Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professions

Jane Speedy and Jonathan Wyatt (Eds.)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Bristol Collaborative Writing Group

This writing group comprises staff and students in the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol. The group has been meeting for ten years and in this incarnation comprises Dave Bainton (see above), Tony Brown (former director of ESCalate the Education Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy), Laurinda Brown (Senior Lecturer in Maths Education, Bristol), Nell Bridges (a counsellor in Shropshire), Viv Martin (teacher, counsellor, author of author of *Developing A Narrative Approach to Health Care Research* (Radcliffe, 2010)) Artemi Sakellariadis (Director of the Centre for the study of Inclusive education (CSIE)), Jane Speedy (see below), Sue Wilson (a former counsellor, now retired to her garden) and Susan Williams (a specialist in transformative change among persons, groups, and organizations).

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Women's Collective Biography Group

This collective biography group comprises seven women: Peggy Styles (counsellor, Bristol) Marina Malthouse (palliative care consultant, Bath) Louise Younie (Medical educator, Barts Hospital, London) Anne O'Connor (Counsellor, Dublin), Ann Rippin (as above), Jane Speedy (as above), Sue Porter (as above).

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Jonathan is Senior Lecturer in Counselling and Psychotherapy at The University of Edinburgh. His most recent book, co-edited with Tony Adams and published by Sense, is *On (Writing) Families: Autoethnographies of Absence and Presence, Love and Loss*.

JANE SPEEDY AND JONATHAN WYATT

PROLOGUE

How and Why This Book Was Written

This book was generated in a particular academic environment, at a particular time, in a particular interdisciplinary space. The community of scholars/practitioners who produced the text were all members of the Narrative Inquiry Centre, one of a community of research centres hosted by the Graduate School of Education at the University of Bristol.

Education is both a professional practice and an interdisciplinary academic discipline, informed by the work of scholars in other disciplines such as sociology, psychology and philosophy. Throughout the Western world, debates about how people learn have continued throughout the 19th, 20th and early 21st centuries. Scholars from Western Europe and the United States such as Jean Piaget and Jerome Kagan proposed individualised/developmental theories of learning whereas work originating in the former Soviet Union from psychologists Alexander Luria and Lev Vygotsky argued for more socialised/cultural conceptions of human development and learning. These conflicts between the psychogenesis and sociogenesis of human learning and development have often perpetuated a battle, almost along 'cold war' ideological lines, between educationalists.

At the University of Bristol, a very traditional British research university, a research culture heavily influenced by Anglo-American translations and reconceptualisations of socio-cultural learning theories evolved during the latter part of the twentieth century within the School of Education (Wertsch, 1985; Wells & Claxton, 2002). This research culture created an environment in which a diverse group of centres and networks emerged, all interconnected within an overall conceptualisation of 'cultures of learning in organisations.' The Narrative Inquiry Centre, one such centre, was not only interdisciplinary but inter-professional, and included educators from within the teaching, social work, nursing and counselling and the organisational management professions. On its website, this centre claims that it has "become an international focus for the generation of new work within narrative inquiry and learning. This centre contributes to critical research on dimensions of learning, plays a vital role in the development of criteria, ethical guidelines and standards of scholarship and works to blur the boundaries between arts and social science. It also operates as a site for the development and dissemination of innovative and creative research methodologies."

The centre's research agendas draw on ideas from socio-cultural, post-structural, critical and literary theories and use both social science and arts-based methodologies in order to support work on written, spoken, visual and multi-modal

narratives and to develop understanding of learning as a relational and social process. This research is interdisciplinary in nature and takes place within many settings including both private and public spaces, informal and formal learning environments, therapeutic contexts and a variety of professional domains. The work of the centre focuses on the complex interrelationships between: identity, culture and agency; learning, transformation and change; ethics, values and identities; and social, relational and personal narratives

The Narrative Inquiry Centre's principal activities span three strands: the development of new qualitative research methodologies, and concomitant forms of ethical know-how that provide better insights into interpersonally sensitive and culturally complex issues; engagement with the critical extension of psycho-social and relational dimensions of learning and narrative approaches to research and practice; and commitment to inclusive research dissemination and capacity-building amongst users, practitioners, professional organisations and policy-makers, as well as research students and scholarly audiences.

Students and staff in the centre are not all engaged in professional practices that would traditionally be seen as educational, but all are engaged in the development of different kinds and ways of learning—personal, professional, organisational and other forms. They are also all involved with research projects and teaching and learning programmes positioned at the methodological and disciplinary interfaces between scholarship and professional practice and between the arts and the social sciences. Above all, they are committed to the use and development of narrative inquiry methods. They did not all make a conscious, informed philosophical decision at the outset of their studies to commit themselves to a narrative worldview, but as one of their number, not included in this volume, put it (West 2012, p. 24) they soon found that the "idea of a relational and continuous research experience that navigated and negotiated multiple discourses and meaning making processes resonated strongly for them and gradually seeped into their ways of making sense of the world." For them, narrative inquiry methods echoed previous commitments to feminist, egalitarian research practices and made sense of their situated, multi-storied concepts of themselves as researchers as well as of the fields they were studying and of the participants in those studies. Using a narrative lens to look at the stories people tell themselves in context, over time, all three of these constellations of stories, those of the researchers, the fields of study and the research participants, could be embraced. Narrative inquiry spaces, as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), two Canadian educational researchers and narrative scholars, could include not only the stories of people being researched and the context of that research, but also the telling of research stories and the contexts of those tellings. Thus all the projects and writings included in this book emerged themselves from within a narrative inquiry space and invite you, as their readers, to enter a world of stories: written stories, image-based stories and collaboratively produced, conversational stories.

This narratively-informed lens makes a difference to how these stories are seen and described—it nuances the form and content of the telling and the manner in which they are told. If this research text emanated from a purely arts-based research

centre, without the focus on narrative forms of inquiry, the stories you are about to read might lack their current emphasis on what it means to *inquire* into the *stories* people tell about their lives and the emphasis on *ethnographic* as well as *aesthetic* dimensions of the human imagination. If this text had emerged from a different social science discipline the emphasis on how people *learn* about themselves, about others and their worlds might be lost. This book is all about what we can learn from each other's stories of life experience and all about stories of life experience as a *vehicle for learning.*

AN UNAPOLOGETICALLY MESSY TEXT FOR A MULTI-STORIED AND MESSY OLD WORLD

This book has been designed to illustrate and demonstrate the use of different examples of practitioner inquiry from different contexts that are informed by arts-based methods and myriad theoretical positions: it is not designed as a 'how to do creative practitioner inquiry' manual. If you are looking for 'arts-based practitioner inquiry for dummies' this is not the book for you. These methods, under constant scrutiny and attack from the methodological mainstream, are no easy option to take up, and require a heightened poetic and/or artistic awareness and skill as well as an advanced degree of philosophical and methodological literacy (see Denzin, 2009, 2010). Textbooks traditionally designed for the teaching of research methods in the 'human sciences' have a certain similarity, comprising, typically, introductions followed by 'how to' sections covering the chosen methods and perhaps including a few illustrative examples. Such texts are typically divided into chapters of a 'one size fits all' length; whereas this book includes fairly lengthy essays such as chapter nineteen, wherein the Bristol Collaborative Writing Group made quite a seminal and theoretically innovative contribution (Davies, 2008) to the literatures of collaborative writing, and short three page interludes like chapter five, wherein Cindy Gowen 'nailed' a complete photographic, layered account in just three pages: why take more? Indeed, the layering of text and image, typical of this research genre, often leaves compelling gaps and cracks betwixt text and image for readers to slip through and imagine themselves into the lives of others that are revealed before them in tentative and tacit ways by the writers.

This kind of research often says what it wants to say in less space than the more explicit, positivist research forms that leave no messy, dusty, unfinished traces in the corners for their readers to pick up and play with. Arts-based research often leaves much of what it has to say implicit, believing that this is a legitimate means of 'getting to the heart of the matter' in ways that are meaningful for researchers and research participants alike, particularly with regard to representing and including the voices of people who have normally been excluded from the traditional canon of social research (see Caroll, Dew, & Howden-Chapman, 2011).

This book includes both chapters that are quite methodologically and theoretically explicit, such as Gale and Wyatt's 'two men talking' in chapter seventeen, a contribution that demonstrates a collaboration thinking with Deleuzian theory and producing meaning (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) and others that leave all

the methodological justification to their context and editors and all the thinking with theory to their readers, such as Kemp's poetic inquiry as she "writes herself to life" in chapter fourteen.

This book is rather like the folder on the top of the in-tray on Jane Speedy's desk in Bristol University: it looks like all the other manila folders, neatly stacked and labelled in her filing cabinet, only this one, perched at the top of her in-tray, is labelled 'current stuff' and is bulging ominously. Opened, it reveals a seething, overlapping mass of papers and documents, post cards, publisher's catalogues, hand and type-written letters, and calling cards from visiting academics and plumbers. No two documents appear to be the same length or style or are written in the same typescript. Almost everything in the folder looks as if it is going to fall out and yet there is something that binds all this 'current stuff' together; some hidden ingredients that allows it all to cohere: and so it is with this book. 'Visual inquiry' overlaps and seeps into 'Writing as inquiry' as the water slides across the sands into the images in Mike Gallant's auto-ethnographic essay in chapter nine and the borders between research and fiction are breached in several places throughout the book, most noticeably in Joyce Ferguson's introductions to her research team in chapter twelve and Jane Reece's conversation with Sylvia Plath in chapter sixteen. This book includes myriad versions of creative inquiry and as you open it multiple voices and competing theoretical strands fall out at you, but nonetheless the book achieves an overall coherence by virtue of the mutual commitments towards viewing the world through a narrative lens, as outlined above, and by dint of the dual practitioner/researcher positions of each of the authors. All researchers want their work to make a difference in the world, but the contributors to this volume all regard their research as an extension of their practice as teachers, nurses, counsellors, organisational managers, etc. and it is this reflexive practitioner/researcher narrative stance that provides the common ground for much of this work and a coherence to this text.

PRODUCING THIS BOOK

The idea for this book came originally from Jane Speedy (coordinator of the research centre that all the writers were affiliated to) but, unlike many edited books, most of the contributors to this text knew each other and many had contributed to other writing and research projects with each other. At the beginning of this publishing endeavour Jane Speedy edited the book and everybody else contributed the work she asked them for from their doctoral projects and assignments, but gradually as the book took shape other people began to co-author the overarching introductory chapters and the whole group began to amend and contribute to these chapters and each other's writing via an online listserv. The boundaries between editors and contributors, and professors, students and graduates, began gradually to blur. Just as the project began to take shape, Jane Speedy sustained a massive ischemic stroke. Jane was in hospital for three months and the project went quiet, except that Sue Porter, a regular visitor of Jane in hospital, kept everybody else informed of her progress. When Jane came out of hospital she was at home on

extended sick leave for months, where most of the other contributors to this book visited her and the book took shape out of the shadows in Jane's mind and on her computer, again. At this juncture Jonathan Wyatt took on the role of named co-editor and the project immediately went up a gear … and then we were on the home straight.

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JANE SPEEDY AND SUE PORTER

1. INTRODUCTION TO 'CREATIVE PRACTITIONER INQUIRY IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS'

Slippage between fact and fiction, a commonplace feature of arts-based inquiries, is exemplified in the use of science fiction in this chapter, which is presented 'as if' extracted from the field blog of the twenty-ninth century Zelotzvian archaeologist and historian of academic systems of thought, Gregorius Corbilsohn. Perhaps it was.

BLOG ENTRY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2924

Our excavations in Wessex have unearthed sheaves of notes taken about various paper books and a single folder of written work in ancient twenty-first century British English. These latter writings appear to be some form of correspondence between two British academicals in the process of writing what looks like a beginning chapter to some kind of conjoint piece of work: a work inquiring into the social and emotional events and circumstances that occur betwixt and between humans. The human belief systems and customs of the time in ancient Britain, made manifest in the texts we found, included an extraordinarily overarching belief in the boundaried insularity and separatedness of all human beings. There was no understanding in these times as to how to communicate with each other except by using spoken, written or visual images and texts—quite literally in a linear chronological form! The texts you see below are not inscriptions from thought-meldings; indeed, there was no knowledge at the time (although this was the century of major discoveries about inter- and intra-global interconnectedness) of communication via either microbiological or mind-melding methods and technologies. What you see below is the actual written correspondence that two academicals were engaged in as they constructed their introductory chapter in 2013:

Sue to Jane, 31/3/13

Jane and I are late with our chapter for this book, and as a result I find myself writing the opening section of the chapter on Easter Sunday 2013, the day before major changes are introduced in the British welfare state, turning it from a compact between citizens designed to support us all at the most vulnerable times of our lives (childhood, unemployment, sickness, disability and old age) into a vehicle/mechanism for reproach, exacting a toll of

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 1–6.

> humiliation from those too weak to resist. Branding the weakest as thieves and scroungers, as stealing the country's future from those deemed 'hard working,' it typifies a particular sort of distraction from criticism of those who steal it away in their huge bonuses, along with any hope of decency, fairness and justice.

Ancient British society at this time was on its way into the decline of the second feudal period (see Amthrolbusdottir, 2921). The divisions in early 21st century society were between the two social groups known broadly as the 'toffs' and the 'plebs.' The bonuses that the writer refers to were financial handouts that those toffs involved in the banking industry had handed out to themselves, having first stolen the monies from the coffers of the poorer plebs.

> What better time to be embarking on a chapter that celebrates what arts-based research practice (ABRP), and creative approaches more generally, can bring to our practice as researchers, practitioners and activists, I ask myself. In a time of increasing social inequity and division it could be argued that it is timely to revisit the potential of creativity and arts based methods for practice.What teachers, counsellors, social workers, nurses and community workers share is a need, and hopefully a commitment to enabling 'voice' for frequently silenced groups and individuals.

See what I mean about this belief in individuality and insularity? Groups with voice and groups who are silenced—separated out rather than conjoined aspects of each other? Although during this historical period there were some social/emotional scholars trying to uncover the voices that inhabited the silences (Mazzei, 2007) and vice-versa, for the most part this was a period of firmly delineated boundaries and borders between peoples, and between people and contexts and environments.

> Creative approaches offer effective methods for enabling subjugated knowledges to be explored and made visible/vocal. Like action research, ABRPs have a history of being used in community and pedagogical settings … and both are disruptive and subversive approaches. (I (Sue) notice that the student groups I teach tend to divide into two groups; those who are excited by the idea of subversive methodologies, and those who are disturbed by the idea. The former are generally made up of student social workers and social care professionals working in the context of personalisation and co-production, the latter are more interested in academic careers.)
>
> Like action research, ABRP seeks to connect theory with practice, for as Kurt Lewin has said, there is nothing so practical as a good theory (Lewin, 1951, p. 169). Also like action research, an arts-based approach is more than a method, it's a way of understanding that comes with its own principles and values. (It is a mistake, according to McTaggart (1996, p. 248) "to think that following the action research spiral constitutes 'doing action research.'" He continues, "Action research is not a 'method' or a 'procedure' for research

> but a series of commitments to observe and problematise through practice, a series of principles for conducting social enquiry."

Theory and practice were separated out into different categories of thought and activity during this period. It was thought that theories were foundational to practice, rather than vice-versa and action research's thinking and learning was relatively radical for the times.

> However, socially useful research does not need to be 'worthy' in a dry, joyless sense. For those of us struggling to keep the different aspects of our lives connected then what Leavy calls "emergent methods" (2009, p. vii) offer a way to honour our creative selves, engage our social activist selves and all within an academic context; linking the self that knows through making and writing to the self that theorises (even if the space for this socially engaged arts based academic practice needs to be fought for), and again to the self that acts. We can be scholar activists, taking our creative methodologies into the daily practice of social work, teaching, counselling, nursing and other forms of health and community work.
>
> *Jane to Sue 4/4/13*
>
> What we share as practitioner researchers in applied fields such as teaching and social work is our ongoing commitment to our practice and to the process, as well as the product of our work. This commitment to the process (the making of) as well as the outcomes (or results of) of inquiries is equally evident amongst arts-based practitioner-scholars and fits well with our professional, participatory values. The artist/scholar Barbara Bolt (Bolt & Barrett, 2010, pp. 29-34) extols her commitment to the process and materials she uses as an arts-based researcher by proclaiming the "magic is in the handling," which somewhat echoes the literary scholar Helene Cixous's (2004, p. iv) faith in the agency of the writing process: "when I write what happens continuously are happy accidents that I don't chase away." Thus the 'fit' of arts-based methods for practitioner-scholars is held in the process/practice-orientated and active qualities of this kind of work.

Note the distinction between arts-based scholars and others. Although these particular academicals considered themselves radicals who did not agree with (or adhere to) government policy, they still distinguished between arts-based work (their own) and work that adhered to policies that privileged science technology engineering and maths (STEM) studies. They were still working within the bi-partheid assumptions of their day and had not jettisoned these distinctions. We believe that they were nonetheless atypical of social researchers at the time and the 'experts' they are citing: an Australian arts educator and a French poststructuralist philosopher and novelist were not really foundational to social forms of scholarship, although both had links to second wave feminist research at the time.

> It is also held in the choice to engage with 'inquiry' rather than other forms of scholarship. To 'inquire' according to Oxford dictionaries online (2013) is to

> ask for information, which also speaks to engagement in a process, rather than outcome; whereas to research is to glean information in order to "establish facts and reach new conclusions." To 'inquire' implies a more modest and curious stance in the face of that which is unknown and uncertain, whereas 'research' seems a harsher word, imbued with intentions to 'get to the bottom of things' and 'excavate all the facts.' Inquire is a gentler word, speaking of an endeavour forged within a more participatory and collaborative world of scholarship.

Humility and modesty in scholarship was not a claim included in research ethics guidelines and codes of the twenty-first century: this came in later after the nuclear holocausts of the twenty-third century. Twenty-first century scholars seem manifestly arrogant to our ears and did not really regard themselves as providing a public and community service like any other.

> *Sue writes to Jane 21.4.13:*
>
> Visual methods have the ability to get to different sorts of knowledge, for groups of people who may be different from those who are most often well served by more 'traditional' research and practice. I am thinking of members of communities whose more tacit, experience-based knowledge is often undervalued in comparison with more intellectual, theoretical knowledge.

The above passage delineates clearly between "toff" and 'pleb' knowledges and demonstrates the established thinking of the times

> Liamputtong and Rumbold argue that the experience of using arts-based methods enables experiential knowing, which names "the essence of our 'pre-sense making' encounter with the world," and that "presentational knowing emerges from such encounters" (Liamputtong & Rumbold, 2008, p. 11). In this way knowledge that is otherwise tacit "becomes known and expressed through symbolic forms" (Leavy, 2009, p. 241) using the arts as a medium. I think that we can extend this argument for the efficacy of arts-based practice to enable the expression of different knowledges differently by making a case that for groups whose knowledge is disrespected or disregarded, arts-based practice can support voicing sorts of knowing that are or have become tacit through this sense of being devalued. And, if practised in a liberatory way, by making the knowledge explicit arts-based practice can support the raising of consciousness and so contribute to self-actualisation and emancipation.

Notice the assumptions of this period set the context yet again for this exchange. The emails were written in a time shortly after a period when a university education was valued over any craft-based learning, the polytechnics having long since been converted into aspiring universities, and further education colleges were at this time under pressure to offer foundation degrees and modules that could be strung together to make higher qualifications, despite the absurd inappropriateness of this in many instances. Academic degrees were created in a number of

disciplines where a more rigorous, craft-based apprenticeship would have been more appropriate.

BLOG ENTRY, SEPTEMBER 26TH, 2924.

Back to the last few pages of our findings. These last pages may have been part of the same introductory chapter or part of another section of the same work. This section distinguishes in various ways between 'lifewriting' and other forms of writing:

> Quoting the North American performance studies scholar, Tami Spry (2001, p. 708): "I have begun creating a self in and out of academe that allows expression of passion and spirit I have long suppressed. However academically heretical this performance of selves may be, I have learned that heresy is greatly maligned and, when put to good use, can begin a robust dance of agency in one's personal/political/professional life. So, in seeking to dis-(re)-cover my body and voice in all parts of my life, I began writing and performing autoethnography, concentrating on the body as the site from which the story is generated, thus beginning the methodological praxis of reintegrating my body and mind into my scholarship."

Note shared assumptions, despite the implicit critique, about separations between body and mind, between embodied, performed writing and academic (mind) writing, and between personal/professional and political 'selves.' During this period, 'science' was thought better expressed in isolation from life context and life writing or its performance was considered a form of academic heresy, as expressed in the above early 21st century quote from Spry, a distinguished scholar in her field. To engage in academic endeavour explicitly through the filter of the scholar's 'embodied life' (as if there was such a thing as a disembodied life!). This whole era of the history of human thought is exemplified by dualistic (either/or) thinking. Even such burgeoning dissension as was shown by our two (mildly) radical scholars (albeit eminently employable in a respected mainstream university) was fuelled by dualistic forms of argument: plebs versus toffs; arts versus sciences; theory versus practice; inquiry versus research; academic versus life writing. These scholars lived and breathed division; they lived in a divided, not interconnected world and failed to grasp the echoes and connections in their own arguments with the traditions they rejected.

During the early 21st century, early research on agential realism by scholars such as Barad (2007), was being published, but because of the divisions cited above between arts and science, most arts/social science scholars were not abreast of the new physics and so in their well established versions of how the world worked the agency and movement of material objects and environments was solely dependent on human agencies. In this era humanity was paramount, all things divine and magical from previous eras had been subsumed under human-centred schema and to inquire was an entirely human activity; an inquiring planet had scarcely been imagined.

From a modern viewpoint the lack of entanglement or entangled knowledges and technologies demonstrated by these ancient scholars demonstrates just how insular and removed from the realities of life on their planet and the mess they were making of it even dissenting scholars had become.

Sue, have you seen my recent email concerning our introductory chapter? We are getting in a real tangle here, I'm not sure how, or even whether to end it?

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PART ONE: VISUAL INQUIRY

JANE SPEEDY AND MIKE GALLANT

2. INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL INQUIRY

Between the Visual and the Textual

Referring to a delicate mammoth-tusk carving of reindeer swimming, archaeologist Stephen Mithin says:

> Something happened in the human brain, say 50,000 to 100,000 years ago, that allowed this fantastic creativity, imagination, artistic ability to emerge … [that] gave them a new capacity to produce art. But Ice Age conditions were critical as well: it was a very challenging time for people living in harsh long winters—the need to build up really intense social bonds, the need for ritual, the need for religion, all these related to this flowering of creative art at the time. (quoted in MacGregor, 2010, pp. 23-24)

In the challenging conditions that amount to human existence, visual (re)presentation has continued to be both a product of, and an expression of, social bonds, ritual and religion—the very meat and bones of life and society. Visual inquiry has a substantial history. From the illumination of early religious manuscripts through to the digitally-animated images of a 21st century website banner advertisement, visual images have provided an alternative and additional source of information to that of a lingua franca and its associated written text.

Despite our current inquiries being set in cultures dominated by visual images (Barnard, 2001) there is still some lingering reticence regarding the use of visual research methodologies amongst practitioner researchers. Singh and Matthews (2009) interestingly point to the development of photography in the 19th century being associated with political movements and journalism rather than with the continuing grand narrative of scientific enlightenment. They suggest that this concurrence set the visual image apart from 'credible research data,' a misconception that lingers to this day, though these views are beginning to change, not least with the accessibility and availability of digital images (both moving and still). Indeed, in research with young people and children our 'subjects' or co-researchers are often running ahead of the academy, inquiring into their worlds using mobile phone and other digital technologies and uploading their inquiries onto sites such as Facebook and a variety of blogs and web2 sites, sometimes way ahead of any scholarly activity, leaving researchers dragging along behind them, frantically discussing the ethical complexities of this situation (see Dimitriadis, 2008; Luttrell, 2009; Wiles et al., 2008).

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 9–15.

Visual methods are now burgeoning across social and human research, an explosion that has been amply rehearsed and critiqued elsewhere. Pink, for example, from the more traditionally visual field of social anthropology (2003), reminds us that the intensely interdisciplinary nature of current visual research practice can lead to the borrowing of techniques across disciplines without sufficient understanding of their heritage. It is impossible in the space we have here to cover the whole of this rapidly expanding field other than to give a brief contextual overview and to refer enthusiastic practitioner researchers to some of the key texts in the field (e.g. Banks, 2001; de Cosson & Irwin, 2004; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Margolis & Pauwels, 2011; Pink, 2006, 2009; Rose, 2007; Sullivan, 2009; Springgay et al., 2009; Minh Ha, 1992, 1993).

Here (in the images printed on the pages of this book) we are constrained by stillness and two-dimensionality in our form of dissemination, reminding us that images are inherently interdependent with the medium in which they are carried: a photograph is not only framed by its photographer in compositional terms, but also by the physical nature of the paper or by the screen on which it is viewed, and beyond that by the context of its viewing, whether that be the sharing of snapshots at a family gathering, film clips at a festival, or an advertising hoarding or gallery wall. Visual methods not only extend the possibilities of communication and dissemination but also provide a crucible in which creative practitioners can discover what otherwise might have remained out of their awareness. In doing research differently, using images as well as or instead of words, practitioner researchers hope to come up with different kinds of research: research that speaks to a different audience perhaps, and engages people in a different way, but also research that creates different kinds of knowledge. One of the questions that Barrett (2010, p. 1) believes we should ask of practice-based creative research is:

> [W]hat new knowledge/understandings did this inquiry/methodology generate that may not have been revealed through other research approaches?

In this section of the book we have limited the work to two genres, art/o/graphy and photography, in both sections using some found images and some images constructed as, or as part of, the inquiry. Our chapters can do no more than offer fragments and traces for others to follow up and explore in greater depth. They nonetheless seem to reflect the three main strands to the field: studies in which visual material is generated by the inquirer(s) as part of their inquiry; studies of pre-existing visual material and/or where visual images supplement inquiries, or as Rose (2007, p. 239) suggests:

> [W]here the specific visual qualities of photos are allowed to display themselves rather more on their own terms, thus acting as a visual supplement to the written text of the researcher.

And finally, studies where visual images and artefacts are used as a means of elicitation (see Rose, 2007; Luttrell, 2009; Singh & Matthews, 2009).

TRANSFORMING INQUIRIES: TRANSFORMING OURSELVES THROUGH MAKING ART

Visual materials can certainly be used in a wide variety of ways within a bricolage of inquiry, and previous writers have identified a number of distinctive categories. Of the four examples offered in this section (other sections of this book also include chapters that use visual material, though have been categorised by methodologies other than visual), Percy's (chapter three) autoethnographic piece is perhaps most dominated by her own visual creativity and is an example of how the inquirer herself acts as the creative artist in order to better express and disseminate her inquiry experience. In this particular case, the discourses of time and history are explored by textual analysis, but an analysis that relies on colour, image and form more than the written word. Like other artist-researchers working with text and image and text-as-image, engaging in visual and written textual processes, Percy, like Iggulden (2010, p. 79) has "attempted to reveal the 'silent' spaces that lay within and between both languages."

Her work is also an example of the participative qualities that creative visual research can support, including as it does, artefacts found and accounts given by her young son as well as herself.

Casey's (chapter four) work is essentially a written account of the use of creative art forms as self-elicitation for her co-researchers to reflect on their experiences as student nurses. As such it is a rare written/spoken inquiry into the efficacy of using creative/visual methods within a professional practitioner education environment dominated by evidence-based practice. It is an opportunity to discover whether creative arts-based inquiries do indeed allow new knowledge to emerge or whether: "art practice can only do what other kinds of research can do" (Vincs 2010, p. 101).

To this end, with some caveats about the kinds of group processes and atmosphere required, Casey uses both given images and poems and creative work produced by the student nurses themselves as an inquiry process that succeeds in creating a different climate of 'wondering' that clearly has not been experienced by her participants before.

For both these practitioner researchers, using creative arts processes, the act of both engaging with and producing art has transformative qualities for the researchers themselves: just as Casey is clearly affected by the words of her student/participant 'Alice,' Percy is equally moved by the thoughtful actions of her son in supporting her in producing this work.

Casey and Percy both give us examples of embodied work, a coming together of art and word. The construction and spoken/written discussion of images as both a process and product of inquiry is reminiscent of art/o/graphy, whereby inquirers:

> [R]epresent their questions, practices, emergent understandings, and creative analytic texts as they integrate knowing, doing, and making through aesthetic experiences that convey meaning rather than facts. (Springgay & Irwin, 2005, p. 7)

PHOTOGRAPHY, MEMORY, NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

The two authors using photographic methods offer chapters from their completed, unpublished doctoral theses as invitations to readers to explore ideas about how to use photographic research methods. These texts, whilst only snapshots, encompass much of the current thinking in the field and include the use of both 'found' artefacts in the form of personal, family photographs (Gowen, chapter five) and photographs taken as an integral aspect of an ongoing inquiry (Bainton, chapter six).

Gowen's deceptively short and simple text includes only two family photographs that nonetheless artfully explore the delicate relational tracery between family photography and the construction and re-construction of identity and memory, or as Kuhn and McAllister (2006, p. 1) suggest: "the shadowy presence of what might have been forgotten, lost or eradicated."

In using the written stories of sailing and photo-narratives of fishing with her grandmother as a way of re-membering the relationship with the father that she might have forgotten, Gowen produces her own form of post-memory—a reworking of the lingering memories of others into her own—in such a way that she articulates what the family photography scholar Martha Langford describes as: "a sense of self in the continuum of belonging" (Langford, 2006, p. 242). In this instance Gowen is writing an intensely autobiographical piece, but clearly is also writing to much more than a personal, domestic memory and in so doing is demonstrating, by implication, how she (and others reading this text) might use photography in their therapeutic practices as a way of building/rebuilding and strengthening fragile memories and identities.

Bainton's chapter, although an equally reflexive and personal narrative, is much more rooted in his practice as a science educator/researcher. The photographs in his text are not found but emerged organically as part of his inquiry and are partly there to locate both the researcher and his readers. His chapter begins with the photograph of a bridge that we later cross as we follow his written narrative up the mountain, subsequently coming across photographs of the Dzo and of what to us (and initially to Bainton) looks like the barren landscape further up the mountain. We are being orientated as western readers into the landscape Bainton is describing and experiencing; simultaneously, Bainton is also leading us methodologically to gradually discover (by going with him up the mountain) what he discovered for himself: that no amount of data collection, interviewing of local people or participant observation could have led him to the discoveries he made as a science educator/researcher by engaging in the practice of 'dancing' with the Dzo. Bainton's photographs appear to follow his journey up the mountain chronologically. They illustrate and supplement his text, but they also locate his narratives in relation to place, space and post-coloniality in ways that perhaps "do not speak about, just speak nearby" (Minh-Ha, 1993, p. 95) the experience he is attempting to articulate for us.

Massey (2006, p. 46) suggests a reorientation toward seeing "… place and landscape as *events*, as happenings, as moments that will be again dispersed" (italics in the original). In both these photography chapters, and indeed all

the chapters in this visual inquiry section, we are given the sense of capturing a fleeting moment that will later have moved on and that will always have been partial, contingent and time-dependent. Casey's and Bainton's work emerges from and speaks to their different practices as educators, whereas Percy and Gowen are engaged with much more personal inquiries, so have they produced different kinds of research texts as a result of using different (visual) research methods?

They have perhaps all entered into the inquiry space in a different way, and opened different doors and windows into our understanding that may otherwise have been left closed. They have certainly all avoided the closure of completed knowledge and have left unanswered questions in their wake.

CRITICAL METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

Are visual methodologies evaluated by different, more 'aesthetic' criteria than traditional genres of social research? If so should visual inquiries be left to professional arts practitioners such as photographers and filmmakers? Anthropological research methods have often included still and moving images, but contemporary social and educational researchers have relied predominantly on written texts—admittedly excluding much of the available data—but can social research venture successfully into the arts?

Percy and Gowen both include family members as research participants and their work might easily have come under another hybrid category of 'visual autoethnography.' Percy does not mention obtaining the informed consent of her son in the account she gives us, which we would certainly expect of her as an academic writer if her work included other people's children. Does she believe that her position as mother gives her different claims to 'ownership' of her son's life stories than any other researcher? Gowen has written about her family and included a photograph of her father. If her father were still alive would she have asked him for permission? Does his death give her 'additional rights' over his image? What are the ethical issues we should take into account when including dead people and their images in our research texts? Who should be informed?

Bainton's work includes images of no-one other than himself, but it does include highly evocative images of an environment that might seem rather 'exotic' to the western readers this book is aimed at. What are the ethical issues that visual inquirers should consider when including images of 'other' people, places and cultures and how has Bainton addressed this?

Our four contributors in this section have all offered fragments and suggestions of their work, rather than templates for others to follow. They have taken risks, as reflexive practitioner-researchers, "that lay bare their own investments in their own relations of looking but also pointing to the locations where they believe memories and hope do reside" (Kuhn & McAllister, 2006, p. 15). And perhaps that is enough.

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3. SEEING LEARNING DISABILITY

A Re/claimed Book

Dear Reader,

Welcome into an experiment. The re/claimed book excerpted here is part of an on-going research project into experiences of and around learning disability in children. Stigma and communication challenges are just some of the potential reasons that experiences of learning disabled[1] individuals have traditionally been underrepresented within academic research and popular media (Chappell, 1998). Yet this is a global issue, affecting individuals irrespective of race, gender, nationality, or economic level. To me it is also a personal issue. As the parent of such a child, a professional, and also being learning disabled myself, I realize how complex, emotional, and isolating the experience can be. This project combines qualitative research practices with visual modes of exploration as a process of inquiring into and re/presenting learning disability. Altering a 1961 textbook and tracking the research and interview process within its pages simultaneously incorporates old knowledges with fresh perceptions, thus physically and metaphorically constructing new representations of this hidden disability.

Surprised? Perhaps after making such a grandiose claim of scholarship you'll expect something that looks more traditional, more scholarly, more like…well, real research. I ask you to temporarily suspend your misgivings and simply look, feel, question, and most importantly, think. You see, altering this book is my own version of quest(ion)ing (Leggo, 2008, p. 171) into how to voice the experience of learning disability. Like Smith's memorable Food Truck (1999), I hope to create a catalyst to trouble how people think and understand learning differences, including my own perceptions. The spaces within this book are dedicated to exploration, a "performative site of reflection" (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 902) using writing entwined with visual imagery in search of what Cixous calls "that mysterious but vital force, the 'leaven' that has the capacity to take the writer further than she would otherwise be able to go." (2004, p. viii). Reader, I want to know more and better than I already think I do.

Numerous qualitative researchers recognize the corporeal act of writing as integral to knowing (see, for example, Cixous, 2004; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; van Manen, 2006). Indeed, written is the traditional, privileged vehicle of scholarship. However, to me, writing is not the natural course of my thought-process. Instead, my visceral sense-making is visual; writing is the secondary output of logically arranging my thoughts. No matter how much I try to loosen up,

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 17–21.

writing always feels like a translation of pictures of my head versus *version originale*. Combining reading, writing, and imagery attempts to access levels of thought below the synthesis that occurs when I write, allowing me a depth to examine and trouble my most basic assumptions and held knowledges. Springgay et al. discuss similar inquiries process combining art and writing:

> [We] attend to the process of creativity and to the means through which one inquires into an educational phenomena through artistic and aesthetic means … This displacement from what does it look like, which emphasizes a product driven representation of research, to an active participation of doing and meaning making within research texts, is a rupture that opens up new ways of conceiving of research as enactive space of living inquiry … Through doubling, hegemonic categorizations of knowledge production are troubled, infusing both the art and the graphy with intention and attentiveness. This doubling is not a static rendering of two elements positioned as separate and distinct; but it is in the contiguous interaction and the movement between art and graphy that research becomes a lived endeavor. (2005, pp. 898-900)

Linking art with written inquiry can be seen as a version of Richardson and St. Pierre's CAP [creative analytical process] (2005, pp. 962-963). Simultaneously, it is creative and analytical, desirable and valid, and allows exploration into thorny issues like learning disabilities in all of their multiple complexities. "Trying out evocative forms, we relate differently to our material; we know it differently. We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences … we struggle to find a textual place of ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties (Richardson, 1994, p. 521).

Additionally, visuality allows viewers to access information in a different manner, potentially including diverse audiences and creating a space for populations underrepresented in academic research.

Now, reader, I've discussed why I am doing this project, perhaps you might be interested in how it evolves?

RE/CLAIMING A BOOK

Lord Brain's venerated 1961 textbook, Speech Disorders, serves as my textual playground, both physically and historically. Much of Lord Brain's research is still relevant today, whilst other thoughts and modes have been revised. For example, referencing children as "it" was a professional, objective writing standard during the 60s, but raises hackles on many levels in modern thought. First I read this text interactively, writing my notes and reactions atop its pages, regardless of text or illustrations. Simultaneously, I also read contemporary literature and likewise recorded my reactions by writing in the textbook, including rants, questions, follow-ups, lists, streams of consciousness. Form and content are not important; instead my intent is as van Manen describes:

> It is in the act of reading and writing that insights emerge. The writing of work involves textual material that possesses hermeneutic and interpretive significance. It is precisely in the process of writing that the data of the research are gained as well as interpreted and that the fundamental nature of the research question is perceived. (2008, p. 715)

The process of writing, travelling with my thoughts in a linear fashion to put words to paper, is my intention; product is irrelevant. All writing is done on top of the printed text in the book. The resulting script is difficult to read and, by being virtually anonymous, allows me a freedom in writing without need for a finished, coherent product. Thus overwriting becomes both part of the fore and back/ground: Overwriting intermeshes thoughts, emotions, and insights alongside the original text and the result creates a new meta/physical space on which to build new meanings.

Separately, in a journal I record a brief synopsis of my overwriting sessions, jotting down main points, revelations, or ideas generated from my overwriting stints. These notes track of the progression of my thoughts and research.

Like sediment settling, my thoughts coalesce into a visual representation. As Lawrence-Lightfoot notes, "the translation of image is anything but literal. It was probing, layered, and interpretive" (2005, p. 6). The act of choosing how to re/represent my thoughts is the integrative pivot point between what I've read, my reactions to it, and how I think/need/feel I should approach a topic. Presenting visually forces me to ask questions from many angles and confront how I feel about it. For example, the physicality of choosing orientation on a page, size and shapes of different elements in relation to each other, even the textures, are all conscious choices requiring me to examine how I assign value to particular elements of an issue. Images are built on top of text, notes, and overwriting. The inquiry process underneath is often visible, yet it is the synthesis of the thought process (the picture) that stands out. No image or writing is ever finitely complete. Van Manen states:

> [Q]ualitative method of inquiry constantly has to be invented anew and cannot be reduced to a general set of strategies or research techniques. Methodologically speaking, every notion has to be examined in terms of its assumptions, even the idea of method itself. (2008, p. 720)

Returning to readings regenerates the process. Inevitably a new reading or someone's reaction sparks further strains of inquiry. For example, I found that including the re/claimed book in interviews often yielded interesting results, changing the tone and nature of our communications and sending our interactions in different directions, generating different perspectives. I make a conscious effort to listen heartfully and incorporate reactions.

Finally, the performative element of this project is one that I had not anticipated when starting this project. When creating images I sometimes find myself assuming an advocative role, requiring me to step outside of my introspection and interact publically. For example, when photographing people's shoes for Fig. X or requesting samples of native language handwritings in Fig. Y, I was required to

articulate my project and why I wanted their participation. Very interesting conversations ensue. The resulting frictions, abradings, and bolsterings from the myriad of people I encounter, create ripples that permeate my images and perhaps flow outwardly too. My relationship to my subject is constantly in flux, and I am able to continuously re/examine my existing findings from new perspectives.

Reader, I am curious about your reaction to this. After all, I have made no claims of greater knowledge, drawn no definitive conclusions, nor pointed you toward new enlightenments. Eisner states, "What arts-based research should do is raise fresh questions" (2008, p. 22). Re/claiming this textbook attempts to generate and track new representations of learning disability whilst constantly revaluating my and others' relationship to the subject. I hope it is an on-going conversation that you can see; what it means is always in progress.

For now, I give you over to a few excerpts of the book itself. It is, in the words of Leggo, "… shaped out of citation, exposition, narration, poetry, and rumination in order to evoke a textual space for both invitation and provocation. It is my hope that … by performing an artful work of words, will invite readers to ruminate on their conceptions of experience … especially in the tangled complexity of each day's demands" (2008, p. 166). So, reader, I give you my thoughts in physical form and ask in turn, what do you think?

NOTES

[1] Labels can be powerful, have varying cultural and ethical connotations, and are particularly hotly contested around learning disability. Here the term 'learning disabled' is chosen with respectful intention. It is used within the context of Disability Studies, with the intention to look beyond conventional and medical ideologies of disability as located within person's physical or intellectual flaws, and instead examines disability as the complex way society acts upon a person to classify and enact 'normality.' Therefore, a person is disabled not by impairment, but by society's inability to encompass a spectrum of differences.

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BRIEGE CASEY

4. FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Interrogating Nursing Through Art

Internationally, student nurse education has changed remarkably over the last fifty years, transforming itself from an apprenticeship based, service driven model towards an all graduate profession. As a nursing educator, aiming to contribute to the professional identity formation and knowledge development of student nurses, I am positioned in this changing landscape. The traditional reliance in nurse education on vocational training pedagogies and performance outcome strategies is being challenged as we scrutinise instruction models of conventional pedagogy and explore alternative interpretive pedagogies such as critical, feminist, phenomenological, and postmodern approaches (Diekelmann, 2001). In contemporary nursing, teachers and nursing students alike operate in a context where these alternative approaches to nursing pedagogy rub up against traditional perspectives and practices.

Koithan (1996, p. 535) asserts that "the profession requires an awareness and multiple methodological strategies for an educational system that models creativity and thinking rather than conformity and performance." Nurses encounter situations every day that are emotionally, ethically and cognitively complex. There are no textbook answers and nurses call on past experiences, knowledge, intuition and critical reflection to respond in the moment in these encounters (Benner, 1984). Knowledge and acts of nursing/meaning are created between people engaged in health/care interactions in dynamic and unsignalled ways (Watson, 1988; Peplau, 1998). This complexity of integration and inter-relation has few reference points in positivistic domains; nursing educators argue that, while scientific and positivistic inquiry are recognised and valued as a means of generating some aspects of nursing knowledge, the domination of nursing and midwifery curricula by scientific rationality has meant that the intuitive and relational aspects of nursing work and knowledge have been marginalized (Jackson & Sullivan, 1999). Further, an emphasis on outcomes and the observable may "inadvertently obscure the uncertainty within and complexity of nursing practice, as well as the multifaceted problems facing nurses and clients on a daily basis" (Ironside, 2003, p. 515). Schön (1983, p. 49) claims that professionals need "an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict."

I am interested in exploring with students these evocative, less 'certain' ways that we learn things about ourselves, other people and nursing. Arts-based

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 23–33.

approaches offer me and the nursing students I work with, a means of generating and exploring evocative understandings (Richardson, 2003) of lived experiences and identities as nurses. Arts-based approaches in education, research and nursing practice offer ways of calling forth inner creative forces and developing possibilities for new or different perceptions and understandings (Darbyshire, 1994; Koithan, 1996; Johnson & Jackson, 2005; Price et al., 2007). Eisner (2002, p. xii) asserts that many of the "most complex and subtle forms of thinking" occur when students have an opportunity to work meaningfully on the creation of images, "whether visual choreographic, musical literary or poetic," and to scrutinize them appreciatively.

This chapter is concerned with the interactions between engagement in arts-based inquiry and the evolving knowledge and identities of student nurses. The chapter derives from a doctoral research study that explored art-based inquiry processes and involved participatory research among twenty second-year undergraduate nursing students as they undertook a Nursing Humanities option module. During the course, the creating and performing of art work (poetry, visual art, drama, dance) by students and the study of art in the public domain enabled us to meaningfully engage in reflection, interpretation and dialogue regarding the experiences of people requiring health care, as well as offering us powerful ways of inquiring into the students' perceptions, motivations, biographies and identities as nurses and care givers. In this chapter, students' evocative understandings of their lived worlds and identities are re-presented. The capacities of arts-based inquiry as a means, for these students, of exploring and dialoguing complex experiences and perceptions are considered. The potential of arts-based approaches in the curriculum to foster inquiry and critical thinking, essential attributes in contemporary nursing, is examined and possibilities and challenges of engaging with aesthetic approaches in educational and research contexts are discussed.

SCRATCHING SURFACES: INQUIRING AND EXPERIENCING THROUGH ART-MAKING PROCESSES

Through our work together, I noticed that the art-making process seemed to offer the students a means of accessing nebulous understandings or previously unvoiced perceptions and enabled them to articulate these in divergent ways that resonated with others and invited response and dialogue. The students often used the art-making process to aesthetically encounter or re-enact experiences of caring, undertaken during nursing practice, and/or to explore the situations of people in care. For some students "'re-playing' strips of experience" (Goffman, 1981, p. 74) through the construction of a signifying art-piece enabled empathetic and cognitive inquiry and learning to take place. Here is Helen's work; entitled 'Beneath the Darkness: Colour, Hope and Beauty':

Beneath the darkness; colour, hope and beauty—Helen

Helen's comment on her piece

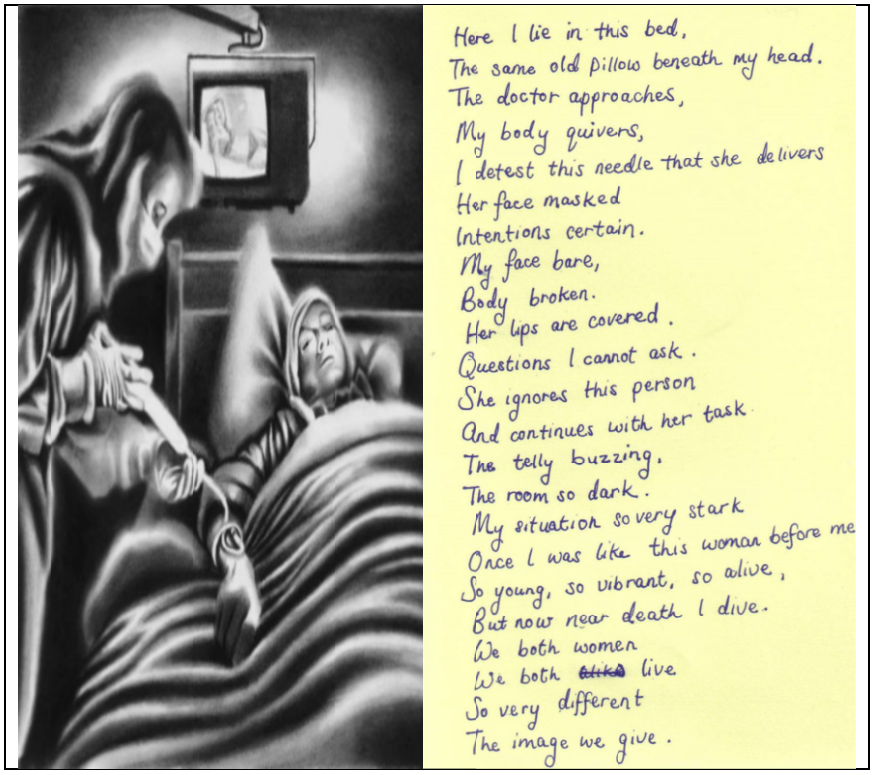
The piece was made by covering the paper in lots of colours. It was then covered with a black oil pastel. The pastel was then scratched off with a needle leaving the colour. The piece represents the darkness and black cloud that falls on people when they encounter mental illness. Recovering from mental illness is a slow process and unlike a physical illness, the improvements are difficult to see on a daily basis. The colour in the piece is in very narrow lines created by the needle. However although it is in narrow lines it is very powerful. The small day to day things in nursing can too be very powerful. The colour coming through the black is a representation of the work of the mental health nurse. By supporting, listening to and being there

> for people, the nurse can bring out the person's true colours. Through mental health nursing hope and beauty can emerge from the darkness.

Through designing and crafting this piece Helen engages in a process of aesthetic and philosophical inquiry and representation. She considers her own nursing practice and interrogates an area that she wants to make visible through art. Her choice of art form, symbolism, and art-making method interacts with and extends this inquiry of nursing practice. In overlaying the colours with the black pastel she literally and metaphorically causes the black cloud to overwhelm colour, thus she contemplates and articulates a narrative of the possible progression and effects of mental illness in a person's life. Helen retains a critical awareness that that colour is still there; her choice of tool and method for removing the black and unearthing the colour is similarly well considered and reflects her developing knowledge of the nature of the work of the mental health nurse. Her uncovering of the colour is wrought in painstaking narrow needle lines and the piece retains much of its blackness; this artistic act resonates with Helen's knowledge that recovery is often a slow and possibly partial process. Through her work in excavating the colour, she realises that the emergence of even a small amount of colour through the black is very powerful (and in the actual piece it is indeed striking in its contrast). In crafting this piece, Helen is inquiring into, contemplating and re-enacting the experience of mental pain, healing and the work of the mental health nurse. Her work is a kind of narrative performance which Peterson and Langellier (2006, p. 173) consider to be "both a making and a doing."

DEVELOPING THE ART OF INTERPRETATION

Many medical/ nursing humanities modules involve the exploration of arts and narratives from the public domain that are relevant to healthcare/ nursing interests. This activity was extended by asking the students to respond artistically to some of the artworks they encountered. This approach is known as *ekphrasis*. Hollander (1995, p. 4) states that ekphrasis involves "addressing the image, making it speak, speaking of it interpretively, meditating upon the moment of viewing it." This process seems to me to have many similarities to nursing assessment where we are also asked to 'view' people in care and speak of them (and with them) interpretively in terms of their situations and needs. The poetic response created by students to this visual art piece conveys this critical noticing and empathetic understanding: the meditating on the moment of viewing. The painting is by Robert Pope, created while he was living with Hodgkin's disease and the poem is from students Alice, Rebecca, Rachel and Aiofe.



Here I lie in this bed,
The same old pillow beneath my head.
The doctor approaches,
My body quivers,
I detest this needle that she delivers
Her face masked
Intentions certain.
My face bare,
Body broken.
Her lips are covered.
Questions I cannot ask.
She ignores this person
And continues with her task
The telly buzzing.
The room so dark.
My situation so very stark
Once I was like this woman before me
So young, so vibrant, so alive,
But now near death I dive.
We both women
We both ~~alive~~ live
So very different
The image we give.

Chemotherapy—Robert Pope (reproduced with permission from the Robert Pope Foundation). Poetic response of Alice, Rebecca, Rachel and Aiofe.

Here the students interrogate the artwork and, individually and collectively, interpret its meanings. While undertaking this activity students commented on the value of this interpretive work in helping them to develop their observation skills in nursing assessment, and to formulate more creative, insightful approaches to care planning and care delivery. As the module progressed and students became more familiar and comfortable with working creatively, they became increasingly aware of the relationships between interpreting art and interpreting life. These realisations are conveyed in some of the student module evaluation comments:

> I think if you … if I take anything from this it's like that patients are in a sense to be interpreted, they are the art and you have to look at them and draw things out and you know; not just read it once and go 'oh I didn't really get that' like …—Mary

> You sort of look at someone from a different perspective and see why are they acting that way? What did they feel at that moment? What was going on? Like the way you look at a painting; why is it so dark and gloomy?—Lisa

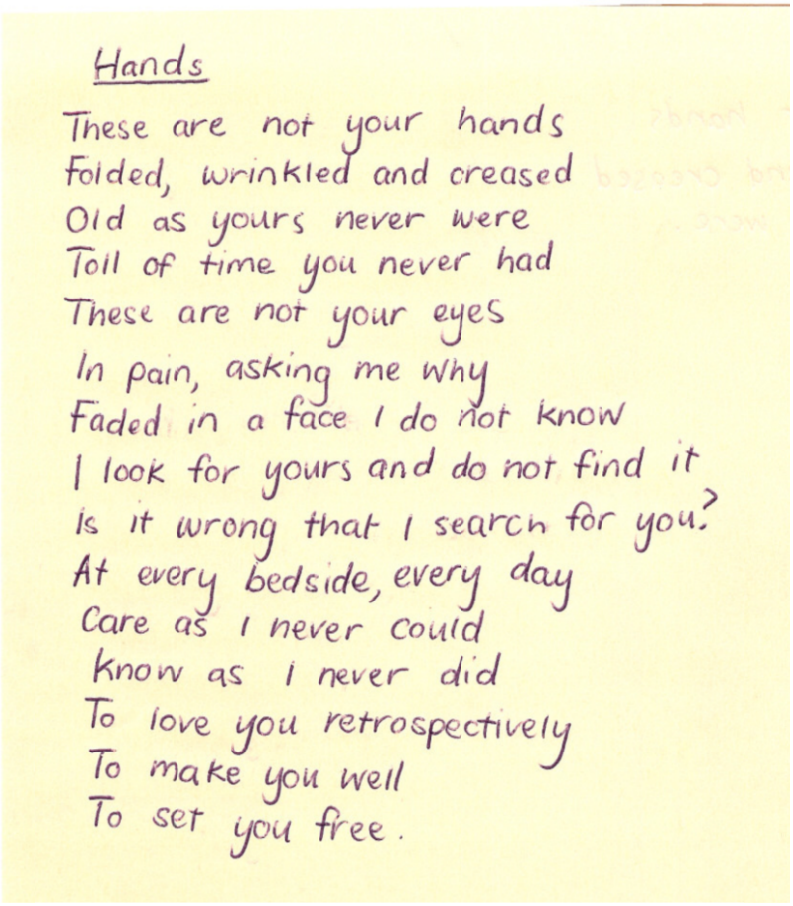
Processes of collaborative inquiry and meaning making in the module also offered rich pedagogical experiences. In this instance, following on from individual interpretation of the Pope image, the students were subsequently involved in creating and articulating a collective response that represented their interpretations of the artwork's meanings. The students recognised the productive and the hegemonic tensions inherent in this process and noted that assessing, interpreting and articulating the 'presentations' of people in care often also involves collaborative meaning making and collective responses.

UNEARTHING THE OBSCURED

One of my aspirations for working aesthetically with students is that this ability to see the unique and individual in each situation also becomes embedded in their learning and working processes and practice. Fostering students' confidence in articulating and sharing nebulous understandings also offers possibilities for challenging the 'certain' in nursing. For example, in their poetic response to Pope's image, in addition to empathizing with the situation of a person in care, the students evoke nuances of gender and power implicated in the medicalisation of illness. Perhaps creating this poem allows the students a safe place to be critical of the systems in which they are embedded—in this case, the medical system? Students also project into the poem their own powerful feelings of identification with this woman's plight: for example, experiences of vulnerability, the broken body, and inability to question certain clinical practices. For these students, putting words in characters' mouths may externalise private perceptions and more safely articulate these for discussion and support.

INTERROGATING SELF AND PURPOSE

Through arts-based processes, the students' private perceptions and personal pain were frequently, sometimes tentatively, explored and evoked. Here is Lisa's poem.



Hands

These are not your hands
Folded, wrinkled and creased
Old as yours never were
Toil of time you never had
These are not your eyes
In pain, asking me why
Faded in a face I do not know
I look for yours and do not find it
Is it wrong that I search for you?
At every bedside, every day
Care as I never could
Know as I never did
To love you retrospectively
To make you well
To set you free.

Lisa's comment

This is a poem about what the experience of caring means to me. Having lost my mother to cancer at quite a young age, I often find myself wondering how she was cared for when she was in hospital, if people took time with her and did their best or were they neglectful or disrespectful. When caring myself I often wonder if I am doing enough. Would it have been enough for my own mum?

Learning to be a nurse and about different illnesses is a strange experience for me. When I was young I didn't realise my mother was terminally ill. It is hard to come to terms with the fact that now I am a student nurse I could look after her and help her a lot more than I did when I was a child but I'll never have the chance.

> I understand now what she must have gone through and things I encountered as a young girl are now starting to make sense. I feel sad that I won't ever be able to thank Mum for the years she was a wonderful mother and friend.
>
> I have come to realise over the last few months that many of my attitudes about caring and the way I feel about the experience of nursing are inextricably linked to the loss of my mother

Through poetic writing, Lisa evokes a dialogue with her mother and explores her quest to find a similar connection through her nursing practice. In her nursing work Lisa re-engages with memories of her mother. She realises that through her nursing performance she is attempting to re-enact and recapture lost caring opportunities and experiences. Writing offers her ways to recognise and articulate this need. It also enables her to interrogate herself, her purposes and motivations in this regard: 'Is it wrong that I search for you?' Perhaps writing the poem helps Lisa to keep in touch with herself and her mother and provides a means of working out feelings of ambivalence and pain. Nursing work can provoke strong emotions, memories and vulnerabilities among students. However, strategies designed to promote students' emotional well-being and access to support remain woefully inadequate (Tully, 2004). Such initiatives are difficult to implement in a culture where the emphasis is on the practical rather than on the reflective. Among these students, art-making facilitated the search for personal and existential meaning.

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN USING ART-BASED APPROACHES

The benefits of using arts-based approaches among these students are manifold; however, there are also challenges in using these approaches. Working with arts-based methods requires students and facilitators to be able to acclimatise to a teaching and learning environment that is not tightly structured or prescribed. The creative process involves a necessary level of grappling with uncertainty. According to Eisner (2002, p. 10),

> Work in the arts also invites the development of a disposition to tolerate ambiguity, to explore what is uncertain, to exercise judgment free from prescriptive rules and procedures … Work in the arts enables us to stop looking over our shoulder and to direct our attention inward to what we believe or feel. Such a disposition is at the root of individual autonomy.

This poses a challenge when the surrounding curriculum privileges evidence-based knowledge and inculcates expectations in students that learning and nursing practice are predictable, knowable activities. In this arts-based work, students sometimes found it difficult at first to move from the tightly structured, outcomes-focused context of surrounding modules; they often initially looked for guidelines and were wary of sharing possibly 'incorrect' interpretations of an art piece. I had to work hard on developing trust and freeing students (and myself) from these inhibitions. As we became more comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity, the co-creative and inquiry process started to develop. Catherine, one of these

participants, commented on the art-making process: "It was about what you could bring out in yourself … like … it was your small idea and it was growing."

Like the students, I realise that I also need to be able to tolerate uncertainty, According to Koithan (1996, p. 536), in using aesthetic methodologies

> The nurse educator moves from a position of information giver to participant in the process of discovery, fostering a supportive environment where inquiry, creativity and self -discovery are encouraged.

I find this more difficult than I had originally imagined, especially in the early stages of the process when it is not clear how the students are adjusting to this type of work. I have to work hard at resisting the temptation, during the initial stages, to ease this discomfort by 'teaching' interpretations. Working with arts-based approaches involves a very different way of conceptualizing and engaging in nursing education.

In this work, I have also learned that all apparently 'natural' and 'spontaneous' discoveries require antecedents, and in promoting this creativity much foundational work in discreetly observing and fostering trust, confidence and participation is required. In addition, the choice and uses of creative activities is not random and needs to be carefully thought through with a clear rationale and appropriate to the group and the theme being explored. Similarly, class discussions can never be totally haphazard and a certain amount of unobtrusive navigation and prompting is required from the facilitator.

I have learned that students needed to feel stimulated to explore yet feel safe and supported in their explorations. Getting the balance right between careful planning, nudging students in fruitful directions, and being over prepared and prescriptive, thus stifling individual creativity, is a challenge for me in this work. However, when this alchemy happens it results in powerful transformative learning for all of us.

CONCLUSION

Many nurse educators value and use arts-based approaches elements in their teaching, "producing different knowledge and producing knowledge differently" (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005 p. 969) put it. To engage in this process involves letting go of familiar positions; according to Mair (1989, p. 13), it requires a leap of faith and imagination "in taking such care we will have to free ourselves enough to imagine how things may be beyond the ways we have been taught not to see and not to say."

My work with these students deepens my appreciation that learning is a multi-dimensional process and that as educators we need to invest more time in helping students develop capability to think and configure knowledge and experience in creative, discerning ways. I believe, like Ironside (2003, p. 515) that

> [P]erhaps navigating the uncertainty and fallibility embedded in current, and future, practice has become as important for nurses as content knowledge and

> skill mastery, and that interpreting (i.e. learning to read) situations is as important as intervening.

And therein, I believe, lies the strengths of arts-based approaches for nursing: in the capacity to evoke and invite engagement with both the particular and the universal in pluralistic, non-doctrinal and collaborative ways. Research and pedagogical practices that model and encourage this plurality have the potential to widen personal and professional boundaries concerning conceptions of knowledge and identity and to foster confidence in asking different and interesting questions.

This is the challenge for all of us, teachers, nurses and students alike. How often do we ask different and interesting questions in our daily practice and how do we welcome and encourage these questions in others? Narrative and arts-based approaches offer me a way of wondering and a means of encouraging others to question.

And it is in the spirit of imaginative questioning, here from student Alice, that I conclude this chapter:

> I wonder like if some patients, like say if some people write books, some people paint pictures and stuff and like … so what would someone go home and write about you? If they were going to paint a picture about being in hospital, where would you come into it? … What would they remember about you … kind of? … I never felt like that before.

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5. SAILING AND THE DAD CONNECTION

It started with hearing the water slap the sides of the boat. Or maybe it was just being on the water and the motion of the gentle waves and the sun on my face. Something was addictive to me about sailing. I hung out with friends of friends that had a boat. I learned how to sail myself and then how to crew. I volunteered for the Oceanic Society of the San Francisco Bay so that I could spend more time on the water. I taught sailing and worked for free. I had this dream or vision of being on the seven-day race to the Hawaiian Islands.

I took my new girlfriend to every harbour around the bay and at the coast to "just look" at boats. After a few years of this I bought my own boat—a 21-foot Catalina sailboat. It was a used boat but in excellent shape. I named her *Whistling Dixie*.

I was lucky to have lots of friends who were willing to try sailing. I tried to be a clear, calm captain, but many times I'm sure I was not.

Weather permitting, I was on the water each day of every weekend and, during the summer, in the evenings too. I just couldn't get enough.

Then one day it hit me. It was the sound of the waves lapping the side of the boat that was the most soothing. This sound was the most calming influence in my life. Why was it so compelling?

I think it's because it connected me to my father who had died 26 years earlier. It took me years on the boat to put this together. The sound of the water was like the sound of his voice to me, as if I was on the water with him again, the sounds of fishing together on the lake in North Carolina. I now had a way to be close to him that I had created without even knowing it.

The love poured back from him as I understood this. I could feel him smiling at me. I know he'd have been proud of how I handled my little watercraft, which was twice the size of his largest fishing boat. I remembered he had always wanted a Boston Whaler.

I come from a long line of fishermen. My grandmother Bernice, my father's mother, was an incredible fisherperson. Every summer I would travel down to Florida to see her. She would take me out deep-sea fishing. I also remember fishing with her at my Uncle Hoot's farm and off the piers into the Gulf of Mexico. If I caught anything worth catching she would report it to the local newspaper as the catch of the day.

I wonder now—as I write this—if fishing with me brought her son back to her? Could she be reconnected with him by teaching me? I wonder who taught my dad to fish.

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 35–37.

This idea brings tears—that I might have given her some joy after losing three husbands and a son. She looked for most of her joy in the bottom of a Black Velvet Canadian Whisky bottle each night before dinner.

My Grandmother: Bernice Duffy 1964.

This gossamer thread of connection to the water, the sea and its wildlife now moves forward to my children.

I took Grace fishing a few years ago. I still say: "You've got to hold your mouth just right," just like my dad and Bernice use to say to me.

Now as a parent, I can see this was just a way to get me to stop talking and give them some peace.

There are many ways I am still connected to my father. He's been dead over 40 years now; still, I can be moved to tears as I write about these connections. These are happy tears and missing tears—they mean I still remember and that he is still important.

Some of these connections are: cooking, grilling, travelling and meeting new people, driving in the car on long road trips, anytime I'm around horses or cows, the smell of leather, and freckles.

And, of course, all I have to do is look in the mirror and the female version of him looks back.

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DAVE BAINTON

6. DZO DANCING

PROLOGUE

This poiesis is a response to a day spent walking above Saboo village, in Ladakh, taking some *Dzo* up into the mountains for their summer pasture where they can graze freely, and not disturb the fields of summer harvest down below in the village.

As we walked up through the mountains on a route that would eventually lead to the pass, the path became a narrative landscape for stories to emerge—stories of place, of past, but also stories of the Dzo and knowledge of them—knowledge that I am characterising as indigenous knowledge. The writing seeks to find meaning in this experience for the possibility of how indigenous knowledge might be conceptualised.

Methodologically, the productive role of the act of walking in enacting stories of indigenous knowledge highlights the importance of methods of data collection that are sensitive to understanding forms of knowledge that are located in landscape. Epistemologically, understanding the narratives as enactments of indigenous knowledge draws attention to the pedagogic importance of such spaces and practices for the transmission of indigenous knowledge.

The title comes from the dynamic between Dzo and person that takes place during herding, and which I have characterised as a form of dance, pointing towards the need for embodied understandings.

The path strikes its way up the valley through and then above Saboo village. A path that has been drawn by generations, connecting the village to the 'beyond'

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 39–48.

spaces above the *phu*, that is the place/name given, in every village I go to, to that which is the end of the village, the 'just' before the beyond.

This path constitutes my experience that day. Up there, beyond the bridge, the path is still inscribed into the stone and sand and grass, a faint line in the brown landscape, while below it has long been painted over in the more modern palette of tarmac grey.

There is a comfort to be found, up here, in this path, where giving and receiving are the same action, where, in tracing the lines that others have walked safely, I cannot but inscribe it further for others to follow, if they choose. This is no simple poetic phrasing—who, if lost on a mountain would not feel the warmth of that path as a gift—the way down, the presence of others, what other way of understanding would be better suited?

Maybe therefore, it should be no surprise that I have heard so many stories placed on this path in the mountains, in my conversations with people in the village. Stories of wealth, of desolation, of the everyday. These stories will be told, later, but that particular day the path was all about the Dzo.

Oh you beautiful beast, you strong beast!
Your tail is long, and your horns reach to the sky!
Please plough our fields.
Please work hard for us now,
And we will take you to the pastures
Where you can eat long grass and flowers
And do noting all day!
Oh, you beautiful beast!
(Ladakhi song of, quoted in Norberg-Hodge, 2000, p. 26)

***

Dzo.
A cross between a male Yak and a female cow.
A large working animal used for ploughing fields. Hardy enough for the mountains.

***

"It might be interesting for you, " Nawang says, "tomorrow, my wife and some people are taking their Dzo up the mountain. There is no grass for them here, and if they get in other people's fields they cause trouble, so we send them up for the summer."

"Do you have to go and fetch them again at the end of the summer?" I ask.

"They know when to come. My Dzo is an old fellow; he knows. He just comes when it is time. Now he goes and enjoys in the mountains."

There is pride – the Old Dzo knows!

"But there is no grass in the mountain; it is all bare," I say, exposing my ignorance yet again.

***

Days later. I am talking with the man who speaks with pride about his water powered grinding mill. We have our milky teas sitting inside the stone dome, covering ourselves in last year's white flour, after he has shown me around, lifted up the massive wheel to reveal the working underneath. But, like all people, there are many themes interleaving his narrative, not least of these, Yaks, the path up the mountains, the (old) old (colonial) times, mostly filled with stories of oppression, forced trips across the mountains in winter. It is perhaps unsurprising that this path and these mountains are often mentioned. Gyatso translates

> He says the path goes up past Digar, after that he does not know it, but he knows it reaches up to Digar la, and then to the Nubra valley. In the winter, if

people wanted to go to over Digar la, they would take their yak going in front to drive back the snow to allow people to follow.

***

I want to write about Yaks.

Hairy black Yaks, their long tails. Massive beasts. Their world is that of the Beyond. Cannot survive in the valleys down below, must spend their lives roaming the cooler mountain passes. They, like the path translate between the world and what is 'beyond.'

If you venture beyond, towards the mountain top, towards to the lands where only Yaks and their herders stay, you will find no roads, no cars, no schools, no, no, no

WEALTH/POVERTY?

There is always an inescapable definitional negativity about the concept of poverty. The inevitable focus upon what people do not have not what they do. Let's be positive.

Yaks.

Great brutes of embodied resistance.

***

So, I am ready to sense sadness, as I hear his words; cannot rule out the possibility that the sadness is simply my own, as his words conjure up for me the beauty of

yaks. “Before, every household would have a Yak, now there are only two Yaks for the village. They live up in the mountains all year. We only keep them in case the village needs more Dzo.”

***

Fieldnote:
“Good with Dzo.” Embodied knowledge, I often hear this expression, “good with” … Yangchang’s dad is “good at farming” … good at. Which of the younger generation of Saboo is going to be “good with Dzo?”

We chat as we walk, Nawang, Gyatso, I, and another guy who is coming with us. There are three Dzo altogether. Nawang’s is the oldest, carries himself like the leader at the front. His left horn is broken, his right marks his age. The other two scurry behind, like teenagers, squabbling for position.

***

Stories emerge.

> Dorji, His Dad is good with Dzo. My Dzo, he broke his leg a few years ago, and Dorji’s dad he set it. The doctors, they just put plaster on it, but that is not good for them,

And

> If they eat poison grass, then we bleed the nose and they get OK. That’s different from what a vet does. Vets, they put a hole through to let the air out; we just bleed the nose.

***

Years previously, I had learnt what western veterinary medicine does about poison grass, in Khaling, Bhutan, The other European volunteer in the village, a vet, had talked about how, that day, she had had to take out her Swiss army knife in a field, and find that particular spot somewhere under the ribs, and push, hard, as hard as she could, to make a hole through to the swelling stomach that would kill the cow if she did not do so. Her first time, she had said. The cow had lived.

***

There is knowledge here, indigenous knowledge. It is an easy label here—the knowledge brought up as contradictory, in opposition to that of the knowledge of the Vet. What is the nature of this knowledge—embodied? enacted?

> Crapanzano writes in a similar way of the stories he heard that would emerge while travelling with Navajo Indians,
>
> "It was as though the narrator's physical movement 'activated' the narrative performance that in turn "activated' the narrated story. (…) We take context-landscape – as containment and lose sense of its dynamic and reciprocal engagement with what we do and say."
> (Crapanzano, 2004, p. 45)

I would not say that my own knowledge of this was only possible through participating in walking the Dzo up the mountain. Perhaps this knowledge would have emerged in interview, perhaps not. I only say that it was the walk, the context that encouraged such things to be shared.

***

This is important. There is a fragility to this knowledge. Fragile flowers in this desert landscape. For me this is research knowledge, for Gyatso and Nawang community knowledge, indigenous knowledge. Fragile knowledge that perhaps only emerges, is possible to be revealed, shared, passed on in these moments.

***

There is a connection here with Foucault—on the understanding of power as the productive force that allows, encourages, empowers some moments to be, while others are passed silently by—some knowledge to be expressed, transmitted, while others lie dormant, silent. The merest shifting on the path takes us elsewhere, takes us away from these fragile places.

***

Indigenous knowledge should not be thought of as sitting in a repository of old people's heads or bodies, like a library, an archive. There are only moments of experience where knowledge is enacted or it is not. Let us be clear—it is only the enactment of this knowledge that allows me to write about it here.

***

In the silence is ignorance
Ignor / Ignorance.
It is a naming. Ignorance—that which we choose to ignore.

***

It is easy to talk hypothetically about indigenous knowledge being preserved—easy to see that there are still people who have this knowledge —easy to say that there is no reason why young people are not able to listen, can't take up the practices—but the life dries out from them as the stories are untold. And this is no open battle, it is a war of attrition as some knowledge simply gets left behind forgotten about, passed over, unrecognised, unspoken.

Ama Danmo / Mother Ibex

O mother ibex thou lookst sad,
O golden ibex thou lookst faded,
No not so, by thee O child,
A little Makhoting juice did I drink
Which made me lazy

O Mother ibex,
atop the hill I see men!
No, not so, by thee O child,
A shepherd from Ling that is

O mother ibex I see,
gun on his shoulder
No, not so, by thee O golden Kiddie!
A shepherd's stick that is

O mother ibex I see,
Hunter's bag around his shoulder!
No, not so, by thee O child,
A shepherd's lunch that is

O mother ibex! I see thy waist red!
No, not so by thee child, I just rolled on a Red soil!

The place where to eat is the hidden meadow,
The place where to hide is the high cliff child.
(with these words the mother ibex dies)

(in Sikander, 1997, pp. 208-209)

***

The Dzo are more relaxed now, in the open ground. There is the sense that we are companions, we do this journey together, the Dzo and I, Gyatso. At intervals we stop, resting together upon the warm rocks and pleasant grass that each desires. We move. There are only a series of moments. It is supremely relaxing. There is a rhythm here. We meander from one side of the valley to the other. There is a line that we try and keep to. I am always behind and farther away from the line than he. It is a strange dance, this, I the lighter, faster particle, circling, as he lumbers upwards.

***

There is no better word than Dance. I dance with the Dzo. We walk, we move. The illusion of causality disappears. It is no longer clear that the Dzo goes ahead because I chase behind. Perhaps it is he who is leading me up the mountain

Fieldnote:

"7 hours walk to get a sense of what 'Dzo dancing might be like. And yet, how else would it be possible to get such a sense. No amount of theory can bring this out even though no doubt, from this experience, I will theorise.

I laugh at this paradox. There is something true about laughter. A jewel discovered.

> Who can doubt that it must be the Dzo who are being chased—for sure, he would not move up the mountain otherwise.
>
> Yet
>
> Who can doubt that the Dzo is leading us—for sure I would not walk unless he went in front.

***

I could interview cattle herders. I could ask them questions about what it is like to herd cattle. About the changing times, about what they see as cattle herding knowledge, but I would not 'feel' this knowledge. I enjoy writing this, enjoy the swaying that inhabits me as I do so, knowledge that can only be poorly communicated, only felt. Knowledge enacted, but not verbally so. The moment allows me to feel such knowledge, only that. Feel not what an experienced Dzo

dancer might feel, feel only the pale shadow of what it might be like, but this is enough.

***

We get back to the house at the bottom of the village around 2pm, tired. I sleep a while.

In the evening, Nawang appears:

"You didn't do your job properly," he says, smiling

"What?"

"He came back?"

"Who?"

"The Dzo, he came back. He is there at our place."

"Really?"

"He is there! He knows! He is getting old. It's cold up there this summer. He knows he can get fed here. Why to have a tough time up in the mountain?"

I hear the humour and pride in his voice—the old Dzo knows.

POSTSCRIPT

The story of one day's 'data collection' in the early summer. What do I learn from this day? I talk to people, experience things in a faraway land, and through many layers of translation represent these experiences.

What is left from this experience? A few photos, a few pages of fieldwork notes, written in the evening.

What is left from this experience? The feeling of Dancing with Dzo. Memories of sounds, images. A feeling that makes me sway and want to leap from rock to rock to rock, to feel the connection between the movement of the Dzo and my own body. Knowledge brought into being in me. Not spoken of, not 'transmitted.' Knowledge that had to be danced.

What is left from this experience? Moments lead to other moments. I write this. The path of life goes one way rather than another. Each experience takes us

somewhere (not else-where). There is only the journey and the path is constituted by the data.

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PART TWO: WRITTEN INQUIRY

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7. INTRODUCTION TO WRITTEN INQUIRY

In this section practitioner-researchers use writing as a form of inquiry into a range of subjects, some that emerge from their therapeutic and other practices, some that arise from more personal connections, and others that hover between the two. Family relationships with the secrets, lies and loves that bind us; the frustration, pain and questioning of parenting a bullied child, illuminated against the backdrop of cultures—ancient and institutional—that do not bend easily; a questioning of how sexuality is defined—generalised perceptions that contradict the ordinary, lived, yearning life and one woman's struggle to maintain and gain strength from her position at the borders of academia; a woman's narrative in prose poetry patterned by the past to lead the reader through a spectacular breakthrough and two accounts of women's ageing process—one presented in multiple voices (including an uncontrollable canine wit), the other through snapshots of the often under-acknowledged freedoms that accompany ageing.

The writers use prose poetry, fictions, dramatised scripts, autoethnographic, and epistolatory approaches to show not only how the emotions and experiences they seek to express might best be represented but also to give the reader a sense of living through these highly visceral performative pieces. In some of the chapters more than one approach has been used, rolling from fact to fiction to poem and prose, using whatever form(s) appropriate for the retelling. What these diverse chapters have in common, alongside the use of writing as modality and means of exploration, is that they all trouble, play with and ask questions of time.

Freeman (2009) talks of hindsight as an opportunity for humans to garner insights into their life-space and reshape their lives in light of reflections on their experience. In this sense hindsight loses its more commonplace nostalgic and nihilistic qualities and becomes a source of hope, of ethical know-how about how our lives might be lived, of renewed agency and of hope for the future. In his earlier work (Freeman, 1998; Freeman & Brockmeier, 2001) Freeman also talks of the different qualities of actual, autobiographical and narrative time, to which we would add mythical, magical and geographical time (Speedy, 2011).

Thus the autoethnographic pieces in this section by Bradshaw, Gallant and Heywood stretch actual (or chronological) time differently across autobiographical time, expanding 'epiphanal' moments into long narratives and compressing long stretches of chronological time into seconds. Similarly, the fictionalised pieces from Ferguson and Scarlett 'play' with reality time and space, moving seamlessly, in a magical realist fashion, between different mythical and actual realities and geographical contexts. In the poetic texts it is as if you could hear a pin drop, and there is no sense of time. Meanwhile, in fictionalising their accounts, these authors say much that they would not otherwise have been able to say. Like Clough's

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 51–57.

(2002) fictions and narratives about the underbelly of life for teachers and students in secondary schools, the only way of successfully telling these stories in ways they can be heard or read is to fictionalise them.

WRITING AS INQUIRY

Writing as a recognised form of creative inquiry has come a long way since Laurel Richardson's (1997) struggles for recognition in the academy and writing as a research process in its own right (as opposed to a vehicle for 'writing up' that which has already been researched) is now a well established form of qualitative research. It is to Richardson that we owe the transformation of writing from a mopping-up activity to a research method (Richardson, 2000: Richardson & St Pierre, 2004) that embraces many forms, including in this section of the book, poetic inquiries, fictionalised inquiries and autoethnographies.

Speedy (2008, p. 145) writes of students who saw "research as the high ground" and her desire to take issue with those ideas to produce "troubling and incomplete texts: texts that explicitly invite ongoing conversation." Here, the writers take up that invitation by exploring the various ways of presenting embodied texts, linking the body inextricably with the physical, emotional and social landscapes out of which the experiences arise and offering the reader a means of entering those spaces.

Three pieces here are rooted in autoethnography (chapters eight, nine and ten), a genre that is not for the fainthearted researcher, evoking as it does criticisms of self-indulgence, laziness and the "narcissistic substitution of auto-ethnography for research" (Delamont, 2009, p. 51). Auto-ethnographers, straddling the spaces between self as ethnographic field of study, culture and context, need to produce exceptional "writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739) if they are to avoid such stringent critiques.

Given that this genre evokes such hostility, why are we advocating it as a genre for practitioner researchers who surely have enough straddling to do? Partly because there are some fields of human experience that can only legitimately be made sense of through the combination of autobiographical and cultural weaving back and forth that autoethnography affords, and partly because no other form of research brings to the fore the complex, thorny and disjointed relationships between narrative, memory and identity (see King, 2000). In doing so autoethnography effectively describes how we recall incidents and make sense of our experiences, not to make them into a consolidated homogeneous statement but to make known the differences, the angles, that make up the prisms of our lives, retold through that most unreliable of narrators, memory.

Ellis et al. (2011) describe the epiphanies or moments of hindsight that constitute the 'data' of autoethnography. All the autoethnographic authors (Bradshaw, Heywood and Gallant) establish their writing motivations as confusion, anger and frustration, from positions of being misunderstood and unacknowledged, either misunderstood culturally or sexually or as a family, or only seen through this

one dimension. Here the writing not only provides another version but invites the reader in, through storytelling and a mixed poetics writing approach, to the family, the alpine bunk, the pain of parenting and the lonely heart.

In their very different fictions, Scarlett and Ferguson take us into more dramatic forms. Scarlett's powerful fictionalised narrative leaves the reader turning the page both in anticipation and fear of what they might be told while Ferguson's exploration into academic research belies the words of one of her alter-ego characters, Paula: "you are, to put it kindly, a terrible writer lacking anything resembling a creative imagination."

Chris Scarlett's account is a fiction, but is based on accumulated accounts from her doctoral work on sistering, work that she was in the end only ethically able to represent in fictionalised forms in order to protect the identities of the people she writes about. As Sikes and Piper (2009) maintain, writing about people's lives always carries a heavy ethical burden, not least because of "the truths that some readers might construct and read into our stories" (Piper & Sikes, 2010, p. 572). In this case Scarlett has not chosen to produce composite identities or symbolic equivalents (see Sikes & Piper, 2009; Yalom, 1991) but rather has written one fictionalised and dramatised, performative narrative of her own life story. In this way, she has changed, enlarged, left out, 're-performed' and re-arranged details of lives, including her own, whilst at the same time keeping her writing true to the roots and spirit of sistering relationships that she has encountered. In this sense her 'truth claims,' like those of Spry (2001) in writing about performative autoethnography as a genre, are of verisimilitude or trustworthiness and what Geertz would call 'being there' but also, with more than a nod to Carolyn Ellis (1995), about producing writing that performs on the page and engages readers:

> Being There is a postcard experience. It is Being Here, a scholar among scholars that gets your anthropology read … published, reviewed, cited, taught. (Geertz, 1988, p. 130)

Ferguson seeks to evoke verisimilitude and to engage, but also to amuse, a rare phenomenon in academic research, by her use of 'theatre of the absurd' techniques to highlight the absurdities of the human condition she witnesses around her. In order to gain altitude on the position and visibility of older women, she takes her research team up into outer space and includes amongst them Boris, a talking Glaswegian dog, bringing to mind in the most extraordinary way the words of Cixous (1994, p. 132) "we are never more human than when we are dogs."

In so doing, however, she quietly introduces contemporary discussions about the forgotten Scots dialect and makes pertinent methodological points about the uncertainties and impermanence of qualitative research texts. Ferguson is working within different dimensions and truth claims to writers of traditional social research texts and as Richardson (2000, p. 926) writes:

> Claiming to write 'fiction' is different from claiming to write 'science' in terms of the audience one seeks, the impact one might have on different

> publics, and how one expects 'truth claims' to be evaluated. These differences should not be overlooked or minimized.

Meanwhile in the final group of texts, Bell and Kemp take poetic representations to very differing limits. Bell, drawing in different ways on Riessman (1993) and Richardson (1997), uses the episolatory texts gathered for 'research' to fall into prose poetry, where refrains emerge apparently effortlessly out of the correspondences to draw the reader's eye and ear to 'talk that sings' (Bird, 1997). The contrast between the narrative and the poeticised extracts invites the reader to listen carefully, impacting far more than communications transcribed 'verbatim' could allow. In the final piece of the section, Kemp offers the opportunity to take a rollercoaster ride across elements of her own life stories, into a series of poems that are at times raw and stark and at others everyday dialogue. The piece ends, quite aptly, with a visual poem that offers no answers. Like Prendergast et al. (2009), Kemp is using poetic forms as a writerly and exploratory form of arts-based inquiry with an intention

> To reveal the sometimes hidden intersections between the scholarly and personal, often found in the overlapping landscapes of experience and memory (which also happens to be the landscape of poetry). (Prendergast et al., 2009, p. 1373)

WRITING SOCIAL RESEARCH DIFFERENTLY

The texts in this section of the book cover topics that are explored routinely within the canon of social research and other genres of practitioner research. Family lives and relationships and experiences of domestic abuse, social relations, living 'other' lives within a heterosexual society, tensions between marginalized and dominant ethnic groups within academic life (and within life in general), and the subjugated visibility of older women and/or taken for granted assumptions about these visibilities. The literatures of practitioner research are littered with studies of these phenomena, most usually written offering insights into the lives of others rather than the lives of practitioners themselves. This literature, often covering much larger populations and drawing much broader conclusions, offers a backdrop and context for the writing you will find below, but what is written here is shaped, and therefore shapes its readers differently. The writing as inquiry you find in this section of the book is best suited to small intimate studies and provides descriptive, evocative evidence of the particularities of imaginative, scholarly and/or conversational practice. It illustrates and suggests but it does not explain or evaluate. As such, it is not intended as a replacement for, as an alternative to, or as an oppositional force pitted against, more traditional positivist studies exploring, for example, evidence-based practice. 'Writing as inquiry' extends the repertoire of available research genres. It is an approach that is likely to appeal more to, and perhaps be conducted more by, practitioners and their service users than by policymakers, agencies and health care trusts. Nonetheless, as attention to the art and craft of writing becomes more of a consideration, the whole field of social

research may become more concerned with writing in engaging and interesting ways, with the inclusion of the 'wounded practitioner' alongside the wounded client as a legitimate researcher stance. We can but hope.

CRITICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS RAISED BY CHAPTERS 8-13 OF THIS BOOK

The first question that 'writing as inquiry' evokes from researchers steeped in the propositional discourses of traditional research, is 'is this research?.' Bond (2002), a colleague from the University of Bristol and a fellow psychotherapy practitioner/researcher, asks the question: 'naked narrative, is it research?' which begs the question that Kemp asks of us, by implication, in chapter thirteen: 'naked poetry is it research?.' Kemp does not go to the lengths that her colleague Bell does in chapter thirteen, to quote Prendergast et al. (2009) Richardson (1997) and the relevant literatures of poetic inquiry. Donna Kemp simply presents us with a poetic account and implies by situating her writing in a book about research methods that this naked poetic inquiry into her life is sufficient unto a research text. Is context all that matters, then? Does the fact that Kemp (a published poet) has presented her poetic inquiry here under the 'research methodologies' list and not the 'poetry' list make all the difference?

And what of the slippery and contested (Speedy, 2008) territories of autoethnographic research. as exemplified here by Heywood and Gallant? Are such excursions into personal forms of narrative mere self-indulgence or does the lived-first-person nature of these accounts engage with us as readers in a different way and allow us a different relationship with the texts? Are we left with radically different 'insider' understandings of what it means to grow up gay in our society or what it means to be bullied and what it means to live alongside a bullied family member, or are we merely voyeurs twitching our net curtains onto the experiences of others? Scarlett also offers us an autoethnographic account, albeit one that she has fictionalised, so what are we to make of this disturbing tale? Did this four year old really witness a murder? Can the testimony of a child this young, not admissible as legal evidence, be permitted here as a research text? What does this piece bring up for us as social and educational researchers about doing research with children and allowing the voices of children to be 'heard'?

Research into the intimate spaces of people's lives, particularly the intimate lives of researchers themselves, brings up different questions about ethical boundaries and the implications for family members, in this case the children, parents and erstwhile 'love objects' of autoethnographers. Is this possibly unintended implication and exposure of other people in our research writing justified on the grounds of readers gaining from 'personal/insider' perspectives'? Sikes and Potts (2008) believe that it may not be. Ellis (2009) apparently believes that it is. What do you think?

None of these questions are asked lightly or answered easily. Swimming in the deep waters of what have become known as the 'new ethnographies' (Goodall, 2000) is not for the fainthearted and asks different questions of researchers and research participants alike.

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8. A LIFE OF MY STORY

This inquiry is based around a personal story that I originally wrote as part of an autoethnographic dissertation. I do not claim that there is anything of more interest in my storied life than in anyone else's, but this particular story made me curious. My curiosity was not about the events the story narrates, which have been well-known to me for many years, but about the way the story appeared; the way it continues to interact with me and with others. I want, if I can, to uncover more about the life of this story.

As a starting point for inquiry, I situated myself primarily in the position of autoethnographic researcher, following the approach developed and promoted by Ellis and Bochner (2000). However, in the act of writing, I have become increasingly aware that my positionality of self-as-researcher is only one of a range of selves that has been interacting with the story. These multiple selves include myself as student; myself as gay man; and myself as vulnerable human, each providing only one perspective of a narrative whole. This awareness of multiple selves has been described by Ochs and Capps, who argue that personal narratives are always apprehended by partial selves, and that such narratives can only provide a fragmentary view (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Ronai (1992) similarly observes how she has 'facets,' which are framed by a culture that demands she frames each separately from the others, but finds that no one facet is more authentic to her 'true' self than others; rather, the self exists as a dialogue between them. The interaction between my multiple selves and the story also interests me: I want to know about the extent to which the story exists as separate from my apprehending selves, like the fabled elephant being encountered by the three blind men, or whether my identity and the story are engaged in a process of co-creation, each intimately bound up with the other, to find whether, as Eakin puts it "the self is being defined and transacted through a narrative process" (Eakin, 1999, p. 101).

Representing fragmented, partial selves within the context of a single first-person narrative represents a stylistic challenge and I have considered alternative ways of achieving this. Blumenthal (1995) offers one approach by providing question and answer exchanges indicative of different roles contained within one person. Other writers, including Ronai (1992) and Chawla (2001) have used an alternative approach that allows layered and multiple voices to be interwoven by using a narrative form in which voices are separated by physical signification of the narrative discontinuity on the page. I have adopted this latter approach and have used a series of three asterisks to represent the disjunctions in chronology, as well as attitude and style of writing that follow.

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J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 59–68.

It is May 2007 and we have arranged to meet to discuss our dissertation proposals as an Action Learning Set. The three of us agree that the terrace of a city pub is a better venue than the basement seminar room we had booked and that is how Alison, Beth (not their real names) and I come to be sitting together in the sun among the umbrellas and hanging baskets that Spring afternoon. When it comes to my turn, I describe my chosen dissertation topic: an autoethnographic exploration of my identity construction as a gay man and a professional manager. Alison and Beth are my friends, close enough to be honest with me, and I really want to know what they feel about my topic. We agree to record the conversation and before long, Beth comes out with her view:

Beth: I find it uncomfortable, because I would never in a million years want to discuss with anybody else, issues of my sexuality. Issues of who I have sex with or why. To me, I feel uncomfortable about someone who is gay wanting to talk to me about those issues, when I wonder why you feel as though you have to explain those issues, because I really don't mind what you do in bed …

Me: 'Do.' So you see my sexuality as a doing thing do you? That's interesting … It's relevant to how I research it.

***

Anger can keep me awake like nothing else. My anger comes in gusts of imagined dialogue …

"How dare you dismiss my experience by saying you don't care what I do in bed?"

"How *very* dare you!" … "No, I can't say that, it sounds far too camp."

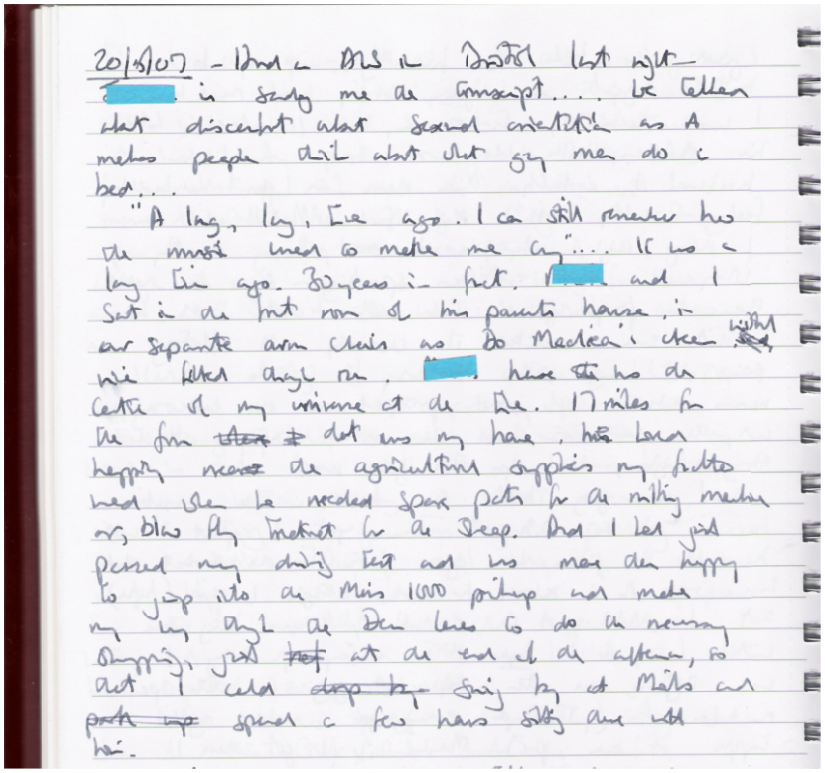
"So what's wrong with camp? What are you scared of? That it's old fashioned? That it's inauthentic? That you wouldn't be taken seriously?"

"I'm angry. I'm fucking seriously angry!"

"But what will being angry do for your dissertation? Will it make you irrational? Is it OK for a researcher to be motivated by anger?"

***

The birth of this story happened early one morning in the grey light of the back bedroom, sliding in a trail of wet ink from the nib of my pen. As soon as I saw the words spidering across the page, I knew they were fundamental to me, as much a part of me as the hand that wrote them; I even think I fell in love with them on the spot. It wasn't that they described new thoughts; they were all events that were well within my conscious memory. But they had never been linked up like that before, tracking events across thirty years and two continents. An effortless flow of words, needing little conscious crafting; quite unlike my usual tortured efforts to get words down on paper.



* * *

Why did that story appear on that day, when the events that formed the plot had been available to me as memories for so long? I have a strong sense that all I was doing that day was finishing off: committing to paper a story that had already assembled itself at a subconscious level to communicate something important to me, an example of what Eakin describes as the 'double construction' of autobiographical writing, where writing is a late phase in a life-long process of identity formation (Eakin, 1999).

Given the deeply personal issue of sexual orientation that lies at the heart of my story, it is also interesting to note Eakin's view that autobiographical memories are socially and culturally constructed, with storytelling constrained by social sanction. The years that my story spans saw changes in societal attitudes to sexual orientation more dramatic than I could have imagined (Nardi et al., 1994; Sandfort et al., 2000; Seidman, 2004; Weeks, 2007). Is it possible that these external changes have affected the way in which I have remembered my own past? It is difficult for me to imagine that the story would have been tellable ten years ago, or

even that I would have wanted to tell it, particularly in the context of an academic inquiry. I can only conclude that the story appeared because something told me the time was right…

***

"A long, long, time ago. I can still remember how the music used to make me …." What is the next word? Is it 'smile,' or is it 'cry'? I can't remember. Anyway, it was certainly a long time ago. Thirty years in fact.

Chris and I sat in the front room of his parents' house in our separate armchairs. The house was the centre of my seventeen-year-old universe, sixteen miles away from the farm that had been my home all my life, at the opposite end of the school catchment area. The attractiveness of any place on earth could be measured very simply back then, in terms of its geographical distance from where Chris lived. The best mate I'd ever had.

Happily, Chris' house was also very near the agricultural suppliers that my father used and I had recently passed my driving test. My father was delighted at my willingness to leap into the Morris 1000 pickup and drive through the Devon lanes on an errand to pick up some udder cream, or blow-fly treatment for the sheep. I usually managed to time my trips towards the end of the afternoon, just before the warehouse shut, so that I could pick up the requested supplies and then just swing by Chris' place to spend a few hours in his company.

I can't remember what we talked about that day. I remember the window, looking out onto the garden; the nick-nacks on the mantle-piece; the smell of the carpet. Mostly, I remember the heat of his thigh, burning the skin on my arm from six feet away, where he sat in his chair. But the only words I can remember were the wistful words of Don Maclean, singing away on the stereo-gram "… and them good old boys, were drinkin' whisky in Rye, and singin' this'll be the day that I die …."

Before I left that night, I remember going up to the bathroom and seeing his worn shirt, slung across the towel rail. I sat there, buried my face in it and breathed. Just to take in the full sense of him.

Soon after that, I went off to university, and like a slick, slow-fade slide transition, Chris slid from view, and was replaced by Tom. Shock-haired, toothy, energetic, Tom, my rock-climbing buddy. Sheffield University was a great magnet for climbers in those days. Roped and harnessed together we clambered and clanged over Stanage Edge, Froggat Edge, Millstone Edge and Lawrencefield. I still have the climbing guide on my shelf, with the bloodstained pages and the ticked routes of our conquests. Later we expanded our horizons, went off to the Lake District and spidered our way up Shepherd's Crag and Pillar Rock and went skinny-dipping in the icy water of Stickle Tarn after an early morning climb up the warm rock of Pavey Ark.

Tom married young, and I was an usher at his wedding, just after we graduated. But by that time I was off to start my post-graduate course in agricultural

engineering and was sharing a house with Ed. Laughing, rugby-playing, spliff-smoking, Joni-Mitchell-listening, Ed.

I was very fit at the time and was training for the 1982 London marathon. On Saturday afternoons we would both be out, him playing rugby and me running. Increasingly, my running route took me past the rugby pitch, but I don't think he knew that. Sometimes he would be home before me and would be up in the bath by the time I got back. When that happened, I always knew immediately, because I could see his jock-strap slung off the radiator on the landing as I walked through the front door.

Ed thought that having a gay mate was cool. And I was a good mate, always up for a pint or a curry. He didn't know that I would have cheerfully left my Grandmother's deathbed if it increased my chances of hanging round on the off chance that he might fancy some company at the pub.

Just before we completed our post-grad course, I got a posting with Voluntary Service Overseas as a water engineer in Uganda. When I told Ed, he thought that was cool as well, and decided to apply. We were posted to the same place. A small, dusty town in Acholi, near the Sudanese border. And so the sweet agony jumped a continent. I carried on being his cool, gay mate, of course, until he fell in love with a Ugandan girl and, after a brief but intense affair with her, returned the UK.

But the slow-fade slide transition soon kicked in, and Fergus came into view: tall; blond; Canadian; kind. We worked together out in the Acholi villages during the day, and spent the evenings sitting on the veranda of my house, drinking beer and comparing lives. After a while, Fergus got re-posted down to Kampala, but a few weeks after, I had a message from him. He hoped I was doing OK and said he was really looking forward to seeing me down in Kampala, as he had something he very much wanted to say to me.

I was, of course, soon visiting Kampala and arranged to meet him for a meal in a restaurant just off the busy main drag through the city. From the moment he arrived, I could tell he was pleased to see me and that the thing he wanted to tell me was important. His eyes were shining, and he spent the first two courses nervously trying to choose the right moment to say the words. Then he told me. He told me that he had fallen in love with a woman who was a mutual friend of ours and wanted to know if he should marry her.

I was great that night. The best mate you could have hoped for. We talked about the excitement and the difficulty of his situation; about the importance of being honest with yourself and following your own heart, but also remembering how feelings can change as time moves on.

A couple of months later, we went on leave together to climb Mount Kenya. I still have the pictures from our four-day trek. We started in the wooded foothills, climbing up through the heather and spongy moss, among giant lobelia and on up to the bare, upper slopes. Late on the second day, we arrived at the Austrian Hut, on a col, at almost 5000 metres. We spent a few hours there, dozing on an alpine bunk, before setting off in the cold darkness, kicking steps in the snow up to Point Lenana. At the top, we jumped and whooped and hugged each other; in the pristine

snow, above the clouds, as the sun rose over the rim of Africa. And it is one of my saddest memories.

I saw Fergus with his wife and kids last year, while they were on a lay-over for a few hours at Heathrow. He is the last link in the chain of special mates.

If the meaning of being gay is what you do in bed, then the meaning for me of being gay, across all those years, was nothing whatsoever.

***

Okely and Carraway (1992) have commented that traditional academic research often leaves us in the dark about researcher motivation. This is one criticism that clearly does not apply to autoethnography. Published examples that explicitly expose researcher emotional motivation are easy to identify; whether tangled emotions of love and grief (Ellis, 1997); political resistance (Kideckel, 1997), or the struggle for acceptance (Berry, 2007).

However, even within the field of autoethnography there remains debate about the extent to which the emotional/evocative presence of the author within the text is legitimate. Writers such as Anderson (2006) and Delamont (2009) are critical of autoethnography that looks inward at the personal and emotional life of the ethnographer-as-author rather than looking outward to an intellectual constituency informed by social theory. Ellis and Bochner (2006) disagree with this view and argue that it is the presence of the author at the heart of the text that characterises the strength and uniqueness of the autoethnographic approach.

***

Feedback from my dissertation assessor, October 2007:

> You 'show' rather than 'tell' us about the anger really well at points, but at other times I feel you defuse or hedge around that anger in a way that this reader let the pressure drop too … I would have liked encouragement to inhabit the outraged space a little longer. There is part of me that feels you are letting me off the hook of inhabiting the full rawness of your experience, by offering the relative comfort of social science story-telling.

So my assessor had had no difficulty in detecting two partial selves in my work: the social science student and the angry man. And interestingly, he described his reaction as attributable to his own partial self, 'a part of me,' rather than to himself as an integrated whole. I had become familiar with the voices of two of my inner selves during the writing process: the social scientist was confident and comfortable with his well-defined, socially validated role, while the angry man was vulnerable and less certain about whether he should be speaking up at all. But I found that the feedback validated and changed the angry man, reflecting what Ochs and Capps describe as the concept of a fluid, evolving, identity-in-the-making. As they put it: as narratives are apprehended, they give rise to the selves that create them (Ochs & Capps 1996).

My assessor had not talked of my outrage, but of 'the outraged space'—the space between us that we had both occupied. This had been a performance space, occupied by me as performer and him as audience. However, as Conquergood (1995) argues, audiences are neither pure voyeurs, nor passive recipients of a performance, they are witnesses of the performance and performers of their own interpretations (Conquergood, 1995). Was it possible that the performance had changed my assessor too?

***

It is March 2008 and I have embarked on a Diploma programme in Narrative Inquiry. It is 8pm on the second day of a taught module and by tomorrow morning I need to come up with a short performance to make to my fellow students. This makes me feel anxious.

I trawl my notes and the reading list, head empty of ideas, stomach in a tight knot. But suddenly a story comes into my mind, one that has already appeared in written form, but that has never been be performed out loud before. I don't have a copy with me and there's no time to go home and get one. If I stand up there in front of the audience, with the video camera rolling, will I be able to remember it? "A long, long, time ago, I can still remember…" Yes, of course I can. I might even sing the first bit.

***

It is 11.30am. I am on my feet surrounded by the performance space. My audience have no idea what I am going to say. They will witness the story creating itself again, word by spoken word. And I know that as I speak them, the words will change, they will no longer be the memories in my head, but part of a new shared experience.

But this is not a one man show. There is a cast of characters to muster:

Member of learning community?

… Hi there, I'm OK.

Nervous performer?

… Shoulders are a bit tense, but I'll be alright when I get started.

Vulnerable man, talking about emotions?

… I'm not feeling that vulnerable with this audience, just intrigued to know what happens.

Angry man? Angry man, are you there?

…

***

In live performance, an audience has little choice in their embodied engagement. As Cooper Albright puts it: "the audience is forced to deal directly with the history of that body in conjunction with the history of their own bodies" (Cooper Albright 1997, quoted in Spry, 2001, p. 716). This raises a moral question of whether it was right for me to impose embodied engagement of an audience in such a story. Denzin argues that performance cannot avoid enacting a moral stance: it is always enmeshed in moral matters, asking an audience to take a stand on the performance and its meanings (Denzin 1997). If any unease about that engagement did exist in the room that day, it was not apparent to me. As we packed our bags to leave, some colleagues shared things with me about themselves that were far more personal than anything that had previously been spoken, even over a beer in the pub. Coffey (1999) argues that the confessional voice can be therapeutic, not only for the reader, but also for audiences, who are invited into complicity with penetration of the private self. I found myself wondering if my performance had offered a confessional voice that had liberated my fellow students to say things and perform their identities in a different way.

As Denzin puts it, we are all co-performers in our own and other peoples' lives (Denzin, 1997), but I am wary of assuming that my experience of the performance was shared by others. Speaking for myself, my embodied experience was strong and positive. Immediately after it, I felt different; the feeling was not dissimilar to my experience of reading my dissertation assessor's feedback, but it was more immediate. I almost felt that I had glimpsed my partial selves in the act of changing their relationship: the decreasing anger of the gay man, the growing confidence of the student, the human more at more ease with his own vulnerability.

***

Sitting at my laptop; typing up my inquiry; performing my identity through a story into which is threaded a familiar series of events as I struggled to come to terms with my own sexuality. But yet again, the story has changed: the memory of sitting with Chris in his front room in Devon 1977 sits alongside the memory of sitting with my friends outside a Bristol pub; of writing and receiving feedback on my dissertation in 2007; and of standing in front of my student colleagues in March 2008. But today I find that the confident self that was energised by a live performance experience has been joined by someone new: a critic who questions whether all this personal writing is of any real value. The critic feels vindicated by Delamont (2009) who argues that autoethnography has no analytic mileage and tells readers nothing of social scientific or pedagogic interest. The critical voice is a strong one and could easily drown out the others, providing arguments to justify a decision to close down the story, avoid the risk and vulnerability of self-exposure in the public domain.

But Delamont's manifesto of objections to autoethnography as a genre is so uncompromising that I also experience a reaction that I can only describe as stubborn resistance. I take some comfort in the knowledge that the battery of arguments about the ethics and epistemological validity of autoethnography have

been faced down by many before me in debates which go back over many years (Sparkes, 2002; Holt, 2003; Ellis, 2004, 2006).

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So, what does the future hold for this story? Is its role in co-constructing my identity complete? Does it have a role to play in influencing the way anyone else might perform their own identity? The act of publication, of putting it 'out there,' will render it an artefact, interacting with a world well beyond my knowledge or control. Claiming it as legitimate academic inquiry will expose it to the possibility of highly critical interaction with those who would doubtless claim that it has nothing of value to offer anyone else and amounts to little more than self-obsession. The risk of facing such criticism undeniably places me in a vulnerable position. I have protected others who appear within the narrative by anonymising them and the only way I could get similar protection would be by anonymising myself, but that to me would be self-defeating, and I find myself strong enough to accept the risk. My experience suggests to me that personal stories are more powerful than the harshest critics of autoethnography might believe. The assertion that such a story has no role in creating new knowledge for anyone else is a bold one to make and one that my inquiry leaves me unable to accept. The act of reading this will be sufficient to reveal to a reader whether the story or their own interaction with it reveals anything new to them or not. For some, it won't; but for others, at least some parts of my fragmented self think that it might.

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MIKE GALLANT

9. BATTERED FISH OUT OF WATER

A Work in Progress

In the summer of 2001 my family and I moved to the Shetland Islands, the most northerly of the Scottish Islands and an archipelago set on the edge of the North Atlantic some 225 miles west of Bergen, Norway. We were enthusiastically grasping an opportunity to live and work in beautiful natural surroundings—and an opportunity to bring up our children away from the hurly burly, the violence and the pollution of urban life. In 2007, for the sake of our daughter's mental health, we moved back to the UK mainland.

Bullying within schools is not a solely Shetland, Scottish, or indeed European problem. This universal issue affects victim, perpetrator, family and community. It affected, and continues to affect, me. In this auto/biography I tell one story of a father and his teenage daughter living through her experiences of physical and psychological bullying at school. I use writing as a methodology to both explore this experience more deeply, and to uncover a way of expressing embodied experiences in text and photograph. I have presented this writing in the metaphorical structure of a well-filled sandwich: something apparently ordinary and digestible.

PROLOGUE. SANDWICH MAKING WITH ANGER

Take two slices of bread and ~~cry~~ lay out
On a well-used surface
Butter up—they're a little stale
Choose your filling—
I suggest:
Take a healthy young fish from the sea of life (immature and keen to grow). Hit very hard to stun. Hit very hard. Hit. Stun. Hit.
Hit very hard. Hit.
Stunned.
Fillet—dead or alive (hard to tell) —
Hang to smoke
pepper and salt
peel off skin
mash in bowl (with mayonnaise for good measure).

Pile generously on one dry slice
cover with the other

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 69–79.

take a bite
I invite …

BROWN BREAD (BOTTOM SLICE)

If the narratives I weave form my identity shawl, then this comfort cloak that warms and protects me must be created in a place, a context. Space, place, and non-place[1] are the familiar scenery for my costume dramas, my tragic tales—for my (un)performable[2] script. As Sarbin (2005, p. 205) puts it:

> (T)he built and natural environments provide a multiplicity of stages upon which people engage each other in dramatic interactions. Such engagements are the raw materials for building life-narratives from which identities are formed.

There are many *me*'s that inhabit my world—a community struggling to live together, negotiating shared stories that I use in the complex task of constructing a stab at a world, and then negotiating with others' moderated multiple selves to form a further shared understanding. I am the trainer, the car driver, the greying long-haired fashion-follower. I am the consultant, the therapist, and the supervisor. Some of these *me*'s are fascinated by the liminal—the spaces and places where we step out beyond our comfort zone to face the threshold of the unfamiliar—the places of the partially known, touching our toes in foreign water—inviting and yet so full of uncertainty and danger. It is in these boundary places that I walk alongside the people who consult me. It is in these spaces where novels of new lives can blossom and fruit as we spill off the well-trodden path and discover new joys—and sadnesses.

There is another *me*. A parent. This *me* couldn't give a damn about liminality and intellectual theorising. This particular *me* gets so f***ing angry—and mad and confused and frightened and frustrated and sadthis bit of me is broken out from its comfort zone when I live amongst the stories of the bullying. The bullying of my 13-year-old daughter. This is one part of Rosie's story. It is a work in progress—forever.

THE FILLING (IN THIRTEEN SCENES)

Scene 1. The Pink Bedroom

I'm standing over her bed, about to kiss her good-night. She's reaching out to turn off her mobile. The little green light still flashing. Its strobing stopped, she's placing it back on the shelf behind her head (green flash in my skull—green flash in—green flash) and I'm noticing the gouges in her arm. Her left lower arm. Then the vicious gouges in my mind. The scratching. The surface. The now.

"God, Rosie, have you been scratching at your eczema? That's really bad!" She pulls her arm back and I sense some change in the place—some empty, lonely space, some movement from the comfort zone to the unknown. I plough on,

noticing the discontinuity—feeling my fear. The maiden plate cutting a dangerous furrow.

"You really should be careful doing that you know—it looks too much like you've been cutting yourself, and we don't want the Social Work jumping to conclusions …." She's turning away from me, grunting something I can't hear. And don't want to hear. We are kissing and saying goodnight.

"Love you."

"Love you too, dad," she replies.

I'm walking down the corridor, away from her room. I know it's her eczema getting worse—she's under stress, after all. I know my daughter's cutting herself. How can I know both at the same time?

Scene 2. The Beach Below Our House

Walking down to the beach we can see something going on. A wedding party? A baptism? A funeral? (The graveyard is on the banks beyond the beach.) Then, as we approach, it becomes clear. Sixty impeccably dressed Vikings marching down the track, over the banks, onto the sand. A posse of photographers settling themselves above the gathering squad, and a flurry of women and children following in the wake.

Figure 1. 'Einar of Gulberwick' and his Jarl Squad (2006 Up Helly Aa') on Gulberwick beach, 29/01/06, from the souvenir brochure for Up Helly Aa.' Photo by John Coutts, Shetland

We're jumping the stream as the purple tunics, the shining stainless shields and raven banners are unfurled and positioned. Hoarded into place. Loud voices laugh as larger than life men mount roughly made benches; standing on scaffold planks set on saw horses. Organised chaos; a photographer's bad dream.

Now we're amongst the family followers, the boys talking with boys, and I with mothers from the lower hillside. We point to Viking friends—there's the goalkeeper of the under 11's. He's the son of the Guizer Jarl. And there's another colleague—I had no idea he was in the squad! The TV camera pans the scene; the press set their focus and record in digital clarity the crazy carbuncle on the natural shore.

Einar of Gulberwick was no bruising bully—not so far as Orkneyinga Saga tells.[3] When Earl Rognvald was washed up here on this beach, his two longships *Hjolp* and *Fifa* wrecked on a dark Odinsday night a thousand years ago, he and his men were welcomed. They were billeted, each home taking their part. The largest house in the neighbourhood appears to have been Einar's. Perhaps he was hot on image—he'd take in twelve men, though only if it included the Earl himself. The Earl was on good form it seems, improvising poetry for the occasion despite the loss of much of his party's belongings as a result of the storm. Of course, the Earl had just sailed from Norway, and that was where Shetlanders' loyalties lay.

Back on the beach an Englishman ponders the importance of history, of cultural heritage, of identity—and of improvised poetry. As my boys are 'in,' and yet 'outwith,' I consider the 21st century welcome we received—and the possibility that within that garish costumed attempt to recreate a grand Viking history there stood my daughter's nemesis: we had presumed to step onto this foreign ground in the expectation that, like Earl Rognvald, Shetland would welcome us. Of course, many did.

And yet, that morning wait for the bus was a scary schooling in how children search for self-identity and meaning. Was I simply naïve to have expected anything else? Perhaps I was conned by my assumption that we shared a common tongue—the language of Shetland is unquestionably English-like.

Scene 3. Busy Pedestrianised Street in a Provincial Town

If you ever come to Lerwick you really must go to The Fort fish shop! It's just above where the Bressay ferry comes in, and has the best battered fish in town—just part of the local knowledge I share with you. Enjoy!

I'm standing in the queue. It's as busy as it always is at this time: crowds of us salivating as we wait for our Fish Suppers. No longer concentrating on the task in hand, my mind has time for rumination. Now my mouth seems dry. The grease behind the glass is turning my stomach; my anxiety response as I'm looking at the girl behind the counter.

Scene 4. The deck of a P&O ferry

We're passing the Ness of Trebister now—the point at the north edge of the bay of Gulberwick. The light fading as the evening wears on, we watch from the top deck, taking in our new homeland. It was here that the Pionersk KN-D121, a Latvian Factory Ship, smashed against the splintered rocks in autumn 1994. Maybe they were seeking the shelter of the *Sooth Mooth* to Lerwick harbour. Crossing the deck

to look to the east we pass the Bressay Light, whitewashed buildings set below the towering cliffs of the island. And through the harbour mouth now we turn again to the west as we pass by the cemetery and the modern mish-mash of the High School buildings.

Down below on the car deck sits Trailer 30, packed with the material of our lives. Our car is parked next to it. In the footwell behind the driver's seat our goldfish swim to their new home. It is I who brought us here into this unknown, cutting our ties, moving on.

Scene 5. The Head Teacher's Office

The Head Mistress is telling us that she's lied. She cannot be believed.

Scene 6. The un/shoreline

Scene 7. Office Environment—Brightness 95%

I am sitting at a bare table crushed into a room with seven others—it's some sort of 'behavioural support' room. I don't feel mainstream. I'm feeling like a tragic backwater defending my view of the world. Of course, I'm looking for anything consistent with MY view of what has happened. Of why Rosie has been out of school for two weeks following a couple of incidents that led to the school reporting her as a child protection case for the second time this year. The police are now investigating allegations of sexual and physical assault. Last time around it was racial assault. There wasn't enough evidence to take it further. Now she's sitting next to me, her mother in the chair beyond. I'm proud that my daughter has decided to be here and to state her position, her view. This morning, as I left for work, she wouldn't consider it—I wonder what had changed, and yet now is not the time or place to ask. Our eyes meet again and we smile. Nervous love.

The bully is here—no, not one of the 15-year-old boys who do this, no: this is the bully from the education department. He's telling the attentive crowd once more, "At Primary School I was a bully …." For the second time he leans forward, looking Rosie in the eye, six foot and sixteen stone. He could be wagging his fingers; he could be laughing at her. His experience, he is implying, gives him an insight. Yes, he knows about bullying. And now he's responsible for the council's policy on bullying. He ordered the blue and white armbands 'say no to bullying.' He is the only one in this room who does what he says he'll do. He makes things happen. Where is that unsure line between assertiveness and bullying, between clarity and control?

The head of year is angry. I am talking of an organisational culture, of sweeping it under the carpet. "I really object, Mr. Gallant," he says "to such an accusation!" I tell them that they're not to blame—they're only working for the organisation. Only working for the organisation. They're hurt. I'm feeling that I should sit back and hold my tongue.

The social worker is disturbingly quiet. He questions whether we can be involved in mediation with the parents of the accused—the police investigations continue. (The day after he seems to agree that the school don't believe that Rosie is being bullied—that she ever has been bullied. She is the problem; the Gallants are the problem. If only they would go away. Perhaps we will, like the others before us.)

And then I find that we're agreeing once more to the same package—our ideas are *maybe*s, *we'll see*s; their ideas are *Must*s, *Should*s and *Can't*s. Two hours of meeting, and I feel bullied once more. Are we returning her into an abusive situation—am I responsible, despite the Social Worker's presence, for forcing her into re-abuse? How can I live with this? And yet she seems to agree to it—I give her every chance to object. I almost feel let down that she won't continue to rile against the purveyors of authority.

This mo(ve)ment[4] of subjection, the paradoxical simultaneousness of mastery and submission.[5] Is this, captured in the mo(ve)ment, simply a concentrate of her education—and of my lifelong education?

Scene 8. Night—High Angle View of Father and Mother Asleep

I am watching from above. Tunnel vision love. She is on the cold stairs. In the well. They are beating her. They are beating her.

They are beating her. "English Catholic Bitch!"
whimpers
they hit
they hit
I am forming words to shout—words in my heart, and words in my throat—dry mouthed words unable to shout
them out—

gagged in the sky looking down on my stairwell nightmare
"Oh God, why hast thou forsaken me?"
physically fighting the strange chains that hold me
from intervening in this barbarous world

struggling
shaking
the twitch
the clamminess of the cold sweat

Now woken in the night too early to face another day
brutally loaded with embodied fear

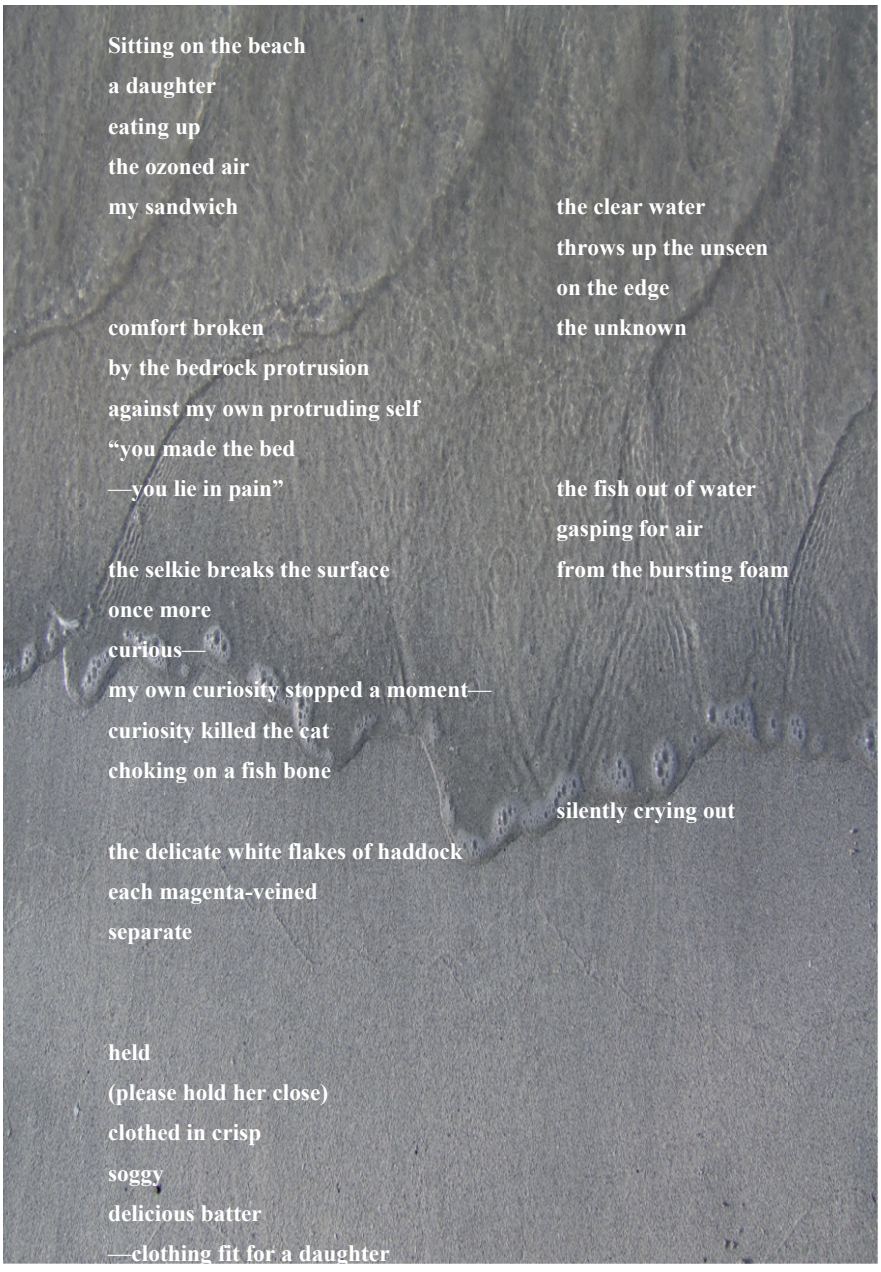
Scene 9. Close-up LCD Screen6

> Soz i never spoke to u! I mis u loads! Im havin a bit of a bad time. Spoke 2 sum of the girls calmed me down a bit. don't know when u get this or where u r. luv u r

Scene 10. The Pink Bedroom7

Dear Lord
Help me to get through life without hurting myself and others around me. Help me to keep calm even when I feel like I need to hurt myself. Help me not to lose my temper and fight back when others hurt me. And remind me that you love me, and so do my family and friends. Help me to be patient when people don't understand how I am feeling or why I react to certain situations the way I do.
Amen.

Scene 11. Battered Fish out of Water



Scene 12. The Pink Bedroom and the Father's Office[8]

Just one more normal day, just one more normal place, just one more normal situation …. No! That's wrong, the situation should NOT be normal.

That's what I think, everyday, Monday to Friday, this sounds like a job description. It's not, in fact, I'm not even old enough to get a job.

I'm 12, my name is irrelevant, my story isn't.

I live on the Shetland Islands, lucky you, most people say. It must be wonderful … They're wrong!

I came when I was 8 a little cute girl, a little cute, English, brown skinned, Catholic Girl. I tried to fit in, make friends. I made 3 and about 10 times more enemies.

We live out of town, only 4 miles, but far enough away from school to merit free transport … That's how it started, 1 girl, 2 boys, 6 school bullies and a school bus full of kids.

It was painful, it was necessary and it happened.

That was 5 years ago. The 6 school bullies went to high school, I was alone. This summer I went to high school, worked my way through a primary school nick-named HELL to a high school which now carries a similar name.

This was my life, a life of fear and pain, a life of bullying.

3 weeks into high school it started again. I had friends, things to do, I thought they'd get over it …. They didn't.

I started talking about it; it was the only thing to do. Sometimes it upsets me, others I just don't care. All I care about is my friends getting hurt. This still goes on months after it started.

It's gone on so long, the temptation is to normalise it—it appears that some part of you really has. You have resilience though—a real belief that your experience is not normal.

Sad to think that your expectation of 'a job' appears to be some sort of tedium. And then there's that tension about your age—you should be a child/ you should be grown up.

Resilience again—I'm proud of you .

Yes, 'lucky you' is what I thought, and lucky me is what I thought when first I said yes to the offer of my own (not at all tedious) job—it has been good though … hasn't it?

You are who you are—and I love you for growing that way, and for believing in life the way you do.

Enemies? Surely not? You must be exaggerating.

I know now—how blind I must have been not to see it at the time not to hear it from your brothers, or from words caught on the wind.

No it can't be 'necessary'—surely, no, shout it from the rooftops! IT CANNOT BE NECESSARY!

Sounds like 'alone' is so good. I don't think of you as liking or disliking 'alone.' Both in balance feels more like you ….

HELL? Why should your primary school be called that? I don't see it. Oh, believe me, HELL is surely worse than this! Though sometimes, Rosie, I wonder how much worse it can be.

We all thought they'd get over it—though now, as I write this more than a year after you first went to high school, I feel the flutter of anticipation that maybe this time, maybe this time …

	You must care about yourself <u>and</u> others
This school carries the old nick-name …. This has got to stop ….	
	… this has stopped.

Scene 13. The Living Room, Sunday Afternoon

"Dad—I am not your psychology project!"

She leaves the room. I sigh, and feel like I'm a bully. Is this all really about subjection?

BROWN BREAD (TOP SLICE—TO COVER AND CONTAIN)

If Judith Butler's interpretation of the process of education towards citizenship is to be believed, "… at the heart of becoming a subject …" (note the ambivalence of this word—subject/object and subject/ruler/measurer/quantifier) "…is the ambivalence of mastery and submission, which, paradoxically, take place simultaneously—not in separate acts, but together in the same moment" (Davies, 2006, p. 426). In adversity is, indeed, growth.

The writing (and the experiencing of this *Action Research)* is 'rhizomatic,' affecting the participants in complex and unexpected ways (e.g. Amorim & Ryan, 2005). Use of the present continuous tense as in my previous work (e.g. Gallant, 2005) is bringing an active urgency to this narrative, at one time placing it in a very particular moment and taking away a specified chronology, enhancing the uncertain truth.

Readers may well question the ethics of involving my daughter in what she, quite rightly, termed my 'psychology project.' I have struggled with this dilemma, and can only say that at this point in time I am writing with the full agreement of Rosie. *She* is not my psychology project—my focus has been on *my* experience of her experience. To attempt to anonymise the material entirely would be impossible: the relationship of father and daughter is central to this work. Likewise, any thoughts of protecting the identity of the Islands where I lived run into the same problems experienced by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000) in her studies of rural Ireland. This community is too small to hide in. My decision is to call a town a town, and not to pretend that it all happened somewhere else. I have drawn the line in naming individuals however—if they ever read this, then I hope they will at least respect my sincerity in writing about my own personal experience.

EPILOGUE

I asked Rosie what she thought: "It was correct in showing the way I feel. Some bits were hard to read because they make me think of things I don't really want to. I like the way you've involved some of my stuff in it."

NOTES

[1] Marc Augé (1995) describes non-places as lacking direct cultural identity, the most obvious examples being connected with transportation: airport lounges, motorways, bus stations etc. They may signpost the passer-through to places with identity, becoming thresholds; spaces of liminality.

[2] I use '(un)performable' to convey an understanding that this script is both performable and un-performable. It has already been a performance as a constitutive part of my own life, and yet this script is an incomplete representation of that performance.

[3] Orkneyinga Saga is a mix of fiction and history written around the end of the 12th century by an unknown Icelander and is our main source of knowledge surrounding the early social and political history of Orkney and Shetland (Pálsson & Edwards, 1981).

[4] Davies & Gannon (2006, prologue) use *mo(ve)ment* to express a process that takes a "… remembered *moment of being* …" and transforms it through "… telling and writing and reading that *moves* us in a variety of ways" (italics in the original).

[5] Davies (2006) uses this analysis in her exploration of how Judith Butler's philosophy of education may affect its praxis.

[6] Rosie and an older friend, who had also experienced bullying at the school, wrote this prayer jointly. Both gave permission for their work to be included.

[7] This is a text message sent to my mobile by Rosie, May 2006.

[8] The left hand column here was written by Rosie early in 2006. The right hand column is my reflection later that year.

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FRANCINE BRADSHAW

10. COCKA ROGIE'S SONG[1]

Outsiders Within

THE POSITION: INSIDE/OUTSIDE

The room is large and airy. It is a room I like. I have spent many happy hours here, listening to lecturers, participating in stimulating counselling exercises, which sometimes left me in tears or furthered my understanding of my white colleagues' perspectives.

Today, however, my feelings are different. I feel very outside in this particular white group. I feel distanced, shut out. I see the group as homogeneous, the Insiders, sharing a common experience that seems to include them all but excludes me.

I look round the room. I do not see myself. This is a common occurrence for me, the only black face. I feel very visible. This high visibility accentuates my difference. What I see in the room initiates an internal process: the visible difference seems to be a marker for 'culturally different.' I am therefore not only different physically but now culturally as well. This separates me from the Insider group. I am different, I am the Outsider.

This sense of feeling 'outside' seems to heighten my awareness, and I now notice that whereas writers from as far as Australia and New Zealand are mentioned, Black writers are not. I notice the omission of names from places like southern Africa, the Arab world, the Caribbean, names like Maryse Conde, a well-known author from the French speaking Caribbean who spent a number of years working in Africa which is the setting of one her best known novels '*A Season in Rihata'* (Conde, 1981). I feel as if it is my job to contest this, to champion their writings. But I am unable to, feeling weighed down and now having huge doubts about my own writing, about my own abilities. I am becoming marginalised, squeezed into a position of constriction and rigidity. I am losing my voice. I become quiet.

I am reminded of an earlier instance, in the small group, when the subject of feeling 'outside' was raised. A response was that we all feel 'outside' at some time. I attempted to say that there is a difference between feeling 'outside' and being an Outsider. I knew I had not articulated my thoughts very well. I was frustrated with myself. Once again I had lost my voice. On reflection this incident may have been a trigger for my seeing the large groups as homogeneous (although it may not have been).

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 81–95.

Trying to make sense of my experience, I wonder about the 'outsider,' that feeling of being on the outside. Is it a common occurrence for certain groups or is it a personal emotion that has no political or social context? Psychological theories on attitude and prejudice attempt to explain marginalisation of groups or individuals. Examining attitudinal change, theories adopting an 'inside' perspective, refers to the personal or phenomenological experience, whereas an 'outside' view is the detached observer. Psychologists differ in their understanding of prejudice, arguing on the one hand that what produces the in-group or out-group may depend on structural factors whilst others, like Adorno who proposed 'the authoritarian personality,' suggest it is in the person's character (Radford & Govier, 1987). However, these theories do not account for the personal emotion of feeling an Outsider. Is there a relationship between the intense personal emotion and the phenomenon termed Outsider? Does the one begat the other? Or were my own feelings to do with being black in a white dominated society? Is this a *motif* of the Black condition?

APPROACHING THE STUDY

My first grandchild is about to be born in the U.S.A. and I am planning a visit there. I realise that it would be an ideal time to observe the Outsider position. As a stranger, I would have no desire to acculturate and I could monitor my reactions to a different culture. I also decide to interview my daughter-in-law, Tracy Fisher, who is a professor in Anthropology, at the University of California. She is an excellent subject to comment on education and academia and is well placed to compare Britain with the United States as she carried out her field studies in London.

Our linkages constitute the basis of what is known as 'autoethnography.' As relatives, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, we are placed in both personal and professional roles, I as researcher and she as subject. But she is also a researcher, an anthropologist, and we stride parallel ground, for she has studied Black women and I am writing about Black women and education, a study that springs from my own specific educational happening. Like mirror images we are both Insiders and Outsiders: her 'insider' position is the African-American academic, mine the student in England. Our 'outsider' position relates to her, also a student, but in Britain; and mine as a visitor to her native place (and her home). Our professional inquiries, cross-cutting gender and race, not only play out in our academic/student lives but in our (personal) mother/daughter-in-law relationship.

Ruth Behar speaks of the delicate position of researcher and subject. She argues for the inclusion of the personal and a move away from the 'observer' stance (Behar, 1996). 'Exposure of self,' as she did in her study of Esperanza, a Mexican street peddler, is "essential to the argument … not exposure for its own sake" (p. 14). Behar uses the terms 'vulnerable' to describe this type of ethnography.

I am placing myself in a 'vulnerable' position as I record my own feelings on going to the States, a very momentous occasion for me: becoming a grandmother. Because of this I decide to separate my autoethnographic study into two parts: one

it seems to me is the intellectual and cognitive activity (I am researching the assignment in the States), whilst the other is a record of my emotional and immediate reactions to the everyday events of my (new) social/physical environment. To emphasise these differences, I experiment with the writing on the page.

My identity is constituted of both researcher and mother/mother-in-law. As this is academic writing that was initiated from being in the 'academic role,' I decide to make that central. My personal experiences I therefore place on the margins. Not only is that my lived reality as the 'outsider' and as such is marginalised (almost as if that is its place), but as well I am not yet that 'vulnerable' to place my own personal life in the centre. I also accentuate the difference by writing the one in the present, personal tense and the other, in the past, academic style. By so doing, I aim to convey the in-the-moment experience contrasted with the once-removed mediated activity. The immediacy is also present in that I wrote it there, in the United States, as I experienced it (I carried a notebook for that express reason) and it has not been edited. On the other hand, some academic reading and references were obtained over there (thanks to Tracy) but the analysis and further reading was carried out over time and long after my visit to my family.

Placing my experience at the margins, it feels as if I am subjectively describing my marginalised position in the classroom. The text becomes the physical representation of myself in the classroom where academic theories and conceptualisation was the main focus. In academia there is no space for the emotional; we exist as 'rational, intellectual creatures, bringing in our ideas but leaving our feelings at the door. My experimentation with the text is an attempt to physically represent this dichotomised way of being.

Geertz's use of 'thick' description, as in Ryle's notion, is a kind of intellectual effort that observes an action, develops its meaning and adds an interpretation which takes it beyond the original action (Geertz, 1973). The recounting of my direct experience of being an Outsider adds thickness to the more routine interviewing and data collection. In addition my reflections and the personal experiences of my subject aid to enrich the study.

***

[I]

I exist on the margins. I know that is my place because I am a stranger, a visitor to this place. I do not belong here.

∞

I am noticing my attitude even before I leave England—I am refusing to take a United States carrier, despite their cheaper flights. It's a personal protest! They're not having my money! Even before I arrive there, I have a hardened prejudicial attitude -towards whom/what?

∞

On the flight I sit next to a young woman from the States. She's very chatty.

As the 11-plus was the shared experience that initiated my feelings of being on the outside, I begin my exploration of Insider/Outsider within education but it is a journey, which like a river, flows into, and out of, different terrains.

> Being in a foreign country means walking a tightrope high above the ground without the net afforded a person by the country where he has his family, colleagues and friends and where he can easily say what he has to say in a language he has known from childhood. (Kundera, 1984, p. 71)

[II]

I notice I am watchful, ready to pounce and declaim, quite what for I'm not sure. Instead she charms me and gains my sympathy: the British immigration gave her a hard time (she didn't have a visa) and put her back on a flight to Los Angeles.

Like me she's an outsider in England. Unlike me, she still speaks kindly of the place. She's able to separate the officious immigration officer from the rest of the 'nice' British.

I'm caught out. I find that difficult.

Hey she's white!

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The 11-plus was described by members of the group as a pivotal moment in their development, separating them, not just from their family and friends, but moved them into a different social class.

[III]

I notice that in my next encounter, with a black man, an African-American, I do not seem so wary. In fact I share a lot of information about myself. We discuss the National Assoc. for the Advancement of Coloured People. He's a member. We are in the airport shuttle bus and I notice I keep my voice low. I'm sure it's because of the white couple sitting in front. I think I'm still in Britain, where to talk about race issues so openly, might be considered rude/impolite (or so I feel).
But the couple are very friendly and warm towards him. Nor does he make a comment about them when they go.

I was very conscious of my experience hugely contrasting with theirs: at nine years old I sat, and passed an entrance exam for the best girls school in the island.

It was a privilege and an honour. Whereas my white colleagues were less happy with their success, mine was held up in my culture as an achievement. I was proud and pleased—they felt estranged. Their feelings, although personal, are also political, stemming from the class differences that are played out in the discourse on education. In Britain this discourse is part of a wider political debate that opposes state and private education on a superior-inferior scale. I can share some similarities with my white colleagues: I too was separated from the boys on the pasture with whom I played cricket. However a major difference is the attitude to that separation and the value each specific culture places on education. Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow (1977) note this in their research on sexual stratification in Barbados.

Notable for the "absence of marked sexual inequalities" (Schlegel, 1977, p. 293), the Caribbean was an obvious choice for such a study. Conducted between the fifties and the seventies, their research spans my educational experience in Barbados. Their findings help me to make sense of my outside feelings: "education is viewed as the prime means of acquiring social prestige" (ibid., p. 306). Although owning a house and land might be associated with personal autonomy, the parent's social standing increases when their child gains a place at one of the 'top' schools in the island. The researchers remark on the struggle that parents have in order to pay for their children's education but "they do not hesitate to express an equal pride in the educational attainments of their female and male children" (ibid., p. 306).

The majority culture's discourse on education, markedly different from my own minority culture, positions me on the outside, and because there is no entry for my experiences, fortified in that place, I become silenced. My 'success' and social prestige cannot be vaunted in the dominant discourse of problematic and displaced educational experiences.

[IV]

In Britain, as two Black people, we might have said something, I believe, to show our solidarity—we the Insiders. His easy banter with them makes me feel an Outsider.

Ranks feel closed against me. He and I might share some …?race/blackness? (unsure quite what) but he also shares … a ?culture with them that I am outside of.

I do not know the rules here. In Britain Black and White do not generally have such amiable conversations and seem very comfortable with it, unless they know each other well.

Writing from a Black perspective, Patricia Hill Collins has theorised an 'outsider-within' concept. It is the framework of her theory on Black Feminist thought (Hill Collins, 1990).

[V]

The driver of the bus is Indonesian. Does he feel an Outsider?

He tells me his mother who lives in Indonesia wouldn't live in the States; his sister, who lived here all her adult life, is planning to go back home, but her children, born in the States, see it as their home. For himself, he won't return home till he makes his money. But he thinks he would not want to stay forever in the States.

I understand: my two sons live in different parts of the world, and I have a home in the Caribbean. Where is *home*?

We reach a tentative conclusion that *home* is where we began and as we get older we feel the greater urge to be there.

Feminist theory grounds its ontology in the social construction of gender. Arising from women's organising in the sixties, it issues a challenge to positivism to accept an individual's experience as valid data. Feminism demonstrated how women's views of the world had been omitted from academic research and feminist theory criticised the 'grand narratives' of empirical research. This stance promulgates the notion that science is 'situated' in a specific context. This gives a specific angle on reality. Objectivity therefore, as feminists argue, is not possible: science is value-laden (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The allowance of different voices and different realities offered a space for Black feminists to critique what they perceive as 'white feminism.' From this juncture Black women criticised white women for also being racist and oppressing Black women. The 'Sisterhood' as espoused by feminism was viewed by Black women as a white construct (Bradley, 1996).

Hill Collins (1990) focused on the experience of ordinary women. Analysing the lives of Black domestics, she perceived that their caring for and relationships with white families placed them 'inside' the family. But their exploited economic position, their ghettoisation in domestic work, coupled with the disadvantages of being Black in a predominantly white society, positioned them 'outside.' Collins names this the 'outsider-within' stance that produces a "peculiar marginality" (p. 11). She sees this 'curious' position as giving a "unique Black women's standpoint on self and society" (p. 11). The Black woman's reality offers "a distinct view of the contradictions between the dominant group's actions and ideologies" (p. 11). These Black women working in the homes of white women are perpetual outsiders because of their 'blackness' but their central position within the homes, as caregivers and pivotal to the efficient functioning of the household, gives them an 'insiders' knowledge of where the real power and authority lies.

[VI]

He drops me at the hospital and now I seem to struggle as I come into mainstream.

I don't understand the signs e.g. 'Urgent Care.'
I ask someone (who looks like medical staff). They explain: "'Urgent Care,' exactly what it says!"
"Does that mean 'emergency'?"
"No," he explains, perhaps thinking what a dumb*** "emergency is 'Emergency,' this is 'Urgent Care'! ('Urgent Care' is maybe our equivalent to 'Outpatients.')

Was I playing a word game? It's a game that is often repeated in the next few weeks.

Language differences highlight my Outsider status.

Turning to academia, Collins argues that female Black academics are also in the position of 'outsider-within.' The oppression felt by Black women, coming from the macro structures of society, leads to the suppression of Black feminist intellectual tradition. As their ideas are excluded from mainstream academia Black women are the outsiders. Yet simultaneously, the economic, political and ideological conditions foster "the continuation of an afrocentric culture" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 12) which then creates the 'outsider-within' stance so "essential to Black women's activism" (p. 12). Tracy, as a young budding academic in the States, has experiences of the 'outsider-within' as described by Collins.

> In my own experiences in college I found there were not many black women professors. In my subject, political science, there were none. There weren't many black women in my class, in my governance class I was the only black female. There weren't many black professors, they were particularly, white and male.
>
> Only until graduate school, I began to encounter more black women in academia, more black professors. For me when I decided to go to graduate school, to get involved in academia, it wasn't surprising particularly in anthropology where it was overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly male. On one level not surprising, and then on another maybe it was. It wasn't surprising because I did my graduate studies in New York. My programme centred on political economy. It tended to have more people of colour than in anthropology. At the same time there are more black women than men. The numbers are very low overall.

As someone who is an academic now, particularly in women's studies which are overwhelmingly white- white liberal feminists- it's somewhat difficult because they see themselves as doing positive work. They see themselves as radical when in fact…*[Me: they are not radical enough]* exactly. It takes a while for them to even realise the position that they are in. They are in different positions of power really because you see more white women in academia.

[VII]

One of the first things I do when I arrive at my daughter-in-law's home is drive a car.

It's a very odd feeling, sitting in the car on the left/?right.
(I never actually identify the left/right, it all seemed too confusing).
Physically being in the car made me feel as if I had lost a limb; as if the car might tilt; a feeling of being on the edge and not centred. So although I was physically able to drive, I carried, for the most part, an existential feeling of division, of 'half a person.' It helped if there was a passenger to balance.

At the end of my stay (two weeks), I am still reaching across my passenger's neck for my seatbelt!

I ask Tracy about her experiences in Britain:

It was difficult for me going there. It was difficult for me to find a black woman to work with. I never did. It meant that the sort of conversations I could have had with black women here, I didn't have. There are more black women academics here than in the UK. There was just a lack of people I could have a discourse with. And I didn't in the end. In those terms it is outside.

If there are no Black women academics or a Black feminist intellectual discourse, where does a black women find support? Thinking of my own isolation in the classroom, I wondered how Tracy found support for her research whilst in London.

I did meet with some black women who were interested in similar academic ideas through a contact in Greenwich. She introduced me to a woman. We connected because she saw me as a black woman interested in race and I felt the same about her. Through her I met other black women. There was one (British) Black woman academic, Julia Sudbury, who was working in my area, Black Women Organising, but she was now in the States. When I phoned her up, she said "Where are you?' I said "England!"

It was just a handful of us meeting to discuss some of the readings we had to do … on Sundays. It didn't last long although it did help, for a while, because I had dialogue with other people and young black women and because on a personal level I was coming in contact with black women and I could discuss things that I noticed in England … yes like feedback. They helped me too. They encouraged me in terms of the work I was doing because no-one was doing that type of work.

[VIII]

I never really become oriented to where the house is. I make it home each time but it's a sort of visual map, rather than a knowing.

I wonder if *outside* stems from an inner emotion/a psychological root that structures and which systems then connect with!

Are left/right abstractions?
Not rooted in any reality?

Is this what postmodernists mean by language being a force that creates differences in the world?

Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe (I had to go to the USA to find her!) had similar experiences to my daughter-in-law. She attended the University of Bristol where she was researching Black youth's political consciousness but having difficulty in engaging with her subjects, she was drawn to those individuals "who lived life at the borderlands deemed marginal people" (Ifekwunigwe, 1999, p. 46). Ifekwunigwe describes her standpoint as one that stems from several ancestral and migratory reference points. By connecting with others who similarly lived the "half-life of the outsider" (p. 41), it gave her the courage to change her thesis. Those outsiders, for whom "home has particular layered textured and contradictory meanings" (p. 41), were like herself, metis(e). This term, originating from Diop, Ifekwunigwe adopted to identify individuals whose parentage is both black and white. The lives of these 'metisse' friends who supported her struggle in academia, then become the subjects of her thesis. She examines their insider/outsider experience from a critical feminist position (Ifekwunigwe 1999). Tracy and Ifekwunigwe found support outside the walls of academia. It was other, non-academic, Black women who encouraged them. As Hill Collins points out, it is the outside sustenance that produces the challenges to the inside. The research of both Tracy and Ifekwunigwe augment the Black Feminist intellectual tradition.

[VIV]

Language! The expressions they use strike me as dramatic e.g. "we're not on the same page"; 'Great Start,' a name for neo-natal care.

At dinner four of us discuss these cultural differences: "in the States there seems an ethos of 'we can do'; a progressive attitude, nothing cannot be overcome."

"In Britain, people are timid, hesitant about jumping out of their box; they complain instead"

Cultural differences: I notice in the hospital that staff are smiling, seemingly upbeat. Their uniforms look like holiday shirts from Bali.

INSIDER/OUTSIDER POSITIONS: ENVIABLE/DANGEROUS?

Ifekwunigwe describes how she was forced to "step in and step out" (ibid., p. 44) of her British identity as her construct of herself was challenged both through the dialogues with her metisse friends and through the eyes of the white, and black, British public. Her stepping in and stepping out is a familiar feeling to outsiders. Like Hill Collins' domestics, we are within, but still do not belong.

Yet the 'outsider-within' position is not an enviable place. On the one hand it is viewed as a privileged observational site where trust already exists, whilst on the other its position is invincible. But authenticity of the voice is hotly contested within feminism and postmodernism (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). For Black women it is problematic. Collins reported that some Black women found the insider position a burden as the felt they could not criticise other Black women's work.

However Tracy thinks that white women do not fully grasp the Black context. Because of the unequal power relations they cannot fully immerse themselves in it. And their 'left' politics, she argues, means that they are really re-producing what people of colour have been saying for some time. Almost as if the 'outsider-within' position is piggy-backed on the intellectual tradition of white academics. Little wonder that Black women academics are fearful of criticising each other's work. It topples another. Tracy believes that white women are not aware of the power dynamics and not conscious of what they are doing.

Prina Motzali-Haller in her paper 'Writing Birthright' conveys the problematic nature of the politics of representation. A Mizrahi Jew, she describes her ambivalence and tension about working within her own community. She speaks of feeling 'noxious' when invited to come and research the Falasha, black Jews from Ethoipia: "I resented the moment that was going to transform me from the subject of those professional researchers into a membership of the group who made their careers by writing about those 'problematic' Others" (1997, p. 211).

[X]

The 'personal' and 'private' becomes the site of major cultural differences.

Differences in our inter-pretations
of what is personal/
private varies hugely.

I'm conscious that I can't really say where mine come from. They talk about me in England, but I have to correct them—I am not English! They then become confused, and I, in turn, am confused too.

Are my ways Caribbean, Bajan or English?

In this home my ideas are definitely an outsider's.

These differences create tensions.

Motzafi-Haller experienced the position of outsider in Botswana where she carried out her fieldwork. There she was identified as the 'white woman,' despite her protestations of being the 'Black' person in her own country. Yet she could recognise the fluidity of her position, for at times in southern Africa she could be 'white,' using it to her advantage. Meanwhile she in turn observes the 'fixed' position of her black subjects. Ifekwunigwe too relates similarly of being mistaken as that 'red-skinned American gal, or that 'half-caste,' or whether from her accent, she was perceived as American or English.

Prina Motzali-Haller's reflections on her Insider/Outsider position, helps to clarify my own experience in the classroom. What occurs is that my high visibility (and my different cultural perspective) accentuates my difference and makes me feel an 'outsider.' As Outsider, I feel I am perceived as Insider, holding the 'trusted, authentic' voice. In fact this is burdensome, especially as there is no academic evidence of the Black intellectual thought. The 'only one,' like Tracy and Ifekwunigwe, I am unsupported.

Stuart Hall says of his state: "I have a funny relationship with the British working class movement. I'm in it but not actually of it" (cited in Morley & Chen, 1996, p. 493). Jamaica born, Hall was one of the very few Black male academics in the U.K. who is 'within' but clearly feels 'outside' at times. These shifting sands of identity, he analyses as arising out of the diasporic experience: "the experience of being inside and outside, the familiar stranger. We used to call that 'alienation' but nowadays it is come to be the archetypal late-modern condition … it's what everybody's life is like" (ibid., p. 490). Diaspora, a term originally used to refer to the Jewish experience, in Hall's notion, began in the Caribbean, at the juncture of European and African collision.

Both Mutzafi-Hallen and Ifekwunigwe refer to this position as 'mestiza.' Hall uses the term hybridity, arguing for a 'shift' from the essential black subject. His

deconstruction of their representation contests the marginal position they hold. There is a need to recognise the "extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'" (ibid., p. 443). To reach this understanding is a personal journey but it is also political. Tracy makes the point that we may all be unaware of the political tensions, blinded to how it is played out in the personal. The individual is barricaded behind the personal experiences and emotions unaware of the structural and systemic weight behind the door.

Like Ifekwunigewe, using an autoethnographic approach opens up the seams where I can explore my feelings and articulate them academically. This is Behar's vulnerable observer—how can we speak of something that affects us personally but which has much wider social and political implications. And Ellis, in the story of her husband's death, demonstrates that personal relationships can produce valid sociological data (Ellis, 1995).

RE-POSITIONING

Hall's conceptions of diaspora, like a lifeline, drag me from the morass of identity politics. People of the diaspora cannot be 'cured' by merging into a new national community (Clifford, 1997). This explains how I may always be on the outside. Diaspora has come to identify "immigrant, expatriate, refugee guest-worker, exile community" (Guibernau & Rex, 1997, p. 287) and although none of those identity tags may resonate with me, I certainly connect with the idea of a "domain of shared and discrepant meanings, adjacent maps and histories" (ibid., p. 287). (Travelling in a plane full of women from India and Sri Lanka going to the Gulf to work in 1991, evokes the memory of seeing my uncle board the ship in 1955 to go to England.)

[XI]

How to cross these boundaries: to strengthen relationships and get to know people?

Openness isn't enough it seems.

∞

Language—it's difficult! I'm struggling to understand what they mean.

I'm having to stop people in mid-flow and ask for definitions—not conducive to good conversation!

I am phased out by the television. The language seems inappropriate, colloquial. I can't read expressions: they seem aggressive.

A woman is crying for her dead daughter. To me, she seems over-the-top; pretending. I can't sympathise.

[XII]

I remember British physio-therapists saying that Asian people are too poetical about their pain.

I realise this must be how they feel: unconnected.

∞

'Different strokes for different people' becomes the refrain in the home.

It helps us to cope with the yawning gulf of meaning.

I can see how history /the legal system etc., all influence our behaviour, our thoughts to bind us to the Outsider position.

I am energised by Collins who believes that Black women can do more than just develop a Black feminist analysis "using standard epistemological criteria," but can contest the "very definitions of intellectual discourse" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 15). It is exactly what I need to do in the classroom. Challenge their educational experiences as the centrepiece of all educational thought. Open it up to other cultural forms. This would then enable them to see the cultural specificity of their experiences. And the political and systemic weight would be more evident. As centrepiece it remains an individualised experience. But the cultural discourse of the educational system remains hidden from view. Opening the centre instigates a flow from margin to centre, from outside to inside, and back again.

My outside position began as a negative effect on my self-esteem. However I can transform it into my motif. Kundera writes that a motif is a sort of code that we live by, as in music, that appears at the beginning and at the end, "guided by … [a] … sense of beauty the individual transforms a fortuitous occurrence into a motif which then assumes a permanent place in the composition of the individual's life" (Kundera, 1984, p. 49) The 'outside' position, as my 'motif,' could be my site, the position from which I challenge the Insiders. I could use it as a vehicle to bring writers on the outside into the light. It could be a place of discovery.

Carrying out this short autoethnographic study has enabled me to re-position myself, to be "a woman of the border: between places, between identities … between cultures … one foot in the academy and one foot out" (Behar, 1996, p. 162), to find my voice.

[XII]

An encounter in a shop. We are buying flowers. Only one foot on the threshold and it bounces off us: "hey guys, how are you today?!"

It doesn't cheer me up: am I supposed to seriously answer the question? I guess not because when I do—"we're well, what about you?"—I draw blank looks.

I notice my reaction to her, with her upbeat, high-pitched voice. I'm thinking: she can't be very bright! I explore my prejudice and see that I am expecting a different type of communication from a sales person).

As a woman of the diaspora, I am an outsider but I can secure the site and make it one of strength and courage, where I might "struggle for different ways to be—ways to stay and be different, to be British and something else" (Clifford, 1994, p. 308).

[XIV]

I expect her to be impressing on me her maturity and capability—not talking like a schoolgirl!

(My son tells me it sells goods)

It confirms what I know: *Communication is Cultural*.

But it also spotlights my own expectations and how they make me see someone.

This realisation draws me closer to understanding White British people.

I feel more empathetic with their difficulty in communication with minority ethnic groups.

NOTES

[1] Cocka Rogie's song is a traditional in my family. It tells the tale of how Cocka Rogie was rejected by his mother, the Hen, but was the only one of his siblings left after the mongoose, by singing the song, lured them out of their nest and ate them:
Little Willy come here
Will'n'bow come here
Holl'n'daniel come here
But let Cocka Rogie stan deh

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11. SISTERS, SECRETS AND SILENCE

Miller (1987) tells us that "every childhood's traumatic experiences remain hidden and locked in darkness, and the key to our understanding of the life that follows is hidden away with them" (p. 5). This key was given to me at the time of a traumatic incident that involved myself, my sister and our father, but I was slow to understand what had been placed in my hands at the time. It was only after another thirteen years and a last and final traumatic incident between myself and my sister that I recognised what had lain within my grasp for a long while. This time I was able to turn the key. So the narrative that follows, drawn from my doctoral research, is evidence of some transformative learning on my part and also of my changing subjectivity. I hope that "[it] brings together through language, the two discordant epistemologies; experience, the material and the emotional on the one hand; subjectivity, discourse and narrative on the other' (Mauthner, 2002, p. 191). But it is something more fundamental to me as well. It feels like one woman's transcendence, a small quiet victory over the mighty weight of patriarchy. And that is because one reading of this narrative is that my father shaped my own and sister's stories; more, he shaped our relationship from start to finish. Or at least that would be true if I had not embarked on a search for my sister, for my sistering relationship. As Foucault's (1980) work demonstrates, there is a vital connection between knowledge and power. And what occurred to me was that the unfolding story was not just about my sister and me but part of a wider narrative, of families, female relationships and a particular familial connection named 'sisters.' So yes, it is a personal story, a private relationship buried deep within the closed circle of our family group. But it is also a story of two females situated in a particular society at a specific period in history, one that we share with innumerable women who are also sisters. I was excited when this dawned on me. From out of the pain of my own sistering story I could perhaps speak to others, help to make some connections, provide a narrative that could stimulate reflection and discussion and argument and challenge. So what I want to do is to make the vital connection between a private issue and public concerns, between individual agency and social institutions, between biography and history, between the story of two sisters and the nexus of patriarchy, social class and gendered subjectivities which enmeshed us. I hope to demonstrate in some small way a 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959) through the performance of a fictionalised autoethnographic narrative inquiry.

Our sistering relationship played out over five decades in post-war twentieth century England. We were born into a working class family in a northern industrial

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city, our father a blacksmith, our mother a factory worker. We transcended our class origins by way of the 1944 Education Act, a good girls' grammar school, and in my case the explosion of higher education opportunities in the 1960s, to arrive at some version of a middle class professional life. We both entered the teaching profession, both married and divorced, both remarried, and had a son and a daughter each along the way. Both of us were politically active, defining ourselves as socialist feminists, powerfully shaped by the cultural zeitgeist of the times. We were viewed as close, supportive sisters by our common friends and social networks. We shared the same values, dressed alike according to the feminist canon and our near identical houses were furnished from the same Habitat/stripped pine Identikit catalogue. These are the structural, dry, sociological bones. The soft fleshy tissue tells a different story, purpled by the bruising, brutalising presence of our father, and the quiet despairing acquiescence of our depressive mother. Our mother's telling works in counterpoint to the Bluebeard figure of our father. It was our mother who abdicated her maternal role to my sister, making of her a 'minimother' to an extent unusual even in those days. I was entirely delivered up into my sister's care, which she discharged with a grim conscientiousness, swinging alarmingly from mothering to malice in a moment. She took charge of me, looked after me, cared for me, bullied me, crushed me with her hostility and rage. She was my malevolent protector, my vindictive carer. I was confused. I needed her but feared her. I both wanted her to be there for me and dreaded her appearances. We were locked into a disabling, ambivalent, destructive sistering bond from the start, and despite our educational and professional prowess, our feminist espousal of solidarity and 'sisterhood' we seemed powerless to free ourselves from the reach of our shared childhood, to transcend that narrative and story a different one together.

My sister kept a secret for thirty six years. Spilled in a single moment of crisis and desolation, it held the key to a lifetime's sistering relationship. Secrets carry within them their own retribution. My sister and I both learn this over our lifetimes. But secrets, if ever spilt, can also bring about transformations.

FRAGMENT (1)

The year is 1949, the place a reservoir carved from flooded Pennine valleys, and surrounded by millstone moorland, undisturbed, silent, beautiful in its sombre way, lonely. One can drive upon the snaking road, or tramp the moor beside it, and see no one at all.

But today is different. We are only minutes away from understanding how different this day will be.

For here comes a black Austin car approaching the reservoir from the east We may assume that a privately owned car in this year of 1949 would belong to a man of means, belonging to the middle class, a vet perhaps visiting the outlying farms. This driver does not fit with those assumptions. He is a big, strongly-made man, around forty years in age. His still handsome face is calm, he appears content. His bright intelligent eyes glance appreciatively at the surrounding landscape. But

something about his body, his hold on the steering wheel that suggests this man is from a labouring background.

Yes. It is the hands. Massive, hard-muscled, scarred, with broken skin and ragged unclean nails, these hands rest lightly on the steering wheel. Such hands have seen decades of hard physical work and, given some knowledge about the city from which the car has journeyed, we can surmise that this man has spent some time in that city's steelworks. And indeed this is so, or rather, in the forge, a place marked out by this man and others in that city as a workplace set apart by the historic nature of its task and by the apprenticed skill of its blacksmiths. The forge required men whose fathers and grandfathers have done their time in the infernal crucible, who apprenticed their young sons and oversaw their work; who were capable of building muscle and brute strength and who could last out a shift, a working life, in the brutal heat, the liquefying blaze of the forge.

But for the moment this man has time to stop and enjoy the surrounding beauty, a landscape he has loved since a boy, cycling through its villages and valleys, just his dog loping along beside him. He knew this valley before it was flooded, has cycled many a time through the village now lying at the bottom of this dam.

By the end of this day something else may also lie there, undetected, unsuspected for decades to come.

He glances at the small girl sitting quietly on the rear seat of the car. A feeling of disquiet niggles away at his present tranquillity. His wife does not seem able to cope with what seem to him the perfectly normal tasks of looking after babies, small children. What other women appear to take in their stride his wife struggles with. She is depressed of course and he is out of his depth but still for this moment in the marriage trying to understand, to help, as he can. That is why the eldest daughter is with him now. The birth of the second child, another girl and thus a serious disappointment, has created extra strain at home. It is not the baby that is proving difficult so much as the eldest child's reaction to her arrival and his wife's inability to manage the two of them together. So, he does what he can and sometimes takes the eldest child with him to give his wife a break. She is good enough, this eldest daughter, a quiet, watchful little thing, no trouble to him. Why she has taken the second child's arrival so hard is a mystery to him but not one he is inclined to waste any time thinking over. She must learn to get on with it, he won't have a spoiled brat in his house. It does not occur to him, now, or at any time for the rest of his long life—this man will live to see a century and beyond—that his wife's first attempts at uncertain mothering have made for an insecure and anxious little girl, struggling to find the secure attachment, the longed-for bond.

And what of this child, the first daughter of this mismatched couple? Now a sister, a big sister, she is told, viewing the baby for the first time that awful morning. A morning she has not forgotten, nor will she for the rest of her life. A story will be made of it, and told to her sister's friends within the first hours of acquaintance. Told with all the anguish and rage of the two year old she was, the two year old she still is during the telling of this monstrous injustice, this primal wounding.

Collected from an obliging neighbour, she resists going home. No, she says, want to stay here. Don't want to see baby sister. And indeed, why would she? But the father is not in any mind to see the child's point of view. He will not be disobeyed by a child of his. Swooping down, he picks her up, and stills her struggles by a hard and prolonged slapping from those massive muscled hands. Beating her all the way home, he carries her into the house and deposits her in the bedroom, by the baby's crib. Shaken, in considerable pain, furious, she stares down at the cause of her grief, the reason for her smarting body, and knows in all her small being that this baby is the cause of her unhappiness and it is here to stay and she is desolate.

Today she sits quietly on the back seat of the car swinging her legs and in her heart knows the truth about this car trip. She has been banished so that her mother can spend the whole day with her little sister. Furious, sad, she appears unconcerned, looking at the scenery, monitoring her father, keeping a safe distance.

This will change in a very short time now.

Her father stops the car at the edge of the reservoir and hauls out the primus stove, heats a pan of milk. Sipping their drinks the father scans the landscape and bringing his gaze closer to the dam, he thinks he sees something move, low down in the heather, near the water line. A sheep lying down, in trouble? No, a farm dog perhaps, trapped, broken a leg? His attention focused now, he stares intently and then, no, it can't be …, surely not? Not here of all places? Then his body stiffens, and the neck muscles are taut with barely suppressed anger. The child senses the change, looks first inquiringly and then fearfully at her father. Something is wrong. What is it? Has she done something bad? No, her father's gaze is trained on something outside the car, not on her.

Suddenly her father's body snaps up. He is shouting instructions at her.

"Get down, get down, get between the seats. Stay there. Don't move. Stay there until I tell you to move. And don't look. Do you hear me? Don't look. I'll give you a hiding if you look through the window. Get down now."

And with that he is gone, and the child is crouching down in the gap between the seats. All her life she will remember the particular smell of the carpet pressing against her nose. What has happened? Where has her father gone? When will he come back? A lifetime passes and still she stays crouching as she has been told to do. But anxiety as to where her father has gone, and an irrepressible compulsion to look, just a peep, brings her head up, inching an eye above the windowsill.

An incomprehensible scene plays out before her horrified stare. Her father is grappling with a man, fighting, punching his weight, the other man is flailing. A few feet away a woman is starting to scream, no, no, stop it, stop it, oh … Her father is easily the bigger, the stronger of the two. She sees her father's raised fist, the smash down, the crumpling shape. Now she sees her father kicking the inert body. On and on, oh, she can't bear it, ducks down, trembling with the horror of it, comes up again to see a changed scene. The woman is gone, nowhere to be seen and her father is now dragging a large dark shape to the edge of the reservoir. She is paralysed. She sees the dark water, she feels it closing over her head, she is choking, suffocating, drowning …

She comes round lying on the bottom of the car floor and then her father is there again, slumped in the driving seat. Slowly his body quietens and he straightens himself, pulls his body up into a driving position and takes hold of the wheel.

Her father's massive, knuckled hands gripping the wheel are covered in blood. She cannot take her eyes away, she is transfixed with terror. The fight, the lifeless body, the black water … she opens her mouth but no sound comes. She is left possessed by a terrible knowledge. Her father has killed a man. The idea, once thought, takes root, becomes over the years of her life an unquestioned, unshakeable, unchallenged absolute. And she feels with grim intuition that she will always carry this dreadful secret. Aged just four this dread knowledge enters her soul forever more. She will live her life burdened by this awful act. Yes, here is her father, telling her now that she must not talk about this, ever, to no one, no one at all.

And as the car pulls away driven by a man armoured by his righteousness, and she sits shaking uncontrollably on her seat, it comes to her with an overwhelming force, a rage, that if she had been at home this day, then she would have known nothing of this. Staring at her father's bloody hands on the wheel, she thinks of her little sister. That is why she is shaking, shaking, as the car accelerates away and the dark stillness of the dam causes her to turn away with a barely stifled scream.

And so this day the die is cast.

Between daughter and father certainly, but also between two sisters. What has up to this moment been an unfortunate introduction between the sisters, a natural sibling rivalry intensified by uncertain mothering, becomes transformed into something else.

One sister burdened now with a terrible secret, an unspeakable terror she takes with her through every lifelong day, and one sister burdened with being the cause of it.

FRAGMENT (2)

Winter now, winter everywhere. Ice and tiredness. This cannot go on. Mum is still putting up her doomed fight against the massive brain tumour laying her mind and body waste and we are nursing her through the nights now, taking turns. At least that is the theory. But Dad simply can't manage it, and not surprising either. He's seventy eight and worn out too in his own way. Several times now either my sister Jean or I have arrived in the morning to find Dad in bed asleep and Mum in a wet bed. We do have options. I contacted the Macmillan nursing team ages ago and they have repeatedly offered night nursing support.

We have broached the night nurse option with Dad several times but he is at his most difficult, most obnoxious.

"I'm not letting strangers into me 'ouse at night, yer can think agin. Wandering round, nosying in drawers, stealing whatever they can find. We'll manage."

But we're not managing, not any more. Jean and I are stretched beyond ourselves as it is, we can't take over Dad's nights on top of our own. But this is of course what Dad wants us to do and thinks if he holds out long enough, leaves Mum in wet beds enough times, we'll do it.

But today is different. Today is when I say to Dad that we have to deal with the night nursing situation. I shall have to be the one to say it of course. Historically this is how it has always been. Jean will be behind me physically as well as metaphorically.

Dad's face shuts down. The mulish look is there, the jaw out, the head lowered. Jean and I exchange a weary look.

I go through the arguments yet again. We must now start to use the Night Nursing Service.

He is instantly furious.

"I've told yer, I've told yer 'til I'm blue in t'face. I will not have them women in my 'ouse."

I am calm at this moment. My mind is made up.

"I'm afraid you don't have a choice any longer about this Dad. Jean and I are agreed on this."

"Yer'll do as yer told! Yer the daughters, you'll do as yer told!"

His temper thoroughly lost now, he raises his voice and Jean instinctively steps smartly back from him.

"No, Dad, I say, mustering all my reserves, it doesn't work like that now."

"By 'eck, it does, he snarls in my face. Yer don't dictate what 'appens in my 'ouse, lass. I do. Allus did, allus will do. Yer'll do as you're told. I'm yer father, yer'll do as I say. I'm yer father, do you 'ear me?"

And now I am somewhere else. I have reached my limit. No, am beyond it. I look at him directly now as I say to him what he has coming, has had coming for a lifetime.

"I know you're my father, and no-one regrets it more than I do."

Then the world explodes. I am off my feet as his blow lifts me and I slam against the kitchen wall before crumpling down onto the floor. I know what is coming now. I instinctively roll into a foetal curl and cover my head with my arms. I can't manoeuvre to get away from him, the space is too small and I am boxed into a corner by him. He has me and he knows it. The kicking starts, aimed with calculated deliberation at my head, his heavy shoes finding their target. I am in trouble. I can't protect my head as I need to. I know he isn't going to stop.

But he does. I hear a strangled noise and I uncurl and look up to see what is happening. I can't take it in. Jean is trying to pull Dad off me. She is screaming at him, something I can't hear properly, don't understand, something about knowing something about him, something she'll go to the police about *now* if he doesn't stop this minute. And he does stop. Instantly. I look up into his face and what I see is a frightened man. I still don't understand what has happened to make him back off but it is clear enough to me that something about Jean's words are

powerful enough to control this man, to strike a terror in him now etched on his face.

And then Peter, Jean's husband, is through the door. He looks aghast, takes it in with a fast appraising glance and acts swiftly. Pulling Jean off Dad, he locks down his father-in-law with an iron grip.

"You bastard," he says tightly. "You ever touch Susan or Jean again, and so help me, as old as you are I'll beat the living daylights out of you."

Dad slumps defeated and slinks out of the door. I pull myself up into a chair and dust myself down. We can hear Mum's voice, a wavering cry from the sitting room. Peter stands looking from Jean to me.

"Go on," I say, "go to Mum, we'll sort ourselves out."

I look at Jean. She is ashen and visibly shaking. Then I realise she is shaking not from fear but from rage. She is beside herself with rage, a towering, incandescent rage I cannot remember ever seeing before.

"Stay there Sue," she whispers. "I'll get something to wipe you up." I haven't noticed that I am bleeding.

And as she crouches by me dabbing away she tells me a story.

FRAGMENT (3)

Her hospital bed, high, high up on the hill, gives a fairy tale panorama of twinkling lights across the city. But the light in my mother has been extinguished. I lay my head on my mother's body and howl.

"Don't," says my sister sharply. "Don't. Don't do that."

* * *

Rogers (2006) tells us that silence as well as language plays its part in the construction of relationships. I find this to be true. The ensuing silence has been a gift. I have been given a clear quietness in which to reflect on my sistering relationship, a space that I have filled with writing, study, research. And I have learnt that sistering is both an intimate personal tie *and* a social relationship and that our gendered subjectivities were shaped in the crucible of our sistering role; that power relations between sisters mirror those of the wider world—domination and defiance, superior reach and subjugation. I have recognised that economic dependence as well as depression rendered our mother powerless and that our working class roots resonated differently with us and between us as our educational trajectories propelled us across a class divide.

In short, as Rushdie (1981, p. 370) puts it:

> I repeat for the last time; to understand me, you'll have to swallow a world.

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12. NEW SCRIPTS FOR OLD WOMEN

This work grew out of my desire to explore the experience of ageing through experimental writing. My initial idea was to abandon standard academic research practices that encompass planning, objectives, goals and structures and, instead, to write every day to find out what would happen.

Having just written this, I realise that I have no memory of ever making such a decision or indeed setting out to implement this plan of action. I think I wrote the above paragraph to impress some imagined academic.

No, it did not happen like that. Somehow or another this whole thing started without a conscious decision or a defined plan of action. I suspect it was initiated by that elusive, almost invisible, dreaming process, which underlies all my activities.

And yet, as I wrote on through the months, with no idea of the direction or purpose of the words that tumbled out, a surprising off kilter kind of order emerged. Part of me wanted to keep going while another part squealed, "stop" as she so wanted to impress, not produce something crazy, embarrassing and potentially humiliating.

But I simply could not stop. It was as if the characters I thought I had created were hijacking me. To make matters worse, they started to reveal what I thought must surely be a distorted fairground image of somebody else's psyche. The idea that those squabbling beings, who stormed their conflicted way through the pages, were a reflection of me was frankly intolerable.

It was just not possible that I could be as controlling and obsessive as the central character Emma. I certainly did not believe I had magic powers like the crazy witch Paula. Nor was I ever as clever as the super-duper child genius Katie. And as for Boris, that garrulous Glaswegian St. Bernard dog, well he bore not even a passing resemblance to me.

As I researched and wrote I felt more and more as if my life was a bit part in a play. Then, one day, I came across a poem about Scotland and realised I could write a personalised version:

… fur this wumman isnae wan culture,
ur class,
she's no wan generation,
ur gender,
she's goat merr than wan language,
and string tae her bow,
she's aw bitsae o' awthings,
wi as many moods'n aspects

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 105–115.

as the weather,
an as lang as she remembers
tae celebrate that,
wull be fine.

Adapted from Nancy Somerville (2006) The Big Hooley

My writing has revealed, like nothing else, that I am indeed bits o' awthings. With Boris the St. Bernard around I can't even claim to be of one species, never mind one age, gender, culture or class. If 21st century cultures are bits o' awthings perhaps the individuals who inhabit them are too. As distinct national identities loosen their grip on our imagination, is it possible that individually defined identities are also blurring at the edges?

This is how it all started.

NEW SCRIPTS FOR OLD WOMEN: ACT 1—THE RESEARCH TEAM GETS TOGETHER

We are in a deserted library. There is a conventionally dressed woman—Emma—studiously entering quotes into her laptop. Beside her is a dishevelled woman—Paula—dressed in brightly coloured eccentric clothes reminiscent of the sixties. She is having a sly smoke. Emma believes they are researching into women's experiences of ageing. Paula's motives are less clear.

Emma agitatedly types—

> According to Foucault in The History of Sexuality Vol. 1 (Foucault, 1988) the perspective changes to the liberation of the body from the prison of the soul. Techniques of body formation, such as dieting, are no longer seen as subordinating desire in the interests of the salvation of the soul; instead they are focused on constructing the modern person's sense of self-identity. (Sulkunen et al., 1997)

Emma: Well what do you think Paula?

Paula: I'd settle for the liberation of the mind from the prison of boredom.

Emma: Oh come on, take this seriously. This construction of the self through the body is fine until you hit decline. What happens when the body starts to deconstruct rather than self-construct?

Paula: No problem. Just construct a fabulous afterlife. Think, there are no truths only constructs.

Emma: For Christ sake, you can't smoke in a library.

Paula: Oh keep typing. It'll calm you down.

Emma: But it doesn't. I feel threatened. I'm afraid of poverty, terrorists, actuaries, dementia and being thrown out of libraries.

Paula: Oh go on Emma, write us a beautiful vision of the afterlife.

Emma, snatching the cigarette from Paula's mouth, chucks it through an open window, and bangs out the first paragraph. Paula, not to be defeated, grabs the laptop and, between them, they construct this *Beautiful Vision.*

Emma: Nothing worth reporting was happening when Paula died. The whole thing was uneventful. She just squirmed out of her body and transmogrified into a streak of light. Feeling a bit taken aback, she floated through the ceiling and, dodging the satellite dishes, circled Southwark and Lambeth before heading out East to Stratford and The Beyond.

Paula: As she drifted through the galaxy she realised she was not alone. "Wait for me," wailed a pathetic little voice. Oh shit Emma, don't tell me I have to spend eternity with you.

Emma: Slow down, I haven't come up with anything beyond you floating through the Milky Way.

Paula: Christ, you better get busy.

Emma: Okay, okay. What would you like to happen?

Paula: Oh I think a welcoming ceremony might be in order don't you? A party—a bit of a shindig.

Emma: Wouldn't you prefer an explanation of the meaning of existence?

Paula: Save our souls. What we need is a splash of champagne and then everything we could possibly desire.

Emma: But it was too late. Paula had fallen headlong down a big black hole.

Paula: Emma this is one crap plot. No wonder you're afraid of the future when you are, to put it kindly, a terrible writer lacking anything resembling a creative imagination. I asked for a beautiful version of the afterlife, not a trip to Old Nick's Kingdom.

The Devil: *[Making an unscheduled appearance.]* Oh, so it's Emma and Paula is it. What do you want? We don't take prissy types here. Bugger off. Only the gloriously sinful get in.

Paula: That's her fault!! *[Devil slams door.]*

Emma: There's no point trying heaven. You'll never get in there.

Paula: So where do the mediocre go after death then, Emma? Write something.

Emma: Okay let's go with your party and the beautiful life; big shopping malls in the sky, endless money at negative interest rates. Just more, more and more for less, less and less."

Paula: Shit Emma, how come you manage to make things tedious with such little effort?

Emma: Okay, okay, we'll be invited to captain a space ship to fly to the outer reaches of reality. We'll become great explorers and write new scripts for old women to live by.

Paula: Much better Emma. Let's go. It's time for a very big adventure.

[And, to their mutual surprise, it comes to pass. But, as they circle the planet in their instantly acquired spaceship, "Gratification," they spot two tiny figures waving desperately from below.]

Emma: Do we have to take them along? What's the point of a child and a dog?
Paula: Over-ruled. Captain's prerogative.
[Paula slaps a captain's hat on her head and aims for Pimlico were Boris (a talking Glaswegian St. Bernard) and Katie (a very clever wee girl) sit surrounded by a mountain of boxes.]

Emma: What's all this rubbish?
Katie: [Looking querulous]. It's the images and music.
Emma: I didn't know we we're going to write a musical. I suppose this one is going to include talking dogs.
Boris: So human-wumman-centric.
Emma: We're poststructural third-wave feminists and we're writing new scripts for old women because we think they're getting a raw deal.
Boris: Aye, aye, so we heard. Just move over hen.

[And with that Katie and Boris clamber aboard as the ship slips off into the night although its direction is far from clear.]

Scene Two: Getting Organised—As the sun rises over the earth strange chanting can be heard from the cabin (Newell, 2005).

I will show you hidden things	I will show you hidden things
Hidden things you have not known.	Hidden things you have not known.
I will show you hidden things	I will show you hidden things
Hidden things you have not known.	Hidden things you have not known.
I will show you hidden things	I will show you hidden things
Hidden things you have not known.	Hidden things you have not known.
I will show you hidden things	I will show you hidden things
Hidden things you have not known.	Hidden things you have not known.
I will show you hidden things	I will show you hidden things
Hidden things you have not known.	Hidden things you have not known.

Emma bustles into the control room where Paula and Katie are sitting cross-legged, and slightly cross-eyed, conducting chanting a session which they do not appear to be taking seriously.

Emma: For God's sake what are you doing? What we need is organisation. We'll get nowhere with these new scripts if we keep drifting around with no direction.

Paula: Great idea Emma … great idea … you get on with that …
Emma: I have.

[Emma whips a schedule from her files and tapes it to the control room wall. The others, having just staggered out of bed, read it with expressions of abject horror.]

Morning and Lunchtime		
07:00	**08:30**	**13:00**
Breakfast and household duties (see separate schedule).	Reading time (schedule of study texts to be discussed and agreed).	Lunch and rest period
Afternoon and Evening		
14:30	**16:00**	**16:45**
Group discussion of texts studied.	Afternoon tea. (Discussion to be continued during this period.)	Individual study time devoted to the development of personal projects. (All projects to be discussed and agreed.)
19:30	**20:30**	**22:30**
Evening meal.	Group activity (to be discussed and agreed).	Quiet reflection time and close down.

Boris: Christ, it's like being in the army.
Katie: Back in nursery school.
Paula: Stuck inside Emma's head.
Emma: Any better ideas?
Paula: [Yawning and lighting a rollup.] Well I guess I could read till lunchtime.
Boris: [Stretching himself lazily.] Och well it micht be nae sic a bad notion efter aw.
Katie: [Looking in amazement from Paula to Boris]. Well, yes, yes…I do like reading.
Emma: [Distributing a slim volume.] Well to save time let's start with *Moon Tiger* (1987) by Penelope Lively. I'm off to my room. I suggest you each find a quiet study space. On the way out she sticks another notice on the control room wall.

It is against the law to smoke on a spaceship

Boris: Dae yese fancy a game o' Bridge then? [Gets out cards.]
Paula: Why not. [Rolls truly fat cigarette.]
Katie: But, but, what about the book? We promised Emma.
Boris: Dinae fash yoursel hen. She's so fou o hersel she'll never notice. We'll think o' something tae say at the time.
Katie: But Boris, I don't know how to play.
Boris: Dinnae worry lass, you'll soon get the hang o' it.

Act Two: The Study Team Meet

[14:15—Emma arrives carrying large stack of books. Boris, poking his nose around the door at 14:27, rushes off to the library for a more impressive pile. Running into Katie on the way, he tells her about the book thing, and she goes back to her room to collect a few favourites. Paula turns up empty handed at 14:47. Emma looks pointedly at the clock.]

Emma: [Glancing at her notes.] Well re-reading *Moon Tiger* made me think about history and time and how we are all born into a set of cultural events that shape our individuality as if densely time sculpted. [She smiles in a satisfied way.]
Boris: Aye, aye, everything we are is history richt enough.
Emma: Would you like to elaborate on that for us Boris?
Boris: No really hen.
Emma: Well would *anyone* like to summarise *Moon Tiger* and why it might be important to us in exploring depictions of older women in fiction?
Boris: Is that whit we're daein? Who decided that lass?
Katie: [Looking anxious.] Oh why don't *you* summarise it for us Emma? You're so good at that kind of thing.
Emma: Well I suppose I could. The central character, Claudia, is an unconventional seventy-six year old historian dying of cancer in hospital.
Katie: Oh, didn't your mother die of cancer too Emma?
Emma: Yes, yes, she did but I think it is better if we stick to discussing the text and write about our personal experiences in our private journals Katie.
Paula: What? Are you planning to keep *Secret Files* then?
Boris: Aye, dae you think we are gaunae sit aroond bein aw cerebral and never express any o' oor feelings lass?
Emma: I just think we should avoid mawkish sentimentality Boris.
Boris: And is that whit you think o' Glaswegians?
Katie: Oh Emma I just thought you might be upset about your mother.
Emma: Well, yes, yes. My mother was seventy-six when she died of cancer in hospital and … mmm …
Boris: Aye, the memory o' oor mither's can turn into a fearful prophecy richt enough.

Paula: [Having surreptitiously logged on to *Google* in a random search for something relevant.] Sounds like Sylvia Plath would be in agreement with you there Boris. She wrote:

> It is her face that replaces the darkness. In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish. (Mirror, 1981, p. 42)

Boris: [Resorting to a *Wikipedia* scramble.] Aye, and whit was that Simone de Beauvoir (1973) said again. Let me think … aye … there are photographs of both of us, taken at about the same time: I am eighteen, she is nearly forty. Today I could almost be her mother and the grandmother of that sad-eyed girl.

Emma: Look, do you think we could just stick to the text we *all read*?

Paula: [Flicking through *Moon Tiger* and inadvertently landing on the relevant.] Well what about Claudia's description of her own face: "The eyes have sunk almost to vanishing point, the skin is webbed, reptilian pouches hang from the jaw; the hair is so thin that the pink scalp shines through it" (p. 20).

Boris: That's the kind o' sentence that could float a thousand anti-ageing companies.

Katie: But my mother's beautiful Boris.

Boris: Aye, but she must be awful young, hen.

Emma: So was I when I first read *Moon Tiger*. It seemed like a love story then but now my attention is captured by the way Claudia reflects on the sense we are all the products of our time, our history, our culture. Claudia muses over the idea every life has a centre; a set of historical and cultural events.

Boris: And whit does that mean lass?

Emma: Well Paula's propensity to smoke suspect substances might be seen as centred in the 1960s hippie rebellion.

Paula: And that'll put it a whole decade ahead of your 1950s authoritarian movement with its post-war military schedules.

Katie: [In an anxious squeaky voice.] Or does it mean people of succeeding generations experience old age differently, based on the major cultural events that have influenced their communal and personal identity across the lifespan? Is old age re-created in much the same way as each new cohort of young people re-shape adolescence?

Boris: [Looking alarmed.] Michty me hen, education must be making great strides.

Emma: Good points Katie, but perhaps we should move on. What about the paragraph that takes us to the hospital and provides a depiction of the compassionate contempt so often unwittingly shown by professional carers towards the old? "I'm writing a history of the world," [says Claudia]. "And the hands of the nurse are arrested for a moment; she looks down at the old woman, this old ill woman. 'Well, my goodness,'

the nurse says. 'That's quite a thing to be doing, isn't it … Upsy a bit, dear, that's a good girl—then we'll get you a cup of tea'" (p. 1).

Katie: Do you think the old become more marginalised in cultures with a vested interest in developing some kind of historical dementia?

Boris: Aye, they become just as invisible as the terrible times they've lived through.

Emma: I think you'll find this invisibility applies much more to women than men Boris.

Boris: And how are you gaun aboot measuring this gender invisibility lass?

Emma: Well men just don't talk about feeling invisible.

Boris: Well Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus does as he comes up for retirement in *Exit Music* (2008): "He took a left on to Fredrick Street and a right on to Princes Street. The castle was illuminated from below…groups of kids were weaving their way past the shopfronts, paying him not the slightest heed. When did I become the invisible man? Rebus asked himself. Catching his reflection in a window he sees heft and bulk. Yet these kids teemed past as if he had no place in their version of the world. Is this how ghosts feel? he wondered" (p. 166).

Emma: Well that's unusual Boris.

Boris: I thoucht we wis supposed to be looking for the unusual hen. I seem to recall you sayin we wis gaun tae write new scripts for auld women, no study auld scripts by middle-aged women.

Katie: What do you mean Boris?

Boris: Well according to my calculations Penelope Lively wis 54 when she wrote *Moon Tiger*.

Emma: At least she's a woman.

Katie: But Emma there might be men who can write great old women.

Paula: Right, from now on it's transgressive work published in the 21st century, and radical men and young writers of both genders are welcome.

Katie: [Rustling desperately through *Moon Tiger* in a bid to divert the serious conflict indicated by Emma's mounting colour.] But we must finish *Moon Tiger*. I really like this bit where Claudia thinks: "A history of the world. To round things off … The whole triumphant murderous unstoppable chute—from the mud to the stars, universal and particular, your story and mine … A history of the world, yes. And in the process, my own … The bit of the twentieth century to which I've been shackled, willy-nilly, like it or not … The history of the world as selected by Claudia: fact and fiction, myth and evidence, images and documents" (p. 1).

Emma: And what is it about that Katie that attracts your attention?

Katie: Umm … well … every personal story is also the story of a culture.

Emma: Yes … well I suppose … but I'm not sure personal stories are all that important.

Boris: Ye suppose dae ye. Then wad you mind telling us Emma whits in aw them files you hae wi ye? I've heard tell they're fou o auld documents and stuff aboot the history o yer famlie.

Emma: [Showing marked increase in colour.] Have you been looking through my private files?

Boris: Heaven portend lass.

Katie: But Emma, only yesterday, you told me our lives are wrapped up in the history of those recorded times we did not live through - the time of our parents and grandparents and back and back.

Boris: Aye, and Audre Lorde wrote through our lips—"… come the voices of the ghosts of our ancestors living and moving among us" (in Heilbrun, 1988, p. 74). Rankin's ghosts again. Perhaps the auld are getting intae practice for the afterlife.

Emma: Does anyone have an opinion about this devastating three-word question? "'Was she someone?' enquires the nurse. 'I mean the things she comes out with …' And the doctor glances at his notes and says that 'yes … yes, the records do suggest she was someone, probably' (Lively, 1987, pp. 1-2).

Boris: Och I wudnae worry about that hen. You'll probably avoid becoming an ex-someone through the simple act o' failing tae become someone in the first place.

Katie: [Scrambling under her chair to pick up her copy of *Moon Tiger* opens it at random.] "Claudia in contemplating what kind of history of the world to narrate, thinks: … shall it or shall it not be a linear history? Chronology irritates me. There is no chronology inside my head. I am composed of a myriad Claudias who spin and mix and part like sparks of sunlight on water. There is no sequence, everything happens at once" (ibid., p. 2).

Boris: Aye, my ain memories hae the kind o' chronology reminiscent o' an overused landfill site. I seem tae spend aw my time wrestling wi slippery words that refuse to form into a decent account o' my time on earth.

Katie: "Language," warns Harold Pinter, "can … be employed to keep thought at bay" (Pinter, 2005).

Boris: Aye, history and memory gets aw tidied up intae books fou o coherent gibberish

Katie: Perhaps that's what Claudia means Boris—"History unravels; circumstances, following their natural inclination, prefer to remain ravelled" (Lively, 1987, p. 6).

Boris: And she goes on—"All history, of course, is the history of wars but this hundred years has excelled itself. How many million shot, maimed, burned, frozen, starved, drowned? God only knows. I trust He does; He should have kept a record, if only for His own purposes" (ibid., p. 66). Aye, I feel l like a passing witness to aw the pointless wars and inane slaughters o' my time.

Paula: And what about where Claudia says to the nurses:
"'God … is an unprincipled bastard, wouldn't you agree?'
They exchange quick knowing glances. 'Goodness … that's a funny thing to say.'"
'Come,' says Claudia. 'You can't work in a place like this and never have given the matter a thought. Is He or isn't He?'
'Oh I'm not religious … Tea or coffee dear?'" (ibid., p. 54).

Katie: And here is why the book is called *Moon Tiger*. Claudia, lying in her hospital bed remembers another time—a bed in Cairo where she lies in the arms of her now long dead lover: "She lies awake in the small hours. On the bedside table is a Moon Tiger. The Moon Tiger is a green coil that slowly burns all night … dropping away into lengths of grey ash … She lies there thinking of things … Another inch of the Moon Tiger feathers down into the saucer" (ibid., p. 76).

Emma: And Penelope Lively goes on ravelling together the Claudia who is dying with that young woman full of love and passion—that young women invisible to the carers who see only an old sick body. Yes, yes, these are not past memories fixed in time: "nothing is ever lost … everything can be retrieved … a lifetime is not linear but instant … inside the head, everything happens at once" (ibid. p. 68).

Boris: So it does. Love binds it aw the gither—"If your life is a leaf that the seasons tear off and condemn they will bind you with love that is graceful and green as a stem" (Cohen, 1967).

Emma: And she writes on: "The Moon Tiger is almost entirely burned away now; its green spiral is mirrored by a grey ash spiral in the saucer. The shutters are striped with light; the world has turned again" (p. 79).

Boris: Aye, and one day the world will turn and we'll no longer be on it.

Katie: Oh Emma could you read the part where Penelope Lively narrates Claudia's death?

Boris: Aye, go on lass, go on. [And so she did.]

The sky has darkened, and the room with it; the window is struck as though by tiny pellets and water slides down it in bands…And then the rain stops. Gradually, the room is filled with light; the bare criss-crossing branches of the tree are hung with drops and as the sun comes out it catches the drops and they flash with colour—blue, yellow, green, pink. The branches are black against a golden orange sky, black and brilliant. Claudia gazes at this, it is as though the spectacle has been laid on for her pleasure and she is filled with elation, a surge of joy, of well-being, of wonder.

> The sun sinks and the glittering tree is extinguished. The room darkens again. Presently it is quite dim; the window violet now, showing the black tracery of branches and a line of houses packed with square light. And within the room change has taken place. It is empty. Void. It has the stillness of a place in which there are only inanimate objects: metal, wood, glass, plastic. No life. Something creaks; the involuntary sound of expansion or contraction.

> Beyond the window a car starts up, an aeroplane passes overhead. The world moves on. And beside the bed the radio gives the time signal and a voice starts to read the six o'clock news. (p. 208)

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CHRISTINE BELL

13. VISIBLE WOMEN

Tales of Age, Gender and In/visibility … Poetic Representation Reveals

the process of self-construction reveals
the reflexive basis of self-knowledge
the inconsistencies and contradictions
of a life spoken of as a meaningful whole …
(Richardson, 1997, p. 143)

WHAT IS POETIC INQUIRY?

Monica Prendergast (2009) has produced a list … *29 Ways of Looking at Poetry as Qualitative Research*, rather like a narrative poem. No. XV says it is "most commonly seen as poetic transcription and representation of participant data." My favourite is:

> XIX: Poetic inquiry is a way of knowing through poetic language and devices; metaphor, lyric, rhythm, imagery, emotion, attention, wide-awakeness, opening to the world, self-revelation.

After spending 18 months gathering women's stories for my doctoral dissertation (Bell, 2010), I could not think of a more appropriate way to allow their voices to come across, to convey the openness and honesty my collaborators had shown me. My 'participant data' was all in the form of an exchange of letters via email, mostly individually, between me and the seven women who had enthusiastically accepted my invitation to collaborate in what I called *"an ongoing conversation"* —an exploration of ourselves and our lives through remembering where we have been alongside our current experiences of becoming older. Drawing strongly on feminist and poststructuralist ideas around research conversations rather than interviews (see Speedy, 2007), my methodology (if it could be called that) involved prompting or reflective questions, offering what I hoped were appropriate and relevant stories about myself and generally initiating a two-way narrative dialogue with each woman, including inviting them to ask questions back.

This all resulted in a very large folder of letters—a wealth of stories, questions and (sometimes) answers, musings, ideas, family histories. I was in love with my research, enjoying hugely both the writing and receiving of letters. But as the folder grew and the time came to bring our correspondence to an end, I felt both excitement and also a sense of being slightly overwhelmed. How could I possibly

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 117–133.

adequately convey enough of what these generous women were sharing with me so openly?

Reading and re-reading the letters, noticing the way in which particular phrases sang in my ear (see Bird, 2004) and stayed in my head, I revisited Laurel Richardson's *Fields of Play* and in particular her work on "*the poetic representation of lives*" (1997, p. 139). As an academic and a poet, she tells of her pleasure in finding a different way to present an in-depth sociological interview with a woman called Louisa May. Using extracts from the actual words spoken, she constructed "a poem masquerading as a transcript and a transcript masquerading as a poem" (Richardson, 1997, p. 139).

FIRST LETTER FROM LYNN

At the age of sixty three
similar things are as important
to me
as at age two
but with different emphasis

I am not now fighting any more
to please EVERYONE
ALL OF THE TIME
The freedom of giving myself a choice
rather than other people
making choices for me

As a 'mistake'
and the youngest of four
I was overwhelmed by the need
for acceptance
and to be seen
as worthy of life

My parents
took any opportunity
to row
and I would be used
as their tennis ball
I had to please them
didn't dare make a fuss

I sat perfectly still
staring into the fire
I knew if I sat still
and let the conversation change

no-one taking any notice of me
I could slither away

It is usually
my family of origin
that causes me problems
about being grown up
which is normal I guess

IN SEARCH OF THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

There are many anecdotal stories about older women becoming invisible—sometimes based on the experiences of well-known and apparently very visible women. I am not happy with the idea of quietly disappearing as I move from the world of relatively visible, self-employed paid work into a way of living that is very different but potentially at least as interesting—if considerably poorer financially.

"We study things that trouble or intrigue us, beginning from our own subjective standpoints" (Hertz, 1997, p. xvii). My doctoral inquiry was initially motivated by personal indignation at the apparent acceptance that we older women have become 'The Invisibles.' Nobody sees us any more—or so we are told. My own experience, and that of other older women I know, does not support this hypothesis and I decided to try and find out what was going on.

FIRST LETTER FROM PAT

I feel older—and don't feel older!
Don't feel any different
most of the time
from when I was younger
it seems irrelevant

Never thought
about being 'visible'
or 'invisible'
in relation to myself
I'm not given to analyzing myself

I don't need
a lot of positive feedback
in order to function

It's my opinion that is important to me
Perhaps being an only child
has made me self reliant

I like to be in control

Happy to be anonymous
when I choose

which is why I like living in a city

This point in my life
working only the hours I want
my brain still functioning
enough good friends
a satisfying social life
and a strong relationship
with S [partner] and A [older son]

I can only say
I don't feel invisible in any way
but realise
I'm in a fortunate position
being financially independent
and hope I don't end up
like one in five female pensioners
living below the poverty line

Asked friends of a similar age
if they felt invisible
their first reaction was 'yes'
but when we talked about it
they were missing
the admiring male glances
Perhaps it's a question of self-esteem?

I feel in control of my life
and able to do what I like
when I like
I always have a new project

We lead such privileged lives
in the western world

Don't find the idea of death distressing
but so many of my family died
without doing most of the things
they really wanted to
that I made a list of things to do

before dying
I've done them all
and have a sense of completion

Now fascinated and curious
about where mankind came from
and where it is heading
More chance to use my brain
than when younger and busy with 'life'

No problem now saying 'no'

The Egyptology course
just completed
was pure delight

I think my next career move
will be to become a practising Hedonist!
I've worked all my life
and can now be selfish and indulge myself
without feeling guilty
as long as I'm not a burden to anyone

I feel really fortunate
to still be alive and healthy

Searching through the literature, I did not initially discover much in the way of theory or academic texts about the mythical 'Invisible Woman.' Once started on my inquiry, however, I began to pick up references almost every day in newspapers, journals, on radio and television, in films and books, on the internet—almost all containing the words 'old(er)' and 'invisible women.'

The majority of the stories from women, whether well-known names or not, were negative ones. The more I read and watched and listened, the more I heard an underlying story about the importance of appearance and being 'noticed' (or not) by men. One online journalist seemed to sum this up, citing an address at a women's conference as "my introduction to the concept of 'the invisible woman,' the failure of the ageing woman to so easily capture the attention of men" (Stensrude, 1995, p. 1). The lack of a certain kind of interest from men seemed to be very painful for many women—however unpleasant and intrusive this attention can often be for many younger women. And where, I wondered, were the visible/invisible stories from women who are not—and often never have been—interested in sexual attention from men?

FIRST LETTER FROM JANE

Just coming up to my 60th birthday
and life is great
Better than it's ever been
A clear sense of 'this is who I am'

N and I got 'married' last September
One is not meant to use that term
but for me that's what we did
and I refer to N as my wife

Our lives revolve
around friends in the UK and US
all people who accept us as a partnership

HUGE differences in my life now
Since retiring 12 years ago
creativity has been an important aspect
I opened to another part of me
my right brain
which had been rather under-used
Now a fabric artist
Fabric and colour really excite me
an enormous change from my career
in nursing and midwifery

I loved the job I had
AND it was the most demanding ever
Retiring early
felt like the end of the world
at the time

The stress was a contributory factor
to my intractable back condition
Experienced a lot of anger
about how this was dealt with
Physical pain was part of my life
until having major reconstructive surgery
after retiring

Also gifted myself with retreat time
looking at making changes
to conditioning from a childhood background
of emotional and physical abuse
Witness to extreme parental violence

Always aware of feeling more comfortable
with women
but did not come to terms with my sexuality
until I was 50 years old

Now feel freer than I ever have

FINDING MY COLLABORATORS

For my own research, I decided to initiate an ongoing correspondence with some 'older women' who were interested in exploring their experiences and reflections around becoming older, including the issues of visibility/invisibility. Bearing in mind Arthur Bochner's thoughts on criteria being "ultimately and inextricably tied to our values and our subjectivities" (2000, p. 266), I wrote myself some helpful hints in my research journal about how to choose my collaborators. My 'list' included: known to me but not to each other; over 50 (at least); a range of experiences and backgrounds, including having lived through personal and other difficulties; an ability to reflect on and willingness to write about themselves; preferably different enough from me, in thinking and telling, to make it interesting and challenging for us. I also intended to be one of my own respondents; to actively take part in the journey of exploration, using and sharing my own experience alongside theirs, whilst both asking and inviting questions.

FIRST LETTER FROM ALISON

I found your questions helpful
and welcome the opportunity
to reflect on my life now
and where it might be going

How did I get to be 64?
I don't feel it
though how is one supposed to feel?

Can't see myself living here
as a 'really old' woman
Struggle to feel at ease
in an often noisy
litter-strewn community
where I sometimes feel invisible

Just finished writing a book
and wondering what to do next
Not yet ready to give up paid work

Three words come to mind
transitional ... uncertain ... unclear

Going to India
on a Buddhist pilgrimage
with an open mind
to see what comes up
Maybe this will be a transition?

Transition seems to have been
a constant in the last few years

A brain haemorrhage
followed by a second one
where I was close to death
survived knowing my life had to change

Couldn't go on being work … work … work

Not comfortable
living with the feeling
life is constantly changing

Impermanence is central to Buddhism

Family are important
but in a 'difficult' way

My sister took her own life
My parents died
My brother recently had a stroke
left his wife
and is very dependent on me

Strong bonds with close friends
some known for over 50 years
with a shared past
Despite different values
when we meet
there is much laughter and joy

Jamyang Buddhist Centre
singing in a choir
walking seriously
resting—reading—lounging in bed

an annual visit to Cortijo Romero
All important things in my life

My home and garden
a refuge and sanctuary
offering peace and silence
I find noise difficult now

Try to be compassionate
towards my mind
when it doesn't work as well
as it used to
less at the mercy of my feelings

Currently struggle
with what clothes to wear
and perhaps how visible or not
I want to be

Proud of my new book
but wary of looking for glory
not very Buddhist!

I contacted around a dozen women, in and outside the UK—known over the years through work, educational programmes, campaigning activities and other contacts—who fitted my personal criteria. They were all fascinated by the idea of this exploration, though nearly half were unable to take on a commitment to a long-term correspondence.

With the seven who became my collaborators (two living in the USA), we agreed an open-ended, ongoing one-to-one email correspondence based loosely on their experiences of being/becoming 'older women' (whatever that might mean to them), with occasional 'group' email contact. Any one of them could withdraw at any stage, for whatever reason (though none of them did)—and all could, of course, say when they had gone as far as they wished in either detail or length of correspondence.

FIRST LETTER FROM SARA

It feels great to be this age
So much more free than I've ever been
Can really come and go as I please

Always set my own goals
With R at sea so much
had to make my own decisions

about everything

One thing that is weird …
sometimes a person
usually younger
will walk towards me
and look right through me
as if I'm not there!

Nice to have lots of family
in one's life
but sometimes also nice
not to be responsible for them all

I really like being a great-grandmother
Involves holding and admiring babies
Being pleased with lop-sided cup cakes
and scribbly drawings
No work involved … lovely!

Feel like escaping sometimes
away from all responsibilities
but … there are only so many days
in a lifetime
and I don't want to waste any of them
Too many things I want to do yet

I like doing Renaissance Festivals
such an interesting group of people
artizans and entertainers
choosing to live 'under the radar'

Enjoy being 'mother hen'
to some of the very young women
living on their own
A shoulder to lean on
or a bit of comforting
People were quick to say
I was much too young to marry at 17
After 50 years
guess I knew what I was doing!

When I first came to America
was pretty lost and scared
and had to work things out for myself

Being pregnant put a stop to getting a job
and didn't have many qualifications

I've always sewed
Nanna had been a dressmaker
and taught me when I was 5
Made all my own clothes
then clothes for the children
and toys as they grew up

The local historical society
asked me to make period costume dolls
Started selling them at craft shows
and ventured out more and more
as the kids needed me less
and R retired

It was good to branch out a bit
I felt smothered much of the time
as Mother became ill
and very dependent on me

I'm happy making dolls
very rewarding
inventing and creating new ones
and running my little shops
with some of the family involved

Really fun to be enjoying
a grown-up relationship with the children
there's companionship
not conflict
in how we work together

NOT BEING OBJECTIVE

The criteria in my research proposal included "allowing subjectivity and self-indulgence; i.e. giving weight to my own and other women's individual experiences through telling our stories." I am particularly interested in how our own stories are constructed through the multitude of subjective ways in which we all 'know' and shape our knowledge. Rosi Braidotti, writing about 'non-unitary subjectivity,' says that for her it means "a nomadic, dispersed, fragmented vision, which is nonetheless functional, coherent and accountable, mostly because it is embedded and embodied" (2006, p. 4).

> Language is how social organization and power
> are defined and contested
> and the place where our sense of self
> our subjectivity, is constructed.
> (Richardson, 1997, p. 89)

It seems to me that claiming subjectivity—rather than pretending to be objective—could be seen as an essential to good research. It is simply making visible what is actually going on. And if including oneself can become overly self-indulgent, then it must be seen as part of the writerly task not to let this happen – to remember Laurel Richardson's strictures that "writing matters" (1997, p. 87) and we must not be boring if we want to be read. In musing on her role as a woman in a male academic world, she states simply: "I am a woman writing" and goes on to tell how she learned to construct a way of writing differently: "contextualizing and personalizing … re-visioning my life and work (1997, pp. 3-4).

FIRST LETTER FROM CINDY

Excited about being
in the old lady category!
Permission to be snippy

It's funny being grey
Don't feel old very often
though folks sometimes ask
Are these your grandchildren?

Always told I look young for my age
Maybe it's not true any more
Mentally don't feel any different
except perhaps a bit wiser
Physically there are a few clues

Still like to play and be silly
Often enjoy M's [partner] family
more than mine
Her mom's 90th birthday
celebrated with all the family and friends
They sure know how to throw a party!

Not sure the girls get the idea
of extended family

Moved in with Nonna
so she won't be lonely
Watching M reconnect

with childhood neighbourhood
Can't imagine those kind of roots

We moved so often
when I was a child
The oldest of five
and feel the responsibility at times
My parents are musicians
We seem to get along fine
as long as I'm 3000 miles away
Very Southern
polite
Conservative
racist
religious
Always wanted to be a parent
Had a complete hysterectomy
aged thirty

Have enjoyed young people
for as long as I can remember
an ability to connect
in a way many other adults cannot
believe it is my love of life

Come from a line of fisher people
Grandmother would take me deep sea fishing
Guess you could say
I'm a beach bum
M and I plan to spend
our golden years
looking for world's most perfect beach

Looking forward to our 18th anniversary
We make a good team
and cherish each other
It's the safest place I've ever found

After my dad died
and my mom remarried
the rules kept changing
my step dad
would not let us do anything
other than go to church on Sundays

How did you grow your back bone?

This confident loud person
is the opposite of what the
southern young lady
is supposed to be

This idea of women as visible
My feminist heart starts beating faster
just thinking about
how objectified women are
every day

THE LIVING, BREATHING, SPEAKING BEING

In her work on feminist methodology and narrative interpretation, Leslie Bloom engages with "theories of the speaking subject whose individuality and self-awareness or subjectivity is multiple, conflicted, complex, fragmented and in constant flux" (1998, p. 2).

Julia Kristeva talks of the way language changes when it is spoken by what she calls the "living, breathing, speaking being" (in McAfee, 2004, p. 6). She suggests that it is possible to transform the structure of literary representation: "… a revolution in poetic language is analogous to a political revolution" (in Oliver, 2002, p. 24).

Feminist researchers, says Jane Speedy,

> openly promote an interest in giving 'voice' to a range of women's experiences … not just in terms of … storytelling, but also in terms of making the personal (or private) political" (2007, p. 122).

> XXI
> Poetic inquiry is called by a multiplicity of names in social science
> but is always interested in expressing human experience,
> whether that of Self or Other or both.
>
> (Prendergast, 2009)

FIRST LETTER FROM MARIE

Resident in Georgian almshouses
close to the city of Bath
with twenty five ladies
from 60 to 88
Visible behaviour
is not actively encouraged
We are viewed as an entity
Expectations are not greatly different

from inception over 150 years ago

Our chaplain is 83
He and the handyman
are the only male presence
entitled to regular visits
and unquestioned access to our homes
We are the ‘Partis ladies’
we get invited in groups
to local events

Most of the time
I feel institutionalised

Our only constant link
is that we are no longer
or never have been
married
paradoxically a key concept
in the loss of perceived individuality

As a single woman
the proximity of family
was appealing
in my decision to move
offering a semblance of family unity
and freedom in retirement

The past year
was not a time for complacency
S my daughter-in-law
diagnosed with advanced lung cancer
Within hours
the ground had shifted

S talks of her hopes and fears
for her children
and answers their questions
as best she can
They are laying down memories
and building blocks

I understand the role
she wants me to play
should I outlive her

Approaching 70
I am not sure if I am capable

Sometimes ashamed
of the despair I feel
thinking of the impact
of the loss on her young children

Where it matters
I am visible
My presence makes a difference
to these four lives

I no longer turn heads
but on a good day
feel I have a voice
the most enduring quality of all

We have tales to tell that may well include loss of various kinds as we get older, but are about much more than that. Gathering these stories, triggering memories, sharing our experiences, became a personal, philosophical and political journey in different ways for all of us.

Julia Kristeva speaks of the "need to find a discourse that can answer the question: 'who are you?'" and the "memory that underlies narrative" (2001, pp. 15, 17). Whilst believing that our correspondence did not bear much resemblance to old patterns of sociological interviewing, I was aware that there were, of course, power imbalances implicit in the fact that the 'conversations' were initiated by me and the focus of the work was ultimately my dissertation, written and/or put together by me.

In using poetic representation, I hoped to go some way towards mitigating this power imbalance through allowing other women's voices to be heard and their stories told in their own words rather than through my analysis and interpretation. And to end on what seems an appropriately self-indulgent note, it became a labour of love (as well as sometimes quite painful) to 'create' these poems from the stories given me so generously. Something mysterious and transformational can happen when we take the poetic path—how the words look on the page, the pattern created, the way in which the words sing in our ear—understanding something differently.

When I begin to write,
it always starts from something unexplained,
mysterious and concrete …
It begins to search in me.
And this question should be philosophical;
but for me, right away it takes the poetic path.

That is to say
that it goes through scenes, moments, illustrations
lived by myself or by others,
and like all that belongs to the current of life,
it crosses very many zones of our histories.
I seize these moments still trembling,
moist, creased, disfigured, stammering.

(Cixous, in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 43)

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DONNA KEMP

14. WRITING BACK TO LIFE

COMING …

… from nobody
into nobody
nobody that's me.

LABEL (I)

Jacket
Strait

LABEL (II)

Peel back the
many layers
others have,
in their ignorance,
given you.
Revealing your core,
the only label
needed here—
love.

LABELS (III)

Love hath no labels
labels hath no love.

AUTUMN DRIVE

I drove to autumn.
Plucked myself. Later,
dressed in a new down,
I eased my way
into the world again.

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 135–154.

THE TUTOR

Come
Control
Query
How me
little girl
married you.
Relied upon
instead of self.
Recall I do
early days
wedded bliss.
You and me
disagree.
You walking
away.
Gone.
I soon
learned
not to
speak my
mind.
Till now.

WHEEL WAGON

Hot the day I stood on
kerbside and, in mum-made
comfy blue cotton,
tried to ease the strain of
wheel changing our red wagon.
You afraid of being late.
Nuts and bolts replaced.
Wagon wheeled once more
onward to reconciliation.
Returning home—a bearded friend
the Godfather was
courted on the radio.
You still you.
Controlling grew.
Stamped on us
forever.

LOVE /ANCHOR

Anchor
weighed
down my heart.
Where the scene
was no one knew.
I can't even believe
I married you.
Been looking for
twenty years.
Always been a
poet.
Why did I hide?
Because of fear.
Smirk no more.

SPARK

Spark
the light that is your
freedom, let it glow within,
allow life's love of laughter,
be a simple gift.

GRIEF

It is here then the memory of you!
Captured, ensnared, I sit on the edge of all
our moments and despair of what has been
gone without your mama. Moving into your world,
I touch {the cold bites hard notes of welcome on a washing line}
your soft hair, look into your astonished eyes,
capitulate into your infancy …
Generations of grief are no matter to this world,
they are the mere tears of girls and women.

SITUATE A SELF

I am not to find it in these books.
I am not to find it here.
Knock, knock, knock—coming in—
the world of my previous generations.
Who are they? Do they watch over me now?
Am I just another in this line of what?
Destructive lives?

I cannot change that which has been.
I cannot live in tomorrow and
I am denied a present.
Where am I as woman to be?

UNTITLED

In the darkness alone,
I danced with my distress.

UNTITLED

I sit in the peace of my heart
and knock at the wall of my sadness.

SEPARATED FROM SELF

Self rested on the shelf
that was not dusted.
Outside the raging yellow rags
waged war with all that laid still.
Hid in-between the nurturing breast
laid bare to feed that which was of me?
And, in the scouring days that followed,
each yellow rag turned black, until
the moment when the cold steel of
the surgeon's knife took the future
generations away. It was not him.
No more the yellow rags turned black.
It was the un-dusted shelf that rose
on the tick of my scream and gave
my Self to me.

UNTITLED

She lies, as liars do,
in her hospital bed.
About her is a cluck of offspring,
pulled in on the long lead of,
"Is she dying?"
For a moment, we are together,
and, in the hope/less wind of
now, we love and laugh.

CONFUSION

Sports day and the T Shirt is too big
the boy small.

He sits on the edge of my heart.
He stumbles and falls in the sack,
the rope is twisted at his shoes,
he rips to first place at last.
It is over, the final lap to be done,
he is on the edge of the world
no honour lies here. His pain
will nudge him to meet his yesterday's
and make sweet his tomorrow/s?

Sports day and the T Shirt is too big
the boy small.

I WANT NEVER GETS?

You gave me a name—'Dona,'
spelt 'd,' 'o,' 'n,' 'a.'
Told me it meant "Lady in Spanish."
I tried. Scores of public muddles ensued.
An aeon passed. When it came, at my request;
"But, it has 'Donna' on the certificate!"
"That was your dad. He went to register you."
I muddled up and in.
I wanted to be.
"I want never gets" you said,
over and over and over.
Sometimes, sometimes I do.
Did you?

UNTITLED

If woman is to be free
then she must be empowered
to Be.

L/ONLY WARD VISITING?

Oh, here you are at last!
I have waited long for this?
On the stretched white of the pillow
lies your aged head.

Through the curling mists of grey,
stained with nicotine yellow,
lies the baby pink of your scalp.
Are my fingers to meet it? As once
they did in childhood? No. Not here. Not now.

You have moved from sleep, and, your eyes,
once hollows to mine, possess a winter night
sky, lit only by a waning crescent moon, the twinkle
of any star long since faded here. As always,
these eyes betray your words. Now I can forgive
you immediately—it is easier that way.

You take me in with laboured breath.
I travel the crevices of a most
dry desert, the surface of which is
relieved only by your disappearing mouth,
a bruised purple oasis of spittle and smile.
And, of course, down the generations of women
we meet, becoming one, in a moment of
grief and joy.

THE BODY PARLOUR

Transient finally dressed in a one-off purple!
Her hand in mine, cool as the surface of
a glacial winter daybreak.
The translucent flesh of her face
complements the sole plum garb,
all yellowing and scattered with {exhausted stars)
black holes …
I am left aside and alone.
I crumble amongst a chase for words.
"We meet on the edge of the female line?"
I ask her to watch over me …
"It is my turn now …?" (!…)
I cannot say I am pleased she is
gone. I stoop to kiss her ripe
forehead, it is easy, she cannot
refuse or turn. I am the loving
daughter I want to be and she,
my mother.

BELONGING TO THE DECEASED

We are sorting out
life, bits of this and
that—Mother's life gone
now—all sold up.

BOUNCING TO DEATH

Early morning
with siblings on
the bed …
She has 'GOOD news …'
'Jump,' they said, she said,
'Jump' (fake joy), 'He's gone,'
'We are better off without him' (you).
It's true! Yet, still, my heart
is oozing the flush of red,
the love I felt for you …
Daddy, Daddy, Daddy
Daddy, Daddy, Daddy
I am missing you.

FRUITS OF WINTER

I can recall the shock
you are found and you
are dead.

THE SHOE BOX / FAMILY RECORDS

Here, let's put it here
in this shoe box,
let's tidy up my life
store it in a cupboard
under the stairs. From here
it will be easy to open its rhythm,
pick at its thread—till all is laid bare.

UNTITLED

I am sorting once again
looking for her. I want
to lay her to rest,
take her properly to her
deathbed through knowing.

AGENCIES OF BENEFIT / LETTER TO THE BENEFIT AGENCY

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Bring benefit to me and mine

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Bring the benefit of clarity to my heart

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Crunch numbers into sense

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Agencies of benefit the cashless kind

Please can you—will you
I hope
Please can you—will you
I hope
Move swiftly for I need to know.

(*On writing to the Benefits Agency trying to find any record of my mother's roots)*

FILLED WITH GAPS

She/I/We
She, I, we are filled with gaps—
We live a gap together—
I am a gap living in a
life gap, filled with gaps.

UNTITLED

Lifting off the skin
skin is lifting off

lifting off my skin
my skin is lifting off
Sun—is not—
the day.
Lifting off the skin
skin is lifting off
Lifting off my skin
my skin is lifting off.

SURE SHOCK

Sure, you are ‘dead’
I am hearing him say.
Like lightning, I shunt
three spaces, across
the proud terracotta sofa,
away from him and toward my lover,
“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” my ‘lady-like’ retort
“How much do our children have to bear?”

———————

I am moving,
turning away from the
black and violating, truly
crushing embrace of
his words. Heart. Last night.
Cruel irony slaps repeatedly at my synapses.
He, himself, had saved so many hearts.
There were thank you cards
sometimes on the mantle.

———————

For our children I set off toward
the strangulation that would
become both death to our
life and breathe existence anew
into each cell—of the hell of you.

UNTITLED

Life is turned
on its side
meaning is lost
lost in meaning
life has turned

on its side
in death.

A WONDERFUL LIFE

And so he has died!
I am told a red breast
was the bringer of his death!!!
I cast a glance, a flight
of the eye, across the twinned
worlds in which I live, external
and internal slabs of shock
wait, like the ‘ladies’ they
have been taught to be, to
weep, for our children, for him,
for me. And so it is
that death accompanies life,
a wonderful life.

MYSELF

Fragile
in this possibility
of love
of light.

DRESSED

… she came to me
in a cloak of lies,
of darkness that
betrayed my light …
… decaying … her skin
gone to bones
mattered into the
murmured beat of
my lived heart.
Undoing her
turns my breath
into scars of gasps,
pushed through flesh
undressed
in becoming whole.

HER EYES OPENED WIDE

Bleached
stark white
shock from
the inside
out. Her
abandonment
was riper,
more pungent
in its stench,
of a mother's
betrayal than
I had been
asked to imagine …
previous understanding
now lost to horror …
the horror of
my mother!

NO SEX WORK ON THE STREETS…

Sunday morning …
I had been waiting
for a first call … from one
of four newly discovered
siblings ….

… pulsating into my ear drum
with a strange and familiar
'Corrie' accent '… She was not a sex worker you know,
if that's what you're thinking …'
I HAD BEEN
my Being is ruptured

She was homeless,
imprisoned twice,
for actual …
… abandonment

… pulsating into my ear drum
with a strange and familiar
'Corrie' accent
'she was not a sex worker you know
if that's what you're thinking …'
I HAD BEEN

my Being is ruptured

here's to the foundlings of my mother.

SPECIAL TREASURE

Not gold.
Not silver.
Not precious stones.
Nor any man made chattel.
I am, have found,
the rare riches
of my Soul.

RELATIVELY CLOSE HATRED

Hatred
is taboo.
Lets' talk of love
not hate.
Yet of late
I know that this
is true, hatred
exists within me,
for each and both
of you.

UNTITLED

What is a body ?
a holding frame
for spirit.

SILENCE

In the silence
between the feral
noise of being
children … came a
moment of terror …
before the full throttle
of her anger laid
cruelty across
my soul … unfree
am I from this yet …?

Almost, nearly there.

GORGEOUS GIRLS

Discovered in me
opposite sisters
‘S’cuse me’
and Grey.

LIGHT

Light flickers across
the wall, a melody
of movement,
of God dancing.

RETURNING TO GOD

… is a lesson
of life … all
other lessons lead
to this …

LILLY HALL LANE

I turned into Lilly Hall Lane
looking for a place to sob,
to listen to my pain.

A voice talking suicide, isolated, ugly,
fearful and angry buried deep and
available, no where to be with myself
for me … shame, shame, shame.

I turned into Lilly Hall Lane
looking for a place to sob,
to listen to my pain.

UNTITLED

I am one with
space and substance.

UNTITLED

of course
in essence
spirit is the
bespoke seamstress
the tailor of our
lives.

UNTITLED

Nowhere is
more perfect
than now.

UNTITLED

the glory of spirit
always visits
in solitude.

UNTITLED

My mind
reflects on
poetry…is
this who
I am before
a God felt
in all that is?

UNTITLED

I learn to avoid
the hitting by being
dead.

UNTITLED

I tried today
to listen for
God … in my
Work … but
no, I could not
hear love today,
not today.

A KEY…

… a button,
a potential of
an opening, I
queried in the
air, but no,
today no God
was there.

UNMASKING

Unmasking my
mother …
… unmasked
am I?

IN MEMORY OF SAM

I am the office Angel.
A temp, on Welcome Duty,
being told you have died!
Self - slay they say.

To boot, yesterday,
I bore witness to your anger, your pain, your voice …
'Is Roger there?'
'Yes, I'll call him.'
Dialling from my desk …
A moment, barely discernable,
of hesitant exchange … (your rage?).
'It is Sam isn't it?'
'Yes.'

I remembered your name.
From time to time I didn't
and that bothered.
Later, I hear your
raised voice.
Then you chitchat
with staff about
your beloved dog.
I saw you leave.
I was on the stair.
That's all I knew of You.
Still, in my memory, Sam lives.

SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTED

I am told he has gone—dead.
I am telling him; still a boy, his dad is dead.
In a tackle of telephone calls, we craft a journey.
I see her first through the foyer glass.
In unrehearsed cold-blood, I have just practised on a friend
who is aghast and I am ready …
Eye contact … she knows now something is amiss …
ten or twelve steps to go … Staring through the pane,
we walk parallel and toward each other.
I am seated with her … she collapses like an
imploding and imploring flower, rises from
me and leaves before I can catch her in grief.
A moment or two later she is returned.
She has locked the crumple in a box somewhere just for her.
I want to scream. Travelling home, in turn, we shed tears,
and mutter pragmatic nuances, and there is still the family, his, long since viciously split, to be faced.

SITTING WITH THE HUM OF A DISHWASHER

I sit with my pen and
the hum of the dishwasher,
a beauty in the
rhythm of its beat causes
a click toward life and
its mystery.

I sit with the hum of the
dishwasher and be.

Being here connected
to the star lights, the
spiritual realm of the
body … my dishwasher
and me.

I sit with the hum of the
dishwasher and be.

LOCKED IN DISTRESS

Locked in distress.
I am, I was I is
a dress of crawling

skin makes me
up Outside of
this is I nothing?

UNTITLED

was going out to lunch …
    instead, I am out to lunch
floating away on the edge of
  own skin …
how can this be healed
haunting me … now.

IN THE BROWN OF HER SKIN

In the brown of her skin
lies the laughter of
my yesterday and tomorrow.
In the sand covering her body
I am reminded of the
freedom of rolling in a
moment of childhood,
which fleshes to marry
the blue of the sky
and ocean.

STAFF

Pools of love
given as gifts
to the work
of the day.

LAYERS OF LEARNING

From the mouths
of orators, here
we go … ontology …
epistemology …
methodology …
methods …
ingredients of
meaning making structures,
all extrinsic to the born of
our intrinsic worlds,

layers of learning,
bums on seats,
it's just a research (greedy reductionist?[1])
paper?

GREY

Grey is the pallor of
her skin, her being.
Here her existence is
created, is fear.
Fear and safety
are one. This is
all she knows.

UNTITLED

Coming into the light
the grey that hangs
on your skin, let
us begin, it's not
yours I am sure
it's not yours—from
what you told me before.
The grey of your skin
is his … do you think?

GRASPING

When I k (no) w my
mother was treated
brutally too can I
in a (under) standing voice,
write of my pain
to yours, how can a
woman (middle aged) in
years tell of the
ache, lies, secrets,
rewritings of (Her/Our) story?
Abuse, violence, erasure
through the sheets, wet,
beside the scorch of
a lemonade hot water
bottle—how can I tell
I matter … she did too …

ALWAYS

Always like a pending
Halloween night this trace
of a brutal killing voice,
that stirs in my body,
in my torso, across the
flesh that holds my bones
and innards, speaks …
shut the fuck up, you
have nothing to say,
you have nothing anyone
wants to hear, you
are going to die
ordinary anyway
shut up and clean
that's a real woman's
way.

TURNING WITH AND AGAINST

My body turned
in her polite query
my body turned.

My body turned from a
mere place in which
I reside to the cold
heat of hell, burning
with fear, flooded with
the chill of shame …
all on the back of, against,
a grievance?

My body turned
in her polite query
my body turned

As always, I kept it still

GENERAL CONCRETE CONVENTIONS IN WESTERN POETRY…

not poetic
poem, right.
a Your

not writing
It's is
just your
pain. No-one
else will
be
interested—
they
said

•

NOTES

[1] Dennett, D. (1995). *Darwin's dangerous idea.* London: Simon & Schuster.

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PART THREE: COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

JANE SPEEDY AND SUE PORTER

15. INTRODUCING COLLABORATIVE WAYS OF WORKING

Dear Sue,

I'm looking forward to writing this overview with you. In the original book proposal I had somehow put my name down, just as a marker I think, as the writer of all the overview sections, but of course, when it comes to a section on collaborative and creative ways of working, what could be more absurd than a single author?

This short chapter is intended as an overview and introduction to collaborative/creative ways of working. We cannot 'cover the whole patch' here, but we can excite people about these ideas and practices and flag up through the references list at the end of the chapter, where people might go to extend their thinking and look for more ways of working collaboratively and creatively together. The examples that follow are not exhaustive. We have concentrated on dialogue; on conversational ways of working together (which I suppose is what we are doing here in the introduction as well) and on writing together collaboratively and collectively—the first chapters in this part of the book are exemplars of people having conversations, whereas the second group use collaborative research and collaborative writing methods. All aspects of this collaborative section follow on from the writing section that precedes it, but also trouble notions of ownership and authorship and at a deeper level disrupt and fudge boundaries between selves and others.

These are research texts that are overtly socially negotiated in the making as is evident in both their form and their content, not least in the form and content of this overview, which we produced over a week or so, through a series of e-mail exchanges going back and forth between Bristol and Wales. The form was established fairly early on, in part by necessity, but the content has gone through many ramifications. What I am trying to notice here is that although this is written in the form of a casual, effortless chat, it has been carefully crafted over several incarnations and although to some extent it has written itself, nothing much has been left to chance

Jx

Hello Jane,

I've just been having another look at our collaborative inquiry section overview, and have been linking some underpinning characteristics for collaborative writing

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 157–165.

and ways of working with what we can see in the chapters, to wit that collaboration is based upon assumptions of …

– Interdependence and uncertainty
– Democratisation of knowledge—many ways of knowing
– Acknowledgement of complexities of realities
– Shift of focus from only outcomes to include processes
– Use of reflexivity—focus on contexts of and relationships between researcher and researched as shaping the creation of knowledge.

Should we write around the characteristics identified above? Or should we just point these dimensions out to readers, so that they can identify/disagree with them for themselves? If you are happy with any of this maybe you could move it on a bit? I notice how this coming and going of confidence and of connection mirrors some of the 'assumptions' above !! … Off shortly to Penguin Café Orchestra.

X Sue

Hi Sue,

I hope the concert was good. I went to what I think might have been their first concert in the 1970's at the roundhouse in Camden, which shows how old I am! The Penguin Café Orchestra (PCO) are a good analogy of this collaborative way of working. People often use jazz as the metaphor for the new experimental ethnographies, but the mixture of classical, rock, folk and jazz that Penguin Café play fits really well with this kind of work—many roots, diverse musicians contributing over the years, but keeping on playing together and moving the project forward. I really like your list; can we add in my transformative and subversive elements too? Not that all this work has to be either transformative (a tall and elusive order) or subversive. Nonetheless, more than any other ways of working, writing together seems to make the most difference to shaping/changing people's identities and bring them down from the 'high ground' as researchers and writers. Shall we stop writing each other e-mails now, and if you are agreed, see where this writing takes us? If it doesn't work, we can just tear it up and start again!

Jx

Hello Jane,

Just one more email (maybe).

Yes, I think we need to add 'subversive' to our list, and I think its interesting that I saw this embedded in 'democratising knowledge,' but feared to be as explicit as you as to what one was democratising knowledge for! I also have no problem with 'transformative,' as I think that might be a good way to name the feeling edge of this stuff for me—the rush of emotion as I sense myself daring to connect through the writing (as I bang on about in the Bare arsed stories (chapter eighteen).

I'm also noticing how these characteristics of collaborative writing are very similar to the five characteristics of action research, as identified by Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 1), which are that it: is participative and democratic, based in practice, combines action and reflection, for worthwhile purposes, and has

emergent form. Brings me back to my practice of discovering 'how action researchy' I can make my research.

x S

***

In the four chapters in this section, collaboration takes a number of forms: a fictitious collaboration with a dead poet; two men talking through writing (e-mailing) to each other; a diverse group of women thrown together to write a collective biography about their experience of love; and a collaborative writing group, who have sustained writing together over a long period of time and a variety of modalities.

In approaching this section of the book it may be worth reminding ourselves that these chapters in different ways, demonstrate some of the characteristics we outlined earlier, namely interdependence and uncertainty; a focus on both outcomes and process; the complexities of realities; the democratisation of knowledge (a transgression of expert researcher power), and the practice of reflexivity (Etherington, 2004; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

In the conversation that starts this chapter, for instance, you will notice that Sue writes a checklist of the characteristics of collaborative inquiries and wonders about using it as a way of organising this chapter, but then we don't take it up. Why was that? Was it that we left you, the readers, to use it for yourselves as she suggested? Was it that her voice got forgotten and Jane took more control? These kinds of issues between researchers are not ones that you often see opened out on the page; they remain folded beneath the surfaces of published texts, even though dialogue does lend itself beautifully to showing this. The most open and transparent version of co-researcher dialogue that we know of is still the one running along the bottom third of the pages between Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997) in *Troubling the Angels*, although both Paulus et al. (2008) and our own authors, Gale and Wyatt, contribute to developing these ideas in different ways.

One of the reasons we did not finally organise this overview chapter around the very useful list of characteristics and dimensions of research (above) is that we realised that although they describe collaborative inquiry well, they do not fully encompass all that we hope to discuss in relation to conversational research and before we get to our examplars of these ways of working, we want to discuss, briefly, the distinguishing characteristics and benefits of both these ways of working for practitioner researchers.

CONVERSATION AS RESEARCH

In the chapter by Gale and Wyatt, a teacher and a therapist talking to each other by e-mail, touching on issues of gender, sexuality and power, we get a sense of a very equal conversation and yet they have not told us so much about how this writing came into being and about what was selected, what was left out, how and why?

With Gale and Wyatt we are shown what they do and get to 'eavesdrop' on their conversation, which feels very alive, but we do not get to know how they wrote it and/or whether they argued about what went in/was left out etc. What we do have, however, is a very vivid sense of the intensity and immediacy of their dialogue.

One of the criteria suggested by Richardson (2000) and Speedy (2008) for evaluating creative/non-traditional forms of research, re-visited in chapter one of this book was that of verisimilitude or trustworthiness. In listening to the dialogue between Gale and Wyatt as two men talking, we get a sense of their relationship, their lives and their project together as if we are alongside them. They write with self-deprecating humour and we get a sense of their surprise and delight in having come across each other and developed this way of working. We are jostled and bustled along in the enjoyment and amusement of the conversation and then, almost at the end we are almost taken by surprise by the power and intensity of the moral at the end of the tale. This is not just about men joking and talking and meandering along their way, this is about love and an important emergent ethical know-how on the part of the writers about what underlies their collaborations and conversations (and perhaps those of others). Perhaps all writing is about love?

In the case of Jane Reece's chapter her conversation is in her mind's eye, which is even more confusing and arguably less collaborative—and yet in this chapter we get an even more vivid exemplar of the power of conversational research. Reece tells us of the process she has chosen, a fictionalised memoir of her (imaginary) conversations with Sylvia Plath. Mining her 'co-writer's' texts for inspiration, quotation, and creating a hyper-real narrative (the focus on colours—the way colour is used to highlight and signpost), she stimulates the inner eye as well as the ear. Moving between her voice and Sylvia's, this cross-over style of writing between fiction, and (auto) biography, as practised by, amongst others, Clough (2002) and Sparkes (2002), is noted by Speedy (2008, p. 8) as well established within ethnographic and anthropological traditions.

Using this fictionalised/imagined dialogue Reece explores the otherwise internal dialogue of the suicide and of the survivor, who, with their questions unanswered, is unable to explore the experience with the very person whose reason(ing) they seek to understand. As Frank writes,

> The teller of chaos stories is, pre-eminently, the wounded storyteller, but those who are truly living the chaos cannot tell in words. (1995, p. 98)

This conversation with another suicide has the potential to help the author to digest the reality of her own father's suicide. She cannot question her father; but she can question Sylvia, can put words into Sylvia's mouth, and this conversation enables her (and us) to accompany Sylvia through her final hours. All this restructuring of those hours enables the author to be close to Sylvia, as she might have wanted to be close to her father; to understand, even. To restory Sylvia's final hours in a therapeutic conversation (White & Epston, 1990).

Conversation is difficult to write and when badly done it can seem stilted and is very hard to follow and there are many examples of boring dialogues within practitioner research texts but when it succeeds as we think it does in these two

chapters, conversation engages readers like no other form of text and brings research very much alive, off the page and out into the context of the reader. If you do a google search on 'conversation as research' (as we have frequently done during the development of this book) you will find acres of texts about conversational analysis and the art of representing interview data. You will find very little about conversation as a research process in its own right, apart from Josselson et al.'s (1997) seminal book on conversation as method, when a group of people came together to talk, listen and learn from each other's shared interest in a topic, using conversation as a creative research process. Go into any decent bookshop, however, and the shelves will be stacked with novels and thrillers that use huge amounts of dialogue to engage readers and create immediacy within the text.

If practitioners want to produce creative, engaging research texts, developing ways of representing vivid, immediate dialogues that draw readers in then becoming skilled in writing dialogue may be a key area for practitioner researchers to develop. Why is well written dialogue so vivid? Perhaps because of what exists in the space between the two and/or the many. A silence which is not just an empty space but a space inscribed with the potential, forgotten meeting of the inner dialogues between the two interlocotors, real or imagined.

> At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival. (Bakhtin quoted in Holquist, 1990, p. 39)

COLLABORATIVE AND COLLECTIVE INQUIRY

In a justly famous paper Richard Rorty (1985) made a distinction between the 'desire for solidarity' and the 'desire for objectivity' as two principal ways in which human beings made sense of their lives and the lives of others. In an era when practitioner inquiry seems to have become dominated, in the UK and USA at least, by 'evidence-based practice,' practitioner researchers in the health, education and social policy sectors, in their ongoing quest for professional recognition, seem to have become captured by the 'desire for objectivity.' In so doing they have lost sight of and possibly even fudged over some of the ways in which a 'desire for solidarity' with our clients and user groups makes so much sense of our work and our working lives as practitioners. It is perhaps, by turning towards the politicized edges of practitioner scholarship that we come across the shared humanity and benefits for us all of collaborative inquiry with our 'clients' and other stakeholders. Turning towards counselling research, we find practitioners like Michael White and David Epston, (who described their whole 'narrative therapy' project with people as a co-research endeavour around people's lives) sitting uneasily with what Foucault (2002) described as 'expert power.' White and Epston stood apart from the established scenario of the professional (sane and 'sorted') therapist working

compassionately with their (troubled) clients to a more democratized desire for solidarity, whereby:

> I am thinking of a solidarity that is constructed by therapists who refuse to draw a sharp distinction between their lives and the lives of others, who refuse to marginalize those persons who seek help, by therapists who are constantly confronting the fact that if faced with the circumstances such that provide the context of troubles of others, they just might not be doing nearly as well themselves. (White, 1993, p. 112)

Here we begin to unravel the distinctions between objectivity and solidarity as very windows to look out from onto the practitioner researcher world. Practitioner research as an act of solidarity and shared humanity opens up the space for different kinds of knowledge (such as insider knowledge, professional knowledge, community knowledge) informing the same project equally.

SILENCE, VOICE AND POWER RELATIONS

Collaborative approaches to research are of benefit to the practitioner (and other co-researchers) because they work explicitly and consciously with the expressions of power between people, exposing and challenging the dominant paradigm and opening up its assumptions—e.g. that professionals are the only sort of experts, and only professionals can be researchers—to investigation. Collaborative research, and specifically collaborative writing, can be seen as a reciprocal process through which each party generates and shares learning, for the purpose of creating knowledge for beneficial effect, and promoting voices that might otherwise be silenced.

Thus, for instance, the insider voices of clients are represented alongside the voices of their therapists (see Speedy, 2011) and the insider voices of students in higher education are placed alongside the thoughts of their tutors (as in chapter nineteen, below). This is a different kind of collaboration from those in the first and second parts of this book where the voices of trainee nurses have been gathered and represented by a researcher, or the narratives of family and community members have been harnessed into autoethnographic texts produced by others.

These issues of voice, however, are not straightforward, as can be seen in the discussion in chapter nineteen about the turbulent times experienced in the beginning of the group, or in the uncertainties and unsureness about ‘belonging’ felt by members of the love group (chapter eighteen). Collaborative and even collective forms of inquiry are not necessarily without power relations, or indeed without hidden voices, but rather, they present different and equally complex challenges to the ethics of voice, silence and power relations in reseach. Mazzei’s (2007) very interesting work on the use and acknowledgement of silence in research is useful to evoke here, since she regards silence as

> [N]ot a lack or an absence or a negation, but rather as an important or even vital aspect of the fabric of discourse. (2007, p. xiii)

The advocates of both research as conversation and collaborative inquiry methods often suggest a greater democracy in this approach (see above) but there are still silences, hidden voices, and areas of discussion that are unsaid and unsayable (see Rogers et al., 1999), it may just be that there are more opportunities for more people to have a say in how the ethics of exposure, hiding, silence and what gets spoken operates. Collective biographies, more than most forms of writing together, are attempts to search for our shared humanity and communalities, but are not necessarily achieved in communal ways. Whilst the talking and writing that formed chapter eighteen was produced collectively like the writing in Gannon's (2001) collective girl, it was drawn together by one author. This brings up the question what the term 'collective' actually means and of how to re-present ethically the work of collective others (see below; and Gannon, 2001, pp. 787-790). The Bristol Collaborative Writing group has established ways of presenting as well as talking and writing together collectively, but there are clearly still differentiated types and styles of contribution by different group members, which brings up discussions and comparisons of equality and sameness.

In conclusion, to return to our original list. All our examples are fraught with complexities, strewn, we hope, with different realities and meanings that leave us uncertain, but at the same time absorbed, curious and wanting to engage in similar research endeavours ourselves. Each of the different parts of this book has, to some degree, emphasised some form of reflexivity—that is to say, some explicit emphasis on the relationships between researchers and the topic and or people being researched (see, for instance, Hertz, 1997; Etherington, 2004). Research as conversation and collaborative and collective inquiries, however, perhaps illustrate more than any other section in this book that the term 'reflexivity' needs to be used in its plural form and that there are multiple and 'ambivalent' (Davies et al., 2004) practices and reflexivities pleated into this kind of work, between the two and between the many. In this sense the multiple reflexive opportunities might best be described as akin to those found in a constantly constituted and constituting 'hall of mirrors.' According to the feminist researcher Donna Haraway (2004) there's a lot more going on than we think or notice when we embark on research projects. No doubt this is always the case, but it is in these creative, dynamic projects, in which everybody involved has taken up the multiple positions of researcher and researched, that the rumpus really starts!

CRITICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS THAT EMERGE FROM THESE CHAPTERS:

Some of the questions we asked about ethical issues in the 'writing' section of this book emerge again when thinking about working collaboratively and conversationally. We asked ourselves earlier whether the fact that Scarlett's chapter was 'fictionalised' as well as being an account taken from the author's life experience was sufficient legitimation of a text describing the witnessing of a potential murder? Now what of the fictional conversation with Sylvia Plath—a well-known and much talked about literary figure whose family have had to put up with her life and very public and untimely death being continually poured over by

journalists and literati alike (Hughes, 2006)? Was Reece's chapter wrongly categorised by the editor of this book and her co-authors as 'collaborative and conversational' when her collaborator was already dead and the conversation took place 'only' in the mind's eye of the author? Looking again at the chapters that have been included here they encompass a diversity of methods of collaboration and include multiply-authored texts as well as conversations, virtual, real and imagined, are all these writing technologies, unproblematised in the texts, performing the same tasks—or does it impact profoundly on the content and form of the writing that emerges that Reece's conversation is imagined, whereas Gale and Wyatt are talking virtually, over e-mail exchanges and the women writing about love are gathered together physically, writing in 'real' time? We have talked in our introductory account here about 'democratising methodologies' as if including multiple authors in the process of writing up as well contributing to research studies is necessarily more emancipatory, but the multiply-authored text presented here by the Bristol Collaborative Writing Group appears to have an anonymous narrator who quotes from the accounts of his/her respondents in the style of many other qualitative social research texts- what's the difference? Is this writing seen as collaborative or collective simply because all of its multiple authors are engaged in academic work of some kind? Does collective biography ever include research or service users as well as academics?

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JANE REECE

16. CONVERSATION WITH SYLVIA IN COLOUR

LONDON, OCTOBER 1962

The first time I saw Sylvia she walked into the room, golden hair swinging around her shoulders. Sylvia's red lipstick matched her scarlet skirt and her breasts pointed upwards in the fashion of sixties' underwear design. Her head held high, Sylvia invited attention and, when she spoke, clear New England vowels marked her. My immediate reaction was, 'I don't like her.'

She seemed too cocky, cocksure and headstrong, with confidence oozing from every pore—sexual confidence in her cheerleader beauty and Monroe-like body; transatlantic confidence that only American women have; literary and academic confidence from the scholarships, prizes, awards and publications that had fallen at her feet. The men in the room turned, smiling involuntarily. She stood, a cocktail glass in her hand, dipping occasionally towards it—almost a nervous reaction, but it was obvious that she was a bright and lively woman. Men were smiling at her; she clearly adored their attention and they enjoyed her brightness, her blondness, her American-ness. She did not look at the women in the room. They tried not to look at her.

The martini in her hands was replaced and Sylvia continued laughing, head tossed back, glistening red mouth opened wide—in wit, in laughter. I watched. I wanted to discover the tic that made her red mouth peck up and down to the cocktail glass. I remember thinking of the female blackbird—anxiously bobbing that brown, speckled breast, beauty in understatement—both female—but nothing could have been further from Sylvia at that moment. Sylvia kept pace with the cocktails but the men started to look at their watches as their pre-dinner drink hour expired. One by one, they left. We heard the car doors slamming, Sylvia and I. We heard the pauses as the men in their cars switched on the ignition and sat quietly for a moment as the engines warmed. Then off.

The men now gone to their wives and children, their fantasies falling apart as they enter the warmly-lit hallways of their homes.

When Sylvia realised that she was standing alone, she reached for an olive, painted on her bright red smile and pulled on her coat, protesting,

"No. No. I want to walk home. There's a frost and the sky is clear. I shall wrap up and walk fast."

Cheek brushing cheek, her accented "Goodbye" rang in the night air.

It was silent after Sylvia left.

Outside, a full moon caught Sylvia's attention; she looked upwards, hearing an owl. The hardened earth crunching underfoot, Sylvia, side-stepping a freezing

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 167–175.

puddle, was pricked by a holly spine thrusting through a yew hedge as she brushed against it, passed now the lop-sided warp of the neighbour's gate. The moon shone on the path; a cat ran across that beam. It was a clear night. It was clear.

Sylvia tore off her coat as soon as she passed through the door. The babysitter sent away with her payment, she rushed to her table, pushing aside to make space for her words. The moon through the window sent its message, flowing to her pen where astral lines formed poems on the page. Sylvia stopped and looked at the scarred wood, her home for words—mess, mugs, pens, paper, screwed up foolscap sheets, a testament to labour. She decided to clean the table. That way she would write a better poem, have a better home, be a better woman, wife, mother, writer. Never good enough. Newspapers discarded, mugs washed, then dried and hung, each hanging satisfactorily on a hook. The linen towel hung, surfaces gleaming domesticity. Good girl, good girl.

There was now a clean polished space with pens in a pot and Sylvia thought back to the walk home, the neighbours, the moon, the cat's green stare, the sharp holly.

No! The poem sequence was no good. Through the window, the moon still, two fine curved crescents joined to shine that bellied fullness, but the space between had gone. That entire poem had disappeared into the cleaning, the clean dishes, the washed glasses, discarded newspapers. The room was tidy, there was no untidiness left for the poem to come rushing out. These are the times when Ted would say "Just write" … as if one could … just like that.

ST IVES, CORNWALL MAY, 2007

I am sitting on the terrace restaurant of Tate St. Ives forty-five years later. It is windy but the light for which the town is famous is on display and there is a sense of bright optimism. I am exhilarated. I woke early and have walked along the beach. As I sit down, I recognise Sylvia, beaming, energetic and eager, peering over the balustrade to Porthmeor Beach. She turns around, catches my eye and asks if she can join me. She sits.

"I've never been here before! I can't believe that I never came here! It's wonderful. Imagine—we could have lived here and the children could have had the sea. It's almost Nauset, the colour, the light, the beach. And look… here's even a lighthouse! This whole place could be a Hopper painting."

"I always feel inspired when look over there and remember that is was the inspiration for Virginia Woolf's *The Lighthouse*" I remark, pointing to the headland where the white lighthouse stands as a beacon.

"Places of the dead," she murmured.

"I arrived earlier," she offered. "And wandered around the corner to Barbara Hepworth's studio. They've left is just as it was when she died. There's the plinth and the chisels but her work seemed to be in the everyday, the red plastic mixing bowl with plaster of Paris mixed, cracked and dried now. That, more than her bed in the summer house, the sculptures in the garden, the dustcoats hanging on the hook, seemed to contain the essence of her work."

"And in my case …," Sylvia faltered, "In my case, I am thinking, have I left my essence—my writing—in the fundamental tools, too—the pens, the ink, the paper—all that will disintegrate. Is that my legacy? Is that all?"

I recalled that Alvarez had written of Sylvia's development as a poet, of how she had

> served a long and stern apprenticeship with the masters who dominated the 1950's—first with Yeats and Wallace Stevens, then with Theodore Roethke, Robert Lowell, and her husband Ted Hughes … But the unique poems on which her reputation rests, all of them written in the last ten to twelve months of her life, were altogether freer, harsher and more sardonic. (Alvarez, 2005, p. 29)

And that "she began as a carver and became a modeler … Yet even in the modeler's dream of creativity, she stayed true to her carver's training, rewriting obsessionally" (ibid., p. 44). I remembered the drafts of her then re-drafts of manuscripts I'd seen of '*Stings*' that was published posthumously in *Ariel* (Plath, 1965).

"Well, you left some wonderful, polished poetry, some of the most open, honest and self-questioning journals I have ever read, a heartbreakingly honest novel and wonderful recordings that have an echoing, haunting quality that stays. Above all I think your work has been an inspiration," I remind her.

"Yes, I left all of that."

"And your children …"

Sylvia's eyes fill with tears. "Yes, I left my children."

We sit quietly for a moment.

"From where you are now you must see how they have flourished," I suggest tentatively. I have read enough about Sylvia to tread carefully, to know how easily she can fly off the handle and I don't want her to disappear when I've just met her, now, as she's just started to talk to me.

"Have you been surprised by Ted's legacy to you?" I ask.

"*Birthday Letters*? Not surprised, just overwhelmed that it was in him and that he had to lay it down, set it in ink and tell the world and I yearn, now, to have a conversation with him—about the poems, about him and me and us."

"Would there be anything to say after *Birthday Letters*? Hasn't he said it all?"

"He said all that I didn't know. If only I'd known that he loved me like that, that I was the only woman for him, that our love was indestructible and that I would live with him for ever despite the others, maybe I could have lived with not living with him."

"You would have had to be very patient."

"Yes … I never learned patience. I needed to know that then, knowing now is—well, past, the moment of needing to know was then."

"Perhaps, he did not know those things then; perhaps he knew the depth of his love only later," I suggest.

Sylvia looks stormy and I am frightened that I have said too much, scared her off—but it is not me with whom she's angry.

"He should have known it, he should have. That is the act of faith that is marriage. And …," Sylvia's voice shakes, "The terrible thing is that now, we will never meet again to enjoy each other. I will never see Ted again and we will never meet again here or there. I'll never give him his reply."

I sit quietly and watch Sylvia. Her eyes fill with tears then she reaches inside her bag, retrieves a notebook, searches again and brings out a pen. She has forgotten that I am here as, opening to a thumbed gap in the leaves, she writes furiously, ignoring me.

I watch the sea as Sylvia writes.

It is five, maybe ten, minutes later when I hear Sylvia's voice as she excuses herself to the bathroom and I cannot resist the gift of Sylvia's absence, the opportunity to see her words raw on the open page.

I read and find 'Red,' the final poem in *Birthday Letters* (Hughes, 1999, p. 145), written in full, followed by Sylvia's hurried handwriting:

> You said that I had lost the blue jewel.
>
> That blue is the glowing lapis from Afghan hills, hacked by chisel and carried carefully in clumsy lumps tucked in the pockets of nomad carpets slung across camels, jostling for space with scarred aluminium cans, a handful of cardamom, bolani wrapped in paper retrieved from some other use, a naan bread, thick with sesame and poppy seed. The camel train of men in rough weave scarves, barely protecting their scalps from sun, thinking of the trackless highway—yet they and the camels knew their way from some inherited guide through dunes of dust and grit.
>
> The lapis stayed with them during the nights of cool travel when they could move without the camel stench drowning their nostrils at every leaden hoofed step, anticipating the sale of their blue stones. They knew too, when they lay at full sun in the coolness of caves with their men-wives, that as bodies spoke words and brothers shared journeys, their sex made a bond of trust that would allow each man to leave his food and trade with the lover in knowledge that the lapis would be waiting still on his return.
>
> In the midst of all this life, of bartering bodies for trust and of travelling for dreams, the lazuli remained protected, not lost. It matched the kingfisher blue silk kaftan I wore all summer I was pregnant with Frieda. Then, you called me a Madonna in blue as we thrilled at the tiny woodland violets scattered outside the cottage door.
>
> Red, you said, was my colour. Yes, my lips wore the scarlet of Marilyn, my wrists bore the screaming fragrance of Arden, my temples marked crimson by electrodes to burn away that freedom I'd had for two whole days in the cellar.[1]
>
> And in our room I folded thick deep wombs of burgundy velvet at the window, plush cushions for your back, our lovemaking.

You brought me poppies for my birthday.[2] Huge, open, brazen blooms with stamens of black staring, staring, urging—come and get me! Our love was brilliant ruby gloss, brittle and fragile. I did not want that to break into the thousands of sharp, glass shards we trod on with bare feet, bleeding more. Still, I did not hurt enough. I raged bulls-blood words and leapt and spat and screamed until my tonsils became raw. That bloodied bite was my first sign of love.[3]

All that summer pregnancy I made raspberry gem tarts, strawberry jelly, tomato soup cake, filled bowls of cherries to lie in wait for your hunger, layered the hedgerow dark, rich reds in summer puddings, their juices staining the white bread.[4] All winter I made sauce for thanksgiving turkey with hard, bright cranberries, braised purple cabbage with spice, stirred false glace cherries into the plum pudding, wishing as I stirred. You said I hid in a pit of red.

I did not want the ruby to dull to amber, fragments held in resin, masquerading as a gem. The love-leech drew all its succour from me and there was only whiteness in my veins. Then the cold, cold day.[5]

I had run and run and run myself to the shops, to the phone box, to the ground. I saw all the things I must do listed in columns behind my eyes and as evening fell I watched the navy blue darkness cover the cold air and called, scandalised, to children too small to understand 'Look! Darkness! And not yet five-thirty!'

The children. The coughing, crying children.[6] The fed children in their knitted jackets, then their fleece pyjamas, all padded against the wetness of the night.

I did not see the night except for that gleam, the mirroring moon. I was busy with white moon glow beckoning, my pen fast and furious. This one to the neighbour, this one for the doctor, pinning, pinning on the pram.[7] Then—busy, busy. Throw open the children's window wide, jam the door and seal it all around.[8] More clothes across the gap at the bottom—this white metal's not for them.

Woolly darkness still, pale sky of morning far away. White beckoned.

The clear mugs full of milk—thick Jersey cream for my darlings! The bread was fresh—our baker was good—and thick with the butter to keep them content.[9] They would have each other.

The white beckoned me.

The clean linen tea-towel—you know—the one with 'G-L-A-S-S' woven through it against the weft. White on white. Folded neatly to soften the blow. No blow this time, not this time, just escape.

> Leaving the blue of the silk and the lapis, the scarlet of the poppies, the tulips, the curtains, the veins, and the birth. It was whiteness that beckoned me. The moon insisted and I was won over. No colour to this fume[15] that took me far from camel trains of curious gems and summer fields with loud poppies whose cymbal sounds clashed in my ears still!
>
> My head resting. Whiteness drawing whiteness. Lying on white linen. I saw my white page. Whiteness fell.
>
> From my new dream distance I watched the clear skies as the sun rose and the garden growing on. Tight, white buds of lilac, hidden in woody stems, waiting to erupt, curled along woody stems to pulse its heavy scent as passers-by, careless, brush against it in months to come. The tissue petal narcissi in late pregnancy, gave birth pangs through its tight green bud and in bloom—a snowdrop stared in frozen awe and the world gasped at what I had done. I had done my best."

Sylvia returned to the table. She seemed open to conversation but I had nothing more to ask her.

POSTSCRIPT

In questioning validity after poststructuralism, Patti Lather writes, "In periods when fields are without secure foundations, practice becomes the engine of innovation" (1993, p. 674). Fictionalizing an interview might be included within that practice. Lather (1993, p. 679), proposes that, "Rather than evoking a world we already seem to know (verisimilitude) in a story offered as transparent, the move is toward 'attempts to create indeterminate space for the enactment of the human imagination' (Lubiano, 1991, p. 177)," which invites the use of fictionalization.

In this paper the process is mimicked as the interviewee and interviewer are the same person—myself, as writer—in dialogue with another aspect of myself and written in the manner, described by Rhodes (2000, p. 522) whereby the "researcher cannot then claim to represent others in an essential way or to understand them independently; instead, as Czarniawska (1998, p. 275) suggests (using Mikhail Bakhtin's term) 'empathy is a conceit, and … extopy (the curiosity for Others because they are different) is more than enough.'"

Sylvia Plath's life is very well documented in her own and others' writings (e.g. Alvarez, 1971, 2005; Becker, 2003; Brain, 2001; Hayman, 1991; Malcolm, 1995; Moses, 2003; Plath, 1966, 1983; Stevenson, 1989). In presenting this paper in the form of fictional interview, the reader learns little more about her than offered elsewhere but it affords the writer an opportunity to imagine freely and to hold an internal dialogue.

The impetus to write this imaginary conversation, then, arose out of another situation. The meeting with Sylvia at Tate St Ives was "coincidental," just as Amia Lieblich (1997, p. xi) writes that "it was serendipity, or perhaps the spirit of the times, that led me to writing a biography in which subjectivity and identification

were proudly announced, rather then being concealed." Esther Fuchs, her reviewer, states that Lieblich "had been seeking out a literary mother, one through which she could assert her own right to speak and write—with a difference" (Fuchs, 2001, p. 1-2). In this paper, however, it is Sylvia Plath's exceptional body of writing and dramatic death that provided the invitation to enquiry while my own experience as a survivor of suicide (my father killed himself some years ago) made the inquiry both compelling and prohibitive. Holding a conversation with Sylvia seemed a gentle way of probing into the mystery of what pushes the person over the brink into suicide, while its unravelling might be made gentler through fictionalisation. This method is endorsed by Anthony Storr (1989, p. 129) in his comment that creative writing "is one of the ways of overcoming the state of helplessness… It is a coping mechanism, a way of exercising control as well as a way of expressing emotion." Of course, considering the suicide of someone with whom one is not personally connected makes it safer still.

This paper paints a portrait of Sylvia Plath using "writing as a performative methodology and to performance as a way of knowing" (Pelias, 1999) in an attempt to allow the writer as survivor, through restructuring and re-authoring, to "complete any unfinished business with the deceased to be able to say the final goodbye" (Worden, 1991, p. 38).

Wertheimer (1991, p. 166) suggests that "without an ongoing interaction with [the dead person] … the whole painful and complicated process of separation has to be worked out entirely by the survivor alone." She continues,

> As survivors talked, their stories often took on the form of a dialogue, a questioning, a searching which they had undertaken alone, and were now recounting for the listeners benefit. It is the dialogue which they are now unable to have with the other person. Frequently it seemed to represent the survivor's attempt at working through some of the most painful legacies of suicide—the guilt, the anger, the search for understanding. (Wertheimer, 1991, p. 166)

So that, ultimately, survivors might be able to relinquish what risks becoming "a frustrating, fruitless quest" (Lukas & Seiden 1987, p. 93).

While fictionalized accounts have become acceptable in social sciences, issues of validity have been raised by Laurel Richardson (1992, p. 127), writing of the critical academic reaction to blurring poetry and social science with a "a transcript masquerading as a poem/a poem masquerading as a transcript" and positioning herself as "experiencing the self as a sociological knower/constructor—not just talking about it, but doing it" (ibid., p. 136).

Enosh and Buckbinder (2005) describe the narrative interview as one where the two parties share mutual involvement rather than see each other as objects, receptacles of data to be mined, and who are involved together in a continuous process of *producing* or *creating* the interview. In contrast to the interview I have written, in a standard literary review with Plath (Orr, 1963), it is clear that Plath is the 'object' of the interview with the interviewer placing technical and personal

questions on poetry to her. The interviewer directs the interview, structuring the question around the subject of poetry rather than allowing an experiencing of Plath.

It is however, Plath's own words that tell her story.

NOTES

[1] Sylvia Plath attempted suicide and hid in a cellar of the family home for two days following electric convulsive treatment (Plath, 1966).

[2] In a letter to Olive Higgins Prouty, Sylvia Plath states that she has picked late poppies and cornflowers from her yard to decorate the desk in her study, which has become her sanctuary and the emotional centre of her life (Moses, 2003a).

[3] At their first meeting in Cambridge Ted Hughes stole Sylvia Plath's hair band and earrings while she retaliated by biting his cheek, drawing blood (Moses, 2003a).

[4] Sylvia Plath's famous 'Tomato Soup Cake' made with Campbell's Condensed Soup (Moses, Baking with Sylvia, *The Guardian*, 15 February 2003).

[5] The winter of 1966-7 was the coldest in England since 1740 (Moses, 2003a).

[6] Plath and her children had had colds and flu for several weeks prior to her death.

[7] Plath left notes pinned on the children's pram and under her neighbour's door very late at night.

[8] Before killing herself, Sylvia Plath painstakingly protected her children from gas fumes by opening their bedroom window wide and sealing the door with tape and towels. Plath left glasses of milk and plates of bread and butter for her children in their room so that they would not be hungry in the period between waking and being cared for again. A babysitter was due to arrive at next morning and raised the alarm as she smelled gas after knocking at the door.

[9] Sylvia Plath died by gassing herself.

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KEN GALE AND JONATHAN WYATT

17. TWO MEN TALKING

Performing Selves in Emergent Relational Space

We have been writing collaboratively for eight years, using an approach, 'nomadic inquiry,' drawn from the French 20th Century philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, (e.g. Gale & Wyatt, 2009). In this approach we exchange writings, via email, to which we each in turn respond. We might respond directly to what the other has written, working with the ideas, stories, figures or form of the piece; or we might, as Deleuze would put it, take 'lines of flight,' or work with it 'rhizomatically,' allowing the other's writing to lead us elsewhere, somewhere, anywhere.

We see this collaborative writing as inquiry (after Richardson, 1997; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Speedy & Wyatt, 2014; etc.): we do not know where the writing will take us. We write, together, in order to find out where we are going and what will be created. We inquire into understanding and/or troubling notions of subjectivity; and/or perhaps we are inquiring into friendship (Gale & Wyatt, 2009).

The writing that follows is based upon a longer piece, 'Two Men Talking' (Gale & Wyatt, 2008a), that we originally wrote five years ago as we were producing our joint dissertation at the University of Bristol. Our writing had only recently begun explicitly to consider questions of gender. In Gale & Wyatt (2008b), written during the same period of time as we were writing Two Men Talking, we began to explore our process of "becoming men." In that writing we exchanged stories from our childhood and early adulthood about boarding school, hair, sexuality, mothers, relationships and more. After Butler (2004, 2006), we discussed the provisional nature of gender, and how in our collaborative writing—our "collective biography" (Davies & Gannon, 2006)—the experience of writing to and with each other about gender was central to our process:

> Because of what has gone before, and because of our shared present and prospective shared future, we can perform these versions of our masculinities today. (Gale & Wyatt, 2008b, p. 251)

In this writing, we continued our Deleuzian dialogue about being, not being, and becoming men.

We have presented 'Two Men Talking' at a number of conferences; the text offered here is a re-working of that 'performance' script. It differs from the journal-length version in both obvious and not so obvious ways. Obvious, in that it is shorter and that much of what we think of as being core to the journal version is cut out. (We suggest that it becomes something different, not 'less,' despite—because of?—what is missing.) The not so obvious difference is that in this

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 177–183.

version, we speak, as well as our own words, both each other's and those of some of our 'characters.' At a recent presentation of this script a member of the audience enquired how much we performed each other's words. We responded by saying that although most of the time our words were 'our own' (are our words ever our own?), at times one of us gave voice to the other's. We explained that we structured the piece this way in order to generate more pace for a listening audience. We realise, though, that such a muddying of 'belonging' also works to embody a blurring of the singular Ken and the singular Jonathan, a blurring congruent with the material we immerse ourselves in here:

***

K: In our recent collaborations we have examined subjectivities. Over the past two years, as part of the doctoral programme we are undertaking, we have written to each other through the exchange of texts attached to emails (we live many miles apart, Jonathan in Oxford, me in Cornwall).

J: We are undertaking a joint dissertation, where we are working, using writing as our methodology, in pursuit of understanding (our) subjectivities and what Deleuze refers to as 'becomings.' During this time we have not, until recently, explored our subjectivities as 'men.'

K: We have grappled with this. Have we been avoiding the subject of gender? Were we concerned about how we would deal with it? How much of our apparent avoidance of the subject was itself gendered? We have recently written a collective biography piece about our early experiences of a gendered world. We found working with gender difficult, challenging, and anxiety provoking. This, we suspect, is why our curiosities have not proceeded beyond tentative inquiries.

J: We meet when we can, we email, we text, we phone. We talk. We are two. (Aren't we?) We are men. (Aren't we?) I live with Tessa. She, more than once over the past two years has said to me:

K: "If Ken were a woman, I wouldn't be happy."

J: I have taken this to mean that she perceives an intimacy between us that disturbs her. Once, while I was in Bristol meeting Ken, I failed to contact her during the day. I was caught up in our discussions, preoccupied with Ken and me and our work together. Later, she and I spoke on the phone. She asked me, lightly and with humour (I think):

K: "Where were you? What were you up to? Were you having sex with a furry Cornishman?"

J: She calls our writing,

K: "Up-your-bottom stuff."

J: Referring (I think) to its theoretical content and to its focus upon us. Ken and I are up ourselves. I also live with Holly, who's 16. One summer evening, Holly and I were talking at home in our living room. She was asking me what all this writing and reading and talking to Ken and going to Bristol was about, and what was a doctorate anyway. I was telling her

about the writing that Ken and I were doing together at the time. And I also mentioned that we (the family) were going to meet up with Ken later that summer. She asked me, with that slightly sneering directness that teenagers seem so adept at:

K: "What is it, Dad? Are you and Ken gay or something?"

J: To which I replied an entirely non-defensive "No. Of course not. Don't be annoying."

K: Jane—our supervisor and witness—has often commented how she experiences reading our writings as 'ear-wigging,' a rare opportunity to listen to two men talking. She may, we remember, have used the word 'voyeuristic' in describing her sense of this experience.

J: When I told Tessa that Ken and I were doing this piece together about being two men talking she pointed out,

K: "But you and Ken don't count. You're not proper men."

***

J: Here's a puzzle: I have 'mates,' friends, maybe half a dozen. Most I have known for years. My friends are important to me and I would be happy to describe my relationships with them as intimate. But I think that the point is this: my intimacy with them has not provoked the kinds of questions from the two women in my family—taunting? joking? uncomfortable? One question is what is it about our relating to each other, about being two men talking—or, primarily, two men *writing*—that is disturbing, I wonder? And does it disturb us?

***

K: Two men talking: what's so unusual about that? Is it what we are talking about? All that 'up yer ass' stuff and not about 'wimmen,' or football, or telling racist or homophobic jokes. Is it that? Is it because it does not conform to the stereotype? That seems too simple but Jane's sense of being the voyeur, Holly's acute teenage observation and Tessa's mature inquisitions all tell us something about what we are doing. They are performing their selves to us, they are reading us in particular ways, they are curious. Is this because we are two men talking in ways that surprise them, that encourage them to express forms of disquiet? Jane almost appears gleeful that she is able to peep in to see what we are doing! Tessa's enquiry suggests a reading of us that is perhaps a little threatening: threatening because it is unusual?

J: Women looking at men.

K: Women who care about these men? When we first started writing together my partner at the time expressed one jot of curiosity. She encouraged me. She asked occasional questions about what we were doing but she never looked at our writing or showed much of an interest

in it. If she had thought that I was having sex with a tall sensitive (male) therapist she would probably say 'Well done'! And what does this say to something else that Tessa said:

J: "If Ken were a woman, I wouldn't be happy."

K: It is almost as if our friendship, our writing together, our intimacy would mean something different if I were a woman? If I were a woman is it likely that Jonathan would be having sex with me? Odd though it is, we can be trusted as two men talking; we are not going to engage in anything amiss, we are only having 'up yer ass' conversations! But Jane, the self-confessed voyeur, feels that she might be party to a party! She appears to sense that she is becoming privy to intimacies that are, perhaps, suggestive of something more, the mysterious, exotic (erotic?) frisson of two men talking.

J: Two men talking …

K: Jonathan talks about other relations he has had with men and observes that it is not like ours. I can reflect similarly upon my friendships and agree with the tentative conclusions that he is making but this does not surprise me: I sense Deleuze's figure of bodies-without-organs, I sense an emerging reluctance to talk about these generalised gendered wholes, these 'men,' these 'women.' I sense a uniqueness in him and me. I know he inhabits a male body, though, as Judith Butler points out:, "sexual difference is not a given" (Butler, 2004, p. 178). However, I do not feel that this is leading me to talk generally about Jonathan and me as 'two men talking.' It feels to me we are talking; there are verbs and the nouns are not necessary. I *recognise* him as a man, I *recognise* me as a man, whatever being a man might mean, but I do not therefore feel that this alone inscribes him in a special relationship to me. It is true we are 'two men talking' but it feels to me that the 'men-ness' of this is subordinated by the 'talking-ness.' I am not sure if I want to compare Jonathan with others. I have started to do that in my mind, I have started to try to uncover diversities, my friends, lovers, other 'men,' other 'women' and all that does is to provide me with rich complexity, thickness of description, multiplicity and connection but little gendered generalisation. Jonathan says:

J: What is it, my furry Cornish friend, about our relating to each other, about being two men talking—or, more accurately, two men *writing*—that is disturbing, I wonder?'

K: And I think, yes, this is an important question. Tentatively I am going to suggest that 'two men talking' *is* disturbing and it is to do with the way in which men (and women) are culturally constituted as gendered wholes. We are familiar with Foucault's discursive effects, with docile bodies and the hegemony of type and specification and it feels to me that what we are beginning to do here is to disassemble all that. If gender as discourse, gender as text, makes our talking and writing together in these ways 'disturbing,' then that is part of what we are doing. It feels to me

that part of what we are doing will involve us in troubling the ways in which sex and gender (whatever they are and however they are related) are always brought together into categories, types, or what Foucault prefers to call, 'species.' We are 'male' or 'female,' 'masculine' or 'feminine,' 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual': it is always nouns; it is always presented as black and white. There is a language of nouns but what does this language do? What is it for? What do these words do? Their significations establish them, fixing them with meaning that takes them across the boundaries of place and time but grounding them in self and other. Their identity as nouns generalises, colonises, disciplines. I can't stand it: it all seems to be so shallow. A language of verbs, of doing and of action suggests transgression and possibility. The processes at work here are all to do with the idea that we can somehow *discover* identity rather than engaging in a consideration of the way in which these identifications are made up at different times and in different places. We have here a set of constructed categories of knowledge that appear to govern us; establishing patterns of conformity and framing our norms, values and beliefs, so it seems to me very exciting to be disturbing these things.

J: I participated recently in an intense experiential group dynamics conference where I found myself becoming acutely conscious of my middle-class, Oxford-connected, straight, Englishness. I spoke about this, aware as I listened to myself of my accent and manner. In amongst the effort to identify who we were in this context I found myself cast in this role, moulded. I felt stuck in this persona and could not break out of it. And then, after brooding for 24 hours I managed to say that I was tired of this, that it was not all of me. I have an ancestor who led an English rebellion. He was hopeless as a rebel but he had a go. I wanted to speak up for my rebel. I remember saying, in this group of over thirty people, that I felt inhibited, because here we had to label, we had to box ourselves in. If I told a man that I found him attractive I would have become one of the gay men. We had conveniently located all the 'gayness' in the out gay men. The 'straight' men did not speak of their attraction to each other, nor much, it has to be said, did they do so to the women. For fear of what? Of being ascribed an identity, I think, or of generating confusion about our identities. I was party to that. But no, there was a multiplicity of feelings, thoughts, desires, that flowed through me. I struggled not to be boxed in as straight or gay, English or Irish, middle class or working class, or whatever. I would not be.

K: In reflecting upon this story we mostly dwell on *multiplicities.* Our work on bodies-without-organs has made it clearer that Jonathan's experience was a noticing of what Deleuze has described as "connection of desires, conjunction of flows, (and) continuum of intensities." But I find myself preoccupied with how *writing,* our methodology, contributes to this. When I am writing, this writing and its struggles feel far more important

than saying 'I am Ken,' or 'I am a man.' The writing and the struggling are me. It feels that in the chaos, interconnectedness and multiplicity of Deleuzian thought and feeling we are de-centring ourselves and displacing the self-conscious 'I.' By drawing upon Richardson's inducement to use writing as a method of inquiry, we are acting transgressively, preparedly unaware of beginnings or ends, opening ourselves to what emerges and being ready for the unlikeliest of consequences. Bronwyn Davies talks about 'writing as a place that is blind, where strangers and unfamiliarities meet.' Nomadic inquiry can take us through the plateaus and territories of Deleuze and Guattari's topographies of space, resisting the certainties and stabilities of the *logos* of striated space, where language is only interested in the closure of the denotative utterance, and exploring, through the application of strategies of territorialisation, the doubt and uncertainty of the *nomos* of smooth space, where language celebrates the openness of the connotative utterance.

Pause.

J: I feel dizzy. I am unable to hold any of this still: Ken, me, writing, our inquiry, my gender, his gender, my sexuality, his—nothing is fixed, it feels, even for a moment. These are all flows and intensities … and it seems too much. I long for groundedness—but as soon as I say the word I am destabilised by questioning the metaphor and its implicit binaries (ground/air, low/high, earth/sky). I feel destabilised. In this frame of mind, and trying to allow myself to stay destabilised, I go back to how Ken talks about writing. When I write, I write with Ken in mind. Ken is in my mind, in me. I have a picture of his reading as I write, in his office at home, or, having printed my writing out, in his kitchen with a coffee. I imagine how he might be responding—how he might write in the margins, handwriting at an angle to the text, words, phrases, question marks. I imagine his wanting to rush to respond, trying to find space amongst the demands of his children, his work, and his relationship. I have all this—Ken—in mind; I have my experience of the writing, feeling, thinking Ken within me. And therefore, this is one way in which "we" write together, even when we are apart. Without Ken—or Ken-ness? Or is it Ken-ning, the verb?—there would not be my writing. So here is another take, then, on the 'disturbance' that our relationship has engendered (an interesting word!) in my family, where Tessa asks "were you having sex with a furry Cornishman" and Holly asks if Ken and I are gay: I would suggest that our writing together is indeed a kind of love-making. I think that this is what Deleuze means when he says, "Writing carries out the conjunction, the transmutation of fluxes … one only writes through love, all writing is a love-letter" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. 38).

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SUE PORTER

18. BARE ARSED STORIES

As with any collective biography, this text draws upon the writing, speaking and remembering of my co-biographers, namely Ann Rippin, Jane Speedy, Marina Malthouse, Anne O'Connor, Peggy Styles and Louise Younie.

INTRODUCTION

Collective biography as a method draws upon the earlier memory work of Haug et al. (1987) in its form, bringing together a group of 'biographers' to share memories of a common experience, in this instance 'love,' and through talking and writing develop a collective 'biography' which "produces a web of experiences that are at once individual, connected, collective." (Davies et al., 2006, p. 18). Richardson uses the crystal as an image for new, different forms of qualitative writing practices and collective biography is one such form of writing, a crystal face through which the individual writers reflect, refract, grow and change both collectively and individually (1997, p. 91). The many angles and variations in the shapes and forms of crystals give us a sense of the diverse, multiple voices of a collective group of writers.

The starting point for writing together in this collective biography group was 'not knowing,' and despite the fears and anxieties, it felt as if we set out as equal collaborative researchers to participate in the continuous process of creating and transforming meanings about love (McLeod, 1997, p. 104). There was a sense of Laurel Richardson's "fields of play" that would give us permission to loosen the hold of received meaning (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) and see where it took us.

At its most basic, this piece gives an example of collaborative writing. It is a piece extracted from an extended piece of writing that a group of five women created as part of their formal study on a collective biography unit as part of a professional doctorate. It outlines some of the methods we used, and gives examples of the writing we produced. Our collective biography was about love. The group consisted of seven disparate women, from one who is at the beginning of her career to one who has been retired for some time. Although we were brought together by an instrumental need to complete our coursework, we wrote for some time after the unit ended through the sheer joy of writing and inquiry. Over time, perhaps we strayed from the strict spirit of collective biography and at times we have acted as a support group for each other going through various physical, spiritual and emotional crises. In this way, perhaps we modeled a form of love. This chapter, however, engages with a pressing issue for collaborative writing groups: how much to trust other members and make oneself vulnerable and how

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 185–196.

much to hold back and protect the self. How much, in fact, one is free to bare one's bottom, and has the confidence to do so, and how much one needs to stay safely covered up. We talked about this as a group in terms of taking off all our clothes and jumping in.

TAKING OUR CLOTHES OFF AS A METAPHOR

Taking off all our clothes and jumping in was a metaphor used in our first proper round of writing and sharing, on the first day of the collective biography module. We had done some warm ups, writing in response to a poem and sharing experiences of being loved (practicing the collective biography discipline of write, speak, respond). The conversations about love wandered widely as we sought for areas of common resonance. We were about to try on critical scrutiny; how would it be to respond using the starting points of 'what struck a chord for me,' 'what I vividly imagine,' 'what was not clear to me was …'? We were discovering each other very rapidly for, "In (other) peoples stories we hear their feelings, thoughts and attitudes" (Etherington, 2004, p. 75).

Later, reflecting on our journey-so-far together, we noted that some of us started by taking off all our clothes and jumping in, others were more circumspect, waiting to be sure. The diversity of approach to surfacing/choosing memories to share enriched the process, and mirrored our experiences of love—sometimes we had needed certainty, at others we had just fallen for it. We commented that:

> Taking your clothes off is easier now than at the beginning … we have developed intimacy … Perhaps easier with our mature relationship … [otherwise we] might have created a space to write but not a place to share …

We realised that our hearts had to be engaged in listening to these stories because this was not head stuff only-, it was embodied work (Cixous, 1997[1]; Davies et al., 2004[2]). Whatever our chosen theme had been this was going to be rich and messy, and working with love as our topic only made it more so. As Foucault (1997) urged:

> In order to establish the right relationship to the present—to things, to others, to oneself—one must stay close to events, experience them, be willing to be effected and affected by them. (Foucault, 1997, p. 18)

Later, having created through our writing cycles a mass of material showing our shared experiences which disrupted and challenged the borders between culture and agency (Speedy, 2008), we could successfully move on to better cultivate an attention to the conditions under which things become evident, and how they can then so easily become seemingly 'fixed' (Rabinow, 1997). But at that point we talked about the push and pull of sweaty romance, we spoke of the encodedness of '… *and they lived happily ever after*,' asserting that there was more to it than that; the sustaining of love, the sheer hard work of it. Then, to counter the anxieties about what it was to do collective biography which some group members were voicing, we decided to just start, to try doing 'it,' and through doing it find out

more about what 'it' was. So in a way we all jumped-in at this point, but some kept their clothes on, some donned bathing costumes, and some of us just dived in buck-naked.

The 'jumping' metaphor continued and was used in the performance of the work we had produced together on the unit, which we presented to the other group of students on our programme. We had a shot of cliffs and the sea as a backdrop, and in discussion with other students after the presentation we talked about the process as involving jumping-in, being on the brink *and* stepping back; "it didn't progress neatly, it was a bit like a spiral."[3]

The term '*taking your clothes off*' came to be used for writing that made the writer vulnerable. When writing of our experiences of love there were multiple dimensions of nakedness/vulnerability. These included writing fearlessly, exposing emotions, and sharing stories of intimacy. Later we started to speak (via email) what had been previously unspeakable: the rants; the diversities that were somehow not attended to, including the queer and Crip stories (McRuer, 2006); the feelings of exclusion in our own group process. We were, in the words of Davies et al. (2004, p. 369): "learning to write and tell stories of self against the grain of hegemonic discourse," and in doing so understanding more about our subjugation (Foucault, 2000) and it was unsettling and exciting. We sought to explore the ways in which we, "as individuals are made social, are discursively constituted in particular fleshy moments" (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 4), and we explored how these distinct lines of power exerted themselves in all of our lives, not just those *incorporated* (Drewery, 2005, drawing on Davies & Harre, 1990, and Sampson 2003) or *othered*[4] (De Beauvoir, 1949; Rose, 1995) by sexual preference or disability.

One member of our group had written:

> I remembered you: the excitement, the ambivalence about 'here we go again' as I fell in love with your ideas, found a common place of radical passion … with you there might be so much unspoken common ground, so many conversations we started and knew we could continue over years, with long breaks and short breaks, but no breaks in our connection.
>
> Since you died last year I still keep up my end of the conversation, and yours. After 29 years I think I can do that …

While reading her writing she had to stop, silenced temporarily by tears. She commented later:

> I remember sitting in the group, unable to meet anyone's gaze, feeling exposed but also heard, supported by a circle of women who did not rush to comfort me, to stem the tears, but gave me the space to re-find my voice and complete the reading. This experience of moving into intimacy with the group, and at the same time managing my own boundaries by choosing to make eye contact or not, and by the tone of voice I used to read, were as important to me as the nature of the content of my writing.

Later in the life of the group other examples of managing our boundaries, and our intimacy emerged: Members sometimes chose to send writing to the group by email rather than reading it out loud, or held writing back until they felt confident enough to share it.

As we reflected on the round of readings and responses, it became evident that we had different styles of approaching the writing; that a small subset of the group had chosen to ***t****ake off all their clothes and jump in***,** but that others had other approaches. This was a helpful piece of facilitation at a time when no-one was quite sure of what was expected of us, of what we expected of ourselves. It enabled the members of the collective to be themselves. As two of us wrote later that first afternoon:

> … Working in pairs felt 'safe,' working in a group made me want to find a place to hide my vulnerability from penetrating, possibly critical, eyes. So I took refuge in abstraction – and a very modest degree of emotional striptease —voicing my concern and admitting to what I perceived as a 'weakness' brought me the support of fellow group members and this was immensely comforting—they had earned my trust – whether I shall be able to jump off the cliff, dive into the deep end or trust myself to teeter on the tip of the love pyramid—only tomorrow will tell.
>
> Attracted and repulsed wanting to jump off the cliff into the waves below, frightened, will I, won't I? I want to say … One of the starting points for me is … No, I can't … One, two, three … I've jumped. Jesus, the water's freezing, best not linger, keep moving.

One of the jumpers later noted in her own process of '*will I? won't I?*' on that first evening:

> So where am I in all this questioning?
>
> Is love yet another arena for self-doubt and uncertainty?
>
> Waiting to make sure the invitation is aimed at me.
>
> Glancing to check I'm doing ok …
>
> How much should I reveal?
>
> What will happen if I expose how I really feel?
>
> Should I just play the 'being-cool' game?
>
> What happens when Sue takes off all her clothes and stands on the canal bank naked?

One of the group wrote about an incident on a canal bank and returned to it on the second day, developing it into another story, one of full blown and consummated passion:

> What happens when Sue takes off all her clothes and stands on the canal bank naked? I'll tell you what happened:
>
> We went for a walk. We were still playing at being friends, being neighbourly. I don't remember who suggested it, the walk in the dark along the towpath, over the lock and onto the canal bank. Lying together in the still-warm grass I watched the rain falling on one side of the (ship) wide canal. I swear it never rained on us as we lay there. Not that I would have minded the rain. It was 1976, a long dry summer, and rain became just a memory to us.
>
> There was a magical feeling about the night; everyone else in bed in the farmhouse we shared, the lights out in the houseboats moored by the lock. Seeing the edge of the rain shower—being protected from it—seemed to perfectly fit the mood. After all if I could have you like this, then I could have anything, everything.
>
> When we finally rose to return home I couldn't bear to put my dress back on, but strolled wrapped only in a shawl, the long silk fringes sliding on the backs of my naked calves as I walked, bare footed and bare arsed.
>
> I remember too our perfect parting—you standing in the doorway of my half of the house, silhouetted against the moonlight. The white horse in the paddock moving to meet you as you walked past to your own door.
>
> I lay in my wide bed later, awake and thinking of tomorrow, and tomorrow. A long moment of trust-without-fear, rare and seldom repeated.

It was this piece of writing that gave the group another descriptor; *bare-arsed* writing. Not that all love entails the brazenness of 'bare-arsed,' but most love requires commitment of some sort—requires the lover to jump in. Our vocabulary was growing.

BARE-ARSED STORIES

There were a multitude of forms of emotional striptease from group members, and each contributed to naming and making the lines of force or power visible (Foucault, 1980).

We spoke of the frenzied stage of passion, and the less spoken about process of subsiding into a rich maintenance cycle:

> She loved me right through that beginning love and loved me into … [whoops] well a bit of a frenzy really, and then into a kind of steady passion … not often spoken of, steady passion, but then again she loved me still through long painful years of separation, as I loved her. We are old-ish now and have been together for a quarter of a century. It is not a restful peaceful kind of loving, it is a love of domestic disharmony, of loud voices and shrieking and broken doorknobs and smashed plates and tearful remorse. It is not an easy kind of love. But there is, nonetheless, a slow, passionate,

> humdrum everydayness to our love, which we would once never have dreamed of, never have believed would be possible or, perhaps even allowed …

We explored adolescent passions and the pressures on young women to dance 'the fringed edges between slut and saint':

> Discovering that girls who are bubbly, kind and smile an awful lot are popular, go to parties and have pucks of friends. They lure with glossy hair and spotless faces enhanced with runny egg yolks, used tea bags and cooling cucumbers. They dress in fashionable 'up to the minute styles,' wear just the right make-up and dance the fringed edges between slut and saint. Obviously the way to go. No boy in his right mind, I learn, will pick a grumpy, acne-faced, demanding girl, who lacks both style and submission. I willingly capitulate and fall madly in love with the male line-drawings, always taller, incredibly handsome, kind and protective. I resolve to become their cartooned counterpart. Only then may I have the possibility of living happily ever after.

Pedagogy and love kept appearing, with its distinct power relations between students and tutors:

> I continue to be fascinated by the seduction element in love, by the unspeakable element of seduction in the pedagogic relationship. Because it is so unspeakable doesn't mean that it's any the less real … They may, we may, perhaps have to be seduced into learning. The condition necessary for leaping off into the unknown that real learning entails might require the recklessness of the heady rapture of cheap love songs.
>
> I do not want to have affairs with my students. I do not want the excitement of illicit evenings down the dark end of the street gazing into their eyes over candlelit glasses of rioja. But I do want Lorde's erotic charge … I want the escalation of energy that Lorde describes. I want the zest that Joyce Fletcher describes.
>
> … What can I say about … the enormous pulling power that 'difference' has and how cautious tutors have to be, of WHAT A TIGHT ROPE WE SOMETIMES TREAD …
>
> … How can I explain convincingly that the most unlikely sex object of an overweight middle-aged lesbian like myself becomes a sex object simply because of this fascination for otherness, this desire for exotica tangles with ascribed and systemic power relations between students and tutors.

One of the aspects of bare-arsed stories is the sense of the writer being overtaken with desire. Sometimes this desire was for objects or experiences, and sometimes we remembered yearning for a time when we would be able to walk bare-arsed:

> … she went back inside the dark hallway and came out with one of those cards, all gold and silver shooting stars and hearts dripping with blood … a totally glamorous and mystical kind of a cigarette card …
>
> Are you a catholic my child, she asked.
>
> No I said and opened my mouth to as I really wanted to add, 'but I could become one if you want' but nothing came out …
>
> Ah, she said well never mind never mind, thank you so much, as she slid the card up somewhere in her sleeve with a conjurors grace and shut the door.
>
> Bugger, I should have said yes.
>
> … But by then I wasn't interested in the hems at all and as they unravelled from the long tacking stitches I hit on the idea of trimming the fraying hems back to a 'neat' edge – and for a short while you could barely see the difference between my cut edge and the other girls' hemmed ones.
>
> Eventually of course I was found out, chastised and humiliated, but not before several weeks of trimming-off the frayed edges, seeing my mat gradually reducing in size, with no way back. However in those weeks I got to do the chain stitch, the cross stitch and the stab stitch, I discovered that, for a while at least, I could have my way and get to do the fancy stitching without the labour of the hems.
>
> I adore the freezing, numbing sea that turns my fingers and feet a ghostly white. He teaches me to swim, holding my chin in the icy waves while my frenetic wiggling keeps the rest of me afloat and I dream about the moment when I am brave enough to launch myself alone.
>
> Out of my beloved sea, a special treat, I wear his tweedy sports jacket and feel its rough, warming, smoky weight melting my limbs. My ravenous face is filled with crisps and bread and love.
>
> She knew she was seriously out of time when she got back to the cruiser. She had just an hour to get back over the bridge and log back in at her base. She broke off the bar-chain and unscrewed the bleeper. She was an outlaw now. No matter. This was her moment. This was what she'd been waiting for.

Within some writing issues of coercion and infatuation appeared:

> We walked along the beach between groups of people, all it seemed included bare breasted women, all with intimidatingly pert breasts. It fed directly into my lack of confidence in my physical self … of course we too lay down, I too took off my clothes. I too walked along the line of the seemingly tideless sea, topless.
>
> Love, lust seduction, infatuation, they are all related … and most people, or rather most who fondly imagine they are living normal lives have never had to really think about much of this, never mind articulate it , examine it, have

> it pored over. They have no language for all this, the syntax is missing from their lexicon. That's the problem I think and the exotic in them, the canal-walking bare arsed, I wonder if I'd like it if … unexpressed part of them gets over excited in the moment.
>
> Our walking bare-arsed feels risky, exciting and inciting because it challenges the social hegemony, questions taboos, is transgressive. Mary Douglas (1969), writing about the distinction between nature and culture, uses the emotive term 'a polluting person' for one who has developed some wrong condition or simply … crossed over some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone (1969, p. 4).
>
> We were noticing the lines: both crossing them in our talking-together, and telling each other stories of crossing-over, of being 'a polluter.'

THE INTER RELATIONSHIP IN/THROUGH THE WRITING— WRITING THAT 'CALLS'

When we met up again the following February we very rapidly identified the inter-relationship in our writing. The pieces sent since we had last met, most of them over the Christmas period, had an impact for everyone in the group; stinging/inciting/encouraging others into more writing—or not-writing. One member of the collective spoke of a 'considered silence' as she struggled with the realities of her relationship with her father as others of us wrote about our own relationships with our fathers. A choiceful disengagement became another part of our shared writing/responding grammar, a decision to keep our clothes firmly on and our vulnerabilities protected. As she said later 'there's something about NOT responding to somebody's writing.' The same group member wrote, noting the significance of the unsaid:

> Some have written from their homes and then emailed the group. Some responded with warm comments, of sisterhood, or with more writings … I kept silent, but that didn't mean to say that I didn't have a response or a reaction as I read the emails. Far from it!
>
> I am struck by … the unsaid in narrative. This morning, we were talking about our relationships with our fathers. This was because Anne and Sue had written about their fathers over the Christmas period, one in response to the other, across emails. Whilst explaining why I hadn't responded, my heart pounded in my chest as I spoke about my father. When I received their emails, I was angry with him, for his hurtful and rude behaviour towards me in response to my efforts to be kind …

She also tracks the unearthing/surfacing ability of the collective biography form, as one piece of writing 'calls' a response from others, and the way that this can be experienced in an embodied manner (Davies & Gannon, 2004):

> Recounting that recent memory resurfaces other similar memories. It's as if the effect of each one is additive one upon the other, and the strength of my heartbeat is equal to the amount of adrenaline produced by a lifetime of disliking his behaviour.

So the jumping-in, bare-arsed nature of one member's writing can draw forth responses from others and enable a new level of sharing at times. This changes across the lifetime of the group. Those of us who did jump straight in can remember both anxiety and permission in the group as a result of our 'taking off all our clothes' in the first round of writing. Some were intimidated, others encouraged to undress. Later in the Collective's life, members' responses to pieces of personal/intimate writing shared over the Christmas period was to use the evocative nature of the writing as a springboard:

> I found your piece very evocative, it really had the sense of being an after Christmas present, it also gave permission to show writing, very personal writing. It was a brave role play.
>
> 'Me taking my clothes off again.'
>
> 'I loved that it gave me a chance to be naked too …'

And again:

> 'It [the collective biography] is very important at this moment in my life and my study … when X's email came through it was like this gift… it felt like she was setting the stage for something, it was very important … and I felt here I go: one, two three …'
>
> 'It sounds like you had a response but of a different kind … lovely.'
>
> 'I'm just thinking what an act the withholding is, the concrete not doing it … when looking at narrative it's the unsaid the silent, so much about the unsaid, what I could think …'

Writing about the process—to jump or not to jump?

> 'Maybe that is where I am—for the moment. I feel excited by the prospect of moving into unknown areas but at the same time I like the idea of weaving some familiar strands—content, process and readings … My priority is to stay connected with the energy and creativity of last week in whatever way possible so quickly I attach and send.'

The discovery of the silent response, the unspeakable and the unspoken has enabled a moving-on at times, a release from stuckness. As in relation to the exchange of writing and speaking about fathers (below), where one of the speakers retrieves forgotten memories of her father as caring and trustworthy (teaching her to swim and to ride a bike), through the process of sharing stories of absent fathers with other members of the group[5]:

> 'The one moment I softened to Bronwyn Davies was when she wrote of a photo of her father holding her as a baby looking loving. Interestingly I've been thinking about a photograph of me sitting on my father's lap, its easy to get stuck in anger and not be able to remember the good times; my father holding me, teaching me to swim, and the bicycle. It's easy for me to think of him as useless as a father … the themes are in the air …'

Working in the group engaged and enabled one in Foucault's terms to "get free of oneself,"[6] free of one's inhibitions one might say. Resulting in enjoying what Cixous described as:

> Writing's ability to take us beyond the limitations of the self to a terrain where other understandings and perspectives come into view. (Cixous, 2004, p. x)

Opening the doors for both writer and reader, this willingness to disclose oneself then supports the process of co-creating meaning through the unearthing or evoking of memory, feeling and response to each other. We were using writing as a method for "producing different knowledge, and producing knowledge differently" (St Pierre, 1997, p. 175), allowing the reader/listener to viscerally inhabit a world, and so be engaged.

As we spoke of this facilitating aspect of the 'taking off all my clothes' writing gesture in the group, one of the group wrote of our process in her notes:

> Giving the gift, breaking open the space for others to follow on, as they will.

For, as Davies wrote of the experience:

> It allowed us to transgress, in moments of bliss. (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 96)

One of the group who includes clowning as one of her methods of inquiry wrote:

> And I was reminded of a movement, and imagined how that movement or gesture might be enacted by the clown: where the clown takes a bold forward jump, only to then demonstrate her acute misgivings; backing away, hand over her mouth, looking anxiously at the audience, 'should I have?' But the clown would then find her courage and move forward again, boldly, brazenly 'oh hell, let's do it!'
>
> Over the lines she crosses.

AN EXTENDED GRAMMAR OF SHARING

Together, over time, we have challenged those pressures that kept us from breaking cultural taboos (Butler, Douglas). We have worked to develop our own version of Davies and Gannon and Haug's strategies for staying close to events (Haug et al., 1987), for exposing our enmeshment in multiple, hidden and seemingly fixed lines of power.

Early on in our collective biography process one of us wrote, drawing on Davies and Gannon:

We asked ourselves what our first memories were of:

– Power as multiple lines of force, adding one's own line of force to one's own submission to another.
– Conducting the self as appropriately submissive, desiring to submit to another.
– Becoming a line of force, desiring not to submit, refusing submission.
– Working to change thought and to change relations of power.

To do this we have developed an extended grammar for how to share the data that is our lived experience, and to help us not to re-create oppressive lines of force in our relations with each other.

We have deconstructed terms, and repossessed them:

> To continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power. (Butler, 1992, p. 17)

This includes: jumping in *and* wavering on the brink; getting bare arsed *and* keeping our clothes on; finding our voice *and* staying silent; choosing between email *and* face to face communication; writing that is considered *and* recognising and legitimising 'rants'[7]. And what we have attempted to do in this piece of writing is to highlight the importance for us of working through and with our vulnerabilities: deciding when to jump off cliffs and when to remain on the edge at a safe distance, and when to stay comfortingly fully dressed and when to run into an encounter with the world gloriously bare-arsed.

NOTES

[1] Cixous writes that memory is stored as language on the deep surfaces in/on the body, and that memory is embodied language (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997).

[2] Davies and Gannon describe this process as producing 'a truth that is worked on through a technology of telling, listening and writing' (2006, p. 5).

[3] Video of post presentation discussion. Filmed December 2008. Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol.

[4] Rose (1995, p. 116) explains this process of constructing the Other or Othering as 'defining where you belong through a contrast with other places, or who you are through a contrast with other people.'

[5] Davies and Gannon stress that this process is not uncovering 'buried' memory (2006, p. 5) or a 'real self' underneath (2006, p. 7), but making the workings of power on us visible, the lines of force (Foucault).

[6] Foucault wrote of being driven by 'not the curiosity that seek to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself' (Foucault, 1985, p. 8)

[7] Ranting was positively encouraged, once someone had the courage to start to rant, as this email shows:

Hi X—replying to your rant—OK to rant—and doing it by email
means you/we can rant quietly (being told THERE IS NO NEED TO SHOUT
makes me f-f-f-furious). My cousin (who had seven children) lived in a
house called 'Ranters.' I thought it appropriate. luv X

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BRISTOL COLLABORATIVE WRITING GROUP

19. ENCOUNTERING 'GERALD'

Experiments with Meandering Methodologies and Experiences Beyond Our 'Selves' in a Collaborative Writing Group

This chapter describes a process of moving in and out of a place of *ordinary*, *transient and sustainable community* within a collaborative writing group. The group meets together both on and off line. Over the last five years we have developed an every day, meandering and nomadic practice of being, talking and writing. This enables frequent encounters with a very precious, precarious and particular sense of collective energy. The group came to describe this experience of moving beyond, in, out of and through their individual and collective selves as 'Gerald.' This paper comprises a narrating text together embedded with quotations from our writing archives.

BACKGROUND STORIES

There were originally twenty of us in this group. We encountered a significant amount of turbulence for the first eighteen months. It was hard to see where, if anywhere, we were going with it all. During that time we lost people in a variety of ways. Some left after disagreements and others just drifted off listlessly or in quiet frustration that we did not seem to be getting any clearer about what we were doing or producing. One died, although he still remains a central figure, and yet others left the country or the university. We have become a core group of seven who write together in various combinations, despite being widely scattered geographically and in other ways, with two others hanging on in the background. As individuals, our positions within this group have been multiple and varied, over time. There was some jostling at first, and even some pushing and shoving perhaps, but now it seems more like a merry-go-round with people coming in and out of view and proximity as the possibilities of their lives and work dictate.

We have stayed, more by default than design, underneath the radar of the institution that we work for or studied in. Were we to come under any kind of official scrutiny, it is difficult to know how we might be judged. If we were to remain too long under the gaze of published 'research output' we might, perhaps, disintegrate. Although we have written a great deal together so far, we have only published one journal paper. There has been much talk about the book we are writing together. Up to this point, however, we have not written any proposals and do not have a publisher. When we meet we tell ourselves that this has to do with

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lack of time, but well over five years is a long time in which to encounter such a continuous lack. Our reluctance might also have something to do with our inclinations.

Our contributions towards 'teaching and dissemination' have been more overtly and traditionally successful. We have organized and contributed to several local and international conferences and seminars about 'writing,' collaborative/collective working and arts-based research. It is in the production of a 'collaborative writing pack' that we have had something unique to offer to colleagues in other institutions. We routinely discuss this suggestion and then do nothing about it. Our overt and persistent lack of measurable productivity is, it seems, quite subversive in relation to the twenty-first century academy. Subversive, however, seems too loud, fixed and explicit a description of our process, which has not so much been deliberate or defiant, as it has consisted in a quiet, fluid, meandering from place to place.

> Is being unproductive to be frowned upon? Do our values dictate that unless there is a tangible outcome—a product—our time has been wasted? I remember looking out of the window in an early workshop and watching a squirrel stay perfectly still, watching, alert, on the side of a tree. I was thinking: I want this as a still place, a place to grow towards each other, not to pass each other in corridors, shouting over our shoulders, 'Been busy, must e-mail you my contribution to that chapter.' This kind of noise is a permanent daily backdrop to my working life, and I longed, just in this space, for something else, for different connections, for time and space to shape themselves differently around us and for the threads between us, fragile, fleeting, to be nonetheless woven to a different, more sustaining pattern. Fine gossamer threads …

We have survived, in part, because of the 'Robin Hood' tactics of one of our number, who was in a position to divert funds towards our writing retreats. Nobody has stopped us and we did not want to stop. Indeed, we have surreptitiously thrived. This flourishing has not been so much in the talking/writing/reading/ writing/walking/singing/eating/drinking/ talking/writing together processes that we have evolved, although all of these experiences have contributed to our well-being and continuation. We have continued to experience a flourishing of something in the spaces betwixt and between us—an intercalated element within and perhaps beyond, the writing. We came, in time, to call this element 'Gerald.' The term is used fleetingly, not fixedly—an explicitly transitory marker, flagging up a lack of uncontaminated possibilities—an in-your-face parody of a word.

> I realise how much this process has changed and evolved and the collaborative performance is a sort of holding, being held, and being able to let go. It involves a trust that has been gradually built and formed over time; and through spending time, and deep hanging out (Geertz, 2000). The time for deep hanging out has come over time and in its time. And is a hanging out with 'differ*a*nce'—a 'déférer' and 'différer' (Derrida, 1980)—which allows those liminal spaces betwixt and between; spaces where new identities are

> performed through the stories we tell, the songs we sing, and the sway of the dance. And each new story, each new song, and each new dance is woven into the connective fabric of the whole.

Ours has been a collective experience of getting personal, getting political, getting up close and moving back and forth alongside each other. A recurring theme amongst us has been the notion of time out/playtime/time off/time away from the measurable requirements, systemic structures and endemic hierarchies of the academy. We have nurtured between us a strong sense of getting away with something, of playing hooky from our 'proper' work and studies. This cultivation of a sense of impropriety, perhaps, has become one of the deciding factors in who stayed in and who left the group. Those of us who remain do seem to have in common something of a history of leading ourselves and others along roads less traveled educationally, psychotherapeutically, spiritually, sexually and/or methodologically.

We were, in origin at least, all graduate students or staff attached to the same narrative research centre.[1] Students have graduated, staff have come and gone, yet over time this writing group has remained something of a place of sanctuary, devoid of externally imposed requirements, deadlines and/or assessments. We have, at different times, been extremely demanding, critical of, and delighted with ourselves but there has been no measuring, no prize giving and no ending. This has been central to our way of working wherein:

> Different people have taken responsibility for different aspects of our work at different times. There was initially a great flurry of work from Jane, with Susan in the background note-taking to start with, but once we had all settled into the group, which took a bit of time it just became whoever sent the first e-mail, or whoever wanted to, or whoever had the time, or whoever was missing the group who organised the next meeting, or suggested some readings, or put some writing up on Blackboard[2] or invents or suggests a new process- some different way of writing together.

> It remains the only place where we all do the same work, follow the same process, sit down and talk and write together. It's the only time I've actually seen the staff engaging over time in the painful process of writing … seen them really struggling with writing. Outside here somebody might be somebody else's boss or tutor or friend or rival, or whatever, but this has become, over time, a totally different space, which we all shape in different ways at different times.

We are conjointly intrigued and inspired by collectivities, subjectivities and identities and have put some energy into finding ways of coming together and writing. We are paying close and critical attention to what accumulates and to what White (2000) would describe as the particularities of the narratives we have been stepping into and performing as we have ambled along.

For some of us, faith in and curiosity about the possibilities available within and between a group of human beings engaged in "deep hanging out" (Geertz, 2000,

pp. 107-118) sits loosely alongside religious beliefs (Christian, Druid and Buddhist, for instance). These identity claims are not exclusive and there are considerable overlaps with atheism and social activism. Critical, poststructuralist, postcolonial, queer, feminist, libertarian and humanistic theories have rubbed up alongside each other and shaped, and continue to shape, our curiosity about the constitutive and perpetually constituting experience of selves and others. Common to all these positions and visions is a sense of longing for a better world, a mutual sense of 'Looking for the Blue' (Levitas, 2007) and a tacit knowledge that this might be found, however fleetingly, within the social imagination and in connection with each other. Ours is an unequivocal, critical practice of utopia, not as a goal, but "as a necessary methodology" (ibid., p. 289).

Part of the backdrop to our collaborative endeavours has been a shared interdisciplinary concern with narrative and non-traditional forms of social inquiry (e.g. Bainton, 2007; Bond, 2002; Brown, T., 1996; Brown, L., 2001; Martin, 2007; Speedy, 2008; Trahar, 2006)). We have been drawn together through a keen interest in storytelling and story writing and through mutual preoccupations with a poetics of space and reverie (e.g. Bachelard, 1992).

> Still that uncertainty
> Still the 'whatifmybitisn'tgoodenough?'
> We tell stories of primary school
> Slowly
> Holding on to the scaffolding of the holes in the binca
> Forming cross-stitches
> *This dwelling in 'uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts'*
> *Always wondering what if …*
> *What to weave in*
> *What to weave out*
> *'Negative Capabilities'*
> *Creative uncertainties*
> *Out of which something new is created*
> *Stories generating stories'*
>
> (see Keats, 1817, in Forman, 1952)

We have been challenged and sustained in our explorations of writing as a process of performative inquiry by our readings (Ashcroft, 2002; Cixous, 2004; Denzin, 1999; Derrida, 1980; Ifegwenigwe, 1999; Mair, 1989; Spry, 2001; Pelias, 1999, 2004; Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; Speedy, 2008; and St Pierre, 1997; amongst others). We have also been extended and nourished in our collaborations and collective working practices (Davies, 2000; Davies & Gannon 2006; Gannon, 2001; Gaya Wicks & Reason, 2009; Heron, 1996; Onyx & Small, 2001; Pease, 2000; Speedy, 2005; and West, 1996). Those of us that have hung on in here (whether deeply or lightly hanging) have in common an intense curiosity about writing together.

This ambling and meandering without a fixed goal does not have a slipshod or casual air about it. Whilst eschewing consensus, conclusion or comparison, we

have given ample and significant attention towards the juxtapositions and layers that we have accumulated together. More than five years on, we have archives of writing and what Richardson (2001) would describe as 'writing stories,' to refer back to. These archives are stored differently at different times in e-mail folders; on personal computers; within a virtual learning environment; on google-documents and on a listserv. We have accumulated a jumbled collection of texts that have occasionally tumbled out, from rhizomatic or subterranean rumblings and eruptions, into what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might describe as 'assemblages.' Thus, our original themes —motherhood, culture, sexual identities—lie dormant as we find ourselves energized by accumulations around 'technologies,' 'unproductivities,' 'memories' and 'encounters with Gerald.' Throughout all this time and across and over and under all these spaces, no matter what, we have continued to write and write and write.

> We keep adding empty folders even though we already have several folders on Blackboard that are completely empty and then we meet we talk and write about something else. What's going on there then?

We have inadvertently accumulated sufficient time, space and moments of reverie for these rich seams to distil and emerge, despite our best efforts to plan ahead. 'Dark materials' indeed, to quote Pullman (2003, p. i).

> This … contains a story and several other things. The other things might be connected with the story, or they might not; they might be connected to stories that haven't appeared yet. It's not easy to tell. It's easy to imagine how they might have turned up though. The world is full of things like that: old post cards, theatre programmes, leaflets about bomb-proofing your cellar … All these tattered old bits and pieces have a history and a meaning. A group of them together can seem like traces…

What has evolved has been something akin to Pelias's (2006) *Methodology of the Heart*, not, as he says, a romantic, over-emotionalized heart of the Valentine's variety, but a heart of the pumping, pulsing, blood-spurting, unevenly shaped, embodied kind. What we might add would be our collective experiences of meandering and accumulating, not *Getting Lost* exactly and certainly not *Getting Smart* (Lather, 1991, 2007). This is a meandering, lived in, ongoing everyday pumping kind of methodology—a sustainable and sustaining methodology that seems, inadvertently, to have accumulated frequent encounters with Gerald.

The ordinary—an attention to and appreciation of that which is available to all—is a claim to situate human struggle not in those moments where something special emerges out of and so creates difference from everyday life, but rather in reclaiming everyday life as special. Our writing times together carry with them a day-to-day sense of the sacramental as predicted by Richardson (2001, pp. 36-37) who claims:

> Writing about your life in writing-stories can be a sacrament. By this I mean two things: experiencing the connectedness to others. The sense of time and

> space as separate is undermined, re-understood as deeply interrelated. As you write, you can find yourself connected to others; the meaning you construct about your life connects you to others, making communion—community—possible.

Perhaps we might make slightly different claims for Gerald than this, since we are also writing 'in community,' but it is hard to describe what we mean. If we had an online dictionary attached to our archives and we were to look up this temporary, deliberately derisory signifier, it might say 'sacrament' or something like 'everyday encounters with utopian possibility' (see Levitas, 2007).

It is difficult to discern whether our encounters with Gerald are the outcome of our accumulating and meandering methodologies of the heart, or whether it is through encountering Gerald that we have stumbled across these methodologies. One of our original members[3] had spoken of Aristotle's sense of ambling conversations between friends, sharing and exploring meanings as they went. Certainly a great deal of coming together and talking has preceded any attempts to write together. Along with the conversations came a sense of friendship and commitment towards each other and intense curiosity towards difference. Latterly, there has also been a great deal of walking alongside our talking: through beech woods in the bright crisp light of British winters and across fields of summer poppies in the rain. And there has always been writing: more and more writing.

> I watched a flock of geese fly overhead the other evening. That always moves me somehow. Something about risk and destiny and journeying I think. Yes and something about belonging and togetherness too. Not having to take the risk of the journey alone and unsupported but as part of a shared adventure. Those geese had direction and purpose; their course was due south. They took turns to lead, to break through at the forefront and then to drop back into the slipstream and rest, following those ahead. But we were not geese today. It seemed to me that we were more like a mixed foraging party of tits and warblers, beautiful in our variety and touching in our delicacy and vulnerability, though ready to knock each other off the perch if need be: never really soaring. So what is my hope for this group? Perhaps we could be like swifts that zoom past each other singly or in pairs or small groups, narrowly avoiding collision, exciting, invigorating, and together but with no discernible coherent pattern. It is September and the swifts have set off already, and so have we I suppose. But how will we continue?

But we are getting ahead of ourselves here. Before we go on to explore and scrutinize our encounters with Gerald more closely, we should backtrack a little. Firstly we should explain our processes and practices of writing together and, secondly, we should expand on the whys and wherefores of generating this particular text. This calls for some 'back -writing stories' or more precisely talking-and-back-writing-together stories.

STORIES ABOUT OUR WRITING

We have been meeting and writing together as a group, off and on, for over five years. We have experimented, over this time, with a range of different ways of spending time and writing together and also ways of collating the writing from our collective body of work into specific texts.

When we started out, we would talk together for a long time, sometimes all our time together, then go off and write on our own, often posting our work up on a shared website later. In this era, our writing was like a conversation, containing a pattern of call and response. Later, we began to write together as well as separately, drawing together a way of working that borrowed both from feminist methods of collective biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006) and practices of witnessing taken from narrative approaches to therapy (Speedy, 2004; White, 2000, 2005). Gradually we evolved a method of meeting together two or three times a year on writing retreats, which have become the focus of our activities. On our retreats, we talk, we walk, we eat, we drink, we sit in gardens and watch wild birds … but mostly we write. We sit together in dovecotes and meeting rooms and gardens and talk or read aloud and then we write into that space. This is sometimes writing as resonance, sometimes as response to a call, sometimes as the next contribution to an ongoing conversation. Then we read aloud what we have written, one by one. Later, our work is squirreled safely away, waiting for one or more of us to come along and re-discover it, and make it into a greater whole.

We hardly see each other for the rest of the year, although we communicate online, and begin to weave the writings together. This paper represents an incomplete compilation of 'moments of Gerald' and how she came to be known as such and her place in our hearts. (There have been several other different versions of this weaving process, see Sakellariadis et al., 2008; Martin et al., 2011).

One of us extracted all the writings that touched on or bumped into Gerald in passing. This took the writer/researcher several months, on and off, and meanwhile other Gerald-specific writing was sparked off across the group. She (Jane) then sent this draft paper to the group halfway through production and then again once she had a complete first draft. In this way, the text moved back and forth across the group until we reached consensus that the text was ready for publication. At one point seven of us sat in a room on a snowy day and collaboratively edited the final text.

These practices speak volumes about the collaborative ethical know-how[4] this community has developed. There has been no attempt here, or in previous papers (Sakellariadis et al., 2008) to produce a text by consensus. Indeed, there are many conflicting versions of this narrative and many non-commensurate stories rubbing alongside each other within this text (Clandinin et al., 2007). Nonetheless, agreement has been collectively reached between us that this final text works, very much in the spirit of communicative inquiry:

> [T]hat delicate place where the life world meets the system, a liminal, in-between space where two opposing qualities meet. Rather like tidal wetlands where salt and fresh water mix, these are not restful places but continually

> changing and offering new possibilities and challenges. (Gaya Wicks & Reason, 2009, p. 258)

Neither the readers, nor the original writers can discern any longer which of us wrote what. Original individual authorship has ceased to become what is significant within this process.

> And now I find that the places of my life that had grown thin from either wear or neglect are finding support and substance. My edges meet, and merge with your edges. The threads of our stories pass back and forth between areas of strength; criss-crossing, and so bolstering those bits that may be thought weak; that certainly were thought weak. I find something new appearing beneath and amongst the worn thin threadbareness of my history, and what was my excruciating, all too obvious fragility. Your stories allow mine space and also hold mine in place. Some slip in beneath mine, shoring them up. Some are layered on top, protecting mine. Mostly they lay alongside, companionably.

ENCOUNTERING GERALD

Gerald is not always here alongside, beside or inside us in our writing. Sometimes, often, we come together trailing a sense of rush and of fitting this small space together into the bigness and schedules of many other lives. We whirl in, laptops and papers akimbo, carrying coffees, eating breakfasts and talking hurriedly on phones to our children. Many times we arrive carrying a sense that this is an indulgence, a luxury we can ill afford to fit into our busy, busy lives. We begin to speak, seemingly at random, but gradually we reconnect, find a focus, begin to sustain each other, begin our work. There is an atmosphere of scholarship, of intensity of purpose. We talk, we write, we read aloud, we drink coffee, eat cake, walk in the woods, we talk, we re-write and, at some point, different points for different people at different times, we gain a sense of Gerald.

> You have no idea
> how much I overrate you
> when we meet I get
> overexcited and when
> you are gone
> I feel over wrought
> When we write together
> my marks get overstepped, brains overcooked, habits overindulged, ideas overdeveloped, laughter over spilled, sleep patterns overturned,
>
> It is in the space between us, but also around us and in our writing. It is in our resilience and subversion and persistence and overabundance
> that I am overcome, overdone and dare to overate myself.

> Just like the rustling of migrating birds in the night and the soft morning silence in velvet-coated valleys/ Just like dark rain falling across sharp mountains/ Just like the sky/ you are overrated.

Historically, there have been some shared, key, identifying moments. In one early meeting, for instance, Laurinda and Dave chose not to write but sat meditating in the room whilst the rest of us wrote quietly together. There was a difference in that writing. Disagreement too about whether the meditating was distracting, disrupting or sustaining. The quality of stillness made a difference and we knew we had, in the moment, entered a different space. Maitland (2008) speaks of the synergy between silence and solitude, but it was in the experience of that *collective* silence, not waiting to be broken but hanging between us, that more than one of us encountered 'Gerald.' Other early encounters stood out for members of the group, but it was Artemi who finally dared to talk of 'it' and began our explorations of this sense of otherness and interconnectedness, and also to describe other moments outside the writing group in which 'it' might be experienced:

> She is sitting across the table from me, sipping her wine and telling me what she has been up to since we last met. Studies here, a relationship there, fifteen years in ten minutes. I am gripped by her every word, want to hear it all, need to braid her stories back into myself, to become part of one another again. I munch on some bread and listen to her. Beloved friend, it's so nice to see you again. Anyone watching us would notice that the tables around us are all full, yet such an insignificant detail is slipping off the edge of my mind. At centre stage are she and I, the warm breeze of our togetherness, and the fire we have re-lit.

There was some tension over these early excavations of 'it.' We placed an 'it' folder online, but it remained empty for some time. We feared, perhaps, that our clumsy early archeological efforts might lead to the disintegration of 'it,' which felt precariously placed in our midst. 'It' did not go away, however, and we found ourselves trying to describe our experience within the limits of inadequate language. We came up with words that too quickly sentimentalised or carried overtones of healing/therapy/religion. We tiptoed around God, salugenic places[5] and other spaces. We tried calling it 'Raspberry' and finally 'Gerald' – an aside or quip so uncontested that it stuck. 'Gerald,' in its absurdity, fitted with our sense of being uneasy at placing meaningful human encounter as something more than ordinary.

Gradually, our confidence in our capacity to nurture and cultivate these ordinary encounters increased. We began to articulate the elements that we had brought together through our personal and political energies and interpersonal skills to create the climate we were working in. These included: meandering methodologies; our delight in lack of fixedness; getting lost; transience; relationship with time, and each other, over time; resilience; faith that this would work out despite our differences and disagreements; determination to hang on in there together; subversiveness; the writing spaces we sought out and generated.

> You have all gone (except that we are all still here) and I am sitting writing on the green bench outside in the garden in the sun. You are all still here and I don't know yet that I want to leave. I don't want to leave the woodpecker or the nuthatch or the goldfinches or the pied wagtails, but most of all I don't want to leave you. There is the you-in-me, of course, just as there's the me—in-you. In a short while I shall leave too, but for the moment I am sitting here, pink pen and notebook on my lap, sitting Shiva[6] for our sense of connectedness. I will take something of it with me, but the you I take around with me is smaller. The traces of the recent you (us) that is still here now you (we) have gone are of a greater, deeper, richer, sillier, funnier, sadder more reachable you than the you that I will take. Let's call her/it /us Gerald and leave it at that. A Gerald to be glanced at, sideways, sidled up to, slipped away from and cherished, but never fixed, pinned down or accounted for exactly. Gerald has taken time to develop between us. Sitting here I have a sense both of her hard-won-ness and of her transience. Looking back, I always had faith that we could create this space between us if we just stuck with it. This space will pass as we drift away. Our commitments towards each other are temporary and almost at an end, but no less profound for all that. That is why I am sitting in this garden writing you (me) a love poem. This is a poem (prayer) to the ways in which we have written ourselves into a place of becoming more than we are either separately or in other ways of being together. Susan would call this a salugenic place[7]. I am calling it Gerald. And I realise that I am staying here a little while longer as a kind of prayer. A prayer that we might yet articulate for others not only something of what we do and how we do it, but also something about sustainable, ordinary and transient acts of community.

And perhaps, looking back, as we do now, maybe the truer resistance has been not in the writing as such, but in the forms of connection that we have nurtured over the years. We have simply kept a space for good old ordinary storytelling. In the meantime, we have continued our conversations, our writing, and a kind of faith—in a sort of process. The space between us is full of the stories we have shared and held together.

It is not a fixed space, but rather a slippery, shape-shifting lacuna that we talk and write ourselves into, through and under. Indeed, there is nothing fixed or guaranteed about Gerald. Our writing group certainly existed for a long time without her—a year or so—and although if she disappeared altogether now our work would almost certainly come to an end, she continues to metamorphose in surprising ways.

Are we still—were we ever?—a writing group or are we an interconnected group of human beings who have found a way of being in community that just happen to write together sometimes? We don't know. We cannot answer ourselves, or Gerald. We can only say that it is in the writing, through the work of writing, amidst these fragments of the writing and through keeping *on and on and on* writing under and over and in between our writing that we have got the closest to describing, troubling, rumbling, disclosing and encountering Gerald. We were not

looking for Gerald, nor were we writing to or for Gerald. We stumbled (through the ruins of a series of failed projects, targets and other plans) across a meandering method that we were not looking for, which goes against the grain of almost all 21st century academic discourses and endeavours. And we have kept writing 'unproductively' against regimes of time-limited projects and strategic purposefulness, into these lacunae: these gaps cracks, fissures and extended silences that we have wandered into. Jane Gallop (1985, p. 34) reminded us that "all writings lead elsewhere" and for the moment at least, we seem to have stumbled across a spectacular community practice of never getting anywhere. We wonder if unproductivity was the element that held our continuing sense of becoming a writing community going nowhere firmly in place. We wonder if we are currently kicking over our own traces and risking disintegration by publishing our work in a variety of websites and journals. If so then these could be our last 'writes.' Time will tell. In the meantime we are going on stumbling about and meeting and writing into this space … together.

> And in that space there is something that wells up and makes no sense and has no agenda—a kind of "being deeply moved" feeling; a kind of compassion; a sense of being part of something. A sort of feeling of a temporary community that we find ourselves committed to. We just call it Gerald.

NOTES

[1] The Centre for Narratives and Transformative Learning (CeNTraL) Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol.
[2] A virtual learning environment we have been using as a collective archive.
[3] Kenneth Wilson, former Principal of Westminster College, Oxford.
[4] Varela (1999) conceptualises 'ethical know-how' as an embodied 'project of being,' that is to say as a practice, not a series of abstractions.
[5] See Williams (2007), unpublished PhD.
[6] Hebrew word for the kind of mourning that takes place between death and burial.
[7] Williams, op. cit.

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JANE SPEEDY AND JONATHAN WYATT

20. EPILOGUE

April 2014

Jane: You are not going to be up for this, I suspect/speculate but I think our epilogue should take the form of a dialogue that brings us, and therefore the book, right up to the 'now.' Here's my opening gambit … see where it takes us? Jxx:

Is this where this book is neatly summed up, tied up in a bow with red ribbons like a barrister's brief and sent out into the world … or is it where everything that has gone before slowly unravels … and all the securely hedged and bordered categories that have been set up over the last eighty thousand or so words gradually crumble into each other? It has all seemed like a coherent argument and the three sections at least—visual, written, and collaborative forms of inquiry—seem reasonably distinct and do not arbitrarily set up divisions. Why do I distrust coherence so much and why do distinct disciplines make me behave in such ill-disciplined ways, if only in my mind's eyes? Perhaps speaking a little about the title of the book, and the arguments that we have all had about it, are the best way I have of answering my own last-minute misgivings with this project. You see, we started this book some years ago now and our thinking about much of what it contains over the decade that we have been collecting the contributions has changed/expanded over time. Yes, perhaps that is what I should be teasing out here, our relationship and thinking with theory over various kinds of time with the titles (of the book and its sections). What do you think?

Jonathan: 'Course I'm up for it—back soon xxxx

A day or so later:

Ditto. Let's not aspire to coherence. Coherence is over-rated, like stability. As if we can say that there is such a single thing as 'creative practitioner inquiry,' or that the visual, the written and the collaborative are somehow distinct. Let's not present this disparate, messy collection of disparate, messy texts as some kind of 'how-to,' A-Z textbook that purports to offer clear lines of direction and advice, as one of those academic books that so dulls the senses.

Let's also not make this dialogue between us now, in late March and early April 2014, sound like the kind of contrived device that everyone can see through, you know what I mean, those ones that seem to pop up in 'creative' scholarly texts too regularly.

Let's start with where you suggest, with theory and time and the titles; so that we might "pause, look again, and see [the book anew]" as Mark Freeman (2009, p. 15) might have it.

J. Speedy & J. Wyatt (eds.), Creative Practitioner Inquiry in the Helping Professsions, 211–217.

Also, something I'm thinking of: You've lived with this book for a long time. I remember your talking about it way back—in 2005 perhaps?—and I was going to be a possible contributor at that point. But only now, as we have been getting the chapters into shape for the publishers, have I found myself immersed in its totality. For me it is a new project.

Jane: Yes in a sense this book carries with it a sort of nostalgic vapour trail of history/memory/experience. Its publication, for me, brings with it a celebration of our research centre and all the times we have spent together (not just you and me—all of us), the projects we have undertaken, and above all, despite the sneers of the established academy, the conviction that our shared endeavours as practitioner-researchers were a worthwhile, or even an important, use of our lives. Indeed, I have had the time of my life.

This book, unlike its companion (Speedy & Wyatt, 2014), really deserves the definition 'edited,' which implies not only that there has been careful selection into this volume, but that other contributions have been skilfully selected out. This text has been constructed over about a decade of engaging with this work, a process that was probably just starting when you arrived in Bristol in 2004 and so there is an underlying history of 'what ifs' and 'might have beens' that you have not been party to joining the editorial team in 2013.

I feel quite differently about this book now that I am editing it with you; not less responsible exactly, more that the project has shifted shape in some way from a burden that I have been left with to a legacy that we are engaging with and shaping together. It felt somehow stilted or skewed towards other ways of working for me to edit this text on my own and not at all a reflection of the collaborative sense of scholarship that we have all constructed together, whereas collecting the contributions from people along the way was a task that fell quite naturally in my remit as coordinator of the Narrative Inquiry Centre (NIC).

Now that all the separately constructed contributions have been gathered in one place (our Dropbox folder) we are engaged with phase two of this editing process, bringing all the disparate pieces together into a whole, without stewing out their individual flavours and making an all-purpose soup. I have used a cooking analogy there but it seems more like weaving to me, a loose weaving with differently coloured and textured yarns, definitely not a felting process.

There is another factor that has also not been mentioned about this writing we are building between us, and that is your move from Oxford to Edinburgh, which makes a difference to the you I look to as I am writing this. The front of my house faces directly north-east, and before, when I was writing to you, I was able to look up across the park and imagine you there, sitting in a café in Oxford, probably one you have taken me to for a coffee before. This writing, like all writing, is situated. I am writing in my house, sitting in a wheelchair at a table in the backroom, but it was a nicer day when I wrote the first part and I was sat in a solid metal chair, at a table on the deck outside in the sunshine. Now when I see the Jonathan I am writing to, you are somewhere much further north, with much more space and noise between us. I don't know where to look out towards you, other than vaguely

northwards, and I don't know the layout of Edinburgh so well as I know Oxford, where I once lived. In my mind's eye, you are writing somewhere 'up there' towards the end of the landmass, in a part of the United Kingdom that might yet break away from this part, come the referendum this September: a referendum that you will have a vote in and I will not.

I don't know your Edinburgh writing habits, I realise. How many Edinburgh coffees do you drink per day, for instance? Do you write in café or at home in your new flat (which I have seen pictures of) or at your workplace (which I have been to, but not when you worked there)? Writing to this free-floating Jonathan has a different quality to it. There is a misty lack of substance to you. The Jonathan I am writing to is not as visible, not as embedded in familiar spaces. All sorts has shifted, alongside your location, and I am less sure of this process, less open and trusting than once I was. Less confident, perhaps, than my former able-bodied self? Hence my initial tentative e-mail saying: 'you are not going to be up for this, I suspect/speculate/but I think our epilogue should take the form of a dialogue that brings us, and therefore the book, right up to the 'now,' Here's my opening gambit …' and my delight at your almost immediate reply 'Course I'm up for it. Back soon xxxxx.'

Jonathan: The experience of me that you describe—"free-floating" with a "misty lack of substance"—seems apt today. I don't know where most of me is. Apparently, I'm on the train back north to Edinburgh (home, but not home), having spent a scattered few days in the south east of England. There's a drop of me in Godalming, where I was with my mother and siblings at the weekend, and a dollop in Abingdon and Oxford, where I spent a couple of nights, and now I'm here. While I've been away—Tess is in London looking after our three-year-old niece—we've had some work done on the flat (which is messier and less shiny than the pictures you've seen). I can't quite picture what I'll be going back to. I walked around Abingdon and Oxford feeling at ease but disconnected. Free-floating.

Tomorrow I shall walk up the hill from Dundas St, up past the Mound, over the Royal Mile, and five minutes further to Teviot Place; beyond it, The Meadows. It's my new scholarly home and in many ways what I feel I'm doing is continuing your work: keeping the NIC flag, with a Scottish lilt to it, flying. It's early days, but I'm hopeful.

A short walk from there, and a short walk from home, are, respectively, perfect cafés to write in while I drink my two coffees a day.

I remember the occasional mentions and rumours of this book way back then. I had only a partial sense of it. It seemed to be around and then disappear and then come back into view; and I wondered if it was one of those projects that had to be put to one side while other imperatives had to take priority. But I didn't think about it much—just occasional questions, "I wonder what's happening to that book," to myself rather than to you or others. I didn't know that there were people discussing the merits of one or another term to use in the title. When it became something real and possible, in the form of the proposal, I think it already had the title 'creative practitioner inquiry, etc.'

For me, it's the politics of 'creative practitioner inquiry' that matters: how we are putting those three words together—claiming the ground for 'creative' alongside 'inquiry,' and 'practitioner' alongside 'inquiry.' Inquiry can—has to—be creative; and it is—or can be—territory that practitioners (whoever we are and whatever we might mean by that) inhabit.

Jane: The politics of 'creative practitioner inquiry.' All inquiry, you say, is creative, Hmmm, inquiry—according to OED online to inquire is to 'search for truth, information or knowledge.' Within the academy I believe it has an additional veneer as an alternative to 'research.' Some people use inquiry and research as synonyms, but for me there is a difference in that 'research' is the word taken up by scientism as both noun and verb; for myself, 'to inquire into' is to search without reaching conclusion, to inquire into the expected, to expect the unexpected and even to reinvent the world we are inquiring into—that for me is the politics of 'inquiry' as opposed to 'research,' which speaks of a scientism that finds answers rather than more questions and of the institutionalised, formalised ways of investigating, for which there are templates and rules to follow. Inquiring scholars may follow rules, but are less hidebound, less systematised, and more likely to follow unlikely trails.

Is all inquiry creative? I suppose it is, although not always artful. To inquire requires creative, imaginative and innovative ways of thinking and doing to be devised. As to the relationship between this (always already) creative inquiry and practitioners, that is trickier and more contested territory. Traditionally, in human services such as health, welfare and education, there has been a much-heralded divide between 'practice' and 'research' and, therefore, a parallel divide between practitioners (located in the field) and researchers (located in the academy). Recent shifts in thinking about the nature, efficacy or even possibility of objectivity in social (and other) sciences have led to serious questions being asked about the hallowed 'god trick' position of the outsider/scholar in research projects (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). This has all led to greater valuing of insider/scholar positions and insider/service user knowledge and to recognition of the situatedness, contingency and partiality of all inquiries. Thus 'creative practitioner inquiry' is a highly political title, suggesting, as it does, that scholars who have not spent their whole lives inside universities, might have something particular and unique to add to the ways we investigate our worlds and might even, inquire into, discern and disseminate this knowledge differently. Is this akin to your thoughts? Jxx

Jonathan: I stopped being a counsellor in 2012, back in Abingdon, ground down by the NHS. I paused rather than stopped, as it turns out, because in the first few months of being in Edinburgh I've resumed practice again, volunteering at the Hope Park Centre, the counselling service that our department runs. I see two clients a week on Friday mornings. I'm a practitioner again, a practitioner inquirer. I'm inquiring as I practice, when I'm in the room with a client, and not only when I'm here, in a different café ('Coffee Angel'), writing. The client and I are

inquiring together, in the sense that you describe inquiry. Neither of us of knows where it's going to lead.

When I'm with students and colleagues and we're talking about research, the kind of critical, radical, embodied research you refer to, I have often found myself saying how I prefer the term 'inquiry' to 'research,' because research, I say, carries with it so much baggage about what it should look like. Inquiry, on the other hand, is more open, less weighed down by establishment expectation. I can see people breathe easier when we talk like this. Like there's room created by this re-framing.

There are 'Professional Doctorate' programmes here, where counselling 'practitioners' build up their practice hours alongside continuing counselling 'training' and, in the final stage, work on a research (*sic*) dissertation. These students, practitioner inquirers, are deemed by the institution to be 'Taught' rather than 'Research' students, which carries with it both intimations of status as well as less access to funding.

There's a politics here, as you say.

This is why this book feels so important. It asserts a place for practice-and-inquiry, proposing that these two can, are, should be seen as, intertwined; and a place for creativity/creation-and-practice-and-inquiry that radically challenges established, sedimented assumptions.

Somewhere in the title we could have had 'collaborative.' There is a feel throughout the contributions in the book, and not just in the section on collaboration, of inquiry as collaborative (always, as you've written about—Speedy, 2012). Not just as collaborative with the human, but also with the material and the more-than-human.

There was a bit of a pause here in our writing and a piece of writing that got stuck at Jane's end and not sent, about getting up our own arses and not knowing how to get back again, about the contradictory relationship between collaborations and accessibilities. The Daily Mirror has a reading age of eight. This text is 13+.

Jane: Now you are touching on the way our 'thinking with theory' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) has evolved over time and over the time of making this book in our group. I disagree, I'm unsure that there's a feeling 'throughout' this book that is collaborative with the material and more-than-human. We did not all start out ten years ago thinking with post-human theories. Donna Haraway (2003) was informing my work way before this book was a twinkle in our eyes, but most of Barad's (2007) work on the agency of the material world, which informs us now, was not even published when we started this. Your writing with Ken (2009) was informed by Deleuze and Guattari of course, but the sort of collaborative text this centre produces now, like *Inquiring into Red/Red Inquiry* (Gale et al., 2014) for instance, does not appear in this book. This text moves in and out of Foucauldian situated, partial knowledges (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2012), but it is still the humans that are situated, not the landscapes and other environments they inhabit, and takes up embodied positions or "an embodied aesthetic" as Sameshima (2007, p. 562) would describe it. Yet it does not move very much into a post-human-

centred position. I think you are letting the present Kodochrome seep into and colour the sepia prints of the past!! Can residual traces, spectral traces, even, of not-yet-quite-imagined futures, seep into and colour our pasts?

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Jane: Reading this, I am reading my way back to the future as I read extracts from the twenty-ninth century field blog written by Gregorius Corbilsohn in chapter one. Corbilsohn, originally an archaeologist and anthropologist, was author of "Foresight' (2962) the companion volume and (eight centuries later) update to Mark Freeman's (2009) 'Hindsight.' Corbilsohn's text focuses on events in the stories of predicted futures as a moral barometer and pointer to life's promises.

Corbilsohn posits the present openings to (im)possible futures as the crevices through which we and our lives slip back and forth towards a greater sense of 'thisness' or haeceity.

Our two chapters, chapter one and this epilogue, both use thinking with and between theories and dimensions of time, space, place and materiality, from different worlds and time zones. The future of our research centre, in 2014, was already colouring and shaping its development in 2004, when we started to write this book (although, of course, we did not start it where it begins but somewhere nearer the middle with the dancing Dzo). Such foresight, with hindsight, would have been very useful at the time, don't you think?

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