparently limited educational and social capital, survive, and prosper and even transform themselves by seeing the world and its assumptions in more critical ways. These are 'les miraculés', as Bourdieu frames it, 'an uncharacteristically metaphysical turn', Chapman Hoult observes, 'for a materialist' like him (Chapman Hoult 2012, p. 9). How these people may prosper, or be transformed, even in a culturally exclusive habitus of an elite institution, is glossed over by Bourdieu. Of course, he was aware of the phenomenon and argued, structurally, that such learners serve to mask systemic inequalities, as institutions proclaim 'look, we are open to all the talents!'. But he fails to engage with subjective experience of objective possibilities (Chapman Hoult 2012) among les miraculés: with those learners who buck the trend and prosper as well as challenge. Their stories can tell us about different strategies to cope, and the losses they entail and, in some cases, profound (if unconscious) suffering. It may be that Bourdieu's view of capital is overly constrained by a deterministic perspective and a neglect of psychological, experiential, or imaginative capital (that can be built through learning). We need finer grained, psychosocial analysis of the forms that transform or inhibit the play of self.

We also used Winnicott (1971) to help us think about potentially transitional and transformative spaces. Winnicott placed the capacity

for play and creativity, for letting go of anxieties, within the context of good enough relationships, and the spaces these offer for self experiment. Writers like Shelly Sclater use Winnicott's concept of transitional space, when thinking of storytelling itself or being at university as a kind of transitional activity, a process of self negotiation, more or less productive of selfhood, depending on the recognition that is received (Sclater 2004).

But it was Honneth that provided core connections in the bridging process. His notion of self/other recognition is fundamental, he states, to human flourishing. The dynamics operate, as suggested, at three interconnected levels. At the most intimate of levels, in relationship, experiences of self can be deepened in new qualities of relationship, when we feel seen, valued and understood, as in an Access to higher education programme. Such relationships touch primitive or early parts of who we are, mirroring processes in earlier life. Love, of a good enough kind, can be seen as foundational; not perfect or suffocating love, but one that celebrates our existence and enables us to enter transitional space in truer and less defended ways and to transcend the anxieties involved.

Honneth takes us to the meso, group and institutional level. Mathew's self-respect was forged in the university, by being accepted in groups and in a community he valued, with rights and responsibilities. Rights to participate as an equal member, to be listened to respectfully. And responsibilities to take care of the group, to give ourselves to it in ways that enhance its functioning. Mathew felt increasingly recognised and valued as an effective advocate and political activist, who made a distinct contribution to the wider university and beyond. This is the territory of self-esteem, forged in relationship. These interrelating levels are about far more than rationality or even ideal speech communities, in Habermas' terms (although this is part of it). They encompass largely unconscious, intersubjective as well as culturally infused processes. We can think of university, and research, as spaces for self-negotiation, where struggles around separation, individuation and transformation take place. Doing auto/biographical research itself can be a rewarding and transforming experience. The stories people tell—including to

researchers—become vehicles for recognition, and for self-renegotiation in a kind of narrative experiment of selfhood, where we are recognised and legitimised in the eyes and responses of significant others. What is then crucial is that these processes of self-recognition—feeling seen, valued and understood—enable us to more fully recognise others, on which social solidarities depend (West 2016). This places responsibility on to researchers: when doing auto/biographical inquiry the potential importance of our relationships to the subjects of our enquiry cannot be avoided, underestimated, or denied. In fact, asking for help, in Mathew's case, is 'evidence' of transformation itself, and an act of communication that demands responsiveness. The auto/biographical researcher is thus implicated in transformative learning (Merrill and West 2009).

When Laura stumbled over the RANLHE project narratives, she realized how much resilience, effort, and false consciousness were needed for her, Laura, to survive in a university habitus. She realised, for the first time, clearly, a feeling of being homeless, having lost the language of family, friends and rituals, and not easily being able to acquire new ones. She remembered a moment, years before, when she was explaining that she was coming from the countryside to the city, and a professor laughed: 'yes you are from outside, you are an outer'. It was meant to be a joke, but it wounded.

Laura became aware, over time, of her own inner and outer struggles, and ways of coping, for many years, as a first-generation woman academic trying to become a professional researcher in the Italian university, where social and economic capital are essential for career progression, and many years of precarious even non-paid work are expected (it gets worse rather than better). Economic capital makes a real difference, notwithstanding cultural 'upgrading' or knowledge, or what we might now call 'competences'. You must be able to pay your way. Now Laura has made it, she is an insider, a full professor in the Italian system, but still struggles. Insiders can survive and even prosper in the institution partly because they learn how to play the game while remaining, as much as they can, to be faithful to themselves. New possibilities arrive with new disorientations.

Linden's story has parallels, but different disorientations. He struggled in the habitus of university, in the late 1960s, coming as he did from a working-class background. He donned, in Winincott's terms, a false self to survive, which included rejecting where he came from, even the way he talked (West 2016). He took on a kind of bourgeois mantle that was never fully authentic. Much later, in becoming a professor, and in the recognition given to his work, he began to feel more authentic. But this was also the result of many years of learning in psychoanalysis where he recovered ordinary, split off parts of himself. He began to re-embrace the culture from which he came (although that older industrial working-class culture has died, in a post-industrial world). He learned to be critical, including ideologically, in a liquid world, grounded in new relationships, with actual people—his wife, close friends, a new analyst, his colleagues and students, where powerful forms of mutual recognition were created. And in relation to the symbolic, imaginary and auto/biographical in writing and teaching, finding new theoretical and good objects to help on the way. Like Winnicott, Honneth, Edith Wharton, Jane Austen, and others. But as with Mathew and Laura, transformation was a provisional, deeply embodied, relational, largely unconscious and uneven process, never complete and often fragile.

Conclusions and Openings

We have moved some way from the idea of criticality as a transcendent intellectual progress towards transformation, one interrogating the grip of ideology within and without. In Mezirow's work the pain and suffering as well as emotional ambivalence of the project are acknowledged, but insufficiently engaged with. For him, criticality means conscious reflection on our mind sets that must be changed, voluntarily and radically. In his terms, this is what divides transformation from other significant learning. Brookfield acknowledges how personal crisis, even psychological breakdown may be necessary precursors of

transformation. But a rational criticality is only one ingredient and landmark in journeys of transformation. We have argued, in this chapter, that ideology, abstract thinking and omnipotent masculinity can colonise adult inner life and awareness of it, and consciously distancing ourselves from it, provides one potential key to transformation. But it is only one among many.

Winnicott, the psychoanalyst, and Honneth, the critical theorist (who drew greatly on Freud and Winnicott) take us into the complex territory between inner and outer worlds, self and other, the conscious and unconscious, thinking and the emotions, body and mind, in considering what transformation encompasses. Honneth (2009) reminds us that, as mammals, we are carried by the mother for much less time than other mammals. We are so dependent on the other for survival, and how we separate from the prime care giver, the (m) other, compared to other primates, matters greatly. Any hint of being abandoned by the love object becomes a source of acute anxiety. This dependence, and associated vulnerability, are, so to speak, hard wired into us. We depend completely on that other, and a good enough nurturing environment, for what Winnicott termed the truer self to find expression.

But transitional space can make us feel like babies and infants all over again, including in universities. We may desperately want to feel welcomed, valued and loved. For someone to come alongside and recognise us and our struggles, and emotionally encourage us to become more fully ourselves. We need significant others to welcome who we are in diverse groups, and good enough cultural spaces, to experience feelings of self-respect and self-esteem. Such relationships are important in a lifetime's struggle to learn, which includes embracing the diverse otherness within. But, there is more to such processes than the interdisciplinary of this present chapter. We still need other perspectives to illuminate the possibilities alongside the difficulties of transformation. It includes why, individually and collectively, we resist change and transformational possibility. We now engage more fully with psychoanalytic perspectives, as part of our pilgrimage.

Walking Out of a Doll's House? A Second Metalogue

Laura: Linden, some days ago you were talking of Nora, Ibsen's character.

Linden: Yes, from 'A Doll's House'. A very powerful play. Paul Kegan uses it to illuminate the concept of transformation, as we witness in the next chapter.

Laura: Nora became a symbol for all those women who end up disrupting given rules and roles, actually leaving the family space in order to find self-respect and build what someone like you might call a 'truer' or 'real' self. The play was very ahead of its time; it is no surprise that it raised harsh debates and contrasting interpretations from its first performance in 1879. As with all masterpieces, it disturbs and interrogates us.

Linden: Never had theatre dared to do so much in challenging fixed women's roles and gender stereotypes.

Laura: At the beginning of the play, Nora enacts the perfect bourgeois wife, but soon she realizes that she is trapped in a dilemma, due to her good heart and sensitivity—or naivety. So, she begins to act differently, enacting another, more disturbing, character. For instance, when she dances a Tarantella at a party: apparently, she is going along with her husband's wishes, but he is disturbed by the 'messiness' of her performance, and drags her back home, scolding her for being too sensual and wild. This, a good woman only shows in the bedroom, maybe not even there. Torvald is captured by the exotic side of this dance. In fact, he is excited. But, surprise! She refuses to go to his room. He doesn't understand. As many men who fail to grasp the deeper meaning of North African or Middle Eastern dances. Women's dances, in many cultures, are sacred. They come from old pagan rituals, celebrating women's strength, messiness, and power. They show a hidden, savage side to

us: witches, amazons, women who run with the wolves, are archetypes of freedom, of the freer expression of emotions, and the power to heal, care, give birth, and to invoke the divine. All of that was unthinkable in civilized Northern Europe, in Ibsen's time, and maybe even now. Aren't we all, in a way, like Nora? Struggling to express our true feelings? Displaying an adapted and adaptable persona in diverse contexts?

Linden: There is a wilder more untamed side maybe to every one of us. I have wanted to escape too, into the wilds of Canada, letting the tundra draw me in. John Buchan's novel *Sick Heart River*, touches on a similar theme. A need to escape entrapment, to find our own way beyond a crushing compulsion to abide by society's norms of success and respectability. I felt freer for a while when visiting a First Nation Community, in the 1990s (one of my doctoral students was studying Women's education programmes in a Cree community, and I wanted to understand the culture from the inside). I have also used the escape of theatre to explore difference within me: the more feminine side, maybe, but this has been a big internal struggle. Here I am struggling to express truer feelings in this moment, and as I think of rigidity. The rigidity of Torvald and the culture he embodies; the rigidities that Nora must escape from. The rigidities within me: I felt a need to hold things together as a child, because of a lack of containment of anxieties I guess. Maybe my mother was not there for me; no doubt there was a Nora part to my mother as she sought to escape a culture in which women's roles could be rigidly prescribed.

Laura: This story speaks differently to different people. It can be interpreted as a feminist story, teaching about power in societies and families where women have no rights to decide on the course of their life. I was struck by the nicknames her husband gives to her—little squirrel, skylark—and no-matter-what-happens she is always smiling, dancing and singing. Her life is strictly ruled by the outside, she cannot decide, or learn, but only adapt to others' expectations. Ibsen presents her, at the beginning, as frivolous, delicate, dependent, begging money from Torvald. She embodies the specimen of the well-adapted, compliant bourgeois wife and mother. It is only little by little that Ibsen reveals the shadows, the complexities of her life.

Linden: I see her as having internalized particular cultural norms but the shadow and desire must break through the carapace if she is to develop psychologically. I'm also reminded of Stefan Zweig's writing about haute bourgeois women and their sexuality in fin de siècle Vienna: that some

forms of female sexuality could only be expressed by 'ordinary' women, in the bordello, or even by servants, looking after their male employers and their needs; but the bourgeois woman had to keep up appearances at all costs. 'She' was an appendage to men, caring for them and the family, and even denying her own sexuality because it was considered unfeminine. Nora's story asks all of us—not least men—about the cultural construction of our masculinity and its frequently oppressive, repressive and static forms. Nora insists we all have work to do.

Laura: As a woman, born almost a century later, I still resonate with Nora. Maybe because I was my daddy's little girl too. In the final conversation with Torvald, she explains—anticipating psychoanalysis, emerging only a few years later—the connection between her early relationship with her father—The Man for a little girl, indeed!—and her marriage. The transfer from one doll's house to another. Daddy's sweethearts have a difficult choice to make, if they want to be free. I remember my own awakening, in adolescence, when I realized that dominant role models hindered my flourishing, my freedom. I didn't want to follow the path of some women in my family and acquaintances, astoundingly similar to Nora. People desperately using their niceness to obtain some power in relationships. Unfair and competitive with other women: not even friends and daughters were spared. I despised, at that time, those of my gender who used seduction, childishness, and condescension towards men, to gain their place in life. But lately I stopped blaming them and became more curious for the overall game. People get captured in relational games. Studying the meso-system, family relationships, organizations, helped me to see that a single individual cannot determine the game alone. All of us play games, hoping for a meaningful and good enough life. Do not judge others, Laura, but try to understand complexity.

Linden: And I guess thinking systemically also takes us directly to specific family structures and the nature of the game being played between men and women, fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, fathers and sons etc. Contemporary issues also burst into this space, for me: Harvey Weinstein, Donald Trump and others; women as trophies, or narcissistic objects for display and abuse. And perhaps, at the risk of drawing down much wrath, some women, as you suggest, might be complicit in this, in their interactions with men. Sons too need to learn different sets of possibilities: including non-hierarchal and collaborative ways of being with the other. We are touching huge socio-cultural,

political as well as personal issues here. Like you, I have been caught up at times in a game: treating women as trophies and being expected to do so. Of needing to perform to be a man. But other men are now opening opportunities for men to be different. Writers like Andrew Samuels are helpful in considering lone parent fathers for instance as at the cutting edge of living a different, more relationally attuned, integrated gender reality, in which the feminine has more space.

Laura: In the final conversation with her husband, Nora dreams of an almost impossible 'prodigy': something should happen, between them, that transforms living together into a *real* marriage. She imagines a true relationship, where 'serious words' about 'serious things' can be spoken. She has in mind a transformation, then, that is not only individual. It entails a different positioning for both of them, in relation to each other. A 'prodigy' where separation is a necessary step to open new possibilities. Nora goes away, she tells that she cannot—'as she is now'—be a wife and a mother. Not on the existing premises. So, she has to leave. I like so much that slamming door, in the end. I know how it feels. Maybe because I also had similar experiences in my life, if not in my marriage. I thought, in those moments, that slamming a door gives you great force. When a relationship is abusive, or diminishing, you have to stop it. But here again, things are much more complex.

Linden: Doors slamming can be frightening as well as liberating. My mother slammed doors a great deal. And being abandoned by a woman in one of my own later relationships was shattering even though her desire needed to find more liberated expression. It may have been a necessary experience for both of us, in my own case a prerequisite to challenging my narcissism. I still remember a door slammed in my face, when I was at university, and how painful and psychologically fracturing it was. Who was I, what was happening to me, as I fell apart? Slamming doors is a kind of metaphor of shaking us to our foundations. Teaching us, me, of work to be done. A lifetime's work, that is still going on. I also think of Medea and the feeling of male betrayal that goes with that. In my own case, leaving a wife and children, with a kind of metaphorical murder of them. I have slammed doors and done damage to others. Except, my relationship with my children became a priority and we are now close. I worry about Nora leaving the children but that might eventually have been a good thing too. Reparation is possible, especially if we are able to give more because of the psychological work we have done.

Laura: Yes, life is not linear. We can come back, and repair what was broken. Is Nora's story then an example of transformation? Nora lives a dilemma. There is a conflict, or even many different conflicts: of ideas, problems and possible solutions, identities, values. When she realises that forgery is illegal, and cannot be justified by a higher moral motivation, such as love towards her father and husband, things fall apart. If she acted in disguised, hidden ways, however, it was because she was taught—as a woman—to act like that. To conceal her real thoughts and feelings. Her actions. To make up a false more acceptable self.

Linden: Men create, or are created by and within false self structures too. To put on a show, to perform because this feels like the only way to gain attention. And some women are attracted to men like that, as you state, and I have experienced. I was once active in politics as a City Councillor and a Parliamentary Candidate. Power can be an aphrodisiac for some women.

Laura: Is it power, or a struggle to find someone who is able to take care of you? Because you were taught that you cannot survive alone, without a man who takes responsibility for you, protects you, feeds you, rewards you. It is easy to mistake this for love. We are getting to the 'real' here in both our lives. Ibsen found inspiration for this piece in a real story. A good friend of his had a very similar experience to Nora's. She even asked Ibsen's help, but he had not been able, or willing, to respond, so she acted illegally. But the story went in another way: the woman's husband, when he discovered her behaviour, divorced her and had her interned in an asylum.

Linden: Yes and psychoanalysis may at times have fulfilled a similar purpose, in its individualistic, acultural stance. But not entirely so, when analysis takes place in a good enough relationship, where the analyst is learning too.

Laura: It is also interesting that this is a piece of theatre: something that is created to be embodied and played out. Theatre and cinema have the power to impress our bodies, we feel compelled by the interactions that are displayed on stage. And Ibsen's drama had so many representations. I was not surprised when I read that German and British theatres only accepted amended versions, in the beginning, with another, more conformist ending, where Nora returned home. Bourgeois society could then feel reassured. But of course it was a far less aesthetically successful ending and Ibsen despised it as a kind of avoidance of the real. There are many perspectives to this story: a feminist, maybe dominant one, that is interesting but partial; a psychoanalytic and critical perspective,

a relational interpretation and an existential reading. As with all good pieces of art, there is no final, definitive interpretation. The main transformation is maybe ours, as readers and audience, feeling and thinking auto/biographically, as our lives and perspectives interact. It becomes more of a shared perspective, enriching the dialogue, maybe encouraging another step in our pilgrimage.