



PHD

## On Menschlichkeit: An Inquiry into the Practice of Being a Good Man

Traeger, James

*Award date:*  
2009

*Awarding institution:*  
University of Bath

[Link to publication](#)

### Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:  
[openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk)

Copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Access is subject to the above licence, if given. If no licence is specified above, original content in this thesis is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) Licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Any third-party copyright material present remains the property of its respective owner(s) and is licensed under its existing terms.

#### Take down policy

If you consider content within Bath's Research Portal to be in breach of UK law, please contact: [openaccess@bath.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@bath.ac.uk) with the details. Your claim will be investigated and, where appropriate, the item will be removed from public view as soon as possible.

**On *Mentshlichkeit* –  
An Inquiry into the Practice of Being a  
Good Man**

Volume 1 of 1

**James Robert Traeger**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath  
School of Management  
Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP)

October 2009

**COPYRIGHT**

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with its author. A copy of this thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and they must not copy it or use material from it except as permitted by law or with the consent of the author.

This thesis may be made available for consultation within the University Library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purposes of consultation.

Signed:

## Abstract

*Mentshlichkeit* – Yiddish for the ‘art of being a good hu(man)’ - is offered as an invitation to participate in practices that may have the power to dispel the haunting of a ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 1995). Inspired by ‘Action Research’, what Reason & Bradbury call inquiry into the ‘quality of our acting’, the author uses futuristic narrative, interwoven with discussion and dialogue, to see if it is possible to reflect and act generatively, as a man who is mindful of feminism’s challenge that ‘the personal is political’ (Reason and Bradbury 2001). Within a post-modern discourse, the author heads towards the irony and discomfort to be found in a text that explores goodness and masculinity in the same breath. But he is not alone, like some hero on a quest – rather he is inspired by the voices of challenge and support he hears in the course of his roles in diverse communities: as a Jew, a facilitator/consultant at Roffey Park Institute and a father.

It is my intention to playfully invite you into this story; to see if it moves you, if it usefully meets your own experience and helps you consider your own action, within the paradoxes and dilemmas you face. Too often we can disappear within the words we write. It is my intention to ‘show up’, and as a man to meet the challenge of feminism, to live within this territory and act with some awareness of its contours. The characters in this story are inspired by the people I encounter, who remind me I am not ‘self-made’, and that we men, in the words of Philip Corrigan, may usefully ‘re-member our bodies’ (Corrigan 1988).

Ultimately this is a human-scale story, designed to provoke good conversations. I look forward to hearing what you would like to discuss.

## Contents

	Page:
Abstract	1
Thanks	3
Introduction – How far along are you?	4
Why does this Work Matter?	12
Interlude – From the story of Sarah Jones – September 2015	17
Chapter One – Being the Change?	24
Interlude – From the Journal of Sarah Jones - December 2019	42
Chapter Two – Developing an Inquiring Masculinity	45
Interlude – From the Journal of Sarah Jones – July 2020	73
Chapter Three - Bringing the (Jewish) Body into it	76
Chapter Four - Gender Future - A Story	90
Interlude – Other voices on the Story	136
Chapter Five – Taking the Action Turn	141
Interlude – So, what difference does it make? asks Dr. Jones	168
Chapter Six – A Good Man at Work	172
Conclusion – Where next?	202
Appendix One: Reflective Letter-writing	210
Appendix Two: Praise Song for the Day - 1.20.09	214
Appendix Three: The Viva (The conversation continues...)	220
Bibliography	232

**Thanks to:**

At the University of Bath:

Dr. Gill Coleman

Professor Peter Reason

The CARPP 8 Cohort (particularly my supervision group, Raquel, Jane, Carol)

At Roffey Park Institute:

Helena Clayton

David Lines

Penny Lock

Sabine Stritch

Steve Tarpey

and everyone else who had a conversation with me, either that inspired, or was about 'Gender Future' (Chapter Four)

My friends:

Specifically:

The Brookfield Mens Group (Wynn, Adrian, Chris S, DBT, Chris G, Jon, Hugh, John, Geoff, Richard)

Carol Daniels

Denis Postle

Rob Neil

Persia West

Bob & Gail Weigl

My family:

Max, Jessica and Gillie Traeger

To all my family, and the significant men, such as my grandfather, my father and my brother, who all showed me, without trying, how to be a good man.

To all of you, as we say at home every Friday night, as we light the Sabbath candles, in Hebrew:

*Yevarechecha Adonai veyishmeracha. Yaer Adonai panav elecha vichuneka. Yisa Adonai panav elecha veyasem lecha shalom.*

And our own translation:

*May God bless you and keep you. May he cause divine light to shine upon your face and be gracious to you. May the lady Goddess turn her divine spirit to you and give you peace." Amen.*

*James Traeger October 2009*

## Introduction – How far along are you?

*'Well then,' said the Zaddik [the righteous one], 'in every era, God calls to every man: "Where are you in the world? So many years and days of those allotted to you have passed, and how far have you gotten in your world?" God says something like this: "You have lived forty-six years. How far along are you?" (Buber 1948, 1994) p4*

This thesis is a report of a journey; a report to the world, to you the reader (and even to God), in answer to the question that Martin Buber has the 'Zaddik' pose above: *how far along am I?* Coming across this passage was timely. I am about to enter my forty sixth year when you are likely to be reading this. Such synchronicity is significant in this type of work.

My work in this thesis comes from the broad school of 'action research'. The 'action' here is in the context of everyday lived life, 'living life as inquiry', as Judi Marshall says (Marshall 1999). The quality of this type of 'research' is measured in terms of the 'quality of our acting', as Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury propose (Reason and Bradbury 2001). In textual terms, we are concerned with how this thesis shows the developing knowledge associated with living, acting and reflecting with respect to a set of challenging questions.

These questions are about how to be a man, a *good* man, in my work and life, measured in action. It explores these themes through the lens of a post-modern world, a world that is critical of simplistic notions of goodness and progress. Goodness, in this sense, may seem naïve or ironic. Yet the impetus to consider change in/of myself in order to change 'men' and to 'be that change I want to see', has obstinately persisted.

So I aim to be sensitive to both the postmodern/poststructuralist attention to language, text and subjectivity, as well as the incitement to action towards generative ends that is the hallmark of the 'action research' school, and in particular the inquiring approach of the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) at the University of Bath, UK, where I have been studying since 2004.

Importantly, and especially in the story that I interweave in the text (see especially Chapter Four), this thesis addresses my own children, to whom, in my view, I am ultimately answerable. I am walking a challenging line here: along the edge of the post-modern Patriarch. I am a father, and as such inherit habits of patriarchy, yet as I search for practices that explore and disestablish some of its degenerative power relationships, I want to enhance (not undermine) these vital, loving relationships.

For this reason, I adopt the strategy of narrative: 'inventing' (or living in?) a parallel, 'storied' world, wherein I can play between the 'warts and all' account and the hero narratives that are the hallmark of patriarchy. This allows me to dance between the pressures of habit and the possibilities of new performances. Action Research encourages us to be alive to missions of change, and the knowledge associated with them, but also realistic in the face of dangers, shadows, paradoxes and mysteries thrown up by post-modern and critical spotlights.

I come from a Jewish background and this provides a context for this inquiry. In Yiddish, the language of my Eastern European ancestors, the word 'mentsh' was used, literally to mean 'person', but it also meant more; variously, a 'big person', a 'good man', or even a 'person who is always working at being a person'. So this is about how to be a mentsh, to live in 'mentshlichkeit' ('the art of the mentsh') in a heartfelt, and embodied way; with a critical consciousness, a sense of irony and with

sensitivity to the challenge of both feminism and the times and places in which I find myself.

This is an inquiry, with reference to CARPP's outlook on the world. In such an inquiry, I am sensitive to questions of validity, such as:

- What is the significance of this work?
- What enduring consequences can emerge as a result?
- How can it be expressed through practices?
- Which key relationships and subjectivities need to be honoured as a generative source of knowledge?

(derived from (Reason and Bradbury 2001) p12)

In that sense, this is primarily a 'First-person inquiry'. (Torbert 2001). What I take this to mean is that this research process, unlike those in the more traditional social sciences, start by tackling the 'problem' of participation of the researcher in what is being researched head on. Traditional research methodologies, under strain from the challenge of post-modernism, usually find a mechanism to side-step their discomfort with the separation of knower from what can be known:

*The more usual, or at least currently fashionable, practice is to devote at least a chapter of your book or PhD thesis to a tortured, self-flagellating disquisition on the ethical and methodological difficulties of participant observation. (Fox 2004) p4*

But in this research project, the torture and self-flagellation are transformed into signs of disturbance (or discomfort) that, in themselves, represent something interesting; 'data' or, if this word is too atomising, then at least 'information'. We can foreground this experience, not as something problematic, to be swept aside, but as inherent to an account of action, one that can inspire action in others.

Such data is also relevant to the mission of a feminist epistemology: feelings and emotions are signs commonly ignored by the (male) dominant discourse, especially in 'the Academy', the collective term for the global University-based community. In moving towards them, and by considering the impact of this discomfort on action, I am addressing what is commonly elided as useful knowledge. And at another level, quite simply, perhaps if we men own this discomfort that may be a shadow of our privilege, and carefully consider our action in this light, then the normally disappeared 'others' (women, children, black people, etc.) don't have to carry it for us.

Adopting this position, we can expect to hear, perhaps in the disembodied, dominant (male) voice that predominates, the accusation that this is in some way solipsistic and self-interested. But my response to that would be, isn't all research, ultimately? My sister is an Assistant Professor of Medical Genetics. She has reached a high level in Science and this bucks the trend for women. I am proud of her achievement. She began her career by participating in research investigating the blood disorders of Ashkenazi Jewish families, like our own. Who can honestly claim these days that any science is disinterested? In many ways, her work and mine are alike.

In the words of Philip Corrigan, '*We (men) need to re-member our bodies.*' (Corrigan 1988) p377. This is a (somewhat ironic) attempt to re-member mine, in the course of serving generative (feminist) ends. So this is a journey into self, but with a liberatory (rather than solipsistic) purpose. It is about the detail of my intentional action and choices around a set of questions, towards generative masculinities, work, fatherhood and ultimately the meaning of being a good man.

This work is located and relational. It stands for new knowledge found between myself and others - between myself and my children, with my work colleagues, and between me and you the reader. The text is located between people, and also in a physical and temporal space, in the significance of the now, and the choices I am making as I write, telling you a story which had choices in it. I accept that the timeliness of this text may be lost in the editing process, and 'now' becomes part of a tangled 'then', but right now, I am located upstairs in my house, in my attic-office. It is a foggy February morning. The sun is beginning to shine through the haze and burn it away. For a while, you could look through the mist directly at the sun and see its outline. Right now, the sun is too bright to do so, but for a while you could stare at the sun without harm. To be able to admire the sun like this is a rare thing. The mist has to be just the right density to do so.

I am struck by the timeliness of this vision. The world reaches out to me, helping me to articulate something. Through my voice here, my hope is a larger-than-my-voice will speak to you, with enough transparency to reveal new things, like the roundness of the sun. My emancipatory intention is to be present in this text in a way that challenges the general absence of ambivalent, trembling, questioning male selves in academic and business texts, and the world of work generally, which is the world I want to explore. There are plenty of heroes, who present themselves fully-formed and 'self-made' to the world in their story, but far fewer reflexive male voices. Who asks: 'What sort of a man am I, in this work, in this text, in this role, in this world? What man-words do I speak? What sort of man-space do I occupy? What sort of man-time do I spend?' In the words of Stephen Toulmin:

*The "modern" focus on the written, the universal, the general, and the timeless – which monopolized the work of most philosophers after 1630 [and Descartes] - is being broadened to include once again the oral, the particular, the local and the timely. (Toulmin 1990) p186*

Why do we use the voices of 'others' in our texts like this? Because they represent the authority we draw on, in order to take our place alongside them as our own authority in this pantheon. My own voice of authority voice is being tested here. And in itself, this represents a particular and arch challenge for me; a challenge central to this inquiry. In gaining the qualifications and status of a doctoral degree, do I risk losing the freshness, the timely, relational, baked-afresh self, by 'becoming' someone, a 'Dr.', part of the expert dominance that is one type of (masculine) hegemony? Is there a particular seduction to the academic, male voice and role to which I am succumbing? I explore this particular edge here – through my inquiry practices and the stories I tell. This is an ironic, highly reflexive question – I feel uneasy about it, and I aim to foreground it through this inquiry and its examination.

Let me say a little more now about this inquiry space I occupy, so you can locate it alongside your own world and test its claims alongside your own experience. I undertake this inquiry in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, during a time of immense global challenges and forces at play.

I have mentioned irony because these are ironic times. Social, economic and ecologic fault-lines impinge on my life and the life of this inquiry. Progress as an idea is deeply problematic. At the time of writing, I live in the southern United Kingdom, in Surrey, with my wife Gillie and my children Max (10) and Jess (8). Explaining masculinity to Max, as the older one, and the boy, was a stimulus for this work. In a timely way, when this started to come together in 2008, he was the proverbial 'intelligent 10 year old' who grounded me and inspired me to express myself in a more straightforward language, particularly in the storytelling sections. I want him to be able to read these

stories (at some future point) and find them useful in his own life, in his own questions of 'mentshlichkeit'. (Again, ironically, in this choice, am I 'disappearing' my own daughter? I notice my discomfort).

Christopher Poulos talks about such a relational ethic in narrative research:

*In the writing of autoethnographic research, the relationship between the researcher and his or her significant others becomes a primary locus of ethical action.* (Poulos 2008) p46

In such a way, my 'narrative conscience', as Poulos describes it, holds me to account in a way that may be argued is far more poignant and effective than some abstract ethical principle. In the end, my reader, our meeting may be fleeting, but in the years to come, I have to be able to look my children in the eye. Ultimately, won't they be the most fitting judges of whether I lived up to my intention of being a mentsh, a good man? As such this whole work is a living dedication to them, and not just as some throwaway line in the Acknowledgements.

*And the feel of your tiny hands  
wrapped around one of my fingers  
has made more of a man of me  
than I could ever make of myself*

*Abraham Gibson, From Mookie, Boogaloo, Shalamar (My children)  
(Gibson 2002) p70*

I am a 'Surrey Jew', itself an ironic identity, spatially defined at my house, where the 'leafiest County in Britain' meets *Fiddler on the Roof*. I offer this as context; it gives you a mood, a frame in which to locate my worldview or paradigm, 'as Ogilvy (1986) pointed out, [paradigms] are about "models, myths, moods and metaphors."' (Heron and Reason 1997) p274.

Most of my work is in and around the conurbation of London. Since 2006, I have been working as a 'Senior Consultant' (I notice a discomfort with the status of my role and its seductive, 'expert' masculinity) at Roffey Park Institute, a business school based in rural West Sussex. Much of this inquiry is located in the practice of this role, or in a parallel world based largely on it. Roffey Park has an academic and business teaching stream and I am involved in both. Prior to this, I worked as the developer of 'Navigator', <http://www.springboardconsultancy.com/navigator.html>, a business-oriented, 'men's development programme'. In many ways it was my frustration with this role that prompted both the move to Roffey Park and provided the impetus for this inquiry, as I explain in Chapter One.

Methodologically, this work is personalised and narrative-based. It is telling a story of a journey of becoming, and in the telling, there is also an uncovering of knowledge; what Laurel Richardson calls 'writing as inquiry' (Richardson 2005). But I hope it is more than just writing about a personal journey. My hope is that it will encourage (or even incite) you. In many ways, this will be a good test of its quality. It is also about action, and how in this complex area of gendered dynamics, we can encounter a difficult and even oppositional relationship between intention and action. I offer an intense, reflexive exploration of what Judi Marshall calls these 'gender interference patterns'. (Marshall 1999)

A word of warning on masculinity - men don't often 'go there', so we can find it a bit odd when they do. Florence Geis argues that when we see women in leadership, they

just don't fit our mental model, so we may dismiss them more readily than we dismiss our prejudice. (Geis 1996). Similarly, I'd like to encourage you to have some compassion for a man engaging in this level of reflexivity about his masculinity. It can make people feel uncomfortable, and they can be hostile, as I shall show. I have worked in this area for many years and I know how 'queer' it may seem. I use 'queer' in the same way that 'queer theory' uses it – with deliberately political and layered meanings: 'strange', 'unusual', and also 'disruptive', especially of unquestioned assumptions around gender, bodies and sexuality.

And yet I hope this text isn't too densely self-reflective that it becomes what it tries to avoid; that is it turns into a hero-narrative, a triumphant declaration of progress according to self-serving measures, like the biographies you find in an airport bookshop. I aim to make choices in my writing that are reflective of important dilemmas. These choices are not fully formed and easy, but they are not all tortured and difficult either. Like the mist outside my window, to reflect this experience, the text needs to be dense, but not too dense, light enough but not too light, self-aware, but not self-obsessed. These are complex choices, in a somewhat ordinary man's life.

*There often seems to be a pre-occupation with the desire to be designated a male feminist, rather than the feminist methodological concern with producing less partial representations of the social world and women and men's cultural habitation of it. Feminist methodologies have made explicit the social processes involved in the production of research. (Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003) p111*

I am not that interested in being called a male feminist, but I do intend to engage with feminism and I am sympathetic to the feminist critique of male power, without being too apologetic of my masculinity (which my feminist friends tell me isn't useful to them anyway). Most importantly though, I am indeed working here with the challenge that feminist *methodologies* and *epistemologies* make to a research agenda. In developing alternatives to what Connell calls the dominant 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995), I assert that what the feminist cause needs at this time is for more men to consider *how* they think, rather than just *what* they think, and act in this awareness. This is after all *action* research.

In the theoretical grounding of this work, I draw on a wide range of textual sources, around masculinity, gender, feminist, Jewish and queer theory, social construction, post-modernism, organisational theory, action research and narrative inquiry. I have also been influenced by fictional sources, including feminist science-fiction, such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (LeGuin 1969, 1997), and Jeffrey Eugenides *Middlesex* (Eugenides 2002).

So let's be more specific about what you will find in this thesis:

I begin with a short statement which explains why I think this work matters.

Then you will find the first of a series of interspersed narrative interludes, tracing a parallel, future world. This narrative takes over and becomes the dominant voice in Chapter Four. This developing story offers a number of advantages. Firstly, as a story, it allows me to 'show' you the kind of dilemmas inherent in this kind of study, rather than just me 'telling' you about them. Secondly, it introduces other voices and perspectives as part of a developing critical subjectivity embedded in this research journey (Heron and Reason 1997). The quality of this critical subjectivity is essential to the validity of this kind of (narrative-based) research process. Thirdly, it introduces a practice of development, based on a fragmented, layered self, that I argue (in Chapter

Two) is the key to a feminist epistemology, challenging the dominant ('whole, self-made') masculinity that prevails in 'the Academy' and beyond. These voices (of women, children, 'others'...) are partly mine and partly beyond me, as is the nature of my-self in a post-dominant framing. I don't offer this as a 'truth'; rather it is a *practice* of challenge to the myth of the (whole, male) self.

The First Chapter then explains further how stories operate in the context of action research. I also interweave with this the context for masculinity in this work. I explain the relevance of developing a 'form' of narrative-based work relevant to the 'content' of gender and masculinity, and consider what constitutes quality in this type of work. I explain how in considering the 'art of being a good man', in the transition of my work from the 'Navigator Men's Development Programme' to my role as a training and development consultant at Roffey Park Institute, I was drawn towards considering what gender/queer theorist Judith Butler calls 'performativity', the fine-grained, everyday performances of gender, rather than taking a 'position' around gender.

The Second Chapter is about how this inquiry work became important to me; about what is inquiry and what might constitute quality *practices* that take me into it. How can I explore my claim to be a good man? I also suggest that an 'inquiry of discomfort' (Wolgemuth and Donohue 2006) as both an idea, and an experience, is another measure of the quality and validity of this work. I consider some of the vital literature around masculinities, particularly focussing on the critique of Bob Connell's notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995). This leads me towards what I call an 'inquiring masculinity', one that is conscious of the critical perspectives and challenges of feminism but sympathetic to the specific, living bodies and selves of men, as they are experienced subjectively. Informed by my own Jewish subjectivity, I then consider how goodness might operate beyond the limitations of western 'reason', and we can start to see the project here as an escape from a haunting, a possession by a particular (maybe even demonic?) spectre of dominant masculinity. How can I develop practices, even rituals, which immunise or resist, in the same way as the acts of observance in Judaism are designed to do?

The third chapter explores an uncomfortable, tentative foregrounding of my (Jewish) body. Again, I am offering this as a story, not *the* story. It provides an insight into my own journey as a model for others. I place this in the context of an exploration of what Gloria Gordon calls 'bi-cultural competence' (Gordon 2007), the understanding of the relationship between our local identity (and in my case, Jewish masculinity), and the mainstream, (for me, in the context of dominant masculinity). I consider this bi-cultural competence, the ability to shift between private and public worlds, as both a blessing and a curse: an advantage, and an example of the shifty, protean nature of a Jewish masculinity that holds itself inferior to the mainstream. It also re-introduces the theme of my own role as a father as an important facet of this located, inquiring masculinity. I conclude with a story that explores the possibility of an embodied reading of text, congruent with the embodied spirit of this inquiry – inspired by Philip Corrigan's incitement to consider 'the intellectual's body'. (Corrigan 1988)

The fourth chapter is a change of register, a new voice entirely. It comes from, and is aimed at, the heart. It is a story called *Gender Future*. It is a fiction, based on my own experience. It opens up a parallel world, not unlike (but not entirely like) my own. My intention is to explore imaginative questions of gender, using a process Laurel Richardson calls 'writing as inquiry' (Richardson 2005). I would encourage you to read it (as I have encouraged others) as a story, as if you were given it in a book club. Why? Because it might be more fruitful to engage in an act of collective imagination. This will require some creative room and a bit of heart. Afterwards, we can return to critique. But to engage with a story from the starting point of a critiquing mind is to akin

to arguing that in all likelihood Goldilocks could never have met those three bears and eaten their porridge.

In the fifth chapter – I show how I used the Gender Future story as an inquiry tool, to engage others in this wider process, principally at Roffey Park. At this stage, I reach towards ‘second person inquiry’, where others are invited to participate by reading this story and take some ownership of these questions with me (Reason and Bradbury 2008). In a sense, as I discuss, this is about how this type of inquiry finds its ‘legs’.

I hope that it is possible to see how I trace a body through this text: I start with head (grounded in thinking territory), move to heart (engagement with a story) and then finally to legs and hands: what do I *do* in this? What are the action choices and dilemmas that persist in these questions? A head and heart with no legs/ hands finds it hard to move. Similarly action without mind (head and heart) lacks reason. Head, heart, legs and hands: a body, re-membered.

Perhaps what’s more veiled here, is sex. I am uncomfortable with this. It is true that, apart from some references in narrative, I have avoided this discourse. I wish I had been bolder, but it was too much of a risk. Like the sun as it grows in intensity outside my window, the lights of this experience are too blinding. This is an example of making choices about what I foreground. We have a right and a responsibility to signal what is in and beyond the bounds of our inquiry.

Early on, my wife Gillie asked not to be included and her absence is out of respect for that request. I would only add that I love her more than I can express in these few words, and her support in this process has been immense, incalculable and appreciated.

In the sixth chapter the legs and hands are engaged, in the form of two detailed accounts of applying these questions of inquiring masculinity, and being a good man, (mentshlichkeit), in my work as a consultant/facilitator. I haven’t said much about the definition of this role, preferring to tell stories that show it, and the action choices and dilemmas in the role that are relevant to my inquiry. My hope is that this is more economic and vivid.

My writing is sometimes deliberately tentative...or accidentally **strident** and this may have an impact on you. I also play a little with changing fonts (and devices like parenthesis). Also:

- In the story-telling sections, I use dialogue quite a bit, but choose to format it as bullet points
- Why do you do that?

Because I am attempting to *appear* in the text. I am attempting to say something about bodies and performance, ironically, by writing about them. I write as I’d like to speak (or at least a toned down version of it); referencing Stephen Toulmin, (and my own Jewish subjectivity), I invoke the oral as well as the written (Toulmin 1990). The oral tradition, as a presentation of knowledge, is one I grew up with. Hebrew, the Semitic language of the Jewish religion (as opposed to Yiddish, the Germanic everyday language of Ashkenazi - literally ‘German’- Jewish communities), has signifiers of meaning in voice and sound that land differently to text. It is significant that the most important Jewish prayer begins with the words ‘*Hear, O, Israel.*’ Notice it does not say, ‘*Read, O, Israel.*’ So I hope at some level there is a play here going on, a ‘hidden transcript’ (something I will say more about) around the oral, the embodied, the *performance* of gender and masculinity (and Jewishness); one that challenges the ‘dominant discourse’ of text. Hence the conversations.

- And why are the dialogues presented as bullet points?

- Sorry. Nearly forgot. Yes. When I write the dialogue, I see it like a film, and therefore I see this as more of a screenplay than a novel. So these dialogues are a script. I wish I'd had the wit (or time) to film the spoken scenes. Perhaps one day I will. Or maybe you will *with* me, in your reading of them. I would invite you to 'see' them, this way. Then this script stands between us, as something we make sense of together. So the text is unfinished at some level, and we can take it further, by talking about it, together. This puts this thesis, and the knowledge I am seeking here, in the participatory tradition of 'action research'.

I won't offer you easy answers, but I do accept that I am *answerable*; that as a man and as a father there is something I need to take responsibility for and to try and change, and hence the impetus for this research project. I don't take all the responsibility for the way the world is, but I do interrogate my part in it, even though paradoxically my part is almost impossible to disentangle from that of others.

*The aim of an inquiry of discomfort is to identify and promote an intentional and conscious shift from dualistic, categorical, and entrenched positionality to a more ambiguous engagement with social reality. (Wolgemuth and Donohue 2006) p1024*

It is uncomfortable to admit what I do not know; to admit it to myself and to my children that any mess we're in has no easy solutions, but it does reflect the truth of my life. I regularly wonder how on earth I got here, rather than pretending I can construct a seamless story about my progress, post hoc. It may not be as pretty but it may be more truthful, and perhaps offering a different kind of hope for all of that.

I also offer at the end some supporting appendices, specifically:

- Two examples of an inquiry practice I developed, using letter-writing to my children
- A Story of my journey to Washington DC in January 2009, for the inauguration of Barack Obama, called *Praise Song for the Day*.

I offer this latter piece as an example of my developing skill in story-telling, a timely study of a 'good man' (ironically put), and also because it has particular significance in the Conclusion.

For now, I offer you some thoughts about how you can engage with this text and measure its quality. You may have your own criteria of course, but I offer you some questions which I hope make sense for you as a way of considering this as action research, a human scale inquiry that enables us to meet and develop knowledge together:

- How does it move you?
- Where does it meet your own experience?
- How does it help you by informing you about your own action?
- What paradoxes and dilemmas does it support you to act in the face of?
- How does it make you usefully uncomfortable?

Ultimately a text on a human scale should inspire good conversations. I really look forward to hearing what you would like to talk about.

## Why does this Work Matter?

*The group sits in a circle, a circle of strangers, in that awkward, polite, pregnant space at the beginning of a four-day course. There are at least 20 of us there – a big group! My anxiety is enhanced. Each of us is asked to make some kind of statement, a statement of commitment. But this has an unusual phrasing: it is not ‘I am committed to...’ but rather ‘I am a commitment to...’ This is the crux of the course on ‘Embodied Leadership’. It’s altogether more personal and...embodied. The introductions creep like a rash towards my position in the circle. I should be listening earnestly to everyone else’s statement, but all I can do is swirl in my own self-absorbed stew:*

*‘Oh God, What am I a commitment to? What am I a commitment to? I’ve got to say something deep, something profound. Something about ...gender...identity... Oh yes! I am a commitment to better gender identity ...Yeuch! I am a commitment to...being a great consultant...no...to being the best...no...to a disruption of disembodied masculinities ...God! No! ...to post-patriarchal....post-patriarchal... post-something! Oh for God’s Sake! To saving the world, and loving kittens? I DON’T KNOW! I don’t know what to say. The rash is upon me. It’s too late. I must speak now. I stop, breathe, centre myself. From somewhere within, after years of this work, comes a voice from behind the whirl. It seems to know exactly what to say: “I am a commitment to being a **Good Man**.”’*

I offer you this story for a number of reasons. Firstly, it tells the story of how I crystallised my thoughts around the title of this thesis. It also shows you a (real and messy) reflexive, inquiring process, rather than me just telling you about it. Of course, a critique might be that there could be many other ways to tell this story, and how do we know if this is a ‘true’ account? The short answer is that the claim we make with stories is not whether they are true or not, but in what can we do with them once they are told. But we’ll come to that. At least for now I hope you can appreciate what it shows you, including the things I haven’t mentioned, and encourages your participation.

But I also offer it because I hope it shows the world I work in, so I can open with a brief but important discussion about how might my work here have some significance; in short – why does my work, and my inquiry, *matter*?

This story describes the arena of a learning programme in a modern organisational setting. In this case it is located in a bright, large training room, at the front of which is a picture window overlooking St Leonard’s Forest, in Sussex, England, the setting of Roffey Park Institute, where I work as a Consultant. In this case I was a participant rather than facilitator, but in my work I can regularly find myself in either role. So what does being a Consultant mean in this case? It means being at home in the kind of scene above; a deep, narrow, peripatetic learning group, usually not more than five consecutive days long, where thoughtful, (sometimes) vital questions of self, in relation to the places we work, and occasionally the wider communities in which we live, are repeatedly worked through. In the context of the scene above, a group of managers and consultants are considering the relationship between who they are and the work they do, and how they embody this relationship.

A colleague of mine at Roffey Park says, “What we do is hard sometimes, but it isn’t coal-mining.” What does he mean by this? I think he is recognising that what we do is emotionally absorbing work (I can come home on a Friday evening feeling like a hollow husk) but there is a level of abstraction in it, which can look a little self-absorbed. It is far easier to see the ‘work’ in something materially productive, like coal-

mining. And yet, in our society's work culture, it is at this level of mental and emotional abstraction that much of the 'work' gets done. This work is in the relationships between managers of a company, or in the decision-making processes of an executive board. These fields of interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics are the stuff of our back-breaking, (or should that be, mind bending, heart-wrenching?) labour.

In the words of Seamus Heaney, observing his father's work in the peat bogs of Ireland:

*The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  
Through living roots awaken in my head.  
But I've no spade to follow men like them.  
Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests.  
I'll dig with it.*

- Seamus Heaney – 'Digging'

So if I, like Heaney, compare my life to my father's and his father before him, there is a progressive internalisation of the framing of our work. My grandfather was a tailor. He cut cloth with his hands, a woodbine cigarette eternally at his lip. He was quiet and unassuming to the point of inexpressive by all accounts and he 'died before his time', of a heart attack, when I was just six months old. My father was a 'company director', an operations man, who organised the making of clothes at factories spread around the UK. His work was more 'relational', although that tended to evidence itself in a Friday night spill-out of all the interpersonal politics, rivalries, jealousies and power-plays between him and his colleagues. In his story, all of this was 'unhelpful noise' that 'got in the way of getting the real work done'.

I notice here, as I write this, the Friday night family ritual, on the eve of the Sabbath, echoing through the generations. It is not surprising, because in a Jewish family, what happens on a Friday night always has great moment as a marker of change and permanence. It is a significant stage for our performances. This stage will return.

Our work at Roffey Park is to help people manage their relationships at work better. We teach (or facilitate learning about) these interpersonal relationships, how to manage the interpersonal power, politics and so on. So my work at Roffey is *about* that noise, much to my father's bemusement. So the world of work has evolved, as expressed by the patriarchal models in my own life; things haven't got more personal but they have become more *about* the personal, as the stuff with which we work; as the matter at hand. What we talk about (or 'construct') as labour, if Roffey Park's work is anything to go by, makes the nature of the work more confluent with the nature of the self. This isn't the only analysis, but it is one that applies to many of us. So ourselves and their dynamics bring us into the arena for the 'action turn', as Peter Reason calls it:

*an 'action turn' in research practice which builds on and takes us beyond the 'language turn' of recent years: the language turn drew our attention to the way knowledge is a social construction; the action turn accepts this, and asks us to consider how we can act in intelligent and informed ways in a socially constructed world. (Reason and Bradbury 2008) p5*

It suggests then, that to take the action turn, following on from the language turn (of postmodernism), we need to consider who we are, what we talk about and what we do as a result. This isn't a justification of what may seem an archly self-referential

research project like this one (although such a justification may be required). It is also to point out that when we are looking for what is good, what is worthwhile, what has *quality* in this type of work, it may be hard to distinguish between what makes a quality research process and what makes for a quality life, doing quality work, lived by a quality person, or in Yiddish terms (as I shall explain) a '*mentsh*'.

If we add to this mix the lens of gender, which, for all sorts of reasons, has become an important one in my life, then this stuff of self must be the stuff of masculinity, and living a good life means being a *good man*, hence the voice which spoke in the scene I describe above.

For years I tried to couch it in more 'high falutin' terms: my research title for a while was: '*An inquiry into the expression and generation of post-dominant masculinities and fatherhood as archetypes of leadership*'. For heavens sake! How about saying this is just about being a good man? Having said that, there was much work to be done to go from that A to this B. Giving up the safety of over-intellectualised language, to come out from the academic closet and be exposed in this way took work; inquiring work. Showing this work in a quality way is the nature of my purpose here. Being a good man isn't a trite thing; it is a vital thing, simple to say but complex to consider. How to show it, in an era that still fails to meet the basic challenges of feminism? Only recently, The Cranfield School of Management quoted Harriet Harman, the UK Minister for Women and Equality:

*The proportion of female directors of our top companies has increased from 6.9% in 1999 to 11.7% [in 2008] (Harman 2008)*

It is discomfoting that in 2008, this is trumpeted as progress. Of course there may be many issues facing us here, not in the least whether women *want* to become directors of top companies (see in particular (*Marshall 1995*)), but the question remains – what is a good man's response to this phenomenon? Men are wont to ignore it, or hang their heads about this, or back away from facing their role in it. This is not surprising; it is a complex, tricky thing to get to the bottom of, easy to be defensive of or in denial about. I don't suggest that what I show here is every man's possible course of action, but what I do hope to show is how a man can move *towards* the discomfort of these thorny questions, not as an abstract challenge, but as a very personal, moment-to-moment one, and that this may offer us some benefit.

Of course I could be doing more seemingly 'important' things than this type of personal work, in developing countries for example, where 'gender issues' are sometimes about whether women and children live or die. But firstly, this isn't where I am located in the system, and secondly, can an argument be constructed to show that being a good man *where I am now* may have just as much moment, in terms of the world we are co-creating? I argue that it can. We are all part of the global system, after all, and it may be falling prey to a very old-fashioned (even macho) ethos to suggest that people who work in arenas that are romanticised as more 'important' do more vital work to the ends of 'goodness'.

I have faced this question about whether this type of work is vital for change or just self-absorbed male hand-wringing for some time. Between 1996 and 2006, I ran a training programme called '*Navigator*', that offered what I described as 'ordinary blokes', (broadly, those men who wouldn't normally choose to join a men's group) a chance to consider the meaning of their lives in relation to their work and masculinity. I talk a little more about this in Chapter One. This programme provoked both resistance and support. For example, when *Navigator* was launched in 1998, Bel Mooney argued in the *Daily Mail*:

*I'm all in favour of pushing out the boundaries of sympathy – but when I hear that men, 'challenged' at work, are being offered self-help groups to enable them to come to terms with the fact that there are women there, I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Women carry the main burden of life, while these 'threatened' men seek consolation in each other – to whinge. Oh, please! (Mooney 1999)*

Yet Peter Baker (now head of the UK government-backed 'Men's Health Forum') suggested in response, in the *Independent*:

*The end of the job for life, the replacement of manufacturing with service industries, the flattening of traditional hierarchies, the increasingly important role of women and the demand for new "feminine" skills, such as communication, teamwork and flexibility, are fundamentally altering men's relationships with work, profoundly affecting their sense of identity and self-esteem. Navigator aims to help men deal better with these issues. (Baker 1998)*

These positions show the stretch of the rope around whether this kind of inquiry mounts a serious response to feminism or not; we all need to decide what looks like 'important work' in this arena. The view I hold here is that there is no more important arena for the progress of complex gender questions in action than in my own life, as an example of what is possible to shift in the moment.

This suggests that the arena for change and transformation I inhabit in this thesis is small scale, about 'micro-practice', local and mostly (at least at a first glance) intra- and inter-personal. Some may suggest that impact of this type of inquiry might therefore be quite limited. In the context of Action Research, Gustavsen for example, says:

*Ultimately the success of the kind of action research described here is linked to our ability to help initiate and support processes that become long-term, self-sustaining and include a continuously growing number of actors and constellations of actors. (Gustavsen 2001) p23*

I am not advocating that inquiry into this kind of micro-practice as the *only* way, just *my* way and *here*. It is the scale of action I choose to focus on, congruent with the mission of *mentshlichkeit*, being a good man. As the Ghandian saying goes, it is about *being* the change I want to see in the world. I hope to encourage such questioning because, I claim, if more men did so, the world would be a different, better place. In Chapter One, I describe a shift I made in my own work that coincided with this inquiry, away from my role with the Navigator Men's Development Programme. Meanwhile, Navigator itself persists, and is still drawing in a 'growing number of actors'. I also hope that what I discuss here has the capacity to draw people in, and one of the challenges I focus on is how I encouraged participation in my inquiry.

But it feels like part of a seductive play, the glamorous haunting of an egotistical masculinity, as I shall discuss, to consider big scale projects as the best way that change happens. Perhaps worthwhile change also happens in the loving relationships we develop, as well? Perhaps this is the most important, most sustainable change? Size isn't everything...

And more simply put; it is my contention that men need to do this personal, challenging, inquiring work, coming down from the rarefied atmosphere of the

mountaintop, letting go of the universality of their voice and becoming the quavering, uncertain individual, and with a more faltering voice, engage themselves in *not* knowing and 'showing up'. We need to show what this work looks like when it is being done, in all its doubled-ness and difficulty, in those complex boundaries between experience, presentation, knowledge and relationship, in the here-and-now.

## Interlude – From the story of Sarah Jones – September 2015

### *Meeting the (post)- Rational Man*

The young woman turned the corridor and mounted the short flight of steps in a single bound.

- Why am I *always* late?

She mutters as she darts along the muffled corridor.

- Which room?! Which *room*?!

She flicks open her Blackberry and checks the schedule.

- 'Maple' – why do they give these room these stupid tree-names? I can never remember which one is which. Maple? Maple? Come ON!

She finds the heavy wooden door marked 'Maple' and hauls it open, and twelve pairs of eyes turn towards her.

- Sorry! Sorry! Sorry I'm late. I'll just sit...here...

She parks herself in the nearest available chair, inconveniently at the front of the room.

There is a man standing at the front of the room, clearly interrupted in mid-flow.

- Hi! Welcome. You are...?

- Sarah. Sarah Jones. Sorry I'm late.

- Ah yes, Sarah. No problem, we've only just started. I'll just continue, if you don't mind.

- No! Absolutely...please do.

She tries her best to disappear into her seat. He flashes a brief smile. He has strikingly cold, blue-grey eyes. She notices his height, accentuated by an upright posture.

- So as I was saying...Although I spend much of my time playing along with a myth of myself as in some way complete, and whole, my experience of myself, in my own skin and in the everyday flow of my life is dynamic, changing, even in some way insubstantial. During the course of a day, like everyone else, I experience a whole raft of powerful feelings, sensations, aches, pains, elations...I usually keep these private, perhaps because this is just good taste. And also because I seem to have learnt that they are irrelevant and unhelpful in the course of work. They are OK for the private sphere, to be splashed around willy nilly amongst friends and family. But in the public, serious world of work, they are beyond the pale.

As he talks, he paces across the front of the room, making little eye-contact with the gathering. Sarah notices how cold he is, how unsmiling. He continues.

- But there is a requirement in the course of my research (and in the course of living a better life perhaps) to start to acquire the craft of skilfully putting this everyday experience into the foreground. Why so?

Sarah is drawn to the intriguing paradox of this man: what he is talking about and the way he is talking about it seem so contrasting. His voice seems smooth to her. He is utterly in command. Eleven other faces stare towards him, each with a studied, serious countenance. She counts: 8 women, 4 men. To her he seems the embodiment of the comfortable, male intellectual. He continues:

- Firstly, because in doing so I am developing my awareness of a kind of practice I bring to my work as a consultant. This work is about using my own thoughts, feelings, intuitions and body sensations in the course of diagnosing and working with the human side of organisations. This skill has been given names like 'process consultation' (Schein 1969), or 'self-as-instrument' (Cheung-Judge 2001).

On the screen behind him, the references are flashed up, and Sarah sees the other students furiously scribbling them down.

- So, therefore, in inquiring into this whole experience (thinking, feeling, body etc.) I am developing the skill of reading and working with this side of my own experience, in order to help people's experience with their own, as a source of

intelligence for their decisions and choices in their lives, for their own good and that of the organization that employs them. In order to do this I need to be more aware of my own inner experience and use it in some way as a meter to gauge the inner experience of others.

Sarah reflects on her own inner experience right now. She is tired and hungry. Having come straight from work, she wasn't able to get anything to eat. Grumpily, she reflects on her enduring complaint about the bad timing of these courses.

- Secondly, because when you start to look at this type of experience, and develop some clarity about how to use it in the activity of such work, it demands that you ask a number of searching questions about some of the assumptions that we may take for granted. These questions go to the heart of some very difficult, thorny but fascinating areas of investigation. So let's look at them in more detail:

The screen flashes up a question in bold:

### **1) Who am I really?**

There is a murmur of amusement amongst some of the gathered crowd. Sarah momentarily notices her familiar feelings of separateness once again. The lecturer continues:

- One assumption that this perspective starts to question is the fixed nature of who we are. This isn't a theoretical, philosophical question only, but a very practical one. For example, in the course of my work, I am expected to know things. Companies pay lots of money for me to talk to their employees about how they work and how they can do things better. This suggests that 'who I am' is some kind of expert. But increasingly, as I have been doing this work, I am troubled by this assumption. I find that the more I just accept in an unquestioning way that 'I know this stuff', (about gender for example), that I am an 'expert', and that I pretend I know how things can work better (even when I know I don't!), the less satisfied I feel about the results. The more I stay with an idea of *not* knowing the answers, but of staying connected to the people I am working with, and helping them work out the answers for themselves, the better, more powerful the conversations seem to be, and the more useful people say they find them (sometimes, but not always). So this gets me thinking...Am I an 'expert' and if so, what am I an expert in? And who pays good money for people who *don't* know the answer...?

The thing that really strikes her is how much he mentions money. Part of her feels envious. She is ambitious and is drawn to the idea of making money. But part of her is irritated by what lands with her as a boast.

- Secondly, I can see that 'who I am', isn't just an important question to me, it is important to others. I am increasingly conscious that although I can't see 'me' in everyday action (because I am too busy doing stuff), the way I am, that for example I am over six foot tall, well-spoken, having quite a big man's body, white skin and so on; all of this has an impact on how I am seen and listened to. People hear things I say and can make quite a different sense of them than if someone else says it. This doesn't mean they always agree with me; I just have an inkling that this body has an impact; that it is much more a part of me than I realise. This man's body has an impact on people, even before I've opened my mouth.

- Your not kidding

She mutters under her breath. And writes on her notepad: But what difference does it make? Do you make? Are you a good man?

- If you look at it, having a big, white man's body might be a bit of a problem. Why so? Because many people are critical (and rightly so, I think), of what big, white men have done in the world. Both women and children have experienced

white men, over the years, as a bit of a threat. I feel very uncomfortable about this. We are told that these big white men (and I have to accept that for many people that is what I am) have been abusive and even violent towards others. They have started wars, run bad governments, exploiting companies and have hurt people. This is a perspective that I have been conscious of since I was a teenager, and it has made me increasingly uncomfortable about having this big man's body, (especially as mine has got bigger and bigger over the years, and not in ways that I feel good about).

There is laughter around the room. She doesn't join in.

- And we are also told by some that white men have dominated and bullied black people, as slaves, or in the wars we are still fighting (in Iraq or Afghanistan for example) and that this is also something I need to take some responsibility for. This is a tricky one for me, because although I do indeed have a white skin, I am also Jewish, and we Jews also have a history of being bullied.

She notices a change around the room. This lands as a kind of announcement, and her impression of him changes, before her eyes, and she feels an immediate twinge of sympathy towards him. It's as if this man, all 'in one piece', has fragmented slightly.

- Sometimes, I try to address these questions head on. That is why I have been involved in men's groups for twenty years. Sometimes I ignore it all and just get on with my life. But if I begin to think that I am not one of those (bad) men; that I am different (and better) kind of man, I may catch sight of when I am behaving in a particular way that fits the profile of these nasty, dominating men (like when I shout at my own children), and I feel ashamed again. So I am back where I started.

Sarah feels slightly guilty about her own judgements of the man. Was she too harsh, and did her pattern of holding herself as an outsider lead her to a more strident judgement of him? Her supervisor has told her before that she tends to 'black and white' things a bit too much. Somehow, now he seems softer to her, less strident, less smooth. But did the mentioning of his children, making this private fact more public, act as a disruption or an entrenchment of his dominance in the room?

- But I wonder whether there is a different response. Are there things I can do to feel better about myself as a man and still respond to this criticism of men that may be valid?

The screen flashes up another big sign, and again she is irritated by the technosmoothness of it all:

## **2) What does this mean about knowledge?**

- This leads me to another one of those assumptions that I have started to question. I was educated into the idea that knowledge was a constant thing; that it didn't vary according to who said it. I am not sure I believe this anymore. I have glimpsed this problem in my own life: my white man's body seems to have an impact on people, even though I think I am 'just a person, like everyone else'.

Michael Kimmel put this problem very well, when he was asked by a black woman what he saw when he looked into the mirror after he gets up in the morning.

The screen flickers again:

*"Well," I said, "when I look in the mirror, I see a human being." I'm universally generalizable. As a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race, no gender. I'm the generic person! (Kimmel 2006) p 3.*

Sarah reflects on her own self-consciousness in the mirror. She is more than aware of being seen as a young woman, especially at work, when people talk to her in particularly patronising ways. She realises how she accepts this as normal and, in her own terms, just 'gets on with it'.

- Like Michael Kimmel, I am uncomfortable about this idea that in some way how I see the world is how everyone does, or should see it; that we all see it the same way. Men don't tend to see the way things are in the world and how they are seen by others, a bit like a fish doesn't see the water it swims in. Because we are men, and men have this special powerful, position in the world (especially white, middle-class men) we can't see what it is. You have to be a woman, a child or a black person to see it. This is what is meant by subjectivity. So in this research project, I have to start to see myself, and also see *how* I see. But *how* does this *how* work?

So how do I see the world? It was a confronting idea. Was how she saw things bound up with who she was, as a woman? This was a novel idea to her.

- Normally, when we research something, we look at it as if we can see it objectively, without any bias, but just as it is. But how can we do this about ourselves? This is a real challenge, and it means we have to do our research in quite a different way to, say, how we research something outside of ourselves, that we don't feel quite so emotionally involved in. How does a fish do research into the water it swims in?

Part of the problem of why men don't really see themselves (as men) but as generic human beings, in the way Michael Kimmel describes it, is because over the years, the way we see the world, and make sense of it (what we might call 'reason'), has become totally confused and bound up with being a man. The modern, scientific view of the world, as put together by men (particularly in Europe and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the period of the 'Enlightenment'), seemed to conflate the idea of Masculinity (that is, a way of being a man) and Reason (that is, of thinking the 'right way' about the world). This isn't surprising, as these were white, European men, and they would think that, wouldn't they? As Victor Seidler says:

Another quote:

*We have inherited a historical identification of masculinity with reason and morality. (Seidler 1989) p2*

- Influential philosophers from that time, like Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), deliberately sought to separate the ability to reason from the feelings, desires and experiences we have, (the very things that I would maintain I am trying to learn more about in order to do my work as a Consultant).

*The central concern of Kant's greatest masterpiece, the Critique of Pure Reason, is with the possibility of metaphysics, understood as philosophical knowledge that transcends the bounds of experience. (Allison 1999) p116*

- So these men associated this reason with their own 'universal reason' and the lack of it, (in the desires, feelings, their everyday experiences, bodily sensations and all these things that weren't 'reasonable'), with everyone else

(women, children, black people etc.). This is how they 'disappeared' their own personal experience and bodies (other than their rational thought) from public life and scientific research. They had good intentions in doing this; they wanted to get rid of unreasonable superstition and prejudice, but in doing so, they forgot some of their own prejudices.

*It is our reason that allows us to calculate the rightness of our action, through a process of abstracting from particular situations and working out whether our action is in principle universalizable. Yet the claim to objective rightness, as well as the fragmentation of the self on which it is built, and the shifting of questions of morality into a realm of abstraction, can be argued to be itself a normalization of a particular kind of masculine experience. (Seidler 1989) p3*

- In recent times, philosophers have been very critical of this universal, general perspective (which they argue is the perspective of an elite group of mostly men). They have become very critical of the 'modernism' that was based on this reasonable worldview. Postmodernism and critical theory have developed to include the subjectivities of others; black people, women, children.

*Critical theorists see the modernists' project as sick and see hope for reconstruction in recovery of good parts and redirecting the future. Postmodernists pronounce its death and proclaim the absence of a thinkable future. (Alvesson and Deetz 2005) p66-67*

- But in the course of this critique, it has left us men in a strange kind of double-bind, as Vic Seidler says:

*So it is that men become strangely invisible to themselves. (Seidler 1989) p4*

Sarah is startled. The strange circularity of the situation she is in is uncomfortable. She seems a man, talking *about* something which is clearly important to him, and in terms with which she has great sympathy. But she also sees a man, a 'king in his own court', declaiming on something in a way which strikes her as pretty traditional, to an (almost) universally dotting audience. How visible is *he*? The paradox of the situation intrigues her.

- To understand and investigate ourselves, to make ourselves more visible, is to break the rules of the very scientific 'rationality' which we have created, bringing our bodies, with their irrationality and irregularity, back into the public sphere. And also, how do we know how to judge what good might be now? If reason and rationality had a moral power in Kant's time, and yet it is unmasked as in some way a prejudicial perspective in our own, and we want not just to know how we can re-appear to ourselves as men, but also to have some idea what *good* might be, in our own knowing and action, this double-bind tightens in on us still further.

Sarah has thought about double-binds, but usually in the context of women; in her own context. She is aware that she is expected to behave like a man to get on in her organisation, but then feels ostracised for 'having balls'. So, do men have double binds too...?

- To take the Post-modern turn at its most extreme, to be a white, middle-class man is potentially to risk disappearance completely, because the whole future,

unthinkable as one cohesive project, is one best left to the 'others', those we have marginalised and oppressed, with their diverse subjectivities. Action towards goodness, in our own case, as men, becomes at best very problematic and at worst, impossible. Any definition of such is in some way an oppression, because of its source, which is us white middle class men, with our invisible bodies and a reason only of our own making.

The man turns to the audience and stands still for the first time. He seems to look at Sarah very directly.

- I reject this extreme because as a man it doesn't lead me anywhere useful. It doesn't help me relate to my children, or be better at my work, or help women or black people in their liberatory project, to which I have always been sympathetic (maybe because I grew up with women and black people who I cared about).

Again, she feels drawn towards him. But she also notices something else that she was half consciously bothering her – it is his fluidity. There is something so seamless about his talk. Yet how could he hope to have such an impact without this fluidity? She saw some of the double-bind he was talking about, and yet she was still bothered by it.

- On the other hand, I don't want to entirely reject the challenge of this critical perspective. Perhaps it can help me too, to be more in touch with these other subjectivities, to consider them and my own ones as well. So as a research approach, I am walking along an edge that tries to encompass both these critical viewpoints of the white, male world, and a developmental perspective that can help move beyond it. Like Bob Pease:

*I side with those expressions of post modern thinking that do not totally abandon the values of modernity and the Enlightenment project of human emancipation. ...I believe that a 'weak' form of post modernism informed by critical theory can contribute effectively to the construction of an emancipatory politics concerned with political action and social justice. (Pease 2000) p24*

- But for a white, middle class man, doing research from this perspective is a bit of challenge because there is always the spectre of that sure-or-itself, (disembodied) reason that haunts the success of this project. The myth of a (rational) male wholeness has been exploded but like the echo of the Big Bang in the white noise of a TV screen, it still reverberates and occasionally deafens us white men to other ways of knowing. Nevertheless, and driven by a hope in my heart (which as an embodied impetus, is a good a sign) I am wondering if there is another 'wholeness', on the far side of (post-modern) fragmentation and (useful) feminist/critical challenge, one that is more fleeting, 'in the moment', embodied and relational, (even ironic?), with which as men we can replace the mythical wholeness of the 'rational' (enlightened) male self?

Half an hour later, Sarah is standing by the door of the seminar room, chatting to a fellow student. The lecturer comes past.

- Dr. Porter?
- Yes? ...Sarah isn't it?
- Yes. Sarah Jones. I wonder if...could I ask you a couple of questions?

The man looks at his watch and shifts nervously from foot to foot. She continues hesitantly...

- I mean, if now isn't very convenient...

- No, well, yes, actually I am late for my next meeting. Could we organise something, some other time?
- I just wanted to ask you...about some of what you were saying, I wondered if you could say more about the practice of doing the type of research you have been doing?
- Yes of course, but now really isn't a good time. Could you...? I tell you what: have a look at my PhD thesis, it's all in there. It is in the Learning Resource Centre. It explains a lot. About those practices of inquiry. Then we can have a chat.
- Should I come...?
- ...to my office. Fourth floor, you can't miss it. At the end of the corridor.
- Thanks. I will.
- Yes, sorry, I must go.

He strides off. She watches him go. His jacket billows up and fills the hallway behind him.

## Chapter One – Being the Change?

*“Weren’t you that guy who used to run those men’s programmes?”*

### Using Stories

I offer you the stories you will find in this text as a gift. It is my intention in writing them is to show my experience, living my inquiry questions around masculinity in my work and life, with an attention to different subjectivities; to disrupt the smoothness of the academic voice, and open up new possibilities in the search for *mentshlichkeit*, the art of ‘being a good man’, in these times, and in my locality. But, as I have learned, stories, and the characters within, once released into the world, have their own life. They cease to be mine alone. The research process becomes shared, in a space between the reader, myself and the characters in the story.

I see such stories as a type of ‘presentational knowing’ (Heron and Reason 1997), a form of knowledge that bridges experience and proposition, (or ‘theory’). I am attempting to ‘live life as inquiry’, as Judi Marshall calls it (Marshall 1999). How can I show this type of embedded, immanent knowledge, which is the signature of this type of Action Research? I chose to do so in a narrative.

My aim as an Action Researcher is to become fully immersed in the questions I am interested in, in a participatory relationship with the world, rather than creating a distinct and abstract research ground, separate to me, as in traditional social-scientific method. As I will argue, this inherently requires a consideration of how I live my life, mind, body and soul, rather than as an abstract thought-experiment, in which I am some impartial observer.

This type of research requires active choices about the framing and perspective one chooses. It is like painting a picture: we have to choose the angle, the perspective, the level of detail, the medium, the frame. The stories I show trace a particular picture, an arc of inquiry, between my relationship with my children and my current working environment at Roffey Park. The process of starting to write and show these narratives to others enabled active choices that, hopefully, reveal experiential data; that is, data in relation to a question researched in the course of living one’s life. This may then uncover practical choices, and in this way, the story can draw others into the inquiry. It isn’t an exact science. Following on with the picture metaphor, it is more of an art. So, how do we know if this type of picture is any good? It is a matter of perspective, even of taste, but also, at times, (even if we don’t like the picture), we can appreciate the technique, the work that went into it, the journey it takes us on, and ultimately, how it moves us. As with a work of art, I would claim a mark of quality in this research process is in how it is more than ‘just about me’; it may have the capacity to reach out to the experience of others, to draw you in, and relate your own experience to mine, so that you may feel like joining in the conversation around these challenging questions.

As they grew, these stories, and the characters within them, became more than a representation of my lived experience. They became an inquiry process in themselves, with new possibilities therein. Writing stories was like shaping the unknown, moving towards a darkness just beyond my outstretched hand. I relate this to what Barbara Turner Vesselago calls ‘writing fearwards’ (Turner-Vesselago nd). It is if this darkness represents a territory of evolving knowledge about gender and masculinity. I found an evolutionary process unfolding as I cycled through the ‘extended epistemology’, the wider ways of knowing that John Heron and Peter Reason describe: through the practice of being a father and working at Roffey Park (‘practical knowing’), to the theories and texts I read (‘propositional knowing’), to ‘representational knowing’ in

story, to lived experience ('experiential knowing') and back again (Heron and Reason 1997).

Unlike what I did in my first degree in Social Psychology, the methodology for this type of research has evolved in parallel with the content, rather than being decided upon as a separate thing, usually in advance. I set out to move towards a territory of inquiry and I have done different things in different places in this territory, as the need has required. It is more of a circular than a linear process, one quite specific to the journey I am on. The method is bound up with the worldview and the worldview in turn bound up with the life of the researcher and knowledge we are looking to develop, and indeed the thesis in which we develop it:

*The idea that we can think consciously about presenting and re-presenting the stories we tell proffers an enticing invitation to think reflexively and self-consciously – not just about the fieldwork we do, but also about the means we choose and use to relay our fieldwork tales to audiences. (Lincoln 1997) p38*

Each of us may find (or stumble upon?) our own methodology, relevant to our own subjectivity and temporal/spatial locality. This is an account of my tentative journey towards mine. This doesn't mean that it was an entirely haphazard process. I took with me some tools, like you do when embarking on any journey into the unknown. My dexterity with these tools, or 'practices', of inquiry also evolved. I spend some time in Chapter Two showing you which ones I took with me, and then in the rest of the thesis you can see how I learned to use them, particularly in the stories I tell, and the way these interweave with the main 'voice' of the thesis.

At the heart of this process is a proposition that there is an inherent relationship between knowledge and power, akin to what the 'Dr. Porter' is explaining in the excerpt above. In post-modern terms, this is about understanding that there is always a 'gaze', a way of understanding that is bound up with particular subjectivities. Those subjectivities aren't all 'equal' - they have different weight associated with them. The post-modern challenge is that traditional, 'positivist' inquiry is blind to its own gaze. My intention is to reveal and explore the challenges associated with the gaze of the white, male academic, (what one might call the 'dominant gaze'); and even the possibility of developing my own gazes, my different ways of seeing, as a developmental process, enhancing my capacity to relate to others, do my job, be a better father and a good man, what in Yiddish is called a '*mentsh*'. It is a worthwhile irony that this might include exploring my subjectivity as a young woman. To hold on to this subjectivity intends to deliberately disrupt the 'comfort' of a dominant masculinity.

In this sense then, with an inquiring approach, we are taking into account the challenge to a dominant worldview that post-modernism claims, and the resultant subjectivities we must consider, including our own.

Action research also suggests that we shouldn't be paralysed by the complex and difficult challenge to knowledge that post-modernism suggests.

As Yvonna Lincoln says:

*But within our partial and situated knowledges, we can nevertheless still move outward, inclusive in our orientation, thinking not first and last about our own research productivity, but rather about the selves we bring to our storytelling lives. (Lincoln 1997) p52*

This strikes a real chord with me. The possibility of bringing 'my-selves' to storytelling, as a research method, was a really exciting prospect, back in 2004, when I began this programme. Without it, I probably wouldn't have embarked on a PhD. This wasn't because (or with all honesty should I say *just* because) I am interested in my own story, but also because it felt like a refreshingly honest approach. I was always struck by the absence of the author in many 'academic' texts, and sometimes what appeared to be a disconnection between the author's 'theory' and their life lived in practice. I will suggest that this is a particularly an issue for men (as with the lecturer above). I do not claim here to have completely healed that rift myself, but I do at least make an effort towards it.

According to Peter Reason, in action research, quality is defined by our engagement with four characteristic dimensions, 'worthwhile practical purposes', 'democracy and participation', 'many ways of knowing' and 'emergent developmental form' (Reason 2003).

Ultimately it is to our choices that inquiry brings us:

*Thus in the practice of quality inquiry, researchers need to be aware of the choices open to them; to make these choices clear, transparent, and articulate to themselves, and to their inquiry partners; and in writing and presenting, to articulate them to a wider audience. (Reason 2003) p4*

I want to be as honest as possible in both the form and content of my writing; to try to unnerve the idea that might be presented through a required, linear text, that it was all 'just so'; that there was consistent, purposeful intention to present *this* knowledge in *this* way. This isn't a 'hero narrative', like the biographies of 'self made men' that I aim to transcend (see: (Mulholland 1996) or (Gergen 1992)), which I will say more about. Life isn't like that, so why should the texts that present 'experiential' knowledge try to fool the reader into thinking that it is?

Rather than pretending that I approached this research project 'just so' looking for a specific outcome, what I would rather suggest is that it has been about holding attention to a set of questions and about developing, finding or even stumbling upon certain practices to do so. For example, the evolution of a story set in the future was elicited by a persistent mulling over (or truthfully, worrying about) how this inquiry would have an impact in my life after this PhD was done.

Like Stephen King suggests, there was no 'plot' here:

*I distrust plot for two reasons: first, because our lives are largely plotless, even when you add in all our reasonable precautions and careful planning; and second, because I believe plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible.*

And:

*When during the course of an interview for the New Yorker, I told the interviewer (Mark Singer) that I believed stories are found things, like fossils in the ground. (King 2000) p159-160*

The stories grew into a central part of my research journey, in an evolutionary process, and in doing so, I found this offered me three important gifts:

- They enabled me to distil some of my experience of 'living life as inquiry', whilst holding in the foreground questions of gender and masculinity

- The process of writing it was in itself illuminating, in way that Laurel Richardson calls 'writing as method of inquiry' (Richardson 2005)
- As texts, stories, (particularly the one in Chapter Four, called 'Gender Future'), were useful to widen the research, involving and engaging others through their reading of it, and subsequent discussions and dialogue (see Chapter Five)

How did this work in more detail? Initially, this started with the heuristic of engaging in 'cycles of action and reflection', a central practice of Action Research. (Reason and Bradbury 2001). My own everyday 'action' was reflected in journaling, and this was further stimulated by reading relevant texts. This initial cycle provided raw material for stories, the writing of which constituted further action, which enabled me to further reflect, and indeed widen that reflection with others.

For example, I began to write letters to my children about my experience, as a journaling practice, about a year or so after my MPhil transfer in December 2006. These weren't letters I necessarily intended to send, or show to my children, at this point. There is of course a question here about whether one day they will read them, in the course of reading this thesis. Indeed, I hope they do, when the time is right for them, and that may set off another cycle of this inquiry. But for the time being, the impetus for this was to explore a particular subjectivity, relevant to an inquiry into masculinity: that of being a father. My intention was to head *towards* patriarchy, (an example of 'writing fearwards'). It was also because I wanted to learn to put things in more simple terms, and writing to my children was a practice that I hoped might help me find another, less 'academic' voice. Thirdly, it provided me with a way of inquiring into the gap between the public and private self that is characteristic of a male-dominated worldview. (I explain this further below). You can see some examples of this letter-writing reflective practice in Appendix One.

However the cycle of action and reflection in writing these letters opened a further door – the letters themselves provided the raw material and the imaginative impetus, through 'writing as inquiry', for the story that became what you see in Chapter Four. Once completed, that story could then be used as a research tool, to be shared with others, as further collaborative action and reflection. This story also offered the resources for a dialogic inquiry practice that you find particularly in Chapters Five and Six. And so on; the process is unfinished; you are also now invited into this widening conversation.

These cycles of action and reflection have been useful, with much growing out of them. After five years or so of this work, my experience is that I have started to live *within* these questions, embodying their complexity and the dilemmas they present, in my everyday thinking, practice and being. The stories enable me to show the evolutionary edges; nuances, paradoxes, discomfort, perplexity, danger. Most big questions in the social sphere, like those of masculinity and gender contain these edges. They might be the very things we are looking for in Action Research.

A story reaches out to the space between the author and reader. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury suggest that 1<sup>st</sup> person inquiry is 'an inquiring approach to [the researcher's] own life', whilst 2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiry is 'face to face with others' and 3<sup>rd</sup> is about 'the wider community of inquiry' (Reason and Bradbury 2008). This again is a useful heuristic. My purpose isn't to stay in 1<sup>st</sup> person inquiry but use it, through storytelling, to reach out to other's experience as well. My deliberate intention has been to play in the space between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiry. Although I drew on my own experience in writing narratives, my intention wasn't to be 'confessional', as Judy Marshall suggests:

*I do not, however, what to tell “confessional tales” to no purpose (but there may sometimes be valuable purposes) or to make myself or others vulnerable. There is an edge which needs awareness, and when we write from inquiry, it requires appropriate signalling. (Marshall 1999) p160*

The stories aim to keep you, the reader, with me, offering an ongoing space of inquiry between us, in which the perils and possibilities of a man holding onto gender questions may be glimpsed. Clandinin and Connelly describe something like this in their explanation of a ‘Three Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space’:

*...in any particular inquiry, one asks questions, collects field notes, derives interpretations, and writes a research text that addresses both personal and social issues by looking inward and outward, and addresses temporal issues by looking not only to the event but to its past and future. (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), p50)*

I also intend an added piquancy in writing a story that proposes itself as a work of ‘fiction’. That is, I deliberately chose to set the story ‘in the future’, as a further disruption of the proposition that this is ‘about me’ or about what has actually ‘happened’. I deliberately offer it as an expansive ‘dream’, set on a wider stage, a form whose scope is relevant to the content of gender and masculinity. These themes are huge and require a greater-than-individual canvas on which to portray the social forces at play. At the same time, I intend to use stories for practical purposes: inquiring into possibilities of action for individual players acting amongst these forces. Such a fictional account invites collaboration, or as Andrew Sparkes says:

*My hope is that the reader might think with the story and see where it takes them. For Arthur Frank (1995), thinking with stories involves allowing one’s own thoughts to adopt the story’s immanent logic, its temporality and its tensions and contradictions. When we think with stories, he suggests, the first lesson “is not to move on once the story has been heard, but to continue to live in the story, becoming in it, reflecting on who is becoming, and gradually modifying the story”. (p. 159). (Frank 1995) quoted by (Sparkes 2006) p29.*

This is also relevant to the political backdrop of my work. In being able to offer a ‘fictionalised’ account, but also one that draws on what is clearly recognisable as my experience, it has credibility as a text but without becoming *about* the relationships that provided models for it in ‘real life’. Playing along this edge between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ is a deliberate strategy to draw readers in (for example like my colleagues at Roffey Park) without becoming a personalised critique of anyone in particular. There is an ethical dimension to this: it would be my intention to keep it real enough to work as a narrative but without making anyone feel in any way criticised. This is also pragmatic choice. If it were the central purpose of my inquiry to critique these relationships, then maybe I would have fewer qualms, but it was not. On the contrary, my purpose was appreciative; to draw these colleagues and friends *into* the story, so that they may become more curious about the questions it raises.

A future-framed story is also a form congruent with a vital question that grew in intensity through this inquiry: how will life turn out for me, once this PhD process is over? How will I keep the freshness of this inquiry alive? Like the character of Jim Porter, the Lecturer in the story above, and Sarah Jones, his student, (both of whom you will meet again) how will I continue to struggle against the dynamics that such status confers upon me, as an ‘expert’ in this field?

## Showing Up

I would like to explain why masculinity is an area of content relevant to this inquiring form. As far as I can remember, my masculinity has always been of interest to me. Its abiding relevance is a bit of a mystery. If I was gay, perhaps it would have been easier to figure out why. But I am not (well, not 'officially', although, I am sure I could 'help out if they were busy', to paraphrase a gay quip about people who seem sure of their straightness). This inquiry is a further turn in an ongoing journey.

In Chapters Two and Three, I consider in different ways the relationship between my Jewishness and masculinity; the proposal that, as a Jew I can never quite live up to being '*the main man*', the dominant masculine model. But on the other hand, why don't all Jewish men have this interest? (Perhaps many do, and I am just surfacing a 'hidden transcript', as James Scott calls it, a subjectivity that lurks in shadow for many?) (Scott 1990).

When I was nineteen, I wrote:

*One day I will achieve a dream: to find a friend, a man. He will love without fear  
and I will walk with him, hand in hand.*

*And soon after, all men will be freed from their fear. And we will walk and talk  
and kiss without being, 'gay', or 'brothers', or 'female', just men at heart, freed  
from thousands of years of needing to be superior.  
1/7/84*

The following year I wrote:

*My hand drops to my side. I glance down, notice its size; large, long-fingered,  
veins pronounced, a man's hand.*

*I go home, tear off my clothes, step in front of the long mirror. A figure stares at  
the image. Male, human, which? Which FIRST?  
26/11/85*

I am both uncomfortable surfacing this (somewhat naïve) transcript, and proud of my nineteen year old self for his sensitivity to these questions. Of course, this could be just a young man's struggle with growing up, coming to terms his own identity and sexuality. But it shows that early on, this profound inquiry was taking root in me.

I am sure I was not that unique as a young man troubling over this. Yet for it to be so embodied, in such an emotional key, finds relatively rare expression, at least in teenage, 'heterosexual' men. I think this is one of the few things that is genuinely unusual about me; the fact that I present to the world as an ordinary, white, heterosexual, middle-class bloke, who has persisted in foregrounding this thorny set of questions.

I will try to show that when I am writing *about men*, I am also persistently visible to you in this process, showing up as *a man*. This is important because I regularly experience men to be generally absent in the texts they write. It is as if a category of 'hegemonic masculinity', as Bob Connell calls it, (an idea I elaborate later on), is expressed by both men and women in the depersonalised, disembodied writing so often witnessed in 'the Academy' (Connell 1995). It seems to be a habit of disembodiment. I notice with

some exasperation that even texts about men and masculinity can feel dry and inaccessible, with the author curiously absent:

*Research on men and masculinity therefore requires the researcher to apply a certain amount of reflexivity to the authority bases of his or her research accounts in order to interrogate critically epistemological claims to gendered knowledge. (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003) p114*

Is there an irony here? I agree with what Chris (Haywood) and Mairtin (Mac an Ghaill) are saying (though if I have never met them), although it took me some time to understand it. Isn't their language suggestive of a certain type of academic dominance? Who are they talking about, and who is doing the talking? Where are *they* in this? And how do we know what constitutes a *certain amount* of reflexivity? I notice my discomfort: have I already shown you too much 'reflexivity'?

It is my contention that real authority for transformation in this work, and genuine 'interrogation' (a harsh, perhaps even macho word?) of gendered knowledge and its epistemological basis, will come through our trembling, stumbling but proud embodiment, our 'coming out' in our texts - our very presence (Right here! Right now!), which in itself is a valid challenge to the absent, 'pale, stale male' selves that we can so easily be (or disappear into) in our writing, our 'lecturing' and in our lives (Jacques 1997).

But this 'showing up' requires some skill. It is a challenge not to appear mawkish, overly sentimental, or self-absorbed. Could I be seduced into a heroic construction of some odyssey that in its perfect circularity of exile and return would perfectly answer all your questions and help you avoid the ones we all wanted to avoid? Somehow this ever-present form would become a trap, suggestive of a coherent self that is, I suggest, literally mythical. Instead the form I would like to adopt here is tentative, shaky. It is proud and determined to speak, but from a place of yearned-for honesty and nakedness; the type of openness that I should exude (but regularly demur) towards my own loved ones. This makes for a 'Dionysian' inquiry, as John Heron calls it, tentatively emerging from the private underworld, blinking in the light. (Heron 1996).

*The Dionysian inquiry takes a more imaginal, expressive, spiralling, diffuse, impromptu and tacit approach to the interplay between making sense and action. (Heron 1996) p46*

I am a shape-shifting entity. I experience myself in constant physical, mental and emotional flux, in the way the lecturer 'Jim Porter' describes in the story above. My suspicion is that finding a voice for this variegated range of private self in the public domain offers a generative possibility. To show you some of this range would be a useful contribution to this field, evidence in itself of the difficult road we tread towards being more present. This isn't for the sake of airing our pathology, or for a solipsistic wallow, but as a practice of escape from a kind of haunting, in the service of developing the practices to chase away a spectre: a type of masculinity that can and does persistently possess us. In that sense, how can the stories about our 'queer' (uncertain, colourful, fragmented, *honest*) private selves serve us?

We could all do with being liberated from the habits of dominance, at the core of which I maintain is a public presentation of self whose coherence incessantly mocks the private self that cowers secretly within. To invite this private, shaking creature to show up, or at least blur the line between these public and private selves, in the service of this liberation, requires a little more than a 'certain amount of reflexivity'. This is

because, (as many gay people know), 'coming- out' is a political process, and like any political process it needs careful management.

Paradoxically, to show you some of this private self requires careful selection, thoughtful choices and the application of an inquiring craft. To have some self-awareness towards a specific set of questions is one thing: to show it is even more of a challenge. So we need carefully considered devices, and in dry text, telling enough stories to break down the walls between us. The irony of this occurs to me: how *artful* I must be in the demolition of the masculine edifice. I can't just blurt out my private despairs, even if they are present. I need to be craft-y, 'dextrous' (right-handed) in print (as with a sword), to show my 'endearing fallibility'.

I am attempting an honest dishonesty; showing just enough of my incoherence as a generative possibility, opening up a space of inquiry between us. Such acts are indeed a challenge to the authority bases of established epistemologies, the 'ways of knowing' that suggest an author is a coherent, fixed and genderless thing, a dispassionate commentator of universal knowledge. So we make an artifice together, a three-way conspiracy between reader, author and text that would suggest this argument came out whole, seamless and even thoroughly spell-checked. It didn't of course, and you would know that in your heart of hearts, but how much discomforting honesty can you take?

I am writing to you along 'an edge' of inquiry right now, within this private/public gap of self. I wonder what private and public self-spaces you occupy, my reader? This is the edge that needs exploring, because in doing so we directly challenge a vital edifice of masculinity; that of the public, 'self-made' man, who is 'fully formed' and 'in one piece', as Sarah Porter discusses in the story above.

### **Finding Form**

Judy Marshall discussed the finding of 'form' as the meeting point between inquiry and literature, and this is what I am moving towards now, as a demonstration of how the writing form itself developed within my work.

*By form, I mean the shape of the writing – its pattern, style, flow and eventual structure. (Marshall 2007) p684*

and that:

*Finding form requires bypassing the censors, accrediting your right to write, identifying and dismissing internalized notions of 'standards' which are inviting your conformity or subduing your voice. Freed from such expectations you may then know how to write what is yours to write. (Marshall 2007) p690.*

In this section, I'd like to explore how I found my 'form'; that is how this writing as inquiry evolved in a way that enable process and content to emerge congruently with each other. There is a crafting dimension to this: using narrative necessitates an awareness of the story having artistry but not just for its own sake: it has to enhance the inquiry process. In my case, it was about showing the dilemmas of a man engaging in a lived response to feminism, in what I call an 'inquiring masculinity', and also to draw others into that inquiry for themselves.

Considering what such a narrative 'claims' is an important starting point:

*Despite the actual blurring of genres, and despite our contemporary understanding that all writing is narrative writing, I would contend that there is still one major difference separating fiction from science writing. The difference is not whether the text really is fiction or nonfiction, but the claim the author makes for the text. (Richardson 2005) p926*

So the issue isn't whether the stories are fictional or not, but what I claim to offer in developing them. There is a meeting point here, if you will, between inquiry, so-called fiction (or biography) and even manifesto.

It feels important to explain why this last one figure on my list. I would suggest that when dealing with challenging, politically complex subjects, like gender and masculinity, there is a need to enhance doubt by adding a spice of manifesto, in order to stand a chance of challenging the overpowering flavours of unquestioned assumptions. This is the 'appropriate contentiousness' that Judi Marshall suggests as a mark of quality in finding form (*Marshall 2007*).

A fixed, bi-polar notion of gender is centrally embedded in our culture. The expectation that gender is an essential quality of men and women in is so rooted, so 'rhizomatic', as it has been described at length elsewhere (Linstead and Linstead 2005) that perhaps we need a bit of polemic to incite a different awareness? Dry research texts that claim to challenge the essential 'differences' between men and women may lack the rhetorical power to make an impact. To really make that claim, maybe we need something more impactful, even emotive, and seemingly 'personal', such as a story, at the risk that it might come across as a bit of a manifesto.

As action researchers, we accept that there is an inherent link between power and knowledge. This link can be explored and shown, in practical terms, by our exploration of the 'gaze'. In short, how do we take account of, and use, our understanding of who is looking? Hence the above story is written through the gaze of a character who started off as a marginal figure in the original story that comprises Chapter Four.

So a story that can claim to be a deliberately ambiguous framing of my personal experience, or science fiction, or both, is such a play for both inquiry and advocacy. Indeed, a claim to 'play' with these ideas, using story that has deliberate ambiguities and paradoxes in it (as subject and form) is also useful as part of this disruption of things that are often taken as 'reality', like fixed genders. To quote Gregory Bateson:

*Paradox is doubly present in the signals which are exchanged within the context of play, fantasy, threat, etc. Not only does the playful nip [of playing animals] not denote what would be denoted by the bite for which it stands, but, in addition the bite itself is fictional. Not only do the playing animals not quite mean what they are saying but, also, they are usually communicating about something which does not exist. At a human level, this leads to a vast variety of complications and inversions in the fields of play, fantasy, and art. Conjurers and painters of the trompe l'oeil school concentrate upon acquiring a virtuosity whose only reward is reached after the viewer detects he has been deceived and is forced to smile or marvel at the skill of the deceiver. (Bateson 1972) p182*

A story uses these 'complications and inversions' as a tool. For example to deliberately frame it as a story that may or may not be 'about me' is part of the trick, to enable greater collective interest in my inquiry areas. Like a trompe l'oeil painting, the aim is to draw people into the scene. The fact that people who I wanted to take an interest in this inquiry process (such as colleagues at Roffey Park) often asked me:

'How on earth can you use a **story** in a PhD?', is an example of this play. Similarly, people would read the story in Chapter Four and then say 'Oh, I GET it now! – I get what you have been saying about gender!' Similarly I have had people who read this story say to me: 'It is about you, isn't it?' This has enabled me to have a discussion with them about whether this is fantasy or whether it is real; and whether things in the story can or will happen. This is all useful play, just like the kind of trompe l'oeil that Bateson is discussing above.

*Postmodernism claims that writing is always partial, local, and situational, and that our Self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it – but only partially present, for in our writing we repress some of ourselves too. Working from that premise frees us to write material in a variety of ways: to tell and re-tell. There is no such thing as "getting it right" – only "getting it" differently contoured and nuanced. (Richardson 2005) p931*

So, 'getting it', is the portal to a dialogue. This is an important quality consideration in choosing both to write a 'fictional story' and also in *how* to write it: to keep enough recognisable features in it (of me, or of Roffey Park, for example, the model for the 'Institute' in the stories that unfold) without it being necessarily *about* me or Roffey Park. This was an essential 'edge' to write along.

### **Staying on the Edge of Not Knowing**

In starting to explain how the story came together, I am reminded again of the above quote from Gregory Bateson. It is as if I am a conjuror asked to explain his or her tricks, and in doing so, does some of the magic get lost? Am I scared that in talking about my story I will be 'revealed' in some unfavourable way; that you will see the thinness of the walls; that you may discover there wasn't that much substance to this? These are edgy fears I feel as I write now, and I do so to serve as an illustration: writing the story was about staying in this sense of this 'edginess'.

I wonder whether this 'edginess' may become a mark of the quality of the kind of inquiring masculinity I am striving for? The concept of the edge has become an important marker of my developing form. Learning to recognise and work with that inner turbulence of 'not knowing' has been a useful counterpoint to the tendency for men to present themselves as 'fully formed'.

I am therefore incited to look closely at the inferences and patterns in my own thinking, being and acting. My hypothesis is that 'in the moment' goodness is enacted in some kind of awareness, not as a paragon but as a committed inquiry into discomfiting questions. This edge of discomfort, this kind of 'trembling' (as facilitation specialist Toke Mulder describes it), is an important mark of quality in this inquiry process (Mulder 2007), congruent with the mission of undermining the 'comfortable' mainstream position of men. When we feel this trembling, it acts as a kind of doorway to a greater questioning, a shift to another level of awareness and action. In an example in the Appendix, I use this edge of discomfort to question an assumption that I am a 'better' father than my own.

I intend that goodness (particularly in the context of exploring masculinity) becomes measurable in the way this edge of discomfort is negotiated. This is a useful heuristic – as both the reader and the writer, our awareness is raised, appropriately, by our own physical, emotional, *embodied* experience of discomfort. My intention isn't to make you uncomfortable for the sake of it, but to uncover the private disturbances that may be masked by the public discourses in this area of inquiry. I am attempting to walk along a useful, discomfiting edge, but not to push discomfort into dis-ease.

I am playing between a space with enough coherence to be able to make relationship with others but also enough uncertainty and 'not knowing', to stay true to the lived experience of uncertain times. As men (and as women living up to the patriarchal ideal) do we tend to hide our 'not knowing' behind a mask of supposed certainty, of expertise, particularly in the 'Academy', or in a business school, like Roffey Park, where, as the Lecturer in the previous interlude described, we are being paid 'lots of money' for it? In my writing process, I tried to actively explore this 'edge' as a creative, inquiring territory, between coherence and not knowing.

Naomi Raab may be referring to this when she talks about 'Becoming an Expert in Not Knowing':

*the terrible anxiety experienced by both client and consultant (students and lecturer) when forced to stay in the present and face their own unknowingness. (Raab 1997) p175*

Raab adds:

*Consultants need to develop more adaptive and useful ways of containing anxiety so that a space can be made for real learning. (Raab 1997) p175*

In this respect, writing as an inquiry process is about writing towards the *not* knowing, as if towards a kind of darkness, staying close to that inner turbulence. When writing, sometimes I feel this anxiety strongly. At times I would write a line or paragraph of story, sit back and panic: 'Ohmygosh! How will someone read THAT? What will they think about me?' I look back at what I've written and make a choice about whether it was too edgy, or not edgy enough. Using this edge becomes an active practice, in writing and in wider life.

Barbara Turner-Vesselago talks about writing 'fearwards':

*To discover where the writing really wants to take us, it helps to keep sensing our energy. If more than one path presents itself, we need to be able to ask, "Which has the most energy for me?", and follow that one. If the answer to that question is still obscure, my advice is, "Go Fearwards". The strongest energy will almost always be found in whatever we most fear to write about. It seems to gather where the ego's shell is the weakest, just as water seeks out the cracks in any dyke. (Turner-Vesselago nd) p11*

As I show in Chapter Five and Six, this 'edge' has use in my practice as a tutor/consultant/facilitator. I start to use this feeling of turbulence in my practice when working with a group, as a sign that what we are doing has some real currency and has the possibility of working to avoid what Raab describes a 'collusion against learning'.

I link this edge to Buddhist teaching. I recognise a resonance with this concept of the edge, and in this case why we might avoid it:

*It is the ego's ambition to secure and entertain itself, trying to avoid all irritation. (Trungpa 1973, 2002) p6*

What I illustrate here is the emergent and even messy way knowledge formation using these kinds of 'edgy' tools can happen. It is about using my personal experience and articulating it without becoming too locked into it. I think Ellis and Bochner put the

challenge here well, when explaining how traditional social scientists might be affronted by such a seemingly personal account:

*They think that if these personal voices can be silenced, then perhaps they can return to business as usual in the social sciences, protected against the contingencies of human experience, restored in their traditional belief in a transcendent position from which to speak (and interpret) with authority, freed of moral choices and emotional dilemmas, and inspired to champion control over fate, facts over meanings, and rigor over peace of mind. (Ellis and Bochner 2000) p747*

Laurel Richardson talks of a 'constitutive force' and this seems to describe best as anything what this edge felt like (Richardson 2005). The immersion in the questions, over a five-plus-year period seems to me to have been a vital nutrient for this process.

So the form I was looking for in the story as it unfolded was one that had congruence with the issues I have highlighted in an inquiring masculinity. Again I would argue that this form is perhaps easier to see afterwards than during the writing. The edge I was writing towards was emergent. As a colleague, David, pointed out having read the story in Chapter Four:

*At the beginning [of the story] I experienced you as more of an 'academicky' type person, who was professorial and at the end you were a real human being that kind of just got younger in being who you are." (Transcript of dialogue with David Lines, 16/9/08)*

What David was pointing out was that as in both the form and content of the story, as it progressed, there was an increasing congruence with the themes of the story, searching for that paradoxically fluid masculinity. When David pointed this out, it was a surprise to me. I wouldn't argue that I had deliberately intended this in the creative process of writing, but I would say that it delighted me to realise this aspect of congruence wasn't merely coincidental; it could even be considered to be a mark of the quality of the inquiry that this kind of pattern is discernable.

### **From Position to Performativity – 'being' to 'becoming'**

In search of *mentshlichkeit*, I intend to 'show up' in this work, because finding a way to be more present serves both personal and political ends. This aligns me with a type of liberation that feminist and 'queer theorists' seek, recognising that:

*The body becomes a peculiar nexus of culture, choice, and "existing" one's body becomes a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms. (Butler and Salih 2004) p28*

This thesis traces the recent turns in an ongoing journey. I conceive this as a turn away from 'being' someone to learning to 'become' someone. In my terms, 'being someone' was about resting in the status of a certain role. It was about the man who 'knew' things, was an 'expert' in his field. In waking up to 'who I was' because of this role, I found myself at odds with my espoused values. This was 'being' as in 'being someone important', who occupied a position of authority, even if this someone was doing something that appeared to be (on the surface) generative. 'Becoming' is about learning through inquiry to find ways to act in a more imminent, phenomenologically fresh way, coming back to the 'edge' of experience, and finding deeper, subtler ways of living according to these values, perhaps looking more towards the *not* known.

*James Traeger is a pioneer of men's development in the UK and beyond. He has over 15 years unique experience of leading the research, development and delivery of learning events specifically addressing the lives and choices of men in the workplace and beyond. (Traeger, Willis et al. 1999, 2006)*

In 1999 I became the published author and developer of a personal development programme called 'Navigator'. Navigator is a 4-day personal development programme, running over 3 months, with an accompanying workbook, of which I was the main author. The biography above is taken from the current edition of that workbook. Broadly, Navigator was supported by a pro-feminist alliance. It was backed by the UK's 'Equal Opportunities Commission' (now the Commission for Equality and Human Rights) and co-developed in partnership with a consultancy specialising in women's personal development, called 'Springboard'.

For ten years or so, Navigator was very much 'my baby'. Its aim was to specifically address some of the questions of masculinity in work in the light of the challenges of feminism, and the changing nature of organisations. The political economy of this work was simple: companies and organisations paid for it because through such a process of self-discovery, workers became more motivated and productive. For the sake of this project, I don't foreground my role with Navigator, or consider in depth whether it was founded on a sound ideological basis, but rather I focus on how this inquiry coincided with my choice to stop being 'Mr. Navigator' in 2006.

It was at this time that I bumped up against a personal dilemma which expressed the essence of 'being someone' rather than 'becoming'. I described it to a colleague in a research interview, and I offer it to you from that recorded transcript, to give you the immediacy another, spoken voice:

*The Big Man's Salad (27/2/08)*

*There is something about the paradox of this work is for me, one of the paradoxes of this whole inquiry is: being a man, doing this work is both a position. I am a man, who runs development programmes changing men, but also about who am I in that and whether I am the man that is the change I want to see in the world.*

*And, there is something about the Navigator story for me, which is why I got out of it, which is incongruent there. I did not feel that I was congruent. There was a sense in which I was going through the motions and that frightened me.*

*There's a story about this. I used to run the Navigator programme at Cambridge University. It was a very prestigious programme to run, for post-grad, PhD and university administrators. It was at Hughes Hall in Cambridge - a beautiful place, a typical Oxbridge College. We worked in this lovely room, with a big atrium. The University would book me in about June to run this programme in January. This happened every year. The programme would start in January, so it was, like a regular gig, between January and April.*

*So I know the place and there is work in my dairy, with a regular income. They paid well. One of the regular guest speakers on the programme would be Dr. Tim Mead, who was the head of University, which was one the reasons why it was happening, because he was the Chief in the University and he was really liked having conversations with me about 'who he was as a man', and he had quite an interesting story to tell and so he was up for it. It was something that I think he enjoyed contributing to. He was the top administrator of the top*

*university in the world (Cambridge) and yet he would define himself as a failed chemist, because he did a PhD in chemistry and could not get a post-doc job, so he went into university administration. He told this story with irony.*

*I'd put on a quite a bit weight between the ages of about 35 and 40. I put on nearly a couple of stone and this worried me a bit. So I went on a diet. The University would always provide a big sandwich lunch. So, I asked them if they could just make me a salad, instead of having all these sandwiches, which they promptly did.*

*The fascinating thing was that the following year, when the programme came around again, I wasn't on that diet anymore. But on the second Tuesday in the month or whatever it was, I arrived at Hughes Hall, to run that programme, and the salad was there again! A year later, without me asking for it, they had programmed it in!*

*This tells you something about Cambridge University: it took ages to change things, but once something was established in the fabric of the place, 800 years hence, the salad would arrive on that table at that particular Tuesday, and it was interesting, because at one level, I was really frightened by that. I was absolutely terrified, because there is a sense of habit in this work that this had become.*

*The Navigator Programme was all about you living your life, about being 'baked afresh', being real and true to yourself and living your values. The idea that I have gone into this pattern of ritual...it worried me. Funnily enough, my friend Chris Sharpe took over running the programme the next year. And, guess what? The salad is still there!*

I am not that interested in a critique of *Navigator* per se. It could be argued there was a fundamental challenge to the traditional patterns of masculinity in the very premise of the *Navigator* programme, which was about men providing for each other a nurturing, learning space. With women absent, men were relying emotionally, psychologically and physically on each other. To set this up as a regular, repeated practice was useful disruption in itself.

More importantly, though, in terms of my own development, I had a sense in which I was taking a 'position' in the role of the developer of *Navigator*, yet I wasn't all that clear whether this meant I had done the work of change on myself. Had I in fact become the sort of man that uses the instruments of feminism, and in particular the language of equality, to avoid changing myself?

*Men are said to study feminism in order to co-opt it and turn it towards their own interests (Marcus, 1988:100) or to approach it as a topic to 'get on top of' or as a terrain to be 'conquered' and not as a process to which to commit oneself (Sofia, 1993:36). (Pease 2000) p11*

How far had I allowed adopting the position of being the man who offers a deliberate programme of 'changing men' to allow me to opt out of considering my performances, 'becoming the change myself', to use Ghandi's famous saying?

This was crystallised for me in a powerful dream, which I wrote about in my first year of study at Bath University/CARPP. In the dream, I was driving an ambulance in a war, carrying the limbs of men who had to be reassembled. I was sitting in the cab of this ambulance, furiously driving, with an uncomfortable sense in my stomach that wasn't

doing anything very useful. In fact I was just part of a process of patching these men up so they could go out there again and 'carry on fighting'. This dream became a signifier of my frustrations with *Navigator*.

Working with the principle of 'going fearwards', I worked on this dream, through a piece of 'first person inquiry', in writing a letter to my children. This letter-writing was a reflective practice and in developing it, I was learning to find a new voice, a different and sometimes revealing subjectivity. I found that writing to my children in this way held me to an ethos of honesty. Below I offer an extract from this particular letter:

*"I suppose I saw men and masculinity, right back then, at the beginning as an opportunity for my own ambition. It always seemed important to me to be different. Even when I was young, I used to try and think of something that made me special, made me stand out from the crowd. I remember a sense a feeling like I was drowning of I didn't stand out in some way. It was a physical sensation, a clenching in my chest, a breathlessness, a need to 'come up for air', as if I would disappear if I wasn't 'special'...  
So another story reveals itself – Navigator not as a burning desire to do 'men's work'; but as an experiment in continued self –importance, or at least the primal struggle for differentiation.  
And so now, when I say to you that I miss Navigator (as I do) I wonder whether I also (as a greater part of this) just miss being a 'special one', who can do this special, unique work...that rather destroys this heroic image of a man 'born to do menswork' - the story that I usually tell people."  
(Fearwards on Navigator... to a 'grown up' Max 15/3/08)*

In this particular dream-letter-inquiry, then, I surfaced my own ambition around this work, and that one of the reasons I went into doing the *Navigator* programme was because it differentiated me as a facilitator, and gave me platform for my own work.

In this way I was confronted with one of those 'gender interference patterns' Judi Marshall describes: being a man who wanted to have an impact on masculinity, realising that this desire in itself (in its grandiosity) may partly have its roots in that very masculinity that he wants to change (Marshall 1999). At one level, such insight may lead one to paralysis; is there not 'clean' trajectory along which one can clearly act 'for good'? And yet curiously, developing an inquiring perspective, it becomes far from paralysing: I maintain that it becomes a fascinating, useful, liberating space, an inquiry ground from which then one does make fine-grained, useful choices in the world.

In 2006, I left the Navigator project, and went to work at Roffey Park Institute. I wouldn't argue that there was a direct causal link between the dream-inquiry and that choice, but it is reflective of a discomfort that built towards the decision. Broadly, Roffey is a business school, based on a set of humanistic principles. In Chapter Five and Six, I talk more about the place of this inquiry in my work here. There is a story I tell people when I am giving a traditional CV-account of my career which was that this shift to Roffey was deliberate, 'self made' move towards a wider stage where I could have a bigger impact. But in fact it could also be seen as grasping an opportunity to move away from this double-bind, and now "finding myself" at Roffey Park (in both senses of this phrase) using an inquiring frame *to be* this change, to embody a more inquiring kind of masculinity.

In the novel the *Life of Pi* by Yann Martell, the main character in the story, a shipwrecked boy, finds himself sharing a lifeboat with a tiger, an almost impossible situation, yet one with which he then finds an accommodation (Martell 2003). This is a great metaphor for the transition I made; in escaping from one situation, one can find

oneself confronted in the dangers and pitfalls of the next, the very aspects of oneself that one hoped to escape and are a lifetime's work to address. For me, the tiger represents a type of dominant masculinity that can haunt me from time to time. This inquiry is about how I accommodate it and develop practices to try and stay just beyond its grasp.

Roy Jacques articulates this dilemma well:

*How can I even dare to claim pro-feminist status when, after years of studying and trying to love feminist values, I can articulate the surprising amount of gender-typical baggage which my wife and I carry into our disagreements, but have little ability to change it? I know that portraying women as available sex objects promotes patriarchal oppression; why is my visceral response to sexist advertising inconsistent with my espoused beliefs? (Jacques 1997) p85*

In my own case, feminist friends and queer theorists, such as Judith Butler, have been a great inspiration in this shift from talking *about* gender, and being the expert in this (as *Mr. Navigator*) towards considering my own 'performance' of gender, what Judith Butler calls 'performativity':

*Beauvoir suggests an alternative to the gender polarity of masculine disembodiment and feminine enslavement to the body in her notion of the body as a "situation". The body as situation has at least a twofold meaning. As a locus of cultural interpretation, the body is a material reality that has already been located and defined within a social context. The body is also a situation of having to take up and interpret that set of received interpretations. As a field of interpretive possibilities, the body is a locus of the dialectical process of interpreting anew a historical set of interpretations which have already informed corporeal style. (Butler and Salih 2004) p28-29*

In my own story, my interpretive possibilities become the issue for research. We enter a more nuanced, problematic but potentially fruitful ground of research when considering the detail of this interpretation. This is about being someone who is an 'expert' in this work, to 'becoming' someone, in the moment, or 'in the nick of time' as Elizabeth Grosz would have it, (Grosz 2004). Rather than being a 'good man' as defined by what I *did* (i.e. Navigator), could I be a good man in terms of *how I am*? This is about moving from a comfortable position of 'being someone' to the discomfort of endless 'becoming'; about taking a 'position' to considering my ongoing 'performativity'.

Building on Judith Butler's notion of 'performativity', Elizabeth Grosz, a contemporary American feminist writer, suggests:

*The more we affirm the value of the nick, the cut, or rupture, the more we revel in the untimely and the more we make ourselves untimely. Political activism addresses itself primarily to a reconfiguring of the past and a form of justice in the present that redresses or rectifies the harms of the past. It needs to be augmented with those dreams of the future that make its project endless, unattainable, ongoing experiments rather than solutions. (Grosz 2004) p14*

In order to make this a research project, rather than just a memoir or confessional autobiography, I am interested in asking the questions about how I know I have the capacity to effect a nick, rupture or cut in the fabric of the kind of patterns around gender and masculinity that I am subject to and play out. Like Bob Pease:

*From this position, I can seek to continue dialogue with feminism as a basis for critical self-reflection. (Pease 2000) p14*

John Rowan calls the patterns that we may find ourselves acting out in respect to gender and masculinity the 'patripsych'. (Rowan 2005) He suggests that the only way to deal with the patripsych's deep hold on us is through psychotherapeutic means. But could Butler's performativity, and similarly Grosz's 'nick, or 'rupture' offer us more hope, in that we can proliferate new subjectivities, and performances of gender, rather than succumbing to their heavy and inevitable weight on us?

*Performativity is Butler's theory of gender that accentuates a process of repetition that produces gendered subjectivity. This repetition is not simply a performance by a subject but a performativity that constitutes a subject and produces the space of conflicting subjectivities that contests the foundations and origins of stable identity categories. ...And because subjects can subversively transform, refuse, parody, or rupture the laws of discourse, thereby reconstituting themselves, identities emerge from discourse and power relations as neither foundational grounds nor fully expressed products. (Jackson 2004) p675*

Jackson proposes that we learn to enact 'interruptions', as 'moments of grappling with' ideas (such as Judith Butler's). Such became the aim of my story-writing, as it evolved, to both be such an interruption, in itself, in the community around me, and also to demonstrate the problematic nature of such interruptions (in the narrative itself) and also in the writing process. It was to show the false basis of 'foundational grounds' in gender in my own life and also to express the unfinished products of such work in my own life and my wider community.

For Grosz, the nicks or ruptures we make are part of evolution's proliferation, in the Darwinian sense. I allowed my own story to proliferate, expanding into the possibilities suggested by the ingredients of journaling, letter-writing and so on. In a Darwinian context, evolution has direction but is blind. It doesn't have teleology; a future destination for its action. Its direction is provided by the motive force of simply growing, mutating in the present. This is the 'nick of time' as Grosz says (Grosz 2004). The natural variations (or mutations) of individuals are selected according to the environment they find themselves in, here and now. This is so-called 'natural selection'. I would suggest that in writing the stories you find herein, my own creative inquiry process was similarly 'blind'; it was moving towards the uncomfortable as well as the fantastical, a deliberate attempt to expand beyond my own limited horizons and take into account the wider, larger forces that may be at play in and around gender, but at no point did I claim to know the 'end point'. In the biographies of 'heroes', the urge to explain the present as if it was a series of inevitable choices in the past, towards a deliberate future, is always, according to a Darwinian interpretation, artificial and post hoc.

Elizabeth Grosz argues, along with Judith Butler, that, by its very blindness, nature provides us with an *opportunity* as gender activists. This opportunity is always 'in the here and now'. It was in this awareness that I was able to quite suddenly write the latter sections of Chapter Four, as a kind of futuristic dream where all sorts of possibilities could combine with my own story to configure a future which was quite fantastical, a possibility if not probability. The point wasn't to show what 'shall' happen but what 'could' happen; an intention to see the possibilities of gender going forward. It was about affirming *possibility*. As such, it was 'Darwinian', perhaps a surprising influence on a gender inquiry:

*What remains crucial and relatively unrecognized by feminists and others in [Darwin's] writings, is the reconfiguration of culture in light of the fundamental openness he attributes to the natural world. Culture – whether patriarchal, class-based, or racist - is no longer the extension and completion of nature, the coloring in of the contours provided by nature. Nature is open to any kind of culture, to any kind of "artificiality", for culture itself does not find pre-given biological resources, but makes them for its own needs, as does nature itself. (Grosz 2004) p72*

I feel a sense of minor triumph to be able to use Darwinian and biological arguments in the service of a pro-feminist cause. All too often, the 'biological' case is cited as grounds for the foundationalist, 'natural' arguments of bipolar gender difference, and social policy that proposes a fossilisation of gender roles. In a misunderstanding of Darwin, people look *backwards* and, proposing that gender norms and roles have evolved thus far in this way, suggest this is what is 'natural', going forward. On the contrary, a Darwinian perspective suggests the future of gender is highly *unpredictable*.

The clarion call of populist works such as Allan and Barbara Peases': '*Why Men don't listen and women can't read maps*'. (Pease and Pease 1999) is that '*men and women are different, because their bodies and brains are different. It's natural.*' To be able to argue that on the contrary, a biological/ technological evolution is likely (and indeed happening) that could fundamentally transform gender relations, (for example, by separating reproductive biology from its dimorphic history), feels very much like hoisting these populist authors by their own petards. I cannot hide a sense of delight I feel at this opportunity.

My thinking was stimulated by other texts, both fiction and non-fiction, including, for example Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto". (Haraway 1991). Haraway's message of gender possibility was irresistible:

*Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves...It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories, Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. (Haraway 1991) p181*

Such reading lent itself to a fictional account as an attempt at cyborg imagery helping me (and hopefully inspiring others) out of the 'maze of dualisms'. It helped me to crystallise the manifesto of my own. I was prompted in my writing to answer some of my colleagues at Roffey Park, who, for example, might say that gender 'isn't an issue' or that they just 'don't get it'. This isn't, I believe, because they were being deliberately obtuse, but perhaps because they had spent less time than me thinking about the possibilities. And why should they? But could other possibilities be revealed, by something more than just a polemic? Perhaps a cyborg-inspired story might be something attractive enough to draw them in, and to participate in something else? And shouldn't a good man, a 'mentsh', learn to tell a good story, a cyborg-story, one fit for the times he is in?

## Interlude – From the Journal of Sarah Jones - December 15th 2019

### Seeing Gender for What it Really Is

I'm pregnant. I can't believe it. What timing! I'm trying to finish my PhD. I don't quite know how to do cap it all off. I wanted to say something about how we resist the conditioning, what is it Jim called it – the 'haunting' of gender? But suddenly the world takes a turn and catches me completely by surprise. What I'm trying to say *matters* much more. It's less theoretical. The whole world seems to have changed, from the inside out. This last couple of years have been a whirl; meeting Steve, deciding to give up my job and go for the research work full time, still trying to finish this PhD, getting nearer to a constantly receding end point. Then I find out I'm pregnant! Gathering my thoughts, the really significant thing I suppose was meeting Jim again. He seemed so different. He was *different*. I want to recall the conversation...it was about a month ago: I'm walking down the corridor in the Institute, on my way to library. The place is so familiar now, in all its cosiness. It still seems so cocooned from the outside world. And what a world! I think it was just *after* the eco-shocks. Those unbelievable pictures. President Obama announcing the move of the Capitol to Denver. Washington abandoned. London in a state of emergency. Travel bans were just being imposed, so I made a dash for the Institute, and made it just in time.

I pass this man. At first I wasn't sure if it was a man. He was wearing a sort of Arabic robe, long, white and flowing, and his hair was so long. But he was so tall, and his hands so big. They made me do a double take. His eye catches mine. In that moment of uncertainty, I turn my head and he smiles. I say hello and he stops. His smile was the thing that caught me. I'd never actually seen him smile before.

- Hello, aren't you... Sarah?
- Yes that's right, Sarah Jones. You're Dr. Porter, aren't you?
- Yes, that's right. Jim.

He holds out both hands, which I take in a sort of double handshake, awkwardly.

- Jim. Yes, hello Jim.
- Hello Sarah.

His eyes sparkle a bit. They are still that cool grey blue but he seems so much softer. Is it just his clothes, or is there something else? An awkward silence passes between us. He breaks it.

- So, how are you getting along? Are you...
- ...Yes, still finishing. It's more of a marathon than a sprint, isn't it?
- Oh yes, I remember that feeling well.
- And I've given up my job. It seems so pointless now, what with what's happened, plus I felt restricted there. I've written about it: having to be more of a man than any of the men to be any good. That's the gist of it, at least. How are you?
- Oh. You know. Bothered by what's going on...
- Yes, that's understandable. But you look... *well*.

He flaps his arms and the long white cloak billows out. He continues:

- This? Ah yes. I'm experimenting.
- Experimenting?
- Yes, I've been meeting with this group of people. They feel there's a link between what's going on...and, how we are, in ourselves, how we think...
- Ah! I've heard about this! Your one of those...'dragsters'...?
- Yes, but we prefer 'mystical adrogynes'. Yes. Well. I'm just experimenting with it really. I'm not really a 'joiner'. I just like what they have to say. They're looking a little deeper for the answers.

He looked really uncomfortable, for the first time. Was he was sizing up my reaction to this? He seemed so vulnerable. That's something I'd never seen before in him. I felt the need to reassure.

- I think it's...really interesting. An interesting response. And really relevant, to my ...research I mean.

I feel awkward that I may have offended him by turning him into a curiosity. But he looks relieved.

- Good. Thanks. Peoples' responses have been very...varied.
- I'll bet they must have been!

Oh God! Not the thing to say! I blush and rush to cover my embarrassment

- Actually, I'm on the way to the library, to look at your PhD, amongst other things.

He seems really thrilled by this, but it was true, so worth saying, I think?

- Really?!
- Yes, actually it has been quite an inspiration to me, in my own work. I really like the stuff around the 'hegemonic haunting' – how gender might be, like a ghost or spectre...what did you call it...?
- *Sheyd*, in Yiddish, *Sheydim* - plural, almost like a kind of demonic possession.
- Yes that's it. That's a really interesting idea. Like a mind virus, it kind of takes us over and we find ourselves performing in certain ways, even if they are against the very things we say we want.
- That's right. I mean, yes, that's the way I look at it.
- I'm working on that from a woman's point of view. I'm interested in how women even with feminist views still end up acting out performances of gender that can seem to contradict them.
- Did you read Amanda Sinclair's stuff on that?
- 'Body Possibilities'? Yes. It's good. But, actually you might be able to help me with a question. Do you mind, have you got a moment? I really need to say something about this.
- Yes as a matter of fact I do. What is it?
- I am trying to find out what we can do about it.
- Ah! Your pragmatic streak, Sarah! You always did want an answer to that!

This takes me back. He seems to know me better than I'd realised. I hadn't thought I'd made that much of an impact.

- Yes, I suppose I did. I do. It seems really important, and I know that in post-modern research we aren't just trying to isolate cause and effect but to look at the subjectivities etc. etc. blah, blah, blah. But there must still be things we can do. I don't know...sort of, practices, even rituals that help us...to...immunise ourselves...escape...?
- There's so much I can say about that. And of course, I am still struggling with it. Perhaps more so now than I did when I was working on my own PhD. That's why I am doing this...The truth is, I'm still looking.

He gestures to his clothes once again. I am struck by a change in him that seems more than sartorial. It is his whole demeanour. He is still very tall, of course, but he seems, somehow less imposing, more accessible and definitely less sure of himself. But rather than finding that off-putting, I find it draws me to him. He seems to have less of a shell around him. He isn't trying so hard. He continues

- But there's one thing I think really helped me. It was drawing.
- Drawing?
- Yes, life-drawing. It helped me to see beyond the obvious. It helped me to really look at people, to see their bodies in all their variety. When I really looked, it's as if gender just seemed to drop away. You start to see the uniqueness, and how superficial the gender haunting is. There's a small section of my thesis, in the appendix, tucked away so not to offend anyone. Have a look at it.
- I will

And so I did. And this is what I found:

## The Practice of Really Seeing Beyond Gender

In my journal, 1/2/07, I wrote, next to the faces of some people I had been drawing:  
"But that doesn't look like me!"  
"Maybe not quite, but I think I've caught something of you, an essence perhaps, and besides it has helped me to really see you and how beautiful you are."  
"Beautiful? I'm not beautiful!"  
"Everyone being drawn is beautiful."



We tend to think that people come in just two types. Gender is such a pernicious programming that we overlook the individuality, the humanity of people. Just look at them: their bodies just don't fit the black and white category, when you really look. Beyond the superficial layer of clothes, or even hairstyles, when you really start to look at it, everyone is so unique, so utterly themselves; and this bi-polar view of human types is disrupted by it. We live with this myth all the time. It catches us before we've had time to really see. But just take a moment to stop, really look, and see the uniqueness of an eye, an ear, a hand... That's when people stop being just 'two types'.



Everyone being drawn is beautiful. Around that time, I began to draw people. In meetings, I would scribble doodles, trying to catch their features, expressions, postures. I briefly took up life drawing. I wanted to really learn to see people. I had a hunch it would help me in a couple of ways.

- Firstly, it would help me really look at them, and learn to be a better researcher this way.
- Secondly, I wanted to look beyond the bi-polar view of gender.



Another surprising thing happened when I did this. When I really started to look at people in this way, everyone, without exception, became beautiful. The details seemed to make them shine. Really seeing people made me gasp with their beauty. And I had to stop doing it in meetings, because they would notice that I was really looking at them. And they would want to see what I had drawn. And they were usually disappointed and I was sorry that they were. I felt like I had let them down. But I didn't do it because I wanted to become an artist, but because I wanted to see beyond superficial dichotomies, such as the difference between a man and a woman.

## Chapter Two – Developing an Inquiring Masculinity

*And the wicked son asked: 'what's the point of knowing where we came from'?*

I'd like to show the place of thinking that this inquiry process, towards 'being a good man', (towards *mentshlichkeit*) emerged. In doing so it will be useful to show how I've worked with some of the ideas, the thinking, the 'head stuff'; around the areas that impact this inquiry; such as masculinities, fatherhood and Jewishness, and tentatively developing an 'inquiring masculinity'. I'd also like to show you some of the practices that lie behind this inquiring masculinity. It is these practices, whose quality is evidenced in the stories I tell, that enable the disruption and evolution of gender performances inherent in *mentshlichkeit*, being a 'good man'.

Even if you are not a father, a Jew or a man, you may still find this useful; I offer this as an example of inquiring into my locality, not to exclude yours, but to invite a parallel.

Interestingly, at Passover, the Jewish Spring Festival, we are offered a clue about what the 'bad' might be in relation to being a 'good man'. During the Passover meal, we are told a story of four sons. One of them is the 'bad son' (or 'wicked son'). What is his wickedness? It is a rejection of where he comes from. Each son asks a question, and basically the wicked son asks: 'What's the point of knowing who we are, of re-telling this stupid story every year about where we come from?' Now there may be many interpretations of this story, and the beauty of Judaism (at its best) is that it invites multiple interpretations. So I make my own one here, as a justification of this stage in the inquiry process: it was vital to explore 'where I come from', in order to fully locate myself in a place from where it is possible to know anything else. Without it, we float in a meaningless place, dislocated, ready to grasp some new regime of truth. So this standpoint chapter is really about what anchors me in work as an inquirer.

Of course, we can answer the question 'where we come from' in many ways. I could have explored myself as a Londoner, a football fan, a Psychologist, as my standpoint. It may even be argued that would have been just as useful. Again, we are presented with choices as inquirers. I chose Judaism, Fatherhood and Masculinity because I felt them to be the most profound roots, the questions I kept returning to, where I was *moved* to go. Being moved is vital in this sense. Sometimes I even use the welling of tears as a sign I am on the right track. In a sense, when I started this process, these aspects of my identity *chose me*.

Perhaps this is what Post Structuralist Patti Lather calls 'Rhizomatic validity', [rooted validity], this is validity around new knowledge that:

- *unsettles from within, taps underground*
- *generates new locally determined norms of understanding; proliferates open-ended and context-sensitive criteria; works against reinscription of some new regime, some new systematicity (Lather 1993) p686*

Responding to an emotional key, whilst considering (as a critique) some of the thinking around masculinity is an attempt at such an unsettling, not to try and 're-inscribe a new regime', but to shake the branches of the tree a little, and see what fruit falls off. In doing so, I am considering some of my own roots, within a Jewish tradition, and how this yields an alternative, perhaps surprising (or even odd) perspective, the idea of a dominant masculinity as a type of 'haunting'. Then, in the quality of *practices* of inquiry as a way to face of this haunting, we might be able to measure of the validity of this approach to action research.

## Masculinities - A Personal and Political Polarity

Perhaps my pre-occupation with discomfort flows from being a Jew? As Vic Seidler says:

*Jewish men, like black men, could never take their masculinity for granted but constantly had to prove themselves. This might explain the number of Jewish men who have been involved internationally in the men's movement since they have been positioned, somewhat paradoxically, both inside and outside traditional Western masculinities. As they could never take their 'whiteness' for granted, so they also had to affirm their masculinities. (Seidler 2006) p10.*

It is a possibility that it may be more likely for a young Jewish man to question masculinity in this way. In Chapter Three, I will show how we can juxtapose this particularly masculine embodiment (of both men and women) against the disembodied, disappearing masculinity of the ghettoised European Jewry of my origin. It also offers a view on the Israeli reaction to this, which was to literally militarise the (Jewish) body.

But it is interesting that the first diary entry I mention at the beginning of Chapter One was made when I was living in Israel. Looking back, I see myself surrounded there by a particularly militarised embodiment of masculinity. In Israel, one is surrounded by militarised bodies, men and women in uniform, carrying weapons. My own discomfort as a teenager suggests that this was more than a Jewish issue; it may be a more general phenomenon that many (most?) young men secretly worry over. It may be advantageous to imagine that such inquiry is the condition of many (most?) young men. Encouraging them to 'come out' with this set of questions is an important part of our mission. If, as Seidler maintains:

*Helping men to name their experience as men – itself a complex task that they often resist – becomes a matter of teaching them to recognise the power they take for granted in relation to women. (Seidler 2006) p93*

Then it is no wonder that these private, tentative, awkward inquiries remain private. It is as if we are handed as young men with the dual burden of a man's body with all it feels like, and the historic guilt and shame of the power relationship that this body represents, the guilt and shame that the lecturer describes at the beginning of this thesis. I know I felt it, as my teenage diaries attest: *'freed from thousands of years of needing to be superior...'*

This is coupled with the fact that:

*an Enlightenment vision of modernity has been shaped by a distinction between public and private spheres. Traditionally within modernity the public sphere was defined as a masculine space of reason and power... (Seidler 2006) p93*

Therefore the emotional, embodied space becomes private sphere; a feminised space, and it is not surprising that young men are encouraged to protect their own private castles with a high wall of reason and a yearning for power. So the embodied, longed-for inquiry remains hidden. If you take a post modern, or social-constructionist view of this, if 'words make worlds', and there is *no* discourse, no words, or 'linguaging' of these questions, then the social reality closes in around them and they are almost snuffed out entirely. But not quite; perhaps they persist in the vernaculars of substance misuse, pornography, and violence to self and others. Perhaps they are also seen in

the everyday, chaotic 'queerness' of organisational life that I see in my work, where the private dynamics leak out in many different ways (as I illustrate in Chapter Four).

Masculinity is often defined in terms of power relations with women, and therefore suggests we face the historic legacy of the inherent privilege that comes with being born in a man's body. One of the most popular contemporary framings of this is within Bob Connell's notion of a 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995): a dominant masculinity amongst masculinities. In this view, there are a range of types of being male, of masculinities, all of which orbit around a fundamental structural inequality most typified and embodied by the privilege of a certain type of white, male, middle class masculinity, which is 'hegemonic'. It exerts its authority over everyday institutions, such as the workplace.

*The concept of 'hegemony', deriving from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic Masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell 1995) p77*

In practical terms, what might this hegemonic masculinity look like? Michael Kimmel quotes the anthropologist Erving Goffman on this subject:

*In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports...Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself – during moments at least- as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. (Goffman quoted in (Kimmel 2006)) p4*

Connell's view is very useful, (albeit put in the very language that tends to flatter a hegemonic, academic masculinity, I would maintain) in that it serves to separate all men from an inherent association with this privilege, and opens up, in Connell's view, the possibility of other masculinities, which can be reflective of other power positions across the categories of class, race, education, wealth and so on, all of which are subject to the hegemonic. It offers me personally the possibility to compare and contrast at least two masculinities I can embody. Being a middle class man, I must accept at some level I can exemplify the instruments of the hegemonic, particularly in the consciousness of others if not necessarily of my own intention. But as a Jew, I am also enabled to consider my own shape-shifting and disappearing masculinity as a Jew, only recently escaped from the ghetto.

It is however from the same Enlightenment that encouraged the demolition of the ghetto, Vic Seidler argues, that we inherit the modernist, universalist rationality which privileges not just a 'hegemonic masculinity', but the very idea of it.

*Thinking about masculinities in terms of a hegemonic model has itself become hegemonic since its very universalism has appealed to international agencies wanting a model that can be translated across cultural differences. (Seidler 2007) p11*

Seidler maintains that Connell's view is useful yet flawed because it still places the hegemonic style at the centre of our analysis:

*Within Connell's conception of power that he later developed in Masculinities, consciousness-raising for men could only mean developing an awareness of their power within gender relations of power (Connell 1995). This was part of a distinction that Connell draws between the "therapeutic" practices of the 1970s and what he identifies as "real politics" that emerged in the 1980s. But this distinction between the therapeutic and the political not only served to disavow the histories of men's relationships with feminism, such as the explorations developed in the journal Achilles Heel in Britain, but it served to block reflections upon the relationship between the personal and the political in men's lives. (Seidler 2007) p10*

So placing the body and its associated therapeutics as a 'lesser than' to the 'real' politics of power relationships is part of an ongoing tension that has persisted "*since Reich argued with Freud about that status of the body within psychoanalysis.*" (Seidler 2007) p15.

This analysis works along an axis, then, between the more personal, body-and-feelings focussed work and discourse on the one hand and the rationalist, power analysis on the other (which is more at home in the heavyweight, disembodied atmosphere of 'the Academy'). If you take into account the feminist-inspired research of Sandra Bem, who showed that 'feminine' traits, (like 'emotional', and 'understanding') are universally valued (by men and women) less highly than the 'masculine' traits, (like 'rational', and 'analytical'), it isn't surprising that the body-oriented, therapeutic camp (because it dealt with things like feelings and experience), seems to have been associated with a more 'feminised' analysis and is therefore less credible and 'weighty' (Bem 1974).

This is supported by the work of people like Joyce Fletcher, who suggests that the 'relational' aspects of labour in organisations, like building relationships and managing the personal experience of employees, is persistently 'disappeared' as useful work within the organisational conversation, in favour of work that looks more 'male' and 'transactional' (Fletcher 1999). Calás and Smircich take this one step further, suggesting that this 'relational' work is mostly done by women in organisations who are recruited for these tasks, *because* it can be devalued, both politically and economically (Calás and Smircich 1993).

An unintended consequence of this feminist discourse is in how the phenomena it is describing have crept into (or come back to 'haunt'?) the discourse around masculinities itself, creating two 'camps; broadly describable as the political and the personal/therapeutic. As if the feminist notion of the 'personal is political' never really happened for men working to change men, this analysis, as Seidler maintains, is an unnecessary distinction, yet one that still seems to persist in practice and in the literature. There are people like Jeff Hearn, Haywood and Mac an Ghail (who I quote at the beginning of Chapter One) and of course Bob Connell on the one hand, for whom the 'heavy-weight' analytical and political dimension of masculinities is key (and are more at home with words like 'hegemonic'), and then the many 'light-weight' therapeutic, 'feminised', person-centred approaches on the other, exemplified in more populist literature, by people such as Steve Biddulph, Robert Bly and others. (Bly 1990; Biddulph 1995,; Collinson and Hearn 1996).

Although this is a broad characterisation, and there are people, like Vic Seidler, who deliberately position themselves across both these worldviews, it is a mapping of the territory that I recognise from my first forays into men's development work in the early 1990s. The territory seemed to be aligned along left wing/political versus a right

wing/personal/therapeutic axis. I found the personal, therapeutic approaches of some of the mensgroups I encountered attractive, but was sometimes struck by a lack of critical thinking, especially when they strayed too far from the critique of male power. When I encountered the approach of Robert Bly, through his famous book, *Iron John*, and in various groups and events I attended, the attention to the therapeutic and embodied attracted me, but I was uncomfortable when it leaned towards holding women, rather than (male-dominated) society responsible for men's current dilemmas. Susan Faludi's own experience of Robert Bly's work is something I recognise:

*A woman in the audience asks if [Robert Bly]'s saying that the women's movement is to blame. 'The men's movement is not a response to the women's movement,' he says. A few moments later, though, he is back to warning men in the audience to beware of 'the forcefield of women'. (Faludi 1992) p345.*

I think Faludi sees Bly at his worst here, and I know great admirers of Bly who suggest that he moderated his position later on, (as did Faludi). However, I personally resisted the subtle misogyny that this approach could infect.

On the political side, I also encountered men like Jeff Hearn, whose work I admire, but in whose critique I found an unnerving lack of attention to individual male subjectivities:

*In a gender, hierarchical and class sense, however, it is men in management, especially those in accounting, engineering and strategic functions, who often most closely represent 'hegemonic' masculinity/ies in the workplace. While their attempts to control employees, colleagues and self may produce contradictory effects, men's organizational dominance both as managers and as men needs further detailed analysis. (Collinson and Hearn 1996) p11*

Oh so *those* are the *bad* men, then, are they...? But what about their inner lives, struggles, their private, quaking selves? The danger here is that it becomes easier to dismiss what might be going on for these men, within their own worlds, and therefore easier to dismiss them, *en masse*. Another kind of prejudice seems to creep in, like a ghost. Indeed, in my experience with *Navigator*, I met many men, including accountants and engineers, for whom the therapeutic wasn't a territory they wanted to get into necessarily (especially if they were working class or 'suburban' rather than metropolitan) and yet who sometimes were represented as 'the problem' in the left wing, metropolitan and academic centres of study into men and masculinities. Usually, these 'ordinary blokes', uncomfortable in either the political or the therapeutic camp, were left completely outside the debate altogether. And this was the vast majority of men.

But for me, the inquiring approach suggested through the action research school of places like CARPP, at the University of Bath, provided a generative space for a transcendent approach. Herein, one can do business with *both* the power-centred, critical analysis *and* the embodied, person-centred as well as phenomenological/post modern/body-centred approach. I would like to call this approach an 'inquiring masculinity'. I offer it tentatively, wanting to avoid the 'reinscription of some new regime', as Lather says. (Lather 1993). I see it more as a glimpse into a world of possibilities, a world that can be both personally and politically engaging and one that enables action, even if it is in the midst of irony and paradox. It also is a world which holds to the possibility that even managers, engineers and accountants have a story, and that in telling this story, we encourage their participation in inquiring how we may shed some light on this spectre of maleness.

In developing this thesis about an 'inquiring masculinity', I was drawn to wonder what this hegemonic masculinity really is. How does it have the power to affect me? And what then can be done about it? One explanation is that:

*Hegemonic masculinity is a multilevel concept operating at local, regional and global levels that also simultaneously engages cultural, individual and structural factors. Furthermore, these cultural, individual and structural factors are interdependent. (Lusher and Robins 2009) p389.*

A problem with this view of a type of all-pervading man-ishness, to which all men (whether or not they are born into this ideal type) are subject, is that it describes a very complex phenomenon. So it is interesting in theory but in practice, what can we do about it, to borrow Sarah Jones' vital question? If it is all about the relationship between the cultures we come from, the local situations we find ourselves in, the power relationships and structures that abound around us, it is all very tricky to sort out how we can do anything about it, let alone anything good.

I think this view breeds a kind of defensiveness at best and helplessness at worst. We find ourselves in conversations, with women for example, where we can argue that 'it isn't our fault, it's just the culture we come from', or 'it's inevitable because of the power relationships we find ourselves in'. We slap our foreheads and laugh: '*Here we are again! Caught in the same old patterns!*'

But how can we develop another, more helpful perspective about this 'hegemonic masculinity'; one that allows us to consider another way of researching it, escaping from it (even momentarily, like a flying fish escapes from the sea) and then at least act as a guide to others to do more of the same?

### **Developing an Inquiring Masculinity – Challenging the 'Hegemonic Haunting'**

One view that I play with here is that this hegemonic masculinity is a kind of spectre, a ghost that haunts us all from time to time. To use a viral metaphor, it catches all of us, or maybe we catch it, like a cold or flu. It may be hard for us to see how this may work. But sometimes it is easier for others to spot it. Notice for example how in the definition that Goffman gives, (quoted by Kimmel, above), we can detect the ghost of an equivalent hegemony: of a North American worldview. In his language, and its seeming blindness to the assumptions that all of us may share his framing (e.g. hegemonic masculine may not be 'Protestant' in a Catholic or Communist country, for example), he seems to have caught a kind of cold, and although he may not notice it, it may be may be more obvious to non-Americans.

A fashionable metaphor that might fit this analysis is that of the mind virus, or 'meme'. This is an idea or thought-form, caring only for its own propagation, which can take hold in a (human) biological system. We could see the spectre of the hegemonic masculinity as a kind of 'meme' that overtakes our body system from time to time. This suggests that men and women aren't 'good' or 'bad', but that we can all be subject to constellations of archetypal behaviour that take us over, like mind viruses, or 'memes', if we allow them to. (Blackmore 2000).

I return to my own question I asked when I was 20 years old. Male or human; which first? These questions might be about recognising our need to be more fully human. In the story *Metamorphosis*, Franz Kafka describes the life and death of Gregor, a man who wakes up one morning to find he has turned into a beetle.

*Gregor's eyes turned next to the window, and the overcast sky – one could hear raindrops beating on the window gutter – made him quite melancholy. What about sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense, he thought, but it could not be done, for he was accustomed to sleep on his right side and in his present condition he could not turn himself over. (Kafka 1916) p9*

What I find so moving about Kafka's story is Gregor's attempts to live with it; to just get on with this awful, ridiculous situation. In a sense I see Gregor's story in my own and in that of many men. Embodying the traditional masculinity can feel like inhabiting a beetle-like shell. How can we stay fully human and yet failing that, when the shell descends on us in the morning, how can we live and work with that too, and not simply turn over go back to sleep?

Our bodies become a kind of possible breeding ground for this kind of 'virus'. If hegemonic masculinity is this kind of 'spirit' that can take over my body from time to time, then we may have a clue about what to do next. We can see ourselves as in the process of developing some kind of awareness of this, with the help of others, as a possible 'antidote'. Jeffrey Eugenides also supports this idea, in his novel *Middlesex*, about an intersex person:

*I've lived more than half my life as a male, and by now everything comes naturally. When Calliope [my former female identity] surfaces, she does so like a childhood speech impediment. Suddenly there she is again, doing a hair flip, or checking her nails. It is a little like being possessed. (Eugenides 2002) p41.*

A Jewish subjectivity is also informative here. Yiddish, the language spoken by my ancestors in Eastern Europe, offers an insight into a different model for this spectre of hegemonic masculinity:

*Compared with contemporary English, Yiddish is a regular haunted house where demons frolic and sinister forces rage nearly unchecked. (Wex 2005) p93*

Drawing on this Yiddish inheritance may serve our purpose of both defining *mentshlichkeit* and providing us with insight into this hegemonic haunting. According to Wex:

*These Sheydim (singular 'sheyd') [bad spirits] are generally thought of as being Jewish - they believe in the Torah, observe all the mitsves [commandments of Jewish ritual practice] incumbent on Jewish demons... and exist, with God's blessing and active cooperation, aftselakhis – just to spite - the rest of the world. They're us, but invisible. (Wex 2005) p93*

This Yiddish subjectivity might give us a subtle alternative to the Rationalist (post-Enlightenment) view of good (reasonable) and bad (unreasonable). The *Sheydim* are part of the system, approved of in their work of havoc because this gives us our everyday challenge to overcome. *Mentshlichkeit* is an everyday process of living *with* them. Indeed, according to a Yiddish proverb:

*A mentsh heyst a mentsh veyl er mentsht zikr, which means literally: "a person is called a person when they struggle with their person-ness." (Wex 2005)*

I notice that in Yiddish, to be a *mentsh*, is by definition, to work, in the moment, with these *sheydim*. This is the essence of good-person-ness. I find the resonance with Judith Butler's idea of performativity here compelling. Rather than settling in a

comfortable (hegemonic) masculinity, to be a *mentsh*, a good man in this context is *always* to be working with, *striving with* the demons, the haunting of good person-ness, working out new performances 'in the nick of time' (Grosz 2004).

In this way, we can see that this work is about the everyday struggle to escape from the clutches of the spectre of hegemonic masculinity. Rather than banishing these demons to the margin, in pursuit of a utopian, colourless, (white, male) reason, we can use this Jewish subjectivity, hold it up against the contemporary view of 'mind viruses', and see if it helps us to recognise this haunting of hegemonic masculinity, and more importantly, recognise the practices that may help us in the political purpose of overcoming it.

Again, it serves the *mentshlichkeit* agenda to see this 'spectre' as part of our own internal colour as (white) men. It is noticing when we are 'possessed' by this spectre that may be good work here, rather than suggesting that this spectre exists only in those ('bad') others (like accountants and engineers), or with others who may be less associated with our white, male reason; all of those who have been traditionally marginalised. Indeed liberation may even be about exposing those parts of ourselves that don't normally warrant airtime in the public domain.

How do we explore, research and deal with this kind of 'haunting'? One device I use is a story-telling process, because in the stories I tell, and the subjectivities that narratives invite, I can catch myself where I have caught the cold of hegemonic masculinity and find ways, practices to 'immunise' myself from it. But this practice of storytelling emerged from other practices, and I'd now like to document some of them, so you can see how they lead to the story-telling.

### **Quality Inquiry Practices**

What I have learned and intend to show is that with long-term commitment to a set of questions, we can develop inquiry *practices* that enable us to catch ourselves in the midst of these systems and reveal the choices we may have, developing possibilities for action that enable our escape from them.

Such practices are made in the context of the 'many ways of knowing' that Reason et al offers. For example, it is in the possibilities of storytelling, as a form of presentational knowledge, that we can develop action practices, or 'practical knowing':

*Practical knowing, knowing-in-action, is of quite a different nature to knowing-about-action; action research is not the same as applied research. I can tell you how to ride a bicycle, and can describe bicycle riding in terms of its dynamic mechanics, but this is not the same as riding a bicycle, as any child and parent knows...*

*At the heart of practical knowing is an awareness of the excellence of the skill of doing it, which is "beyond language and conceptual formulation"; we can, however, ask whether the practice is executed "with appropriate economy of means and elegance of form" and whether the action "does in fact have the effects claimed for it" (Heron, 1996b:43-44). (Reason 2003)*

In my work, the reference to the child riding the bicycle is particularly relevant. I have returned repeatedly to my relationship with my children, to consider my own knowing-in-action. They become the vital arbiters of my 'economy of means and elegance of form', in being a good man.

The complexity of the questions I am exploring suggests that developing a grand design for change in this area would be challenging not to say unhelpful. Indeed it may be part of the problem of a particular kind of dominant masculinity to seek such instrumentally 'grand' change. In this research process, where I am looking for a more variegated, subtle, perhaps paradoxical ways through difficult and often doubled questions, the notion of developing practices of inquiry is helpful. The distinction of practices is that they are everyday, lived, repeated and life-congruent habits, 'living life as inquiry' (Marshall 1999).

In his book, the 'Leadership Dojo', Richard Strozzi-Heckler suggest a way to see these living practices:

*Zen Roshi Richard Baker said it in the simplest of terms when he commented, 'Enlightenment [in an Eastern, Buddhist sense] is an accident, but practice makes you accident-prone'.*

Strozzi-Heckler goes on to say:

*Humans will engage in a practice if they're passionate about what they are practicing. We are passionate about what we practice if it's relevant to the life we want to create. (Strozzi-Heckler 2007) p59*

Peter Reason extends this idea of practice into the world of action research, considering how our work as new paradigm researchers is to consider our participation in (or with) the world as the territory of our inquiry:

*In participatory practice, you no longer know where you will be going to end up; in a sense the very point is to end up with the unexpected. One moves from the security of what is known to radical uncertainty. There is almost a feeling of vertigo in stepping away from well-trodden paths of expression. (Reason 2001) p47*

So there was no 'grand plan', but rather *persistence* with the questions of inquiry and with a set of inquiring *practices*. It is in the quality of living these practices, and the evidence we show of this, that we can judge the validity of this kind of practical knowledge. I document six of the main practices I have been developing below during this work, and show some of the quality of living them.

### **Practice 1 – Challenging the myth of 'whole' male self**

*I am concerned especially with that group of premises upon which the Occidental concepts of the "self" are built...(Bateson 1972) p315*

Taking the idea of the inquiring masculinity forward has meant holding a creative tension at the level of self, inquiring into 'who I really am?' Is the myth of the dominant masculinity based on a view of the self that holds it to be more fixed and unchanging than how we may consider and configure it, when we pay attention to our more phenomenological, embodied experience? Where does this proposition of the fixed self come from? Would it be useful to develop a practice of disruption, for the sake of developing attention to a more shifting, pliable shape-shifting self? How would this help the cause of an inquiring masculinity, and demonstrating *mentshlichkeit*?

*I am a boy. No-one will play with me. They're all too busy. Will you play with me?*

*I am a young woman. I don't have much time to talk, there's washing up to be done, the boy needs getting to school, the house needs sorting. One day I'd like to travel, but right now I have to sort out the house, so excuse me.*

*I am an old duke, living in the attic. I lie dying, wanting to die. I cannot die until I know if he will come back. She sent him to war, long ago.*

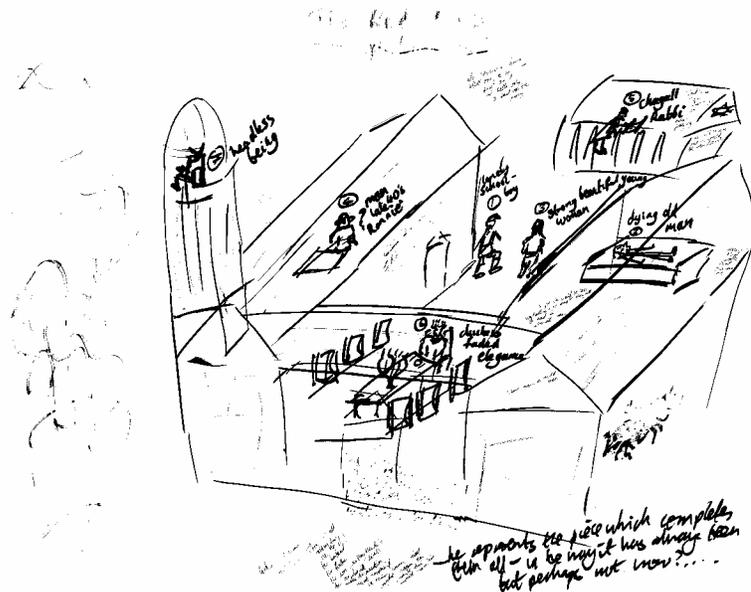
*My name is Ron, a bloke who tries to keep cheerful. I like football. It's silly round 'ere. What we need is someone to come and sort this place out. It's a joke.*

*I am old rabbi. I am refugee. I don't speak English good. I pray. Baruch hashem I still alive. I wait. I wait for Moshiach. Messiah.*

*I am an old duchess. I wait to be served. My life is tragic. I haven't spoken to my husband in over twenty years. My son went away to war. I wait for them both.*

*I body. Where head?*

The above story comes from a piece of inquiry in a workshop on 'sub-personalities' in which I was a participant. During this workshop we were led by the facilitator into a relaxed, meditative state and invited to tour a 'house' and encounter characters who in some way represented aspects of ourselves.



Having surfaced these characters, and drawn them out in the form of a picture (see above), I had a profound realisation, as I journalled at the time:

*"It occurs to me suddenly that they are all waiting for the same person. The person missing is a man. He represents the piece of them that is missing. It is a slightly different piece for all of them but it can be provided by the same man:*

- *He will father the boy*
- *He is the lost son that completes the dying old man's story*
- *He is the man who will marry the young woman*
- *He will lead Ron, give him orders, give him an object for his loyalty, work out how to fix the hole in roof, which he would have done had his back not ached*
- *For the rabbi, he is the 'Moshiach', the messiah, who will come through the door and put meaning in the world to match the words of Talmud*
- *For the faded duchess, he will be her long lost son, missing in action, who returned from the war; the same son that the dying old man waits for*
- *For the headless being, he will know how to bring him down from his tower and give him a connection to this world*
- *He'll also walk the dog, and fix the roof, be the master of the house"*

I found in this practice powerfully symbolic of the dilemma of masculinities as presented by contemporary experience and expectations. It is as if we are expected to be the 'whole man' that completes the picture, as the missing character did above in my own inquiry. And yet what I was left with, what we are left with as men, is a fragmented series of subconscious characters, male and female, straight and queer, old and young, who in some way may be as present to us, if not more so, as the complete man we present to the world in the public sphere.

It is important to note that I choose such a seemingly fragmented, constructed approach because it fits my challenge to the patriarchal monoculture, which tends to frame a normative, 'whole' universalistic (male) self at the centre of things and therefore a research process challenging this, by foregrounding diverse personal experience, is in some way 'self indulgent'.

*Likewise Gergen's (1999) social constructionist view of the self as relational challenges the dominant ideology of the self-contained individual that underpins notions of self-indulgence. (Sparkes 2002) p216*

If the heroic figure in my own inquiry above represents the mono-mythic 'manstory' as Mary Gergen calls it (Gergen 1992), that I (am expected to) present to the world, in the course of my work, for example, then perhaps in the shadows for us 'self-made men' lurk all of these other characters, or their equivalents. So what opens up is an interesting inquiry ground, the phenomenon of outer persona (the male hero) played out in tension with the inner fragments. Our body provides the stage for these characters in our own inner/outer performances.

I make a choice here, moving towards the discomfort, to show you some of my fragmented self, and how this inquiry process has unfolded for me, in inquiry, drawing, and personal reflection, and to illustrate a tension that may be usefully explored and 'lived with' in men's lives, as an active process of disintegrating the mono-mythic masculinist project. Clearly we need to consider how action may follow from this awareness to complete the 'action turn', but to offer this tentatively so not to fall into expectation of grand transformations, which in themselves may be a component of the very psychology we are hoping to disrupt.

Perhaps by exploring this fragmented inner landscape, and coming to terms with it, we are undermining what Rowan calls the 'Patripsych' (Rowan 2005):

*...some writers have been using the notion of the Patripsych – an internal constellation of patriarchal patterns. This is a structure inside, which*

*corresponds to oppressive structures outside, each supporting each other.  
(Rowan 2005)*

To accept one's self as having components symbolised by inner boys, old duchesses, young vibrant women, headless bodies, old rabbis etc... is to accept an alternative internal landscape to the oppressive mono-mythic coherent self on which this 'Patripsyche' rests.

As Bob Pease says:

*If men's subjective experiences are left unexplored, they could be seen as being naturally inclined towards domination. So it is important to research their experiences as 'oppressors' to understand how patterns of internalized domination become part of men's subjectivities. (Pease 2000) p14*

and

*I propose that the formation of male subjectivities that challenge patriarchal masculinities constitutes the first step in the development of pro-feminist activism amongst men. (Pease 2000) p136*

So our engagement as men in an active process of inquiry to challenge our own hero-myth, plays a formative role in such activism. It is a political process, and it may have an impact. How far are we prepared to go in the development of these male subjectivities? Could it be as far as challenging the ontology of the self, not just at a theoretical or propositional level but in terms of the choices we make at the level of how we configure ourselves and how we act as men?

This could mean developing an ontological basis of self that is fundamentally fragmented, at odds with the 'self-made man' who in some way is whole and 'of a piece' and replacing it with a tentative, socially constructed and even 'queer' set of subjectivities; those that embrace a complete reconfiguration of hetero-normative male selves.

An investigation (and perhaps a blurring) of the nature of the self, and knowledge about the self, are essential to a more inquiring masculinity. This is inherent in the epistemological basis of a feminist and post-modern critique; questioning masculinity and developing an inquiring epistemology (as well as considering the discomfort of my own academic status in this very project) converge on a disruption of (my)self as an individualised, atomised 'knower' and 'actor', separate and agentically isolated from what can be known. This suggests we look towards a wider, systemic, relational kind of knowing as central to an inquiring masculinity. I relate it to the deep wisdom that Gregory Bateson, and his description of the unit of mind as 'mind-in-environment', a disruption of

*all sorts of false reifications of the "self" and separations between the "self" and "experience" (Bateson 1972) p469*

So developing an inquiring masculinity may invoke an active, flowing system between body, mind and environment. It means opening up subtle definitions of mission, agency, relationship and choice, seeking the '*difference that makes a difference*', as Bateson calls it (Bateson 1972) (p 459).

So in presenting these stories, such as in Chapter Four, I want to go beyond the simple idea of my 'agency' in it, to see how there may have been interplay of dynamics of which I was a small conscious part, in a wider 'mind', as Bateson says:

*it is important to notice that there are multiple differences between the thinking system and the “self” as popularly conceived. (Bateson 1972) p319*

This lays down a challenge to this project, which is to show how ‘I’ may ‘act’ for ‘change’; and yet it does not stop me doing so, when recognising as an inquirer that I am doing so as part of a wider system.

It becomes a matter of following ‘form’, as Gregory Bateson would have it:

*[it all adds] up to a rather simple accusation of many of my colleagues, that they have tried to build a bridge to the wrong half of the ancient dichotomy between form and substance. The conservative laws for energy and matter concern substance rather than form. But mental processes, ideas, communication, organization, differentiation, pattern, and so on, are matters of form rather than substance. (Bateson 1972) pxxxii*

This grasping towards form (rather than capturing, isolating, *dissecting* ‘substance’) is an important opportunity; to open up the possibilities of a more nuanced, systemic, relational self which is essential in a process of disruption towards which an inquiring masculinity must aspire. We can view the self in traditional terms as a distinct product of the individual, as a ‘self-made’ entity characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed our narratives of self are often couched in heroic terms.

As Kate Mulholland argues in her research of entrepreneurialism in Australia:

*I was amazed by the consistency with which men took all the credit for their success...Invariably the men told their stories as if they were the centre of the universe. (Mulholland 1996) p124*

This then isn’t just a feature of the male entrepreneur perhaps but of this kind of ‘public patriarchy’ (Hearn 1992).

As Mary Gergen adds:

*Myths have carried the form and content of narratives throughout the centuries. They tell us how great events occur as well as how stories are made. Joseph Campbell (1956) has analysed these ancient myths. He proposes that there is one fundamental myth – the “monomyth”. This myth begins as the hero, having been dedicated to a quest, ventures forth from the everyday world. He goes into the region of the supernatural, where he encounters strange, dangerous and powerful forces, which he must vanquish. Then the victorious hero returns and is rewarded for his great deeds. The monomyth is the hero’s myth and the major manstory. (Where is the woman in this story? She is only to be found as a snare, an obstacle, a magic power, or a prize.)...*

*This monomyth is not just a historical curiosity. It is the basic model for the stories of achievement in everyday lives. Life stories are often about quests; they, like the monomyth, are stories of achievement. The story hangs on the end point – will the goal be achieved or not? In such stories all is subsumed by the goal. The heroic character must not allow anything to interfere with the quest. (Gergen 1992) p130-131*

For our inquiring masculinity, researched through narrative, this does pose a problem. How do we address Gergen’s proposition of the seamless ‘manstory’? Our accounts, grounded in our experiential epistemology, must be honest enough to deal with the

fragmented, tentative nature of this experience and the micro-political choices we make whilst at the same time not disappearing into a deconstructed, literally 'senseless' narration. We must be mindful that we are, in Gergen's terms 'mired in convention':

*If I write in acceptable ways, I shall only recapitulate the patriarchal forms. Yet if I violate expectations too grievously, my words will begin to become nonsense. (Gergen 1992) p127*

The fact remains that Campbell's 'heroic manstory' is a convention I am mired in, for example, take my own C.V.:

**James Traeger** BA (Hons), PGDipSenior Consultant

*James has 18 years experience in human and organisational development. His varied career includes winning a fringe-first award as a theatre producer at the Edinburgh Festival, as general manager of one of Europe's leading commercial photo agencies, and as the co-developer of the Navigator Programme, the only international men's development programme to be run in the public, private and voluntary sectors. He won acclaim for his work on the Metropolitan Police's 'gender agenda', and is a member of the prestigious Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at the University of Bath. He specialises in leadership with due attention and sensitivity to organisational and global diversity. James is the Course Director for the Art of Facilitation programme.*

James Traeger CV on Roffey Park Institute website:

<http://www.roffeypark.com/people/consultants.php>

Compare this with:

*He laughs inside again then turns to a young man on the next table and says to him.*

*"Guess who I'm not?"*

*Somewhat taken aback, the young man looks up from his coffee.*

*"I'm sorry I didn't catch what you said."*

*"Guess who I'm not?" Jim repeated.*

*"Guess who you're not?"*

*"Yes, guess who I'm not?"*

*"I don't really get what you're after," says the bemused young man.*

*"It's simple," says Jim, "Just guess who I'm not."*

*"I don't know," came the defensive reply with a touch of worry in the voice.*

*"I'm not Bob Geldof that's who I'm not," blurts Jim.*

*"I'm not Bob Geldof, that's for sure."*

*"Right," says the young man as he thinks about how to exit the situation.*

*"Right. So you're not Bob Geldof."*

*"And I'll tell you something else, says Jim, "I'm not my CV either."*

*(Sparkes 2006) p21*

I heard Andrew Sparkes read this extract from his paper (about the 'audit culture' of the Academy) at a Conference at Hawkwood College, Stroud, in the autumn of 2006. It is a personal story; we are to assume that the character of Jim is modelled on Andrew himself and is a device to explain both the power of experiential accounts and the resistance of traditional (including academic) discourse to them. It spoke to me of the double-edged nature of the challenge we have when attempting to break down the coherent storied accounts of self, expected in organisations, the Academy and society in general. I might myself (wouldn't you?) be as discomforted as Jim's neighbour in the

café was, if I was confronted in this way by a slightly unravelling academic. And yet I can also relate to his mission to challenge and confront the requirement for a coherent, 'self-made self'. We meet such a requirement day to day, moment to moment. For an inquiring masculinity this is at the heart of a double bind – to enter this world of coherent (male) self is to embrace what we aim to disrupt, and yet to deny that we do so is dishonest. We enter into this world still intending to find ways to disrupt it. Sparkes has to make the paper 'safe enough', through his explanation in the abstract:

*In response to the plea by Pelias (2004) for a methodology of the heart this article presents a story about the embodied struggles of an academic at a university that is permeated by an audit culture. (Sparkes 2006) p2*

Therefore, there is, to a degree, a playing the game in order change, transform or transmute the rules, finding a difference that makes a difference, a way of describing the 'world of form' as Bateson would have it, without falling into the trap of recreating an all-too-coherent, heroic 'manstory'.

The *practice* here is contained in the process of story-telling. It suggests that the subjectivities expressed in the multiple voices of the story are not 'just' fictional characters but an expression of my multiple selves.

## **Practice 2 – Surfacing 'Hidden Transcripts'**

Recently I heard Grayson Perry, the Turner Prize Winning artist, being interviewed on the radio and he was asked (probably for the umpteenth time) why he chose to often present himself, notionally a heterosexual man, in women's clothing much of the time, as his alter ego, 'Claire'. The answer he gave really struck me:

*"Because of the emotional range it offers me."*

I recognise this yearning for the emotional expression and 'range' as Perry puts it as an important motive force, and potentially a good reason for men to engage in this kind of project. Perhaps we can reconstruct another kind of masculinity which is diverse, body-centred, more honest and open about our persistent private turmoil and vacillations, not as a therapeutic side-show but as a purpose inherent to the mission of challenging and changing masculinities in an honest response to feminism and the political injustices it has legitimately flagged.

One of the arguments in classic feminist texts is scepticism with men's interest in challenging the basis of their power, yet some of these feminists have also started to realise that men may well have some interest in deconstructing the box of patriarchy for their own sake:

*Men feel the contours of a box too, but they are told that the box is of their own manufacture, designed to their specifications. Who are they to complain? The box is there to showcase the man, not to confine him. After all, didn't he build it – and he can destroy it if he pleases, if he is **a man**? For men to say they feel boxed in is regarded not as laudable political protest but as childish and indecent whining. How dare the kings complain about their castles?  
(Faludi 1999) p13*

As a man, finding personal reasons, connecting with the emotional range that the Patripsych may deny them, is important, and part of the feminist cause. I wrote about this in the second of my portfolio of papers for my transfer process to MPhil in December 2006:

*To Conclude: The Cost of Dominance*

*In the audience at the closing plenary of the Gender, Work and Organisations Conference, June 2005...*

I was sitting in the audience of this closing plenary, feeling an uncomfortable sense that the reasons why I do what I do, that is, work with men and for 'gender change' had once again escaped me. In the heady, analytical world of the conference, I felt I had somehow become disconnected from some very important, body-felt purposes for my work. This happens, I notice, from time to time. I felt the need to re-connect with the question, why is it necessary to try and make some change around men, masculinity, patriarchy and gender?

In particular, I was feeling once again slightly stung by a discussion that had taken place that day, along the lines of 'Well, if men have all the power, why should they want to change?' My uneasiness was heightened by the realisation that part of me was sympathetic to this position.

But I felt like I knew, 'in my bones', that this wasn't the whole truth, that there was some reason for doing this, that was more than my being 'different' to other men, the exception that proves the rule. It is as if the light that patriarchy can tend to shine is so bright that everything in the shadow just disappears. In particular, what is the cost of this dominance *to* men, to which we become inured?

Determined to grope once again in that darkness for the objects of proof that this is more than 'just me', I decided to embark on a piece of 'free-fall writing' (Turner-Vesselago nd):

*What has the cost to me been of my 'advantage'? Unawareness, emotional castration, blindness, bluntness, numbness, nothingness, lack of satisfaction, eating and drinking too much, not living in the now, worrying about stuff, worrying about people, aching shoulders, painful shins, pretending, pretending, pretending, living lies, lack of sense of status, having everything to worry about, turning into my father, losing touch with friends, having a mask on with friends, not being liked, not liking, being grumpy all the time, never, ever, ever, ever being satisfied, not having enough, never being right, never feeling like I've got enough respect, not being loved, not loving, being obsessed with sex, being bored by sex, losing sight of why I loved, not being able to laugh like I used to, being ill, dying young, contemplating suicide, turning everything into an object, having a fear of everything, being embattled, dying in wars, cannon fodder etc. etc. It took me a while but I managed to think of something...*

So what is the practice here? The essence of it is in the work of reconnection I was doing at the Conference. It is, as Bob Pease suggests, asking:

*To what extent can we separate the psychologies of men from the social structures and ideologies of male dominance? (Pease 2000) p14*

An incitement to consider the emotional cost of our role as Patriarchs suggests of course that we can be conscious of it. Many might argue that people are bound by systems which may impact at such a profound level that we cannot be thus conscious. It could be argued that patterns of power and habit sit very strongly with us around gender; indeed it is one of the earliest complexes of social identity we inherit.

But, in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James Scott aims to show that these habits are not insurmountable. Resistance is possible, in the 'hidden transcript' (Scott 1990) p16. But Scott maintains, such resistance is hard, or at least we need to find ingenious, creative, subtle ways to undermine and disrupt the way things usually flow. One of the examples he gives of a hidden transcript is in how the black slaves in the United States adopted the language and symbolism of biblical slavery in which to express their intellectual and emotional resistance. The power of narrative, in this case biblical narrative, is to open up questions that, in other forms of discourse, are more brittle and potentially likely to provoke resistance and backlash.

So the practice here is about surfacing, to ourselves, and to the wider world, the hidden transcript of the cost of hegemonic dominance to men. This is challenging work because we ourselves, as men, may need to develop practices (like the example I give of being at the Gender Conference) where we surface these hidden transcripts to ourselves, first. Our own 'Patripsych' may hide it, even from ourselves, as I found out in the excerpt above. It is potentially uncomfortable work. But then, through story, we elaborate this subjectivity and it becomes an art of resistance.

Although the 'public transcript' or indeed how we embody it as men, may not be directly defied (and in doing so we may well risk recreating them anyway), we can with subtlety show more and see more of our 'queer' side, as Grayson Perry for one invites us, through the choiceful, moment-to-moment work of inquiring masculinity.

We thereby contradict the temptation to place all men in two categories; those (like ourselves of course) that 'get it', are pro-feminist and on the 'right side' in the gender 'war', and those who do not, and therefore persistently embody some kind of patriarchal evil-doing. Nor are we able to control or precisely influence how the hidden transcript starts to roam free. I found this out when I started to share the story in Chapter Four. As Scott says:

*We are not able to tell easily under what precise circumstances the hidden transcript will storm the stage. But if we wish to move beyond apparent consent [to the public transcript] and to grasp potential acts, intentions as yet blocked, and possible futures that a shift in the balance of power or a crisis might bring to view, we have little choice but to explore the realm of the hidden transcript. (Scott 1990) p16*

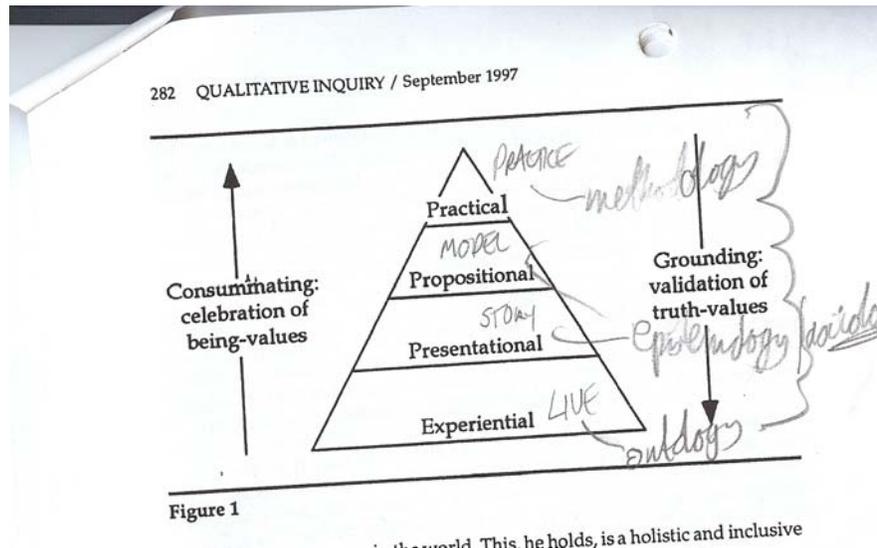
We use can use the 'public transcripts' of gender as a vehicle for their disruption, in the same way that the black slaves of the Americas used Christianity, and in particular the story of exodus, as a way of publicly expressing the private discourses of resistance. The art of articulating and proliferating the hidden transcripts, both to ourselves and to the wider community, is central to an inquiring approach to masculinities, fully in accord with emergent phenomenological, systemic, feminist and even transpersonal epistemologies.

### **Practice 3 – Developing Critical Subjectivity**

In the 1960s and 70s, the feminist challenge was presented in the slogan: 'the personal is political'. As Richardson says, in qualitative research, the 'personal is the grounding for theory'. (Richardson 2005) p927.

As a hidden transcript in itself, Heron and Reason's model of the 'Four Ways of Knowing' or 'extended epistemology', has been useful in enabling me to track this

emergent inquiring masculinity. In itself I see this framework as inherently challenging of the patriarchal 'hegemonic (academic) masculinity'. (Heron and Reason 1997)



(I offer a version of it with my annotations, as a glimpse of my body/my hand-writing, surfacing another hidden transcript.)

By placing the 'experiential' at the root of knowing, we derive knowledge from our embodied, phenomenological experience, which can then be represented (through story for example) towards proposition and action (the 'practical' level). This potentially disrupts a hegemonic masculine tendency to disconnect propositional knowledge from our experience and indeed to value it *above* our experience; hence the tendency (my tendency) to enjoy the language the head over that of the heart. In my unfolding inquiring awareness, this has been one of my patterns to notice and to make choices about; indeed I am noticing it now, as I write this on a hot, sweaty (enjoyable) Saturday afternoon. It causes me to wonder how well I am appearing to you, the reader, how human and present, and therefore choosing to articulate my current, local, timely position and state? This is the 'critical subjectivity' to which Heron and Reason refer:

*Thus, [critical subjectivity] is a close relative of Torbert's (1991) "consciousness in the midst of action"...It means we do not suppress our primary subjective experience but accept that it is our experiential articulation of being in the world, and as such is the ground of our knowing. (Heron and Reason 1997) p282*

So to bring my embodied experience as a man to this project, right here and right now, is itself to do some of this project's generative work. This is especially if I can show you some of the choices I make as a result.

In textual terms, one of the devices I developed to encourage my 'consciousness in the midst of action', and which evolved into the first drafts of the stories I use in this thesis, was dialogue. I found it to be a useful tool to maintain the inquiring intention to stay on the 'edge', keeping 'other voices' in the picture, and with regard to *mentshlichkeit*, (being a good man), maintaining an internal voice (from the source of my multiple selves – see practice 1) of challenge to the (potentially dominant, male?) voice that creeps in and takes over my own. In short, it becomes my own critical consciousness in action.

Here's an excerpt, one of the earliest examples of this practice. The context of this piece was to deconstruct a sense of discomfort I felt when challenged by a man who was a participant in a group I was facilitating at Roffey Park. You will see how the second (critical) voice doesn't wait to let me off the hook. It also shows you some more of the context for my work at Roffey Park. The first voice is 'mine'; the second voice is the critical 'foil'.

8/2/07

*Framing: My intention in this practice: 'Audiencing' this piece explicitly to slow me down, provide a foil to write against, so that I can consider my motives and the sticky angles...the nooks and crannies, and 'hear' my own voice.*

1: I want to talk about something that happened yesterday, it rocked me, and I think it also explores some of the ontological givens I have taken on board at Bath/CARPP.

2. Phew...! Ontological *whats?*!

1. Sorry, yes, I mean, is there a way of seeing, about inquiry, that I have turned into a bit of pedantry. Actually I am confused. Something I took for granted has been challenged and this has rocked me. Can you help?

2. Of course! Tell, me, what was the scene?

1. I was facilitating a mixed inquiry group, of clients and Roffey staff. The morning had gone really well. I felt on a high, after a good couple of weeks. Two good days with SB Council on leadership, then an 'advanced facilitation course', - I felt, you know, on top of my game.

2. So I notice a sense of performance there, of being at home, in your element – a touch of hubris perhaps?

1. Perhaps, a little. But it was nice to think I knew what I was talking about.

2. Dangerous!

1. Well, yes, it proved to be.

2. So this challenge – what happened? How did it disrupt this cosy scene of the morning?

1. I had prepared a couple of slides, you know, the 'four ways of knowing', that triangle of Heron and Reason

2. Their 'Extended Epistemology', yes, I've never been entirely sold on it.

1. Yes, well, as you know I love it. I really like the pyramid bit, how everything is based on the experiential. I showed this slide, as part of a discussion about 'tools of inquiry' and a kind of argument ensued.

2. I see, so this 'argument', it was bothering you

1. Yes, I found it frustrating. It didn't seem to be getting anywhere, and if I'm honest there was a man who was really pissing me off.

2. Ah – now we're getting somewhere!

1. He just exuded negativity

2. How so?

1. His body language, his voice, very aggressive. I wasn't the only one who thought it.

2. Does that make it true?!

1. No, of course, Fair point. But he was using language like, 'practical outputs' and 'measurables'

2. So you thought you were offering him a much 'better' paradigm!? Isn't 'practical outputs', also part of the triangle, at the top? You're sounding a little arrogant

1. That's a bit strong, but I did believe it would be better for the group if we were less 'in our heads' and more basing our inquiry on 'experience'

2. By offering them a *model*?

1. Ah. Yes. Fair comment.
2. So, that was the challenge?
  1. No, the challenge was that he asked a question?
  2. How awful!? Which was?
    1. 'Why is it a hierarchy?'
    2. Sorry?
      1. That's what he asked: 'Why is it a hierarchy?'
      2. That's it? It doesn't sound that bad! It's a good question.
        1. Yes, but *how* he asked it. He went on about how I was privileging experience over theory and practice and this was just an age old argument of metaphysics over empiricism...blah, blah, blah.
        2. He has a point.
          1. Yes, I know. That's what's bothering me. But I also felt there was a 'man's game' going on, as if he wanted to show how clever he was...
          2. Well, maybe he did, but maybe you did too...I mean, *you* are the one standing up, showing off the powerpoint slides. In that sort of situation, you should expect push back. You are the bloke with the big voice, the authority as a 'tutor'. He has a right to push against that.
            1. Yes, that's true. And he does have a point, and I didn't know what to say. I mean, I couldn't explain why it was a hierarchy! The only thing I could think of saying is that experience is more 'real' than models...
            2. But maybe not for him...
              1. Yes, exactly. I think I've found out some of my own dogma. It becomes a political perspective. Like David Abram saying, we have 'lost' something because abstract language takes us away from imminent experience, but yet abstract language could equally be viewed as *adding* something. (Abram 1996). It is a question of balance.
              2. So you agree with the man who challenged you?
                1. Well, no, not entirely. But I have been struck by his challenge. I feel rattled. But I feel that if I believe in participation, real participation, I should be more open to this viewpoint. I want to challenge the bias towards privileging the theory, because it is key to the post modern critique of (white, male) 'reason', but I also want to learn, to be less of that very thing same (white male) bully *back*, and that's what I can see I was, a bit, as well. Part of me feels he just doesn't 'get it' but maybe, holding the other end of that rope, neither do I. But the thing that really caught me is how I felt when he challenged me: disorientated, shaky, like everything started to wobble, like Satre's 'nausea'
                2. Excellent, you had 'ontology vertigo'!
                  1. Now you're being funny!
                  2. No, it's true, you had vertigo; a feeling of disorientation, like everything in your world that you thought was solid suddenly feels shaky and negotiable.
                    1. Anyway, I was left really reflecting on my own sense of certainty. Let's just suppose he wasn't having a go at me. Let's suppose he was genuinely expressing his own take on it? In his world, if he starts with the 'maps and models', maybe he wasn't trying to be difficult, but trying to make sense of it all? And if he was genuinely trying to participate, who was being the 'difficult' one? Perhaps the dogma is mine?
                    2. So what did you do?
                      1. Well, I went back to Heron and Reason, and re-read their paper, and I found this bit:
                      2. Do you *have* to?!
                      1. Yes! Look:
 

*"Our work with cooperative inquiry, in mindfulness practices and ceremony, and our attempts at aware everyday living, all convince us that experiential encounter with the presence of the world is the ground*

*of our being and knowing. This encounter is prior to language and art, although it can be symbolized in language and art.”*

*(Heron and Reason 1997)*

2. Right, well, let's move on then...

1. Wait! There's more:

*“This, we argue, is not a dissociated metaphysical statement, rather it is an expression of a radical empiricism, that can be tested through experiential inquiry, and we invite others, both sceptical and sympathetic, to inquire with us as to the validity of our perspective.”*

*(Heron and Reason 1997) p276*

2. What strikes me about that is the fact that you didn't seem to really *invite* him.

1. Exactly! I realize it isn't a *given*, it is strongly held vector, if you like, and although I hold it deeply (as Heron and Reason do) it may be useful to see it as a personal plea, indeed an invitation, as they say. How do I get better at *inviting* participation?

The full dialogue was six pages long, and I have chosen a relevant extract. As well as the developing practice of critical subjectivity, through dialogue, it shows my deepening understanding of Heron and Reasons' perspective. It also shows how learning about my impact, as an 'authority figure', bound up with my own masculinity, was an essential practice in the development of *mentshlichkeit*. Later I also talk about how story was an answer to that question about how I can invite participation.

I remember that writing the dialogue felt like opening a door – as if it provided me, as a practice, with a consciousness that directly challenges my own blind spots, vital in the practice of inquiry towards *mentshlichkeit*. It was also fun. Weaving this practice into stories opened up new possibilities for this critical consciousness, allowing these 'other voices' to speak directly to/through me. In these early dialogues, I didn't ponder who these critical voices were. They just seemed like another voice of my own, flexing a muscle of internal critique. Later, however, drawing on a Jewish subjectivity, I talk more about other sources of these voices, and their link with *mentshlichkeit*.

This practice reminds me of what Gregory Bateson says about metalogues:

*A metalogue is a conversation about some problematic subject. This conversation should be such that not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject. Only some of the conversations here presented achieve that double format.*

*Notably, the history of evolutionary theory is inevitably a metalogue between man [sic] and nature, in which the creation and interaction of ideas must necessarily exemplify evolutionary process. (Bateson 1972) p2*

Using such practices in research, we side-step the claims of traditional research towards foundationalist, universal knowledge. This doesn't de-value the subjective research process – it merely opens up a different space of knowledge, one that is grounded in the relationship between the writer, the reader, and their experiences. This is what Reason and Heron call 'practical knowing': simply 'knowing how to do things' (Heron and Reason 1997). It is about the reader's reflection, choices and action (in the midst of their ironies and discomfort), as they are informed by the critical subjectivity, the presented choices and action of the writer (struggling with their own parallel 'edge'). Therefore, I am inviting you to judge the quality of my own choices and action, and see if these inform your own. The extent to which they do is a measure of the quality of this practice and the writing it inspires.

Like Bateson, I hope that the metalogues I develop in the course of this inquiry have that double format. I also suspect that they don't always quite achieve it, this is my aspiration. It is congruent with another aspiration: that what I present here is part of a wider, transpersonal conversation. This leads me onto the next practice.

#### **Practice 4 - Reflection *with* the World**

Learning to observe, reflect and write have been intrinsic practices in developing a more inquiring masculinity.

In our inquiry seminars at the University of Bath, the distinction was often made between 'show' and 'tell' – the former being the need to describe with rich detail before interpretation, the latter being the interpretation in relation to the 'show'. This relates to what is sometimes described as the 'ladder of inference' (Senge, Kleiner et al. 1994): the idea that we end up noticing what we want to see and ignoring data that doesn't fit with our worldview. It is important for the participatory inquirer to understand their biases, as part of developing this critical subjectivity, and learning to write in a way that prevents the author getting too much in the way.

I see this as about developing a kind of a journalistic, participatory sensitivity. It is a necessary practice in this type of inquiry – where one is present *enough* in the story for it to have hold the reader, and yet not too present that it becomes only *about the author's* story. I think it relates to the idea that Bateson was expressing above, that what we can engage in is a metalogue, a conversation between us and nature. We can therefore see the stories we tell as reports of a kind of conversation with the world, as part of a participatory consciousness.

Rather than just 'telling' you about this, I can 'show' you an example. In this piece, written as part of developing this critical subjectivity, I am exploring the experience of arriving in my job at Roffey Park, to take up my role as a consultant there in the summer of 2006:

24/8/06

*I was walking through the forest, more on my mind that in it as Bill Bryson once said. Bothered by coming here, wondering if I'd made the right decision. I felt a bit kicked about, not by anything other than the pace of things, the seeming attachment to busy-ness that I felt drawn to join in with. I will have to watch that. I suppose I am a bit scared about how easy it would be for me to jump into that fast flowing stream, and I wonder about that, for me, for those I care about and even for the people we work with – how much capacity will we have for them if we are so full of us and our own energy? I mumbled and grumbled to myself as I walked on through the trees.*

*I knew there was a lake along the main path somewhere, as I had seen it on the map. The path was quite wide, more like a track, with the occasional pot-hole filled by the recent rains. It was also light-coloured, with a bright chalk shining though wet clay, so it gave quite a good impression of the yellow brick road as it wound down the hill. The trees on each side were a mixture of newish pines and older forest creatures; gnarled oaks and beeches that make an English forest. The wind hushed through their limbs. I began to breathe.*

*All at once the lake appeared; an amazingly sudden sighting – green and lush, with vibrant lily pads flowering with the brightest of yellows. It was quite*

stunning. A few trees had been cleared (I noticed only later, for some telephone poles), and I could walk right to the waters edge, where an oak, growing out of the bank, had sometime past collapsed over the water, so it appeared now to grow straight out from the depths.

*I walked around the edge to where a small dam held the lake back from a gully. I wondered what I should do to take it all in; the usual head talk. 'Should I do my tai chi form, should I try a yoga sun stretch, or perhaps the four-fold way salute...?' And then it occurred to me just stop, watch, look, see, take it all in. That's what I did. I saw the colour of the water, a lime-green in places dropping to a dark, almost blackness in others. The clouds and small patches of blue sky cut diagonally across the scene. A small disturbance in the water nearby turned out to be the wake of a large fish, whose shadow lurked a purple-brown, skimming just beneath the surface like a ghost. Further off a loud splash of spray marked where something might have been suddenly snapped up whilst dozing on the surface. Through the trees, a small disturbance turned out to be two young deer following their path. I gasped it all in, drank and it drank me and I wondered where I began and it ended and I got to the edge of the beginning of the point where the distinction didn't make sense anymore. 'Just be yourself', they say and yet who am I really? Where do I begin and everything else ends?'*

*This must have been a minute or two and then I was aware of myself again, needing to go back for normal ego states and lunch. I turned perhaps a bit too fast, back towards the path and there was a flash at the corner of my eye, a sort of whooshing noise and I started. I stopped in my tracks and felt something come to me; an impulse to speak some words, not entirely my own, and they came and said, out loud through my own lips, slowly, as if struggling to speak through some alien device they hadn't yet mastered: 'don't...go.'*

This quality of noticing, of engaging with the immanent world is an important skill in an inquiry project. It suggests our attention to a phenomenological awareness that opens us up to different perspectives and possibilities. In my thinking here, I have been influenced by the writing of David Abram, in his book the *Spell of the Sensuous*:

*By bouncing from one to the other-form scientific determinism to spiritual idealism and back again – contemporary discourse easily avoids the possibility that both the perceiving being and the perceived are of the same stuff, that the perceiver and the perceived are interdependent and in some sense even the reversible aspects of a common animate element, or Flesh, that is at once both sensible and sensitive. (Abram 1996) p67*

In this sense, Abram's work is very reminiscent of Bateson's:

*The total self-corrective unit which processes information, or, as I say, "thinks" and "acts" and "decides", is a system whose boundaries do not at all coincide with the boundaries either of the body or what is popularly called the "self" or "consciousness". (Bateson 1972) p319*

In practice terms, we pay attention to the quality of our seeing, as I put it in the passage above, to stop, watch, look, see. The flow of this passage contains within it how this becomes a skill of attention, from watching, which still has the flavours of the watcher in it, to look, which is less so, to see, which is more about what is being seen than the seer.

(Another example of this in Appendix Two: *Praise Song for the Day*. This story has another significance which re-emerges in the Conclusion.)

I would argue that learning to reflect in this way, *with* the World, rather than as a dispassionate observer of it, is not only a useful skill in the development of good storytelling. It is also helpful in post-modern *mentshlichkeit*, undermining the separation of an atomised self and a (dead) world that is the signature of an enlightenment-derived, 'reasonable' hegemonic masculinity.

### **Practice 5 – Practice of Persistence**

Judi Marshall talks about learning to live life as inquiry is amongst other things about knowing when to 'persist and desist' (Marshall 1999). I take this to be an active practice in writing of persisting until the story-making process becomes too 'personal' i.e. where it loses the possibility of empathy and connection with others. At that point, we can choose to desist. Following from this, I once heard Peter Reason say during a lecture at the University of Bath that he felt there was little difference between learning to be an inquirer and learning to live a good life.

This is echoed by Fisher, Torbert et al, who discuss 'seeking the good life':

*We propose that a good way to approach the good life is to see it as composed of four primary goods – namely, good money, good work, good friends, and good questions. (Fisher and Torbert 1995) p150*

The two that really chime with me in relation to the quality of my inquiry work here are Good work and Good Questions. Good work is about *'the development of craft-like skills and aesthetic judgement (whether in the realm of materials, of relationships, or language)*. (Fisher and Torbert 1995) p153

I see this as in a similar vein to what Reason talks about in his participatory worldview, and it draws on Bateson (and others) in its search of the criteria of feeling, connection and relationship in the judgement of quality. This has been at the essential level of my inquiry work, not in the least because it enables my hoped for transgression of the rule of hegemonic masculinity to privilege the transaction over the relationship. So how well one feels drawn in, related to, co-created with is an important mark of quality in the development of an inquiring masculinity.

Essential to this process is the framing of good questions:

*What are the questions guiding your life (or that you are trying to evade)? What is the single question that integrates those different questions? Are you asking it every day? Every moment? Are you fully alive – let alone living the good life when you are not tasting your experience? Are you embalmed within your thoughts right now or are you tasting your thinking along with your embodiment, outcomes, and your changing quality of attending?(Fisher and Torbert 1995) p159*

In my inquiry, quality is measured not just in what you see here but in terms of the everyday impact, the slow melting of these questions into my life. Carl Rogers (quoted by (Moustakas 1981)) suggested that it was disciplined attention to good questions that we needed more than the teaching of particular methodologies – that this was the methodology required in challenging times, replete with 'wicked' questions– those complex, systemic problems that can't be answered by a logical, or critical approach. (Grint 2005)

It isn't always easy to show how these questions have become so ingrained in me that it is difficult to know what it was like beforehand, without them, but the telling of the story of Jim Porter in Chapter 4, drawing heavily on my own life experience, should go some way to show the challenges, doubled-ness and complexity in this work whilst maintaining this determined stance.

In the end, I wouldn't want to argue that my cleverness has been the most outstanding feature of all of this work – rather its quality may be best measured in terms of the determination and persistence with these questions of masculinity and gender that it demonstrates.

### **Practice 6 - Practice of Biculturalism**

Gloria Gordon introduces the concept of bi-cultural competence, one that involves an exploration of the historical legacies one faces and the tensions this can provide in one's own subjectivity, especially when identifying with a marginalised culture. 'Bi-cultural' refers to the tension (and possibility of action) between the private, historical culture one inherits and the public, dominant culture that pervades:

*The oppositional relationship that exists between Africa and Britain had existed in my psyche. The denial, the blocking out of the inhumane treatment of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and of the DoEAs [Descendants of enslaved Africans] in the white British psyche had also taken place in my own mind-world. The critical task in terms of becoming consciously bi-culturally competent is in the understanding and combining of these three cultural components into an integrated whole in my own psychological world. (Gordon 2007) p136*

Using this notion of bicultural competence, looking into my Jewish heritage and considering its impact on my action, has become important practice. The inquiry into my own private story meant taking in a wider sweep, towards my historical culture, a necessary practice of increasing bicultural awareness. (Gordon 2007). This landed with me during the early period of my developing inquiry, which coincided in a timely way, in the winter of 2005, with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Such timely occurrences are in the nature of this type of knowledge, and not mere 'coincidences' (Toulmin 1990). I have documented the relationship between familial, Jewish and masculinity questions and the story-telling practice I used to interweave them, in my previous submissions at Diploma and MPhil Transfer level.

I am informed in my inquiry into being a 'good man' by my own private/historical self, the self that is 'community made', and as Jonathan Boyarin points out, there is something quintessentially communal about the Jewish identity which challenges the dominance of an individualistic, hegemonic masculinity. In Boyarin's view, the marks on the body of the Jewish man (such as wearing the head covering or *kippa*, and circumcision) bear witness to the fact that a Jewish man is always part of a community, and can never be 'self-made'. (Boyarin 1996)

Bringing that private, bi-cultural self into the public light is a matter of language as much as action. Hence the deliberate, bi-cultural titling of this thesis: putting *mentshlichkeit*, the 'art of the mentsh', into the title. I am practicing the art of bringing the private into the mainstream, surfacing a 'hidden transcript', and allowing the scrutiny of the hegemonic and hopefully acting to challenge and disrupt its smooth surface.

## Other Voices – Mystery, Danger, Opportunity

But I also invoke my Yiddish inheritance because it offers me another counterpoint to the singular goodness of (male) reason and another worldview which is more nuanced in its search for progress. In this work, the *sheydim*, (demons), do not get in our way; they occasionally possess us, trick us, test us, and maybe even help us.

You will notice then, in the storytelling, I have been drawing on different voices as useful friends in the text as we go. There are generally compassionate voices, which, Zaddik-like (a Zaddik is a 'righteous' one) help us spot the practices that help in our political purpose of developing an inquiring masculinity. There are others, which like *Sheydim* try to disrupt and trip up the smooth reason (of the white, male voice), which may creep in and haunt us. For my grandmother's sake (see an example, from her, opposite), I call this commentary 'other voices', which, like post-it notes on a document, serve to offer another view. To judge whether these voices are 'good' or 'bad' may play into the hands of the very hegemonic masculine '*dybbuk*' they are presented to unmask. A *dybbuk* is a particularly powerful spirit, which '*has left one body or being in order to settle in another.*' (Wex 2005) p95). (OK, Grandma, I'll say nothing more for now).

As part of the process of critical subjectivity, sometimes they speak, inviting dialogue, surfacing a hidden transcript, or just, like my grandma above, expect me be a good boy and do what I am told. These 'other voices', then, are just another 'colour'; a touch of queerness in the text, that suggests the moment to moment struggle for *mentshlichkeit*:

*Far from perfect, a mentsh is a flawed fighter. And that's' exactly what we as queer Jews are: flawed fighters in a world that can be rather discouraging but which also grants us gifts of beauty, light, and discover each and every moment. (Brown 2004) pxix*

You may have noticed that '*mentsh*', like the word '*mensch*' in German, can also mean 'person', rather than man. This is a sign of the patriarchal nature of my Yiddish/Jewish inheritance, where to be a person was to be measured alongside a kind of hegemonic masculine standard. My own background is not immune from the spectre and I don't wish to reify Judaism, (and the inherent patriarchy of its father-like God). Indeed, if I am searching for a new type of inquiring masculinity here, I am simultaneously searching for an evolving expression of Jewishness as well. At times, this journey is about both.

If there are 'disciplines' of masculinity (where we take on in our bodies the haunting of the hegemonic spectre), there are also disciplines of Judaism (for example, where we are commanded to live according to the 613 *Mitzvot*, 'commandments' or 'acts of observance'). Both disciplines may need some resisting, if we are to be allowed to flourish in our own autonomy. Bringing my private self into the public discourse, I have

### My Grandmother's Voice

If she were still alive, at this point, my grandmother, on hearing the word *sheydim*, would mutter three spits ('*Peh! Peh! Peh!*') and the Yiddish word '*keynehore!*' (literally: 'to ward off the evil eye'). In other words, to invoke the *sheydim* is to invite trouble - in Yiddish, to name something is potentially to invoke its presence. She would say:  
- "*Peh Peh Peh!* - Don't call them by their name! If you have to, call them '*sitre akhre*', '*The other side!* *Keynehore!*'"  
- "*Ok Grandma!*"

So to avoid trouble, I invoke only those that can really help our purpose. You cannot respectfully draw on a subjectivity without accepting some of its rules of play.

to hold both the inspirational (generative) qualities of my background along with the patriarchal, conservative (mentsh = man/not woman) roots. The art of *action* research is to seek intentional action towards the change we want to see/be in the world in all our/its messiness. In the next chapter I explore my performativity in the arena of Jewishness too.

These other voices, then, serve in this parallel purpose. It is a Talmudic principle. The Talmud evolved before and during the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium after Jesus, as an active commentary (partly as a response to emerging Christianity), like a series of 'post-it' notes on the original five books of Moses, or '*Torah*'.

All of these practices, then (and others which I show in the course of the stories that unfold) suggest that inquiring into mentshlichkeit is a model for a type of work which may have the power to challenge, upset and disrupt the spectre of hegemonic masculinity that may come to haunt us, more often than not. It is not *the* way by *my* way, and as such may serve as an encouragement for others to find their own way. To return to the debate about the personal vs the political, this is work all men can do, with attention to both the critique of male power, and sensitivity to the subjectivity of ordinary men's lives.

But it is work that has unintended as well as unintended consequences, dangers as well as opportunities. In inviting the *sitre akhre*, other voices, in to play, we have to deal with their unknown intentions, and things may emerge that we cannot know about, until we stumble upon them. As I was writing about those 'other voices', unexpected things happened. For example, I lost a whole day's work by not saving the document on my computer. Normally I am scrupulous about this practice. Somehow this spoke to me as a warning. It seemed that these *shaydim* (gulp) might be playing out their game, once again. But I persisted, and in hope of the work of mentshlichkeit stumbled my way through, perhaps turning this setback into another opportunity; to wonder about the mystery in this work, reminding me of my unknowing as well as continuing to prompt me towards the clarity of knowing.

It seems fitting then, to finish here with another voice, to *ask permission* to stay in this territory. As I pondered this, my grandfather's voice seemed to speak, and so I offer him the last word, for now.

***My grandfather's voice:***

*"But what is gender? Why does it matter so much? Surely men are men and women are women and that's just it? Be a fish be a fish be a fish..."*

*"Well just look how many fish there are!"*

*"What nonsense is this?"*

*"Do we ever really look at people, look at them, their bodies, how they hold themselves, talk, walk?"*

*"Look at bodies! What kind of meshuganah?!" [meshuganah = crazy person]*

*"All I'm saying is that there's such a range within, as much as between, what men and women are. It is a performance, like a stage. We think we know the lines, and the moves, and the songs and dances. We are supposed to know them. We mustn't change the play. People don't like it. But it is just a play. I just want to know how far I can sing a different song."*

*"It never bothered me."*

*"Were you a happy man, grandfather?"*

*"What's to be happy, feh!?"*

*"I just wondered what else you would like to have done, you know, on the stage?"*

*"Listen, where I came from, you were lucky just to have part, without some mamzer putting one on you.[mamzer = bastard] My papa was nearly shot by the Russians, you know."*

*"I know. This may all seem a bit crazy. But were you happy. Would you have liked a different role?"*

*"I loved to sing, you know as a boy. And dance. But when I got older, there wasn't much chance. We just got on with it."*

*"For me, you just got on with it."*

*"Yes, for you, for the next generations. So you can go off and do your meshuganah things. Like looking at bodies! Ach! Hob a zorick! Geh Gesund! [I should worry! Go in health!] It's not my world."*

## Interlude – From the Journal of Sarah Jones - July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020

### Ol' Blue Eyes

Only just made it. Phew. Honestly why am I always in such rush? Is this my seat? Panic. No, yes, that's right. Thank God Steve got a permit to drop me off at the station...I made it. 'Special Dispensation' for heavily pregnant women. Coach F. Seat 71. Here I am. Right place. Phew.

That's it. Nice and slow; no sudden moves...I feel like a whale this morning, and I'm starving. Put the bag of goodies there...I can't wait to have some of that coffee. Feeling guilty. Shouldn't really be consuming coffee (very expensive now) and croissants like a locust. It's official - I am the size of a bus. And that caffeine...the sprog will come out like a speeding chihuahua. Who cares? I need the sugar. What a world...

Oh now. He looks nice...bit squidgy round the edges. But nice eyes. Blue. Don't know why I ended up marrying a man with brown eyes. I've always preferred blue.

- Does that seat ticket say...Kings Cross – ah great!

Blue Eyes speaks!

- Why? Is that your seat?
- No. No. It means they're not getting on. I can put my bag there.

He lifts his great big black computer bag into the spare seat next to me.

- You don't mind do you? You can put your bag there if you like? He smiles.
- No. No, not at all – Yes, I'll put mine there too.

Nice smile. Oh God what am I thinking? Eight months pregnant and I'm flirting with a man on a train. How completely naff. That's the trouble with being up the duff: everything's haywire. And it has made me so...horny? No, that's not quite right. Just interested. As if my body's always on the lookout for something...is it some kind of primal defence mechanism...are my genes looking out for some kind of protection? 'Single pregnant female. Vulnerable. Looking for safety. Biologically predisposed to seek male approval and protection'.

- Only just made it. My wife couldn't drop me off at the station. No permit. Had to run.

He speaks again – His wife. Wonder what she's like? Is she a whale?

- Oh. I had to drag my husband out of bed but he had permission. Whales get a permit!

He laughs. There. The signal is exchanged, the status established. Although mine has already been established by my whale-like condition, of course, deluded cow! Smile again. Flash of blue eyes. Oh stop it. Time to work. Got the laptop out...Now concentrate. I need to sound at least half coherent at the seminar...ho hum.

Peterborough arrives. Good, no-one's getting on. Me and Blue Eyes have the table to ourselves. I can spread out a bit. Have my coffee. Yum.

It seems so odd to be still working, with what the world is going through. I'm very keen to get on with it. It's my first proper gig since I got my PhD. I don't want to be cheated out of it by anything as trivial as a global catastrophe. It is so strange how some things just seem to go on, even though so much has suddenly changed. I called and they said the University is still open and the woman on the phone sounded really surprised, like it was odd of me to wonder if their Gender Studies Programme was still going ahead, what with half the world's major cities underwater! It reminds me of what people used to say about the War. So many people's lives changed utterly whilst others just 'kept calm and carried on'.

What is it about strangers, like Ol' Blue Eyes? They can be so...alluring, anything you want them to be. I wonder if he's caught on that I'm writing this and not working on my lecture about the 'social construction of sex'? Maybe I am working on my paper about the social construction of sex! Here I am, pregnant, feeling low, as you do, no more than what you feel when everyone around you is a size 10 and you have to buy your clothes from the tent shop, you just need the affirmation...and just a flash from Blue Eyes there and my day is made! Is that shallow? Where's the feminist in me gone? But maybe that's it. Maybe it's not shallow. Maybe it's quite deep actually. I mean, that feeling I felt. It was not submissive, it was...it felt, so...predatory. Like I'm a...praying mantis or something. Like a deep physical sensation of 'come here I want you'...  
Woah! Let's just leave that there shall we? I mean I might have to go for a pee soon, and I just can't imagine what Ol' Blue Eyes there would think if he sneaked a peek at this?! Oh the headlines:

"Gender Studies Lecturer writes explicit seduction letter to stranger on train..."

Anyway it's not about Ol' Blue Eyes is it? It's about me. It's about how all sorts of things seem to conspire all the time, to knock the stuffing out of my feminist sensibilities...

Why is it that when you are pregnant, it's the women who are the worst? In public places they just seem to emanate a sort of ...malice. Not all of them. Older women can sometimes be nice. But younger ones, especially those who look like mothers themselves. It is so seductive to look to some kind of superficial biological explanation. Like the female dogs that have a maternal pecking order...but I 'know', at some level that that is just some kind of trap – the internalised spectre of a social derived construct – I end up feeling the feelings in my waters that I'm meant to feel in order to support the dominant conversation about how I should be as a woman, and then AFTERWARDS look for some kind of paradigm, pseudo-scientific, biological or otherwise, to support the hypothesis. It starts with the feelings. Being pregnant is all about your body sensations. Everything feels so...heightened. Hyper-aware. It isn't just the baby kicking or that stuff. It is like everything...my organs, my skin, have been bathed in some kind of special balm and I feel so...sensitive, sensual, sexual yes, but not just...more hyper-aware. On guard but also...so interested in everything.

Not all the time obviously. Sometimes, actually most of the time, I just feel knackered. It's only in the mornings. It started in the vomiting phase. I would puke my guts out and then afterwards, I'd feel like 'Wow! I've really woken up now!'

Of course, you could equally argue that these women aren't behaving like dogs, but like women conditioned into that hostility by human hierarchies, which they've internalised, including that of the dominance of the 'scientific' and the belief in their 'natural, biological difference'. And maybe my generalisation about them is my own conditioning. The mote in my own eye...

I've got to pee! Can't bear the idea that Blue Eyes might read it when I've gone. Save it. Ol' Blue Eyes – July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020.doc. Now: to pee...

Back at my seat and the trolley's here and Ol' Blue Eyes is buying himself a drink. I feel a bit naughty writing like this. It seems voyeuristic. It IS voyeuristic. But aren't I just doing what we all do? Watching. Making up stories about strangers? Only difference is I'm writing it down. As autoethnographic research. Yeah right. But it IS research. It is so interesting, spotting things - catching yourself in your seeing of them.

Blue Eyes has just taken out a wallet. I say wallet but it looks more like a purse. Quite sort of ponsy and feminine. And what I notice is my whole idea about him has changed. That one act – that one performance with that one artefact, and...well, the truth is I've gone off him. Just like that. Like a switch has turned. He still seems nice, but, it's less...in a fancy-able way. Surely we're not programmed to like Armani wallets and be less attracted by some kind of ...what is it exactly? A grubby hippy purse? It's such a construction, such an artificially derived set of meanings. So devoid of inherent quality, so totally bound up with the meaning of *this* thing in *this* time...you could argue it is all wired up to some kind of mainframe underneath... a biological drive to watch out for the most 'fitting mate', the best protector of my unborn child from the woolly mammoths etc. etc. but why would a silly little purse have such a strong attachment?

I can't help thinking it's much more to do with the fact that I used to be bit of a hippy. It's about those idiot boys I used to hang out with; those dope smoking dolts who pretended to be so right-on but actually just wanted to get their leg over like the men they pretended they weren't. That's what that stupid purse reminds me of! It's that idiot Alan, who I went to Biarritz with, and he surfed all day, I got bored and all he ever wanted to do at night was shag, the jerk.

So the jury's still out of course. There must be some kind of deep link between the biological, hormonal stuff and the social meaning. No doubt. I can't sit here, feeling seethingly morning-pregnant and say that the body doesn't come into it. I do feel deep physical drives. But thereafter? It is all so bound up with the way we see things, the way we are supposed to see things, according to own ghosts of gender conditioning. The way our performances are tied up, internally as much as externally...perhaps more internally than externally, with the cultural meanings. Being pregnant, everyone notices and treats you in a different way. They expect you to behave in a different way. I can feel it: that internal click that registers if I do something someone disapproves of, which for some people is just to be there, in their world, being a pregnant women. Sometimes people can just feel hateful and I feel their gaze as a pressure to just go away and hide in a cave somewhere and stop facing them with their own primal origins.

Isn't it what Foucault said about the 'cop in the head'? That internal disciplining that ensures each individual acquires the appropriate inner language; conditioning them to perform the required external performances, like being a woman, the 'right kind' of a pregnant woman, on a train? And definitely not to be the kind of pregnant woman who wants to take 'Ol Blue Eyes off into some dark corner. Thank God for his naff purse. I suspect that Foucault was never morning-pregnant. But did he *ever* understand what it felt like!?

Ol' Blue Eyes has put his purse away but somehow the spell is broken.

At least I know now what I want to talk about at this seminar.

## Chapter Three - Bringing the (Jewish) Body into it

*'Be a fish, be a fish, be a fish', my Grandfather used to say. (It makes more sense in Yiddish, but basically it means, 'remember who you really are').*

I experience being the generic person (white, male etc.) who often doesn't notice his own body as a thing in itself. The irony is, as I will show, that the Jewish position in Europe historically has *also* been to physically disappear. Exploring this shape-shifting between my Jewish and White male selves, and the discomfort between them, serves many purposes:

- It provides a new kind of research impetus that goes beyond the limitations of (male-biased) scientific 'reason', to include diverse subjectivities, bodies and reason(s)
- It explores the space between different 'selves' I inhabit, thus challenging the myth of the coherent, single, whole, reasonable, male 'self'
- It enables me to actively draw on my own Jewish subjectivity, as a useful source of liberatory ideas (such as *mentshlichkeit* – the 'art of being a good man'). In doing so, I am making more solid and present another view of the world, as a disruption of the white, male 'reason' that takes over from time to time
- It helps me develop my skills in my work as a 'process consultant', sensitive to *'both self-knowledge and technical expertise'* (Cheung-Judge 2001) p12
- It helps me to consider a very important question: how is it possible for a man who appears to be white, male, middle-class etc. to act in a *good way*?

### My Jewish Body

My intention is to show how these practices have led me consistently towards considering my (Jewish) body as an inquiry ground itself. I also would like to show this body in its appreciation of a text. There is a perpetual irony here, in that my body will be (probably forever) for you trapped within a text. I hope to show that my body has played a part in this inquiry, and that, even in the engagement with text and the ideas within, although my attempts to surface my body are sporadic and ultimately frustrating, this was a dynamic that persisted, and staying with this discomfort came together in the stories including that in Chapter Four.

Living in both worlds of the white man and the Jew can be seen as a saving grace. Like an anchor, my Jewishness has seems to have provided me with some stability from beyond the white man's view of the world; an alternative 'reason', from my own background, that stops me from drifting too far down the stream with the 'pale stale male' current, to borrow a phrase from Roy Jacques. (Jacques 1997). For this reason, I am very grateful to my Jewish heritage. To extend the fish-in-water metaphor, my Jewishness helps me because through it I can be like a fish that can fly. I can occasionally see the water from both above and below the surface. I am not in the air for very long, and I only catch a glimpse of the water from outside, but at least this has given me a sense that there was another way of seeing. This research project has been about deliberating keeping myself in the air a bit longer.

I have become increasingly conscious of symmetry between explorations of Jewish subjectivities, with their use in the development of an inquiring, post-patriarchal masculinity, and that of 'queer theory', and its equally inherent challenge to mono-mythic dominant masculinity.

*While there are no simple equations between Jewish and queer identities, Jewishness and queerness yet utilize and are bound up with one another in particularly resonant ways. (Boyarin, Itzkovitz et al. 2003) p1*

This position is problematic yet useful. Whilst there is undoubted symmetry here, there are also strange interference patterns. My Jewishness has become a useful inquiry ground in the disestablishment and challenge of internalised patriarchy, yet I must also acknowledge that there is a healthy dose of patriarchy in my own Jewishness. So whilst this forms a useful edge of inquiry, it is one that must be held lightly, lest I generalise towards a position that infers Jewishness is *inherently* challenging of a dominant masculinity. It is in the active, internalised inquiry into the relationship between Jewishness and queerness, *in me*, that the generative challenge resides, rather than in positing of inherent challenge to patriarchy in Judaism *per se*.

I compare my own experience to that which Amanda Sinclair describes about indigenous Australians, and the:

*stereotyping of Aboriginals as bodies without brains (athletes, runners, football players, boxers)... (Sinclair 2005)*

The core of Sinclair's idea is of body possibilities; that bodies and embodiment might offer us:

*powerful sites in the construction of subversive leadership and new leadership knowledge. (Sinclair 2005)*

For me this sparked questions about my Jewish experience and how, to develop this train of thought, I think I grew up in a culture which in contrast had an embodied self-construct of Jews as the opposite, as 'brains without bodies'.

Founders of Zionism, such as A.D. Gordon viewed the return to Palestine/Israel as a chance to redeem the Jewish body, healing the distinction between 'guff and nefesh' (Hebrew for 'body and soul' respectively). It is as if I have inherited a Jewish experience of our own evolution as a marginalised people, since and through the Enlightenment as being about a kind of rampant assimilatory Cartesianism; internalised marginalisation that prompted a separation from our own bodies.

Jonathan Sacks (the Chief Rabbi of the orthodox Jewish communities in the UK) says this:

*The seminal Jewish experience for the past two centuries has been a flight from particularity, and both the Israeli and American Jewish communities are its heirs. ... [their first goal] was to be less conspicuous as Jews. Hence Sidney Morganbesser's wonderful definition of Jewish identity as incognito ergo sum. ['In secret therefore I am']. (Sacks 1997)*

Zionists considered that the Israeli/Zionist 're-connection with the land', as seen in the Israeli Kibbutz movement, would redeem us Jews. It is interesting that I find part of my inquiry edging into my own experience of discomfort with Zionist masculinities, as expressed by an archetype of the militarised Israeli male that I consider overly macho (see the reference to my own journal when living in Israel aged 19, at the beginning of Chapter One).

I have discussed with black friends how the key difference in my own marginalisation and theirs may be that I can choose whether to 'come out' or not, as a Jew. As I have said: *'But that wouldn't be true for my great grandparents' – you would have known*

*they were Jewish to look at them*'. I realise now that this might be my own family's contribution to the larger picture Sacks is painting here; has it been our aim to 'disappear ourselves, physically, as Jews'. It strikes me how many of my own family members walk and talk in a way that is very 'English'. As I journalled in 2005:

*Recently I went to a family party, a 50th wedding anniversary, on a glorious English summer's afternoon in fact. We stood outside and chatted and drank our champagne. I joined in but with a part of my attention split into observer mode.*

*In some ways of course this is a very familiar environment, but at this time I had already been formulating this shape-shifting thesis in my mind, and therefore, had a new perspective to 'try out'. What struck me was the essential Englishness of this gathering. Both the content and the form of voices and bodies present. A causal observer might think they had entered any English, middle-class gathering. As the afternoon wore on however I noticed people's voices changing. Expressions became more pronounced. Content shifted. In fact I would simply say that people got more Jewish. The conversation passed from discussions of the cricket and weather to more familial and indeed even religious contexts."*

Jonathan Boyarin demonstrates how there is something, a possibility at least, in the Jewish inheritance that directly challenges the mono-mythic and 'complete' nature of the self that is a core aspect of the hegemonic masculinity; that is that in Jewish culture there are embodied traditions, such as skull-cap wearing and circumcision, that define each Jewish male as inherently made by his community, rather than 'himself' alone:

*The story of the self-made man, stripped down to its common features, starts from a zero point. It has no prehistory...On the contrary; we will claim that a "male Jewish self"...cannot be limited to such a unilinear, bounded, and progressive conception of time...they can be articulated as presenting quite rich contrasts to the rhetoric of the self-made man. (Boyarin 1996) p39*

So circumcision, wearing a *kippa* (Skull cap), lighting the candles on Friday night at our own home, writing my own name in Hebrew, calling this inquiry about *mentshlichkeit*; all these actions, when linked to a wider conception of masculinity, serve to offer a possibility of disruption, and following Boyarin's idea, in how they open up temporal as well as spatial dimensions of relationship.

*It suggest that an acceptance of the mark of circumcision and all of the involuntary connections that it implies place a Jewish male into a "dreamtime" or (Robert Paine's term, 1983) "totemic time" and outside the progressive time of modern self-making. (Boyarin 1996) p39*

Such acceptance is an everyday act. In choosing to comply or not with the totems of Jewishness, with full awareness of what these symbols mean for the continued prescription of masculinity, there are possibilities for evolution. I am influenced here by Elizabeth Grosz's notion of the 'nick'. Grosz, a feminist who boldly ties Darwinian evolutionary theory to the politics of feminism (which has been historically antagonistic to 'great white dead males' such as Darwin) argues that it is only our exploration in the 'now', 'in the nick of time' of reflexive action that we can consider ourselves free to change the habits of inherited patterns such as patriarchy.

*Events are ruptures, nicks, which flow from causal connections in the past but which, in their unique combinations and consequences, generate unpredictability and effect sometimes subtle but wide-ranging, unforeseeable transformations in the present and future. (Grosz 2004) p8*

This closely relates to Judith Butler's 'performativity'. This allows us to consider our political engagement with generative change as usefully liminal, subject to but not forever locked into and therefore having erratic, unpredictability possibilities of escape from the heavy weight of (gendered/ Jewish) historical inheritance.

*[A]gency lies in the work of performativity. Because subjects are constantly reproduced (through repetition), they are never fully constituted. There is always space for reworking and resisting. (Jackson 2004) p675*

So there are possibilities, and they exist in both our attention to our own subjectivities and the inevitably though unpredictable action that follows. This is dangerous, discomforting ground in which to experiment with performativity. In my own life as a Jew in a non-Jewish culture, habits endure about what it is safe to do; about how far it is possible to proclaim or hide our difference, for example. In my submission for Diploma at CARPP, I told the following story of my own son leaving for synagogue with a skull-cap ('coppel' or 'kippa') on his head:

*Max is leaving the house to go to synagogue that morning with my mother and father. He walks down the front path and then remembers that he doesn't have his 'coppel' (head covering) with him so he comes running back and I give him one (the brown one in fact that I wore for my Bar Mitzvah in 1978). He puts it on and runs happily back down the path into the street with it on. I find myself reaching towards his head - to take it off. My hand almost stretches out to take it off but it turns into a half-hearted pat which he doesn't notice thankfully. I have this urge to tell him not to put it on yet, to wait until he is the Synagogue and safe. I can feel my voice rising in my throat and I have to push it back down again, I know I shouldn't say anything and I feel glad for him running down the path and out onto the street with his coppel on. I feel so proud in a way and part of me wants to follow him and shout "Hey, this is a Jewish boy here!" Then the opposite - this urge comes from deep within me propelling my hand out before I catch myself and turn this into a pat or a wave. I feel momentarily cross with him but manage to stifle this, not revealing it to him. I notice my parent look as well, particularly my mother as if she is feeling exactly the same thing, a sort of "Why can't we do this? Shouldn't we just let him do what we were afraid to do all our lives?" I have a picture of myself as a small child being told by my big brother to take my coppel off now we were in the street having left the 'Shul' [synagogue] and I don't know why, he doesn't say but there is something, some feeling about how this might be dangerous or something and that people may do something to us if they see us wearing our coppels. So we blend in and walk passed my school which was on the way to the synagogue with our coppels in our pockets, almost as if we were walking past the police station having just committed a minor misdemeanour of some sort.*

Victor Seidler talks about his own experience of this, an almost deliberate dis-identification with the Jewish body, heightened in the post-holocaust experience:

*In my own learning I have been surprised to discover how fears emerge from a Second Generation post-Holocaust experience have taught me that safety lies in relative invisibility on the margins of organisations. (Seidler 2005)*

I would like to inquire further into my own sense that I grew up thinking that although I did have a 'white male body' I didn't quite have THAT white male body. In some way my embodiment was lesser than that of, for example, my classmates at school. I (thought I) couldn't run, play football or fight like them. Indeed I succeeded in avoiding ever getting into a fight, at a rough all-boys comprehensive school, by effectively 'disappearing' myself, physically.

*The built white body is not the body that white men are born with; it is the body made possible by their natural mental superiority...In short, the built body and the imperial enterprise are analogous. (Dyer 1997) p270*

Amanda Sinclair's 'body possibilities' invite me to think about my own body experience as a 'possibility'. In particular it is the possibility afforded by marginalisation:

*An individual capacity to experiment and subvert bodily conventions may have grown out of experiences of being an outsider. (Sinclair 2005) p19*

This has prompted me to consider the work I do around gender as a possibility;

*The body is personal and political; a reflection of individual and systemic characteristics; both active. (Sinclair 2005) p20*

In this way I have an inkling of how I may use my own experience of Jewishness, of invisibility and presence, as a shape-shifting tool. This gives me a vital thread of inquiry, it inspires me to keep my body in the picture.

*Bodies, in their own right as bodies, do matter. They age, get sick, enjoy, engender, give birth. There is an irreducible bodily dimension in experience and practice; the sweat cannot be excluded. (Connell 1995) p51*

In June 2006, inspired by David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*, I wrote:

*We are all exiled and in exile we are at home.  
We are all marginal and our marginality makes us safe  
We are all queer and queer is normal  
We have no centre but each other*

As David Abram says:

*The Jewish sense of exile was never merely a state of separation from a specific locale, from a particular ground; it was (and is) also a sense of separation from the very possibility of being placed, and from the very possibility of being entirely at home. (Abram 1996) p196*

This may inform how my experience of marginality surfaces itself. Not only do I experience coming from a marginal group in this culture; Jews and Jewishness has had a particular (useful) role in European society in that it has defined the margins of that society for two thousand years.

As Satre said:

*The Jew is one whom other men [sic] consider a Jew. (Satre 1965) p69, quoted in (Hoberman 1995), p153*

This enables me to justify a strongly socially-constructed sense of self. And this is further strengthened by what I read:

*As a living field, in Rosch's terms, comes to "know itself", our identification with the "localized self" diminishes, and a broader and more generative sense of self begins to arise. It's not that personal awareness ceases, nor does this loss of identification with the localized self mean a loss of personal responsibility. But there is a shift in the locus of awareness...*

*Varela spoke of the "virtual" or "fragile self" as a way of helping us "get closer to understanding what it means to be a subject" to experience our personal, subjective point of view. A subject "is not a stable, solid entity", he said. In coping with continually changing circumstances, the self is constantly "updating itself or renewing itself... So virtuality is not just an absence of central self; it also has that kind of fragile flotation of coming and going." (Senge 2005) p100*

Otto Weininger was a self-hating Jew who grew up in an inherently anti-Semitic environment, Vienna at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He wrote the book, *Sex & Character*, for which he became infamous, in 1903. In it he compares what he sees as the parallel moral and physical inferiority of the Jew and the Woman. It could be argued that he internalised the oppression of this world to such an extent that he despised himself, in comparison to Siegfried, the Wagnerian hero who was twisted to form the archetype of dominant Aryan masculinity which was at the core of Nazism.

It is striking to compare Senge at al's description of the 'fragile, floating, virtual self' as a generative possibility to Weininger's self-hating definition of the lack of 'body' in the Jew as a distinct flaw.

*"The corporeal and characterological rigidity of the idealized Germanic type has its counterpart in the shifting, flowing, protean, spineless, voluble, and all-too-visible personality of the Jew. (Hoberman 1995) p151*

Here in my view you have a picture of the starkly contrasting stories around bodies: between the shape-shifting post-modern possibilities of the self/worlds I inhabit, set against the duality of visibility/invisibility that summarises the basic choices my grandparents and great grandparents faced as 'ostjuden' (Jews fleeing the persecutions of the East). For me the ability to 'change my shape' is a possibility; for them it was a necessity of survival.

As bell hooks says:

*I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility. (hooks 1991) p153*

In my own history, the marks on the body that were hidden and the disappearing and fleeing Jewish self, shameful to the generations involved at the time, are to me now a source of inspiration. My great grandfather, so we were told, was nearly killed by an anti-Semitic mob fleeing his home during the Russian revolution. To my grandfather this wasn't something of which to be proud. It was a humiliation. To my father it is a fascination. To me it is a wonder and opens up a possibility of disruptive shape shifting. To my son (I hope) it will be part of a fantastic adventure, one that differentiates his story from others. Such is the journey into storied lives. So

potentiality, once the demons are faced, this quality of shape-shifting becomes a boon, an elixir we bring to the now.

Interestingly, such 'bi-cultural competence', as Gloria Gordon calls it, (Gordon 2007) may support an interest in challenge to the status quo. Unger (1999) argues that it is more likely for people who construct their identity as both marginal and positive to engage in social activism:

*It is not the 'fact' of being Jewish, or Black, gay or lesbian, or handicapped [sic] that is an important predictor of social activism; it is the ability to see positive value to that identity. As I said earlier in this talk, demography can predict marginality, but consciousness determines whether marginality becomes activism. (Unger 1999) p10*

### **In the Nick [ouch!]**

The interference patterns between gendered and raced subjectivities and the body possibilities for their subversion came to some kind of crux for me around the question of my son's circumcision.

This in itself has represented a further turn, the choice to disrupt the habits of my own culture 'in the nick', as a deliberate act of difference within difference that has had its own unpredictable consequences in evolutionary terms.

So you can take a story and show yourself in it as an intentional actor as the starting point. But then recognise that the consequences of it go beyond what you might consciously choose, like ripples across a pond, and indeed some that bounce back and may even amplify unintended causes, even against the flow of what you choose. Here is the story as I told it in my paper submitted for transfer between Post Graduate Diploma and MPhil:

*Max had just been born. We are sitting, Gillie and I, on the sofa when the phone rings. It is Gillie's mother. The tone changes in Gillie's voice. She is talking less, her voice is tight and I can hear the tinny shriek of her mother and I realise she is working herself up. The phone call ends. 'What's up?' and Gillie tells me she is asking why we haven't sorted out the 'Briss' [circumcision]. Apparently people at her synagogue are asking her when it will be and she is embarrassed because she doesn't know. It was my decision, not to do this to Max. We've never discussed it. There's just no question of it happening; never has been.*

*I call her back. I say: 'This decision – it is my call.' She takes some familiar angles, about 'hygiene' etc. I explain my views rationally and with superficial patience.*

*She says, 'He'll feel different from all his friends and won't thank you later in life'. I say, 'Well, I felt different from all of my friends because I was circumcised!' But this gets to me, and I am half-aware of burying away a little nugget of shame and fear; that he will hate me for not doing this to him. 'This is a test.' I think to myself, 'It had to come from somewhere, just not expecting it to be from her!' She is somewhat but not entirely mollified. But when I think of the idea of someone approaching any part of my son with a knife, for whatever reason, I am just filled with rage and horror. I feel like a cat, snarling and hissing; I would just rip to pieces anyone who tried to hurt my boy. My chest*

*feels tight and I feel the need to be near him, protect him behind me and beat the world back from him.*

*An image came to me. I am standing in a court room. I am in the dock. My father's father's father's father...going all the way back through the generations, they are all there. They are asking me to account for myself about this decision. I stand and feel solid in myself. Absolutely rock solid. I say 'There is only one reason why we do this thing and that is because we have always done it. Well, not any more, never to my boy! Not a hair of his head will be touched!' A murmur goes around the room. Then someone says. 'Thank God someone stood up about this for a change.' I feel their relief and am a little uncomfortable about a whiff of shame blowing through the air. Theirs or mine, or both?*

*Later I meet my father, and he says to me, 'What you do is up to you, but just tell me 'why?'. I say, 'For no other reason than I think it is unnecessary and cruel'. 'Why cruel?' he says. I say: 'Would you think it was cruel if we cut the tip of his finger?' 'But that's different', he says. 'Why?' I ask. But I feel ashamed that I have accused my father of cruelty.*

*A few years later, and Max says to me: 'Why is your willy different from mine?' He was probably five. I try to explain: 'Because mine was cut when I was born because that is what is done to some Jewish little boys, but I decided that when you were born, God had made you perfect as you were and I chose not to have your willy cut.' He looks at me, in that way that reminds me so much of my brother. 'I'm glad!' he says, without hesitation. I feel a sense of relief that he wasn't angry with me, and then I realise how absurd it would have been for a five-year-old boy to have been angry with his father for not cutting his willy! This makes me laugh. So far so good.*

In the light of Boyarin's notion of 'totemic time', we meet these interference patterns: between that of my heartfelt Jewishness and my intention to escape from a patriarchal pattern of repetition (following Butler's idea of performativity). This is an ironic story, an interruption *and* a performance of patriarchy, the 'nick' (after Grosz), if you pardon the pun (ouch!). It is an attempt to change gendered patterns and yet it is also a betrayal (after Boyarin) of the difference (the cut) that makes a self-made man unmade and subject to his community. I notice in this account a judgement of my own father, and perhaps a reification of my own fathering in relation to his. This is a theme that will recur.

And yet I acted (or was it easier to choose *not* to act?) for some change. This is the nature of our action turn, towards an inquiring masculinity; to act for difference yet recognising that such actions are constantly problematic; ambivalent and clear, consequent and blind to outcome, heartfelt and reasoned, unique and commonplace, intimate and universal, troubling and uncomfortable as a sign that they are worthwhile, always unfinished...and yet we act. Perhaps this is *mentshlichkeit*: to act in the face of such doubled and difficult dilemmas, knowing that there is no certain, heroic narrative here, but rather and uncertain, tentative acting in tension and *not* knowing?

What links my masculinity and Jewishness? It is as if there is a connection in terms of both of them being anti-teleological; that is, both current constructions of Jewishness (outside of Israel) and masculinity (beyond Patriarchy) don't necessary lead anywhere, they are active dissolutions of powerful identities. Judaism fears assimilation, and masculinity fears feminisation, as reflected in contemporary debates.

As I wrote at the time of my Post Graduate Diploma stage at CARPP:

I read in the *Sunday Times Magazine* about the work of an organisation called Aish Ha Torah (“Fire of the Torah”) which is dedicated to ensuring young Jewish people marry into orthodoxy and do not assimilate:

*Up to 150, 200 years ago, you had no secular Jews [says Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt, joint UK Executive Director] “I don’t know when the rot started, but the Enlightenment brought in this concept of humanism, telling Jews they could live secular lives. The floodgates opened. (Sunday Times Magazine ‘For Richer for Kosher’ 6/2/05, p 50)*

And in the *Observer* magazine I read that:

*The ongoing emasculation and feminisation of men is manifested through body-obsessive gym culture... and male make-up, as in this advertisement for Jean Paul Gautier cosmetics. (Observer Magazine 27/6/04 ‘Men Uncovered’ p 4)*

Both of these represent dominant cultural framings of powerful identities in ‘crisis’ and I notice that much of my life seems to be about questioning the framing inherent in these debates.

I think this is what Roy Jacques is talking about when he talks of the possibilities of gender research moving from being about:

*the dynamics of ‘gender as basic social identity’ to ‘society as a tapestry of identity dynamics’. (Jacques 1997)*

My own teleology embraces the advantages of diverse and dissolving identities. But I carry guilt about a betrayal of a Jewish hero, Abraham, (who circumcised himself, aged 70, we are told) and this seems to point specifically to the energy in my dialogues with the male lineage in my family. Hence the courtroom scene.

I see both Jewish and masculine identities in parallel as ‘dissipative’, in the same way as Margaret Wheatley does when she describes the work of Ilya Prigogine, the chemist, and his notion of ‘dissipative structures’:

*Prigogine discovered that the dissipative activity of loss was necessary to create new order. Dissipation didn’t lead to the death of a system. It was part of the process by which the system let go of its present form so that it could reorganize in a form better suited to the demands of its changed environment. (Wheatley 1999) p21*

There are (and will continue to be I am sure) several unintended consequences to the unfolding of this story, in the system that is me/my-family/Jewish-community-masculinity. When put in those terms we can see how easy it might be for notions of agentic change (that is change where I can be the single, deliberate cause and effect) start to unravel. But there *have been* consequences. When we act, we are subject to what is both intended and unintended. Being a good man, a *mentsh*, may ultimately be about facing both of these.

## Embodiment, Text and Inquiry

It is ironic in that yearning for an embodied inquiry, I can exhibit the (Jewish & male) characteristic of disappearing. In wanting to become more *embodied* in my writing, I have bombarded you with words. These are words I am enthusiastic about. I love these ideas.

But how can I start to show you how I came to *appear* more in this work? Perhaps I can do that in an ironic sense, by showing you how I engaged with a text.

Of course, text has been a faithful companion on my journey of inquiry, as inevitably I have read quite a lot and have been inspired, almost at a visceral level, from time to time by some of these friends I have encountered, through the voice in text.

Isn't it also traditional in a PhD process to do some kind of literature review? Well, here I review some more literature (just in case you weren't sure that I 'knew' enough of this stuff), but with a twist that reveals a little more of myself as the reader.

'Living life as inquiry' as Judi Marshall suggests, invites me into a shifting condition of being, of sitting with a set of questions over a long period of time, and holding them up against action in daily life (Marshall 1999). The research process becomes at once both more 'lived', as in the whole of one's life becomes a potential research ground, rather than an objectified, (falsely) separated part of it, (as in more traditional research projects). It is a challenging edge, leading to introspection so absorbing that one is in danger of disappearing into a well of questions, and thereby appearing aloof to the world.

The texts one reads are also part of this picture – reading IS research in these terms, not an abstraction from it, or merely 'background'. A journal article or book may resonate with me (and you won't necessarily hear about the ones that don't). Yet as a text, I often do not know the author, what they are like, who they are as a person, whether they live what they espouse, or whether it is written as part of some politically-orientated, careerist 'audit culture', as Andrew Sparkes describes it (Sparkes 2006). This is a culture that measures success through the sheer amount of published words. Often, all I have to go on is the text itself, so it is dangerous to attest that this author and I become kith and kin.

It is a seductive process though, and can be very visceral. I will read a text and it may well have scribbles and underlining afterwards (in pencil of course), and annotations, like 'yeah!' and 'absolutely!!!\*\*\*\*\*'. These are gut reactions, embodied, trembling responses of recognition and renewal, like finding fellow travellers who will walk with us for some miles. What is this saying though – simply that the writing supports our already held assumptions? How 'critically subjective' is that? On the other hand, when one is advocating change, one needs allies. Particularly in the world of gender, as John Rowan (who I have indeed met, many times) says:

*This analysis also makes it clear as to why the women's feminist movement weakened over time. It turned out that to be a feminist was harder than anyone expected. The reason for that, if the above analysis is anywhere near right, is that the power of the patriarchy was underestimated. (Rowan 2005) p22*

So whilst it may appear that I am just using John Rowan's words to support my own, in a relational context, where there is indeed a mandate for some kind of change (even tentatively and paradoxically held) then it is valid to build up a network of supportive voices. This doesn't mean I presume to know the author nor that I understand

everything they say, but it does help me to network; to validate my own voice through the power of a credible chorus.

There can be a physical, embodied element to this *reading* as inquiry. I would like to show more of myself through two examples.

The first is a story about reading a book in the library during my first degree in Psychology at the University of Sussex. Here is how I described it to a friend who acts as a sounding board, Denis Postle (more about him in the Conclusion):

*I was sitting in the University of Sussex Library. I must have been about 20 or 21 years old and I was doing my undergraduate degree in Social Psychology. And, what I did was I sat and got this book that I was supposed to read. I cannot even remember what it was. But it was probably some text on some aspects of Social Psychology, probably something to do with cognitive theory or something. I remember trying to read this text and I just cannot take it in. I cannot get it in. It is just words on the page. It is black and white. And I just cannot see; I cannot hear it. But what I get is a sense of rage that the person who has written this is not there. And I became so angry. You know, just remembering the feeling of being so angry that I cannot talk to them and say: 'What the fuck are you talking about here?' Because this is just so completely abstract to me, and does not make any sense or whatsoever. And it is just words and it is just dead and dull. And I just remember, even all these years later, that sense of outrage of the absence of the author. (Denis session 27/02/08)*

As students we are often alone, in the University environment. We wander between talks, in dry rooms on draughty, badly-built concrete campuses. This is an environment that reeks of the hegemonically masculine. Our fellow students are on parallel but not intertwined tracks – after all we cannot share a Degree; they are our own, isolated, 'heroic' achievements. We find ourselves directed to a particular text by a chance comment: "You *must* read...!!" They become like scraps of paper in a treasure hunt; or red herrings, as in the case above. We have to cherish the clues though, because the libraries, real and virtual are getting fatter at a faster rate than we can ever hope to read.

So it is not surprising really that we find ourselves so at home with certain texts – they are like nuggets in a crazy gold rush. One such nugget for me was by Philip Corrigan, a man I hope to meet one day. In stark contrast to the story above from my undergraduate days, when I was directed to and found his text in the University of Bath library, I felt so inspired, so at home and 'at one', in relationship with this man I have never met, that I literally did a jig.

The piece in question was from the *Sociological Review*, 1988, Vol. 36, No.2. (p368-380), entitled: *Viewpoint; The body of intellectuals/the intellectuals' body (remarks for Roland)*. I lugged the huge blue binder over to the photocopier and read the paper in one sitting. It was an enormous revelation. I penciled annotations all over it. By the title I wrote a big 'YEAH!'

What is a text? Sometimes it seems like a voice speaking directly to you. As if no-one else has ever read or written and this one paper on the desk in front of you *is it*. Nothing else needs to be said or done. I looked around me, at all of these other students beaver away on their own and I wanted to shout '*Stop! Give that up and come and look at this! This is the thing!*' Our work is often solitary. In the silent library we are de-voiced and disconnected from each other, deliberately or not we are isolated

bodies, performing the (di)embodiment of isolated, heroically self-contained (male – including the women) selves. Indeed we may even be *competing* bodies: As it is said: “*That book is out, someone else has it - you will have to reserve it*”. So academic knowledge is progressed in quiet, isolated cells, ‘corralls’, *within* but not *between*.

*Music/Images Everything that follows should be read as if in the middle of music and images. You choose, You, too, are written. We - you and I – are trying to talk. But I am dancing. (Corrigan 1988)*

Here I am sitting reading this text, and I want to jump up, make a link and be a body in connection with others. To dance! To Sing! I don’t always feel like this but I feel it *now*. But all I can do is scribble notes all over this photocopy. My underlining is so hard sometimes that it scores through the paper. A big circle around my own written word ‘phenomenology’, next to where Corrigan has written ‘experience’. His words: ‘*whose body, whose signs?*’, attracts special attention with furious underlining, as if it were political slogan from an angry rally.

It also resonates with another text I have read recently, so next to where he says:

*As we know from the start alphabetization and numeration are systems of empowerment/disembodiment. (Corrigan 1988) p371*

I have written ‘c.f. David Abram – The Spell of the Sensuous’ (Abram 1996).

Next to:

*Foucault, of course, has done more than any other to cartographize these modes of projection, these ways of simultaneously realizing/denying human capacities within certain social forms. Which always, and here we are on to a different tracing, announce very loudly the bodies of les autres, the others: captives, slaves, women, children, possessions, but where increasingly such announcements are inscriptions, lists, registers, and which possessions are not bodily but documentary entitlements. (Corrigan 1988) p373*

Les Autres. The lists...my own children as ‘possessions’....All I have done is underline it...a big pause...a big breath...and I have written ‘phew!’ and it is as if I can see my own Jewish tears roll down the page, leaving a slight crumple in the paper.

Of course, I look now at some of these manic scribblings and wonder what on earth was going on for me that solitary afternoon, notwithstanding the resonance with Corrigan’s clever attempt to bring the body into intellectual life. I was, my body was, in a time of its own then, as now. I do remember that some of Corrigan’s words literally took my breath away:

*The masculinization of mind amidst these determining discourses also declares that what you see – what you can see – is what you are; what you are – what you can be – is what you see; what you see and are is, what you say, the worth of your saying. The cognitive calculating coherent I of the sentence is the Eye of perceptual normalcy. (Corrigan 1988)*

I have underlined under the ‘*worth of your saying*’ and in the margin I have written: ‘*we have to do both – be worthy of saying AND live in our bodies in our texts*’. I think this me-in-the-past was trying to hold the horns of the dilemma in developing an inquiring masculinity in the ‘Academy’: our texts, our words have to be of a good enough quality to disrupt; we need articulation in the language we want to change.

(And isn't it interesting that I am, right here, attempting to pass another degree by a sly (or is it gauche – as in left handed?) demonstration of my skill in this game?!)

Reading Corrigan was an emotional experience, because it is 'what I can see' – the point he is making about the 'masculinization of mind' is a vital, heartfelt mission of my own mind and body (as problematic as this is). Yet to be able to argue cogently in a voice that is recognized, as 'worthy of saying' is a huge challenge, as it will inevitably require some deference to this very mind, especially if (as John Rowan maintains) the Patripsych runs so deep within us and our institutions. I wish I had the talent to write this as a play or musical, but I would need to dance it so much better than I could ever write it to avoid being dismissed as illegitimate. How acceptable is a dance as a submission to an academic board, no matter how good?

Or a story...?

So being present to my body and its timely and spatial singularity and at the same time writing comprehensively about it, is a challenge and one that Corrigan's passage above clearly demonstrates. And to engage in the necessary art of critique (for a moment): if you aren't on board with it, following Corrigan's polemical thread, his text might seem as abstruse and enraging to you as that book I was reading all those years ago in the Sussex University Library did to me.

How can we be present in our texts and at the same time say it in a way that simply makes sense, so we don't (or don't appear to) disappear up (or at least into) our own bodies?

But to me Corrigan's words spoke as if his 'I' was my 'eye', in a world where there are living inequalities not just of voice but of ways of seeing, of 'eyes'. This is one of the roots of my inspiration to use writing to my own children (who I can hear playing in the garden outside my window as I write this) because I wanted to recognize them as more than just part of my 'inventory' as a man; my list of goods, more than just a side show in my own heroic manstory, whereby I can (dis)embody the hegemonic as much as the next man. As he says:

*The manliness of mind is one dominant form of masculinity. (Corrigan 1988)  
p376*

I don't know whether Corrigan meant what I took him to mean with the line:

*Considered thus, in the broader sweep of asking all ways, 'The Body and Whose Signs?' might we not more properly consider much of writing, this writing the body, as pornography? It is not time, in timing our words, to see how the hegemonic depiction, description and design of 'difference(s)' as disadvantaged (or denied and deformed) results from the domination of this form of masculinist discourse? (Corrigan 1988) p376*

But it has had a huge impact on me – possibly one of the most eye-opening moments. The idea, as I understood this, that the *lack* of presence of the body of the intellectual who writes much of the texts we read, particularly in the academic environment, as something almost *pornographic*, was stunning. And it makes so much sense to me. But these are ideas whose time may not have come and there may be only a certain level of toleration of them. This is a troubling idea, or as Corrigan puts it himself: 'Un/easy'. Again it points to the challenge of the inquiring masculinity, to choose his words very carefully. I wrote by this part of the text a big 'Phew! Yeah!', because it

does seem to me to be the essence of pornography to invoke the shell (the body) without the inconvenient truth of the person the sign of this body represents. Text can become as much of a depersonalized, disembodied shell as a glossy centrefold.

Corrigan himself begins to close by talking about “my own historical experience of differencing as domination, in which I frequently dominated and denied my domination”, in a register that I recognize very similar to the challenges and dilemmas of my own inquiry. I therefore identified with Corrigan and felt for him, particularly as he put this in the context of having taught on courses about ‘Masculinity’, which I clearly identified with my own experience of running the Navigator Men’s Development Programme.

Will I ever meet Philip Corrigan? Is he alive (in body) as he is to me (in text)? Perhaps, and maybe a meeting through a text is as real as any. Perhaps my letters to my own children will one day be as real to them as Corrigan’s words are for me. Where is the body that is me? As Corrigan puts it:

*Much of the time, of course I neither know who I am, nor which body I should in/habit or haunt. That is to say, I know ‘I’ am Not Yet. These bodies of which I speak are, after all, also a Body of Is, of Eyes; the male gaze is not only on others, but of ourselves. These notes try to delineate and disrupt our way(s) of seeing, academically, artistically, intellectually. We (men) need to re-member our bodies. (Corrigan 1988) p377*

So just because my body is there, in space and time, it doesn’t mean we are connected, and similarly in its absence it doesn’t mean we can’t be. But at least I am trying to reach out beyond theoretical ties, in my own heart, to yours and beyond.

I am trying to re-member my body in text.

By the end of the article, I wrote what I feel simply and aptly would like to express to my own children (for if not them, then who else?) through my actions and words, (knowing with full irony that they right now are down there in the garden and I am up here writing this): ‘Yes, yes, yes, yes!’

as a major resource along with many others, not least my mother who taught me how to talk. But third, I am continually encouraged and coerced to be and become a certain embodiment (as text, as discourse, as image, as practice, as rule, as norm) by that effective panoply of effectual powers that be. Refusing these negative inducements, where I can, has also been a complex learning procedure: there is no rule without its transgression. Much of the time, of course, I neither know who I am, nor which body I should in/habit or haunt. That is to say, I know ‘I’ am Not Yet. These bodies of which I speak are, after all, also a *Body of Is, of Eyes*: the male gaze is not only on others, but of ourselves. These notes try to delineate and disrupt our way(s) of seeing, academically, artistically, intellectually. We (men) need to re-member our bodies (Corrigan, 1984a).

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto

Received 2 March 1987  
Accepted 6 March 1987

→ trying out of self  
yes yes yes

Notes

1 See Clanchy, 1979, 1988; Smith, 1974, 1984, 1987; Foucault 1981, 1982; Rockhill, 1987a, 1987b.

## Chapter Four - Gender Future - A Story

Part One is set in the Year 2015  
Part Two is set in the Year 2020  
Part Three is set in the Year 2220

### Part One - 2015

1.

In a small educational institute, there is a corridor. Along this corridor is an office. Outside the office is a young woman. She hovers nervously by the door, as if summoning up the courage for something. Then we see what it is: she knocks. A man's voice inside...

'Wait a minute!' Grumpily, then, more humanely 'Who is it?'

'It's Sarah Jones. Dr. Porter, you said after the last seminar that I could come by if I had any questions.....' she says this through the door, her voice straining to be heard. The muffled sound, almost like swearing, then 'yes...' then remembering itself: 'Yes come in... do come in...'

She sits on the chair in the corner while he busies himself with shuffling this and that. It is a smallish office, packed but tidy, with a great view over the forest. She sits with her legs crossed awkwardly, as young women do sometimes, as if apologising for taking up space.

'So you said you had a question...? About...?' he said vaguely, as if groping for a memory of her, which he was.

'Well,' she starts to gush, 'You said in the seminar last Monday that there was all of this change going on in the 1990s around gender and you were in there at the time, you even met some of the pioneers, that there was this divide between the therapeutic...or should I say...humanistic...I don't want to get that wrong... and political strands of the masculinities movement and yet...'

She tapers off...then her voice comes back, slower, more determined.

'There are a few questions I have...some things I just don't quite understand....'

'Yes...well what's that...?' he waits...somewhat intrigued.

'It's just that...Your own PhD. I've read it, I mean I've read bits of it, from the website and well you did say to come and tell you if you noticed anything...and you write a bit about your own experience and how your mission is to *embody* it, 'be the change' and all that...except you say that, you say you hope that you would do more than just sound like you believed in change...well...I don't want to sound rude or anything...but...how did you end...up *here*...?? And in your ...well, you know... position...like so many others? I mean how different are you to the people you challenged who wrote about masculinities and how important it was to do more than talk about the change in gender relations but to embody it and here...you...are...I mean, do you ever feel like you too were just going through the motions in order to further your own career...and if so...I'm sorry this is all sounding much more rude and accusatory than I meant it to be...but I just wanted to ask...how has it all panned out...has it really made a *difference*?

He sits down opposite her by the desk. He smiles, for the first time since she came in.

- Do you mean: 'Have I made a difference?'

- Well...yes...

- And here I am, just another middle aged white man, occupying a position of authority, and how different is that to all the people I wrote about?

- Yes...that's it...I mean, to some people you would just appear to be the same as all the rest. Perhaps not totally the same, the work that you do and the things you write

about and say. They are very different. But what you look like (she blushes) I don't mean to be rude...

- No, No! Don't worry this is good! I mean I am glad you are asking me these things, these are good questions.

- So why is gender so important and how is it important? When in the end we end up just being the same, repeating the patterns. Here I am a young woman and you a man in a position of power...is there anything that *changes*?

- Let's talk about that. Let's see what sense we can make together of this, look beyond the stereotypes perhaps. You see a white man, middle-aged, in a position of some power, (although I don't feel like I have much, but that may be part of the point) and this seems at odds with what I say.

- Yes exactly. It looks at one level like you just wanted to talk about these things, but how does that change anything?

- That's a good starting point. It isn't that I ever felt I had to change something. It was that I wanted to change it. I wanted to talk about it. Not many people did, or do in fact, even today. I mean I was then, am now, in some ways, just an ordinary bloke. Except that ordinary blokes didn't talk about these things. That was for others; women, black people, the marginalised. In my view, it was only when the ordinary blokes started talking about things like gender that things could change, because they (we) controlled the discussion.

- But that's it. How much did really change? How much has changed?

- You are here, and we are having this discussion, that in itself may be some kind of change.

- Yes but is that it? Is that all and especially when on the outside not much seems to change...

- The 'outside'?

- Appearances, and real positions of power, where men have them more...

- That's a good point and a double-bind. I mean, what was I supposed to do? Not speak up, and in not speaking up not getting to where I've got to?

- I recognise that double-bind, but the repeating of habits, you know what Judith Butler says; how we feel 'compelled to repeat patterns' of gender.

- That's a name I haven't heard in a while...

- I've read some of her work, and in the end, doesn't she says mean we just end up repeating those habits, in the end?

- Yes and she also says, like Elizabeth Grosz, that in the *now*, in the present, in these moments of possibility, 'in the nick of time', as she says, we can change these habits, be something a bit different, maybe not hugely, not heroically, but a little bit, and that's a shift.

- But look how it looks, middle-aged man etc. etc.

- Yes, and how it looks isn't necessarily what it is...

- But isn't that just a cop out? If it looks like it always did? Isn't it what it always was?

- At one level, I have to put aside a feeling of defensiveness to answer your questions, because at one level I can't help being what I am, or appear to be, a middle aged white man, with (he gestures to the photographs and pictures on the wall), a wife, kids, certificates and diplomas etc. etc. So yes, to a degree it is true. I did have a dream when I was young that I could be a different kind of man...and, have you ever seen that film, the 'Man who Fell to Earth',

- Er no...don't think so...

- It was with David Bowie...?

[She stares blankly]

- It is quite old now I suppose. Anyway, this man, he is a Martian, with special gifts and powers, and in one scene, because these abilities and powers are so threatening to the people around him on earth, they just take him away and operate on him, literally surgically intervene to make him normal, change his eyes, his appearance, re-

engineer him to 'normalise' him through medical processes, it is all very Foucault-esque....

- So what's that saying? Aren't you agreeing with me? That in the end these patterns 'get you' and you end up just the same, 'gender-normalised'?

- That is how it appears isn't it? You start off with these dreams of big change and dramatic difference. But these grandiose dreams may be part of the problem, these expectations of grand transformations. They reflect a mindset that suggests some kind of individualistic, self-determined power, which may be one of the set of assumptions of patriarchy. And it can be kind of depressing, when the system takes hold... drip, drip...your dreams leak away...the first wage... the mortgage...I remember how thrilled my father was when I got my first mortgage, and how much I resented him for it, like it was a victory that he had one over a change I wanted to be...This is further disempowering, creating a myth of the superman that the vast majority feel inferior too. It is a myth of control. We can't control the world, and there's loads of research that shows that most perpetrators of domestic violence have issues of control.

- So it's more than just about 'selling out', it's about an unfulfilled promise

- Yes and that's how it can feel...you know at one level I am what you 'see' before you...but I can tell you too it isn't like that, as well. It is a subtle paradox

- How? You say that. You would say that. But I can't really see it...And maybe that's the point. I mean at one level I just don't get this gender stuff. Like lots of people my age, we just accept there's a difference. Maybe it's just inevitable, because men and women are just different. After all, biologically, we are genetically 99% similar to apes and yet there's a whole chromosome's difference between men and women. That old stuff about feminism and patriarchy; lots of men and women my age, we just accept that we're different and it's not a problem anymore.

- Is that what you think? Really?

- Why not? Isn't it better than just talking about things being different and then living as if nothing has changed?

- [trying not to show his anger] That would make me very disappointed, if that was the case. Did you walk all the way up here because you really believe that? Or isn't it that changing these things is much harder, more subtle and complex, and may just take a lot longer than any of us ever really imagined? I refuse to believe that biological determinism stuff. People blame their own kids for it. We put all this conditioning pressure on them, because the world we present them has this divide in it, so black and white, from the moment they are born, we say 'it's a boy' and then they see little Johnny pick up a stick and and go 'Bang! Bang!' and they say 'See? It's in their genes!' And little Sarah picks up a doll and they say 'see...!' We just reinforce the behaviour we want to see, or ignore what doesn't fit.

- I hated dolls.

- There you go then! Because when little Johnny or Sarah does something different it takes an effort on their part, and they may get hassled for it, and yet they *still do*. Many little boys and girls do rebel against the stereotype. And not just in terms of their sexuality, in terms of lots of other choices. Small disruptions, even though there's all this pressure to conform. Many of them still do choose something different with their sexuality, or what they like to play with, or whatever. And we're seeing these small disruptions more and more.

- And what about you, what did you do differently? What's your disruption?

- I suppose that's it: my only transgression, the only thing I found myself wanting to do differently was to talk about it. I just wanted to start a conversation, and keep it going. I had to learn to do that carefully, in a place like this. Some would argue that using the words changes the reality. Perhaps that's all I know; that's all I am good at.

- So does having a conversation make a difference?

- Maybe not much, and maybe it does. Maybe that is what research is for: without wanting to dress it up, at its most basic level, it is about persisting with conversations, so they just don't go away. That's what Carl Rogers said: what we need is a

'disciplined personal commitment' to a set of questions, rather than a 'methodology'. I have just had some of that disciplined personal commitment to these questions. Pursuing through conversations like this, learning to have conversations that have an impact, maybe in a small way. There is so much that shows the commonly held beliefs about men and women aren't true. Look at Deborah Cameron's book, the 'Myth of Mars and Venus' for example, where she systematically shows how all that stuff about how men and women speak differently just doesn't hold water, yet we still persist in talking about it as if it does. Maybe all we have that can make a difference are these marginal conversations. Maybe this is our methodology. If 'worlds follow words', maybe that's all we can do: think about how we have those conversations and be the change we want to see. That is why your feedback, about me appearing to be the same as everyone else, well, it hurts.

- I didn't mean to hurt, but I just wanted to know, what's the big deal? I mean I just didn't get it.

- Yes I have heard that before, and when people don't understand, don't 'get it', I do get frustrated and then if I'm angry, I can appear as the big, scary, white man; the very thing I am trying to get away from.

- You are quite hard on yourself.

- That's true. But this stuff matters I suppose and I am learning not to be hard on myself, but it's a bit of a life's work, holding it more lightly, learning to have skilful conversations. Like at this place. It is hard sometimes not becoming the person who gets known for banging on about this or that and then you get ignored. I just wanted, I *still* want, to keep the men's stuff on the agenda.

- But why men's stuff? Why not gender?

- Gender is always seen as about women, but where are the men in all of this? In the public domain, where is the conversation about men and masculinities? Men as a class, a 'thing', rather than 'everything'. When Neil Armstrong said 'one small step for man' when he stepped on the moon, did he mean, just men? No. He meant everyone. So how to keep this conversation on the boil, just simmering away for twenty five years or more, that's what my research has taught me? It becomes a kind of life skill, helping me know when to speak and when to be silent...

[There's a silence – which Sarah breaks]

- You do have quite a lot to say now! I wouldn't have realised it mattered so much to you, that you felt it so deeply.

- I suppose part of this long haul has been to know what not to say, and when not to say it, and that's interesting isn't it? Because when I do that I risk looking like everyone else, as you saw me. I do despair sometimes because it can feel like we're right back where we started. Especially when I hear bright young women like you argue for biological determinism.

- And old men like you feeling like they have to patronise.

- I didn't mean to patronise you. But how can I avoid it?

- Things have changed. I mean, compared to my grandmothers' generation, I can go everywhere, do anything. We have different concerns now. Feminism has done its job. But we've got a planet to save. That's more important now, surely?

- This is tricky ground. How can I possibly argue otherwise? I am on dodgy ground. As a man how can I argue differently? Do I want to point out how things *haven't* moved on? How can I argue with women that they are kidding themselves that gender isn't an issue anymore? Just because Yves St Laurent made the trouser suit, is that the end of it? Is that what liberation looks like? Or did it just give them the opportunity to be more like men? And what about the men, who do we need to be like? What's our liberation?

- But the men I know, they are just themselves, they don't worry about these things, and they don't dominate us, they don't get a chance.

- I hope so. I really do. Yes I can see what you mean. I can see it in my own son and daughter. But I also don't see it.
- So what you are saying is that I am kidding myself.
- No! I really hope you don't think that. As I said, this is dodgy ground for me. I want to support you. All I am saying is that there is still this undercurrent, an underlying psychology of dominance. It pervades. Only if we keep talking about it, naming it, can we really hope to shift it. That's all I aim to do, and have aimed to do. I can't tell you how to be. I can try to show you by how I am. Keeping that conversation going and showing who I am in it. It is about a different kind of knowing, telling a new story.
- Stories? How are stories useful? How do they help you in this? You said that before, in your seminar. I don't quite see how telling stories can help.
- It's about practical knowledge. If I tell you a story about something, you get a really clear, direct picture of something happening. A story has so much data in it, about what you can think, what you can do or even try yourself. It is a translation of the wonderful richness of human experience distilled into something even a child can understand. Look at the lessons about deep, big things in a story, like Hansel and Gretel, for example. Good and evil, medieval European parenting, child abuse, trust, sibling relationships, companionship and more. This is what David Abram talks about in *Spell of the Sensuous* – he thinks storytelling is just an expression of linguistic synaesthesia.
- Synaesthesia?
- Do you know when people see number as colours? The world sort of buzzes for them?
- Yes I've heard of that.
- Abram thinks synaesthesia is an innate human characteristic, a trait of our culture – it is the root of animism, which forms the basis of many early human theologies. It is saying that the whole world talks to us; our environment is saturated in a kind of knowledge. In becoming alphabetic, using abstract language, we have rendered all of that knowledge into stories.
- So how does that work? How does telling stories change anything? How does it help us to 'know'?
- Well let me tell you a story. I can say all you like about the importance of gender, the difficulty and complexity of doing work around masculinity in organisations, how arch it all is, but let's see if a story can get you into that world in a way that leaves a deeper impression, and perhaps some more practical knowledge too?

So here's the story:

I was given a project around men and leadership once, a piece of work that fell into my lap and I thought it would be really useful, and be the starting point for my PhD. I thought it was my salvation. How naïve I was! It turned out to be different. At first it all looked quite straightforward. It was for a Local Authority. I was contacted by this woman who organised the development of the senior management, the top men of this council. And they were all men. That was the issue, in her view. In a council that overall was 75% women workers, the top team were all men and they all recognised this was an issue, something they 'had to do something about'. So my job was to work with them to help them address this question.

Now I naively thought that this was about having discussions with them about their masculinity, how they felt, perhaps even get them to open up with each other, learn to cry perhaps? I don't know! Honestly! Poor fool I was! For them, this couldn't have been further from the truth. My job as far as they were concerned was just to sit there and observe their meetings and then 'make recommendations'. I tried to introduce some discussions, to get them to play at men's development, to talk about this issue, about them all being men – I even started by reading them a poem (can you believe it!?). It was a good one, called 'Doodle at the Edge', by William Ayot; it's all about endless

meetings without soul, and it ends with the line about 'bringing the Gods back into the boardroom, the laughing, smiling, weeping Gods of the night-time and the wild'. They humoured me but wouldn't play. Not in front of each other. There was always something more important on their agenda. When I met them one to one, which I was allowed to do, they mostly told me (in confidence) that it was the other person's issue that 'I'm not sexist myself, but I notice so and so is...' I felt manipulated. But it felt important to stay in there, so I toed the line. The woman who had asked me in, she said she thought it was all working fine, but of course, it was her idea, so she would say that, to save face. Then someone else I talked to pointed out that the mere fact that I was involved, hired, was allowing them to tick their box, saying that they were doing something about it. You can imagine how that felt! It was as if I was propping up this little gentleman's club instead of helping to demolish it. I mean I did actually feel for these men, who were by and large very harassed. They were guarded in public, with each other, but in private they did open up to me, about their struggles, their pains and passions, but all with a 'but this has to remain secret, you can't tell anyone about it. I can't be seen to be admitting this'. I encouraged them to open up with one another, but no-one took the bait. Who would go first, and trust that the pack instinct didn't close ranks behind them? One even told me that he usually went home bursting for a pee and starving hungry, because he literally hadn't had time to eat or go to the loo all day. This wasn't exceptional. This was common. But it was too hot to handle. It had to remain private.

- So what did you do?

- I did learn something. It taught me that men are just as subject as women to the demands of a kind of masculinity, a dominant way of being, that influenced their very fibres. In private they could recognise this, but in public – they had to keep on the armour. This all leaves them just as in pain, but that in some ways they have even less space to admit it 'out there'. Well, maybe not less than women, but definitely not very much. And that you can't tackle these things head on. It is just too politically sensitive. I wrote a report, which they accepted graciously. They paid me, and then, as fast as they decently could, they kicked me out and I never heard from them again.

[Pause]

- So that's a story. Of course it is totally riddled with my own biases. Stories are never neutral. But even my biases have data in them.

- Like your bias about that woman and her motivation.

- Yes, you spotted that. But even with the biases there is still loads of practical knowledge there, as long as we don't try and pretend we are being objective.

- I can see what you mean about practical knowledge. It makes me wonder if I'd ever like to do this kind of thing, work with issues like this in organisations! It seems crazily complex. You have to be so...prepared for disappointment, such a political animal.

- But be careful of the generalisation. This kind of 'storied knowing' isn't objective and it isn't general; it isn't universal. It exists in a kind of strange space between the general and the specific. Yes, at one level it is just my story. It is also *our* story, but it may not be *your* story. You might be able to do something different with it. That's that marginal change, 'in the nick of time' as Elizabeth Grosz called it. She means that we only have the present, the here and now in which to make a difference. So it doesn't mean this might happen to you this way, if you tried something like that. But it might help you change your approach, if you wanted to try.

- I was reading recently about something that may be what you are saying. It was David Bohm's stuff on 'proprioception'. I think he meant to see how others see you as you interact with them. And how you can change it by being aware of it. I mean I was involved in this project with these other men, and I could see how they saw me, and

...well, perhaps how *sexualised* their view was. How they looked at me and stuff. I didn't want to be seen that way, so I changed. The following days I changed things, like my clothes. I definitely dressed differently. I think I even smiled less. It's funny but I think they liked me less, but they respected me more. They listened more.

- So how do you know that?

- One guy, the project leader, he practically ignored me on the first day and when I changed, you know, like I said, he responded differently and he gave me more to do and came to see me to ask my opinion on something. Of course it did occur to me he was just patronising me, or maybe he just fancied me...How would I know?

- Its interesting isn't it? In that stories there are just so many possible explanations, positions, possibilities for action and consequences.

- But I really wanted to do that work. It was important and part of me didn't care what they thought, as long as I had a chance to do what I wanted to do. It irritated me that these men behaved the way they did but in a way the result was better for me. So I can see what you are saying about how it pervades, how I had to work my way around this situation. If I challenged them head on and said how sexist their behaviour seemed to be to me, that wouldn't have done any good, I think. They'd have just left me out, excluded me. In some way I just felt like I was just playing their game, but who cares? That's the way it is all the time. I can play their game in order to change it to my rules.

- That's the kind of thing I mean by 'shape shifting'. What Gloria Gordon called bi-cultural competence? Simply put, we can learn to play the game in order to change it, quietly. Not head on. In order to do so it helps to know where we've come from and what we want. In terms of research, there will be things we deliberately try and know more about, and want to change and there'll be unintended consequences too. Like if you can track your story with those men, there will be things you are aiming for and things that emerge as a result of your action, which you can also notice, keep track of, raise awareness about, yours and others. So having told me your story, what do you notice now about it?

- I notice how I felt slightly ashamed of what I was doing, as if I was playing along with their game, but having told you're the story I feel angrier and actually I just feel a bit sorry for them, and feel a bit stronger in myself. And...

- Yes

- It feels funny telling a man, you this story, as if I am giving away something, like secrets or something.

- I do feel honoured that you are telling me this story, and I notice, yes I agree, a sense of transgression. This is the kind of conversation men and women don't usually have. That's what I like though. I seem to have attracted it. I suppose it's one consequence of putting my interest in gender and masculinity out there. I find myself sometimes standing on the border. Like gay men say they do.

- And I feel even more determined. The point is, if I need to play this game in order to get on, I'll play it. I don't really care so much if it looks manipulative. It feels quite good actually! I feel subversive!

- So these are the tools we can develop, of action and reflection, and yes that's Bohm's 'proprioception'. These are the phenomena we notice in action and this can inform what we do, how we do differently next time, 'in the nick' again.

- Is that what you do?

- Yes, well sometimes, maybe. Am I doing it now? Am I changing things, the usual patterns? What's your impression of me now?

- It's true that you look a bit different to me, I can see behind the appearances. I've enjoyed the conversation, found it useful. I certainly feel like I couldn't care even less now what those guys think about me.

- And I've been reminded of something by this conversation

- What's that?

- That the difference I wanted to make in the world isn't that far away, but neither is the opposite – being what I don't want to be. That isn't far away either. It's like a knife edge. It has been a really helpful reminder that no matter how far I think I've come, I can still appear as the very thing I'm trying to change. It has made me think, and it will make me different, today.

## 2.

In the corridor at the Institute:

- What's the matter?
- Why do you ask?
- You look a bit down
- I don't know, a few things I suppose. I get a bit sick of this place. The targets, the deadlines, the politics you know...Monday mornings...
- Nothing big then!
- Yes I suppose it's everything, nothing new, and that feeling of having absorbed...stuff.
- Toxic meetings.
- Yes that stuff, we pick it up, but I'm used to that, inured I suppose
- Is that it?
- No, there was something else...
- Yes?
- I met a student today, a young woman...
- So?
- She reminded me of...something
- Something or someone?
- No, well...yes....She reminded me of myself, because of what she said
- What she said?
- Yes, she said something and it really...you know...got in there, under the radar as it were. It was like a reminder of what matters to me.
- What did she say?
- She asked a question really. She asked, 'Has it made a difference?'
- Has what made a difference?
- She kind of called my bluff. Sort of accused me, gently, kindly, of not really walking my talk...about the gender stuff
- Ah that.
- Yes that, you know what everyone else here thinks is my 'obsession'.
- Yes, it is something we all know is important to you, but you don't bang on about it quite as much as you used to. I remember when you were doing your research, you saw it everywhere. Everything became a gender question.
- Everything is a gender question!
- There you go again. I thought it was too good to be true.
- But is that a good thing? Banging on about it less? I mean surely it's the kind of thing we need to bang on about more?
- What good does it do? Does it influence things, what does it change? Does it sell? It isn't that much of an issue here anyway. We don't really have a gender problem. We have much more of a race issue don't we?
- Is it a contest...
- That's not what I mean. You know what I mean. It's a question of focus. You can't focus on everything, and there's never really been a clear business case for it. 'Gender Studies': It's a done deal. Not enough money in it to open that can of worms.
- So if it's a can of worms, it *is* an issue then?!
- Here you go again.
- No alright, you are right. I can be evangelical and I'm the first to be put off by that in other people. But I always felt that keeping the conversation going about it, even lightly would have an impact.
- And it does have an impact. You have an impact. The way you are, the way we are, that is the real issue surely? So that we aren't replicating the way of things in a sexist culture? Surely that's the heart of what we do here? Keeping

learning at the centre of things. Surely that's the biggest challenge to the old guard?

- That's just it - she couldn't see it.
- Couldn't see what?
- She couldn't see how things were different, how I was different. She said that in a way I represented all the things I write about changing. That I was white middle class middle aged man in a position of power.
- Wow! she didn't pull her punches!
- She was quite sweet about it really and we had a good discussion, but I do kind of feel that although part of me knows I do, or can disrupt that 'patripsych'...
- The *what?*!
- You know, it's what John Rowan calls that habitual pattern in our psyches of being a dominant man...or dominated woman.
- Oh yes, I see. So why didn't you just say that then?
- It just makes sense to me to use that word: 'patripsych'
- And in doing so, it doesn't make sense to me, it excludes me; surely isn't that when you lose people?
- That's just it, gender interference patterns, theorising about gender and masculinity in a voice that in some way is still riddled with the things we want to change.
- And I know you can be different...it is just that when you become...uni-focussed...that's a good word isn't it? You know kind of evangelical and obsessed, that's when I lose you. It's off-putting.
- And that's what she is saying you know, it's so frustrating after a lifetime of looking at this stuff and it only takes a moment to fall back into the old habits.
- And a moment to fall out of it again. Why are you so hard on yourself? It is when you are so hard on yourself that you get lost in all of this.
- Yes that's true, and when I relax with it that I don't need to 'bang on' as you call it. But I fear complacency. She just got under my radar, called me on the very thing that I fear most – that talking about it and not embodying it...the change...in some way.
- And we all do that in some way, you know, espoused versus lived values, Argyris and all of that.
- But she had a point I feel, I wish there was some way I could hold it more explicitly. I still miss doing men's groups I used to do, you know, after all these years. I miss a project that explicitly tries to address this stuff.
- And you always said that you moved on from it because you felt it was just playing the game, in some way making things worse, just playing along with the gender rules, as if you were helping men to catch up in the game that they had temporarily lost the lead from women.
- Yes that's true
- Look in the end there is just you, and there is just now, and all we can hope for is to approximately live our values. You feel marginalized yourself, that's you pattern you know, and then you find yourself being, well marginalised, even though it's around the issues of being the white man. It's a paradox. But it isn't that important. Perhaps you should relax a bit more? What was it I heard someone say last week: 'We're all just flavours in the cosmic soup!'
- Yes I suppose you're right – except...Part of me just wants to keep the conversation going some how. It feels important to do it.
- Argh! Well, suit yourself. Look I must run...

### 3.

Back in Jim's office.

- Have you got five minutes? It is Daniel who puts his head round the door this time.
- Er... (He didn't really, but then says:). Yeees...I have the graduation committee meeting, which I am already a bit late for...
- It won't take too long...
- Go on then (relenting)...come in. Sit down. (He felt something was up. An alarm bell rang distantly.)
- It's not easy news I'm afraid.
- Oh. Really.
- It's about the corporate client, Last week. The programme you stepped in for me, with Sue.

He knew something was up. He always hated Monday mornings, anyway. There was something distressing about putting the mask back on, zipping up the suit of armour. But this morning, he had felt particularly unsettled. Then the conversation with the student had shaken him, then the snatched, murky conversation in the corridor. He felt undone. And now he knew there would be more to deal with. He felt a sense of physical distress, an exaggerated version of his Monday feeling; tight throat, hot eyes, stomach churning, shoulders ache. Muffled explosions within.

- Oh, do they want to change the order again?
- Well, no. It is something else. I know we have had problems with them, and you have gone out of your way, stepping in, I appreciate that, with all their mucking about...but this is a bit different. It seems I need you to, well, step out again. We had some feedback.
- Oh. This is going to take longer than five minutes isn't it?
- Yes, I suppose it is.

This was maddening. It was how things happen here sometimes: quiet assassination. He was being kindly, nicely, murdered by a friend. He picked up the phone.

- Sally, yes, this is Jim. Look, you're going to have give my apologies. Yes I know they must have already started. Something's come up. Can you slip in a note? Yes. Thanks. Bye.

He was conscious of how his voice must have sounded, tense, brittle, not how he wanted to be. He was caught in something and sinking.

- Look, (Daniel continued). This isn't easy. Something happened and you were involved and the client isn't happy.
- Something happened... Can you be more specific?
- OK. I see what you're saying. Look can you tell me what happened, specifically, in the evening, over dinner?
- In the evening?!

He thought hard, trying not to let his upset show too much. He knew in an instant what Daniel was referring to. He had joined the group of corporate trainees in the evening for dinner. Something he didn't often do. The conversation had begun for the most part politely. But then there had been a discussion. Actually, as his memory returned to it, it was more truthfully an argument. He hadn't meant to argue. But at a later stage, probably after he had had one or maybe even two glasses of wine, the conversation had strayed into more controversial territory. It had started when one of the two women he was sitting between, Jane and Jo, had asked him about his work and his history.

- They asked me, these two women, about my past work, before I came to the Institute and yes, I suppose a rather heated discussion ensued.
- Go on...
- I told them I used to lecture about gender politics in the workplace before I came here, that this was the subject of my PhD, and one of them, Jo I think, said something like, 'It's just not an issue anymore in our company. Women and men, we're all just the same, all equal'.
- And?
- We had a robust discussion. I mean, Daniel, come on! 'Not an issue anymore', who were they kidding? We know what that place is like. Anyway, I probably came on a bit strong. I think I just said that things may not be as advanced as they thought, to watch out for the glass cliff, that sort of thing, I was trying to be helpful. I did say, 'Look, far be it for me from wanting to tell you that you haven't got the equalities you want to have. I do want to believe you. I do want you to be right. But look at your company. All the top jobs are held by men. How many women are able to really get on...become an executive, you know that sort of thing? It wasn't very controversial. Just pointing out what I saw, what we can all see.
- That's all?
- Yes. Why? What else was there? I mean it was a 'free and frank exchange of views' as they say. I do remember one of them, Jane saying, 'Well, we'll just have to agree to disagree on this one.' And I said 'fine'. Then we just talked about the weather or kids or something else.
- Anything else?
- Jo did go a bit quiet after that. Look, Daniel, what is this about? I mean it was a discussion over dinner, that's all. I Yesterday I had a similar one over lunch, with a group of male students. It was a really good chat. About the double binds we face. About being both white middle class men and wanting to express more of ourselves. Being strong and soft – the toilet paper generation of men we called it. We laughed. It's what I do. You know it's my thing, my shtick.
- It seems that one of these women complained about you.
- Complained? Which one? What about?
- Well, we're not sure which one actually. The client wasn't sure either. He wasn't sure if it was one of these women – Jo or Jane? – or another one who was watching you have this discussion. In fact we think it may have been the latter. But anyway, they complained. To the client. Jim, they thought your behaviour was sexist.
- Sexist! I am...?? What?!

He was flabbergasted, speechless. A rage rose in him like lava. He wanted to cry, to scream. The sense of injustice went way, way back and grew bigger and more uncontrolled as it did so. It was playground stuff, like when he was accused by a teacher at school for talking, when he knew it hadn't been him. He felt, full on, raging, righteous indignation.

- Oh come on! How can I be sexist? I was talking about gender for fuck sake!

His thoughts raced and twisted. Here was Daniel; dear, affable, garrulous Daniel, calling *him* sexist. He liked Daniel; Daniel was his friend, but still...

- Don't get upset! It's just that it looked that way to one of the women, Jim. In fact, she even said to the client that she wondered if you'd made a pass at one of them, Jo I think...

He felt a blow, like a punch to his heart, and then another to the solar plexus. He crumpled in pain. The rage dissipates like a cloud of steam, replaced by numb, deep,

throbbing ache, a sense of nausea. In an instant, he became a photocopy of himself, slightly blurred, upside down and inside out.

- Do you really think that's likely? (He whispered this).
- No frankly I don't. Neither does the client actually. He was very shocked and surprised, knowing your reputation, your credentials. But it seems they are taking a line on this; that there's 'no smoke without fire' and they're choosing, well, asking if you wouldn't mind stepping down from this work. They don't want to take it further. They don't want any trouble, an inquiry or anything. This isn't a witch hunt. They're just asking for you to, you know, step aside. You know how risk averse they are.

No inquiry. That said it all. Something had happened right enough. There was so much to be said about what happened. He knew he wasn't blameless, but there was so much more to be said, to be explored. But he was condemned already and he knew enough to know that when hanged, it's better not to swing. Take it gracefully. He had plenty other things to be getting on with, as they all had at the Institute. But it was the whole cover up that bothered him; the glossing over and 'getting on with it', the injustices that fester. Especially about this, against everything he believed in.

Daniel was still talking

- I think you just got a bit carried away. You know how passionate you are about this stuff. Perhaps you just came across a bit strong.
- Surely that's the point. I was arguing for them to be more aware of the inherent sexism.
- Yes I know, but look at the bigger picture here, won't you Jim? We don't want a big fuss about it. It's no big deal after all. The client wants to move on. They just want it sorted. I can get Derek involved; he says he's free for the dates. He'll step in and we'll all just move on.
- But this is outrageous [although his voice sounds distant, deflated, even to himself, like a drowning man calling for a taxi]. We are supposed to be developing these people, educating them. It's our job to talk about these things. Shouldn't we push back? There's so much to learn here, for me too.
- You know what it's like here. It's best to take it on the chin. You know how things are. We're strapped for cash. We need the corporate clients so we can do the academic work. We can't take a risk with it. If you fight it, Jim, the Institute will roll over you on this one.

He paused. This was the worst kind of news, especially on a Monday. But what choice did he have? He knew he had reached the buffers, the fat lady was singing.

- What about Sue. Have you spoken with her?
- Yes, as a matter of fact. I did pop my head round her door. It seems one of these women, were not sure which one, because no one can quite get the names straight, did come and complain to her that evening. She said she had deflected the woman, saying she may have got the wrong end of the stick. She stuck by you. But it seems it wasn't enough for this woman, who then took it further. Look, go and see Sue. I am sure she'd be happy to chat. As I said, it's no big deal. I'm sure you've got lots of other things on. I know you were just stepping in to help out on this one, so it's no hardship really is it?
- I suppose not.
- It has happened to all of us, at one time or another. It's happened to me.
- What? Being accused of sexual harassment?
- Oh my God no! Not that. But getting the wrong side of a client, and being asked to step aside.

The mask slips back on. It isn't Daniel's fault. Take the revolver...step outside...Take some time to recover.

- Of course. No. Not a problem. It's a relief actually because I've got so much to do, what with this American conference and everything. Very busy.

- Of course you are.

Daniel leaves. Jim slumps. It put the conversation with the student into even sharper relief. He thought of the risk he had taken. His mind bobbed. What if she'd said he was sexist, or that he'd made a pass at her? He sat and stared out the window, over the garden, down towards the big fountain splashing into the lake. With the window open he could hear it, but the splashing water sounded like bullets, the gentle wind like the howl of an outraged jury. The whole world seemed wired up to pass judgement on him.

#### 4.

He should have gone home. He could have called it a day, licked his wounds. His son was due home and he loved talking to his children. He got more pleasure from this than anything else in the world. Even when his son was 2, he remembered sitting in a hammock with him, curled up together, passing the time of day, as if talking with a friend. Their moving away, fulfilling their own independence was something he was so proud of and yet so upset by.

But he had chosen to stay on at work. He felt compelled to see Sue. He hated the idea that she saw him this way; the way they had portrayed him.

- Hi Sue. I know how you hate it when someone says: 'Have you got five minutes', but...?!

She laughs.

- Come on in then. It is only that they say five but they never mean five. But I had a feeling you'd be coming by.

- Oh Sue, I'm so sorry.

- Come on, look I've got some time. Genuinely. We should talk.

He slumps down in the chair

- That bad eh?

- I'm a bit shocked that's all. Daniel came to see me. It's been such a strange morning. Like ghosts coming in busloads. Be careful what you wish for. I say I want to start conversations about gender around here and three come at once. Firstly this young student comes and asks me about some stuff, then a rather unsympathetic conversation in the corridor, then Daniel. All on a Monday too.

- Ah yes, your Monday morning marginality. You like being at the edge, part of your 'shape-shifting' as you call it, but not on Mondays. Look, do you want the feedback now or wait a bit, for when you are less...raw?

- Oh for pity's sake why not? It's not that important is it? It's not the work. It's like, you know, my crumple spot. It has caught me, sneaked in under the radar. To feel so...accused...of something that is so against my grain.

- It was wrong, bad and all that. You were falsely accused. I knew they were getting the wrong end of the stick. But...well, you didn't help did you? How much do you invite this in?

- Yes, well, thinking back, I can remember when it started. I was tired, drained by the day. I should have gone home. Before dinner, I sat outside and had a cigarette. I felt sort of, empty, nothing left in the tank. It had been a tough day.

- Yes they had been a bit of a resistant bunch. Hard work.

- But I remember acknowledging I was tired and that usually does the trick, slows me down.

- I am interested: did you sit where you sat on purpose, at the table?

- Not that I remember. I saw you on the other table and just thought – we'd better spilt up. So Jane ended up on my left and Jo on my right. This woman who complained must have sat opposite but I can't remember who was there.

- We're not sure quite who complained. It may have been the one who came to me that evening or it might have been someone else. To be honest I was surprised when I heard because the woman who came to me, I can't remember her name, but she didn't seem too bothered. She said she noticed Jo was upset and all sorts of things came into her head about it, but when I talked to her she seemed mollified. I just don't know if it was her who went and complained later.

- That's just it, isn't it? It's all rumours and mystery. Someone thinks they saw something; no-one knows who and it becomes just a big spectre, hanging over me. I do remember someone pouring me a glass of wine and just sort of chatting really, and

the conversation getting a little heated, and then Jo just turning her back on me and that was it really. God this is awful...

- It's OK. Go on.

- *They asked me* about the work I did, and I told them about my interest in gender, I always say 'gender' rather than 'masculinity', which is really more accurate. I am scrupulous about it, because if I say 'masculinity' or 'men's development', some people, some women can get a bit...triggered...you know... 'Is it fair just to focus on men? What about the women?' Etc. etc. So I usually say 'gender'. Then I remember one of them, I think it was Jane, saying 'Well, we don't need that kind of work in our company, because gender isn't an issue anymore.' If I'm honest, that was a bit of a red rag to a bull. I mean, the wine didn't help, but I remember thinking that they were quite deluded. After all, that day, all these young women - and there were only 3 men in that group of 18, weren't there? Isn't that typical for this type of role in this type of business? They had sat there that lunchtime listening to a lecture from this big cheese from the company, who was a nice bloke, but a white, middle-class, middle-aged man. How can they not see that gender is an issue? But anyway, I think I said 'How do you know gender isn't an issue anymore?'

- That's quite an inquiring question, but did you say it in an inquiring way? How did you put it?

- I don't know, Sue! You know me. I can come on a bit strong sometimes; I suppose I was a bit passionate. And this comes out as, well a bit strong I suppose.

- You were just having a conversation at dinner of course, so you should be allowed to be yourself. But that's a little naïve, isn't it? I mean, we're 'always on' aren't we? We are always representatives, when we're here and always acting as some kind of canvas for their projections.

- It was an interesting conversation. I suppose I naively thought it was a conversation of equals, at least at first. But when I knew things were going a bit downhill, I did try and dig myself out of it. I said that 'I didn't want to be in a position of convincing them that their world was worse than they thought', that 'I was happy for them if things were equal'. That was what I wanted. At that point, Jo got really heated, saying that she thought my views were really out of date. It felt like a horrible labyrinth really, like Theseus and the Minotaur, except I couldn't find the red thread to help me out. How could I be arguing against their own experience? How could I as a man be saying they were deluding themselves? Anyway I remember saying 2 or 3 times that I was glad for them if they felt that way. 'I'm really happy for you, but it's not my experience. For me gender is still an issue.' 'Give me the evidence', she was saying.

- Who?

- Jo. Jo was saying that. So I think I said, 'look at your own company'. The lifestyle still supports the male way of doing things. The whole way of thinking, the focus on the bottom line, how the things they measured weren't about the quality of relationships but the bottom line, that sort of thing...Oh God, I really screwed up didn't I!?

- You can see how it might have come across. But it's OK...Look is this helping you?

- No. Sort of. Yes. Really. It is useful. It's like...a reminder, a course correction. It is about how I live my values. Or how I don't. Is it helpful for you?

- It's a bit of a spectator sport, but rare to see a man this fired up about this sort of thing. You are working so hard, and I find that interesting. I am fired up by what gets people fired up. That's my obsession I suppose. So this works for me. And I did want to bottom this out, for my own understanding. And I like you, you know that - I care about you. I want to help.

- Thank you. It is helpful.

- Go on then.

- Then I think she said - 'Look how many women are getting promoted now' and I said. 'Is it about the numbers, then? How do they have to behave when they're promoted? Just like the men? And they're expected to do the emotional work as well, and when they don't they get criticised, often by other women, for being harsh and lacking

feelings.' I do remember thinking I was on really dangerous ground and wanting to get out of there, like being having stumbled into a minefield. I tried to stop, to lighten up, but after that, I couldn't just talk about the weather. Then Jane helped – she just said, 'Well, we'll have to agree to differ', and we started talking about our kids, and stuff, and Jo just turned her back; she just literally turned right around and looked the other way, for the whole of the rest of the meal. That's all I remember.

- Apparently she went to bed soon after that, looking quite upset, so this other woman told me. So she assumed something had happened between you. It is interesting someone, maybe her, made an assumption about what that might have been.

- Yes: that I'd made a pass at her! Honestly! The odd thing is, the next day, after my first lecture, Jo came up to me and said, 'You know, I've been thinking about what you said and I think I get it now, a bit more, about this gender thing.'

- How odd! That's a bit erratic of her, isn't it? I think she did this deliberately in front of the other woman, to show that she was 'alright'.

- Because it wasn't her that complained. Oh God Sue I feel so upset by this. I know it was wrong; I felt so strongly that they were deluding themselves, but I should have left it. But the next day when Jo comes to me and says she 'gets it', well, I thought it had been a worthwhile conversation to have. But I know now I shouldn't have argued with them like that; that I shouldn't have expected to turn them into feminists!

- I've got a few things to say about this. Firstly, looking at you as a lecturer, with some authority, in a business school setting, with that cudos behind you, that was a strong challenge to talk about women not having the opportunity to advance, and it's not surprising that it might rub them up the wrong way.

- I didn't say that!

- I know you didn't say those words exactly, but looking at it more broadly, they may think, 'who's this bloke telling us everything we're learning here is irrelevant because of deeper dynamics we can't change?' Come on! Are you surprised they hit back? No matter what your intention was?

- Yes, I see. It's not what I meant, but I do see it.

- Then there's the *how* of your doing it. You can be a bit strong, kind of on top of people before they know it. That may have looked, from a distance, like all sorts of things.

- I was just being passionate about it!

- Yes and isn't it interesting that passion, being passionate, was interpreted by an observer as possible something sexual?

- It wasn't my intention!

- No, well, not consciously anyway. But it is a kind of display. And look: women can be sexist, tending to interpret things in a sexualised way too. They've got lots of justification for thinking that about men. It's not that surprising to find a man's behaviour may have...a veiled intent to it. I am not saying women are perfect; far from it. But it isn't necessarily, well...surprising, to think a man might have sex on his mind.

- Gosh that's a hard message to hear...but I suppose...

- It's just sometimes your size, your presence, your eagerness to be involved. I know you, so I know the place the intent comes from. And I think it may have been wrong to have judged your intent the way they did. But it's not that surprising, is it?

- I...suppose not. I mean I feel quite sore about it, wrongly judged. It is the opposite of what I intended. But what you are saying...it does make sense.

- I know. It feels very personal. But it's the impact you may have on people. You can't necessarily get away from that. You are a potent male in the room, in a group of predominantly women. Some of the projection is theirs'; some is your own intent. Only you can say what that *really* was. But all I am saying is it is not a neutral thing. It is highly charged. And on top of that you talked about women, about gender, which has inherently sexual overtones; these are things that are taboo. I am not saying this is right, it is just what I notice, as a woman. Well, as me. And the work we do, we act as

lightning rods sometimes, for all of this stuff to zap down. You just caught a bit of the zap.

- Yes of course.

- Of course you weren't wrong with what you said, by the way. Of course in their world there isn't a level playing field, and they must know that, deep down. But you reminded them of that, perhaps in a style that might be interpreted as...a bit invasive, so much so that your intentions look sexual to a casual observer. I mean it just all adds up. And good girls don't make passes, so these intentions must have been yours, not theirs', 'your shout', as it were. Of course their culture is very traditional, very male.

- I should have seen it. I feel so daft now. This isn't news to me. I do know this, at least, theoretically, but in practice it is hard to do, to advocate without all these interference patterns, when things just overlap and overlay and intentions get so twisted back on themselves.

- I know. When you are at your best, you do soften your tone a bit. Of course you do. And after all, being opinionated is what you get paid for; to be an expert. It is a double bind to some degree. Difficult, to live your values around gender, to be a campaigner, and also to find yourself living the patterns too. You put yourself through it, don't you? Well, we all do I suppose. Lots of 'blood under the bridge', as I say!

- I know it! Look, Sue, that's so helpful. Thank you, it is tough to hear but enlightening. Trouble is with this stuff, you think you've made strides and yet you can be just right back where you started.

## 5.

Jim sat outside on a bench, eyes shut, with the sun on his face. He had still meant to go home. He felt empty, old, his limbs heavy. The four conversations were settling in him and he digested them slowly, like a snake. He was what he was. He couldn't escape from that. He was still trying to change the world, just one conversation at a time. In his view, you were no better than your last conversation, no better connected than by your latest relationship with someone else. You are never finished in this line of work. A line from *Fight Club*, one of his favourite books, came into his head:

“As long as you're at fight club, you're not how much money you've got in the bank. You're not your job. You're not your family, and you're not who you tell yourself.”

The mechanic yells into the wind, “You're not your name’.

A space monkey in the back seat picks it up: “You're not your problems.”

The mechanic yells, “You're not your problems.”

A space monkey shouts, “You're not your age.”

The mechanic yells, “You're not your age.”

Why did Jim love *Fight Club* so much? It was a very violent book, and he'd never been in a fight in his life, not a fist-fight anyway. Was it to do with being alive, with being the 'middle generation' of men, as Palahniuk called it through the words of the main character of the book, Tyler Durden: the 'generation of men raised by women, who are wondering if it's another woman they need in their life'?

Jim thinks out loud, plaintively - I just want to have a conversation, to keep the conversation about gender going, about the things that men just don't seem to want to talk about. That's what I want to talk about. And this is what you get.

That's what it was about, this 'inquiring masculinity' of his, the subject of his PhD. It represented an effort to keep the conversations going. If worlds follow words, then that's what was needed, surely? No matter the risks, the misunderstandings the motives and sub-motives? But he was piqued by the student's question – what did it matter? What did it change? Just 'talking'? But what else could he do? Like Seamus Heaney in that poem about his father, he was a man of the word, the pen, or at least the computer keyboard. Unlike Heaney's father, who dug peat, cutting the sods with his shovel, or Jim's own father, a tailor, who made cloth into clothes, a cigarette permanently jutting from his taciturn lips, all he could do was sew words together. This was his product. All he had was conversations. What else could he do?

But then there was the failure of his conversation with the women that night. How could he have got it so wrong? He was caught off guard, like in a T'ai Chi move, where he hadn't quite got set square on his feet and had been toppled. Bam! And he was over and floundering. In an instant he was completely turned over. That's what it was like here. He couldn't help but feel bitter about it. He had known something was up, that he had allowed himself to be sucked into some noxious pit or another, these underground streams that bubbled all over the place around here. It was the nature of this place, where people came to dump their stuff, and move on. Didn't the concentration, the background level of toxicity increase? Didn't you know you would find yourself sinking into it at times?

Yes and no. He knew he wasn't taking full responsibility for something. Yes all of that is true; this could be a poisonous place sometimes, but then there was him. If he really was on a mission, a life-long commitment to a set of questions, still burning after all these years, then this wasn't ever going to be an easy ride. Generations of patriarchy didn't dissolve over night, in him or anywhere else. Constant attention was required to

spot the sucking patterns of the old habits. It did grab him, from time to time, perhaps often, like it did everybody, men and women. Live with it. Roll with it. But maybe even that was too heroic. What was it that John Rowan had said all those years ago: how the 'patripsych' was a lot more resistant than anyone, feminists included, had ever bargained for? Patriarchy is a pervasive creature. It turns its tail, scorpion like, and stings you just when you think it is placid. For him it had just been a sting. Others had felt it, were *still* feeling its lash a lot harder. Just recognise it's a constant, as he had done countless times before, and let go. Dance around it; don't try and warrior your way out of it all the time. That's just playing the game. Let go, 'hit rock bottom', as Tyler Durden said: 'Slide!'

## 6.

One conversation at a time. A figure approached out of the gloom. Jim was still sitting on the bench, as the sun went down. The figure acquired features. It was Colin.

- Oh dear – that bad eh?
- It's O.K. Actually I was pulling myself together, enjoying the sunset
- Colin sat down on the bench next to him.
- Yes so was I. It's lovely down by the lake. Just de-gunking myself before I drive home.
- Hard day?
- No not hard. Intense. Good in fact. How about you?
- Not great I have to say. Well, actually good and bad. I have had some interesting conversations.
- Sounds ominous. Fancy another one?
- Yes of course. Always.
- So tell me about the good and the bad?
- Jim tells Colin some of the story of the corporate client, his conversations with the student and Sue. Colin's musings were helpful and sympathetic as ever.
- Perhaps you just refused to comply with their view of the world and they didn't like it?
- Yes, that's possible, but I suppose I was a bit pushy.
- How do you know that?
- People say I am.
- Did anyone tell you that then?
- Not directly, and in their reaction afterwards. Not everyone I suppose. One woman just agreed to differ.
- Which is probably fair comment.
- It's all just left me kind of...
- Shaken...
- Yes. Shaken. On top of this young student coming and asking me this morning if I thought any of this gender stuff really made a difference. I am struck by the synchronicity of it, the meaningful coincidence. This must be telling me something. Perhaps I am just too naïve?
- Perhaps you were just telling too much truth. We can do that sometimes. But why naïve?
- I suppose it wasn't a very nice thing to say, that they were kidding themselves if they thought things had moved on. And then the student asks me if anything has changed, and I am arguing the opposite. Well not the opposite, but a nuance of it. It is all so fine-grained, this gender stuff. There's no easy way to look at it.
- Yes I suppose it is a bit confusing and you may have been naïve. But it isn't all generalisable. It is also about the specific. It is about you and her, you and this woman who observed you and made that judgement. Maybe you were just unlucky. That happens. That woman found it hard to accept what you are saying and this other woman makes a judgement about her upset-ness and decided to make something of it. Who knows why? Bad luck. But that might be it, nothing wrong as such.
- You sound a bit like Tyler Durden
- Tyler who?
- Durden. He's the hero in *Fight Club*. One of my favourite books. Next you'll be saying: 'You have to accept the fact that God doesn't really like you. Didn't want you. That will set you free.'
- That's a bit strong. But interesting I suppose. But more than that, not just shit happens, but *do something* with it. Do it now, let it unfold. Like you did with that student, and like we are now. Here and now.
- 'Slide'.
- Slide?

- Nothing...something else from *Fight Club*. It's funny isn't it, but by and large, I'm not that interested in the women's side of things in the gender question. At least they have some conversations going about them. Gender is hard enough to get on organisations agenda, but at least when it is there, it is about women. But where are the men? What is *their* side of things? That's why I like things like *Fight Club* because at least they try, albeit clumsily to ask questions for men, about the individual men who aren't usually present in the conversation. Yes they are present as 'the man', the voice that everyone speaks with, the dominant masculinity voice, but not the individual, quavering, uncertain, real voices that we all hear in private. Men don't want to hear those voices, and sometimes women don't either. It seems to be really uncomfortable for everyone to deal with these real men, these shaky voices.

- Like yours?

- How do you...? Yes you are right there. I feel shaky, I want to talk about it, how it is about both men and women, about finding a way through, and I don't feel like it's wanted round here. Same old, same old.

- You do have to accept that sometimes women and men, people generally, feel threatened by this conversation about gender. It isn't their fault. A long time ago, when I was having supervision for during my training as a counsellor, one of the supervisors, a woman, said to me 'Your gentleness and emotionality may freak men out some times.' But in my experience it was often as much the women who were freaked out by it. The men just didn't show up.

- Yes that's what I mean. About showing up.

[a silence for some time]

- Thank you (Jim's voice in the now near-darkness)

- Thank you?

- Thank you showing up. For listening. 'Listening without just waiting for your turn to speak'. Something else from *Fight Club*...

- That's a real compliment. In a curious kind of way.

- It is about men in the end for me; a chance for us to speak about what we usually stay silent about. You know, I could have just gone home, sulked at my wife. But connecting with you...feels so much better, and I can go home now without her catching it from me. That's what we don't do. Men, we don't help eachother this way enough and then women catch the emotional flak.

You know how the used to talk about the 'love that dare not speak its name'? They used to mean about gay love, but for me that's not about gay love anymore. Perhaps it's about men generally. Men coming out to eachother about...well loving eachother. God that sounds daft doesn't it?

- No. No. Look, yes, I think we're making something here. A quality of something I can feel it. Clear, strong, but without threat. Is that too much of a leap?

- No ...it feels...intimate. There could be something being made here which could do with being made more often, especially at work. We could get used to it.

- In marginal spaces, in the gaps. To begin with.

- It feels robust and...yet open, like in a way that conversation I had with that woman wasn't. And at least three conversations I've had today, with you, the student and Sue, they have been. Funnily enough, it has turned out to be a good day.

- How many people in your life do you come across who are robust and open, vulnerable with you. Seriously. How many?

- I don't know

- No neither do I. Not many though. Robust, open, sensitive, strong, that's the important bit for me in your 'inquiring masculinity'. That's what you have been doing.

Not one or the other. Both. The courage for both. Strong, engaged, vulnerable, Wow...

- 'Soft and strong – the toilet paper masculinity'

[Laughter. Silence]

Now Colin's voice again in the darkness.

- No wonder many women find it dangerous, as do many men – potency and sensitivity. A great combination. The warrior and the philosopher/poet, honoured side by side.
  - When you said that, I felt the hairs stand up on the back of my neck. It felt like history. The warrior and the philosopher joining up, a powerful moment of connection. I thought of my grandfather, he was a warrior, a soldier. What did he have to deny in himself in order to fight? Perhaps what I saw of him on later life...the translucent skin of his hand as he held mine so gently.
  - We all have old soldiers in our families don't we? Mine was my father. I didn't blame him, well I don't anymore, but I know that he saw such stuff...you never recover from that.
  - *"We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression."*
  - Was that from...?
  - Yes, *Fight Club*
  - Christ how many times have you seen it?
  - Oh I don't know...loads. I've read the book as well. Many times.
  - It's not very jolly is it?
  - Ha! No. But it is kind of optimistic. Funnily enough I think it's a love story.
  - A strange way to be romantic. You're not going to ask me for a fight are you?
  - No! God I wouldn't know how. But I do want to thank you. This was a great conversation. That's why they fight, to make a real connection. But we can do it without the fight. It has affirmed something for me. We make choices all the time, don't we? My choice has been to keep the door open today. Painful, but a good choice. I feel rewarded by this conversation. It has helped me. I'd just like to go home now. Perhaps tomorrow can feel a bit more like *Mary Poppins* and less like *Fight Club*.
  - From your mouth to God's ears! Come on then.
- They walked in silence away up the hill.

## Part Two - 2020

1.

Mike looked out of the window of the train as it sped through the spring countryside. He was about 21, clean shaven with bright blue eyes, wearing casual yet conservative clothes: his jeans were blue and spotless. Vast fields of blue and yellow fuel-seed crops painted the landscape beyond his window a vivid, colourful psychedelia. The plants were genetically modified – a whole landscape transformed in the service of an emergency technology. He himself knew this new world as an insider, having spent the previous summer working at a rural bio-fuel processing station. Windmills crowned the hilltops. A whole new landscape, the manifestation of a critical time, come sooner than anyone had predicted.

The guard came through the carriage. Tickets and permit. He needed both. You had to buy your ticket and apply for a permit to travel. Journeys were rationed. People accepted the necessity of it. Losing New Orleans hadn't been enough. Losing New York had been. His journey was granted on compassionate grounds. His father had disappeared. It had still taken six months to get the permit.

A pile of letters in his father's own hand sat in front of him on the stained plastic table. He fingered the pile gingerly. It looked like something antique. He wondered if anyone else in the carriage had noticed it, this evidence of his father's...what was it? - eccentricity, mid-life crisis or some full-blown madness? Paper like this was hard to get hold of anyway these days. There wasn't much call for it. Hardly anyone used ink pens anymore. Everyone's lifestyle was measured minutely for signs of over consumption. This was all part of the crisis driven lurch to the frugal. But he was like most people and he did his writing on a keyboard or with a stylus, the screen converting his hand into some standard, legible text. Some people, protesting, still insisted on a personalised handform, but they were regarded as luddites and anyway, once the message was received, you could choose to convert it to your own favoured script to read it. Most people did. Such conformity was seen as necessary now, oddly part of the prudent, conforming pressures of a world where differences suggested resource abuse and unsustainable selfishness. Inexorable pressures surrounded life: fuel shock, land shock, food shock; shared strictures of a planet in crisis. The times demanded everyone smooth off their rough edges. Nearly everyone. He felt a momentary pang of anger again at his father. In these circumstances, his choices seemed utterly, embarrassingly selfish. And yet...he looked around the carriage. People seemed to divide these days into two types; the vast conforming majority 'getting on with it', and a perverse, fringe extreme; mostly young people who seemed almost at odds with the pressing needs of the day. Some of these were nick-named the 'dragsters'. They had a habit of dressing in style that suggested a weird, bright, flamboyant androgyny. It seemed to be mostly a fashion statement, but it had an edge of political protest about it. Some said it was a like the hippies used to be in the 1960s. But this time, their rebellion seemed express itself as some kind of gender freakout. Most people just didn't get it. Most could afford to get on with their utilitarian lives without worrying about it anyway. But not him. It is can happen within families that one person's choices will thrust unwanted inquiry into the system. And so it was with his father. A couple of these dragsters were dotted around the carriage, an uneasiness between them and their neighbour. They seemed almost like Hindu cows, tolerated, even revered, accepted mostly (although some attacks had been reported). But no-one was at ease around them. They were unpredictable. They were usually strangely reserved and taciturn; their physical presence and style making their point. Before, like most people, Mike had ignored them. Now he regarded them with wary curiosity.

Had his father become one of them? He recoiled at the thought. His solid, reliable stable father, a dragster?

He looked back at the letters. He had decided to save this moment until he was on his way, safely on the train. So now, he began to read.

2.

September 2020

Dear Mike

*Hello my beautiful boy. I guess you may not feel like hearing this, but let me say it straight off. You are, and always will be, my beautiful boy. Your sister Jenn will always be my best girl too. It seems so important to say, before all the torrents of difficult words that may pass between us henceforth, just to say that, and tell you that I love you.*

*So now you want to know what is going on with me? Why this sudden and what may seem like ridiculous set of choices? Let me please explain.*

*Years ago, when you and Jenn were small, I embarked on a small, personal research project and in a way, this is the next stage in my fieldwork, so to speak. It all began when I was doing my PhD. I don't know if you remember that time; you were about 10 when I finished, Jenn about 8. But if you do remember, it would be that the subject of my PhD was gender and in particular, masculinity. It seems funny now, what with all that's happened, but no-one was much interested in gender then. Anyway, I was doing this research, interviewing people as you do, and at the same time I was keeping a kind of private journal, of all the things I was thinking about, really thinking about, things that you couldn't put in a PhD thesis because they were too personal. For example, doing the research made me wonder, 'What kind of man am I?' But I couldn't write about that; it wasn't 'proper research', so what I did was keep this journal and it just sort of happened that this journal became a correspondence. You see, you and Jenn were so important to me at that time, and I suppose I felt so guilty that I was spending all this time away from you, working, doing my research, etc., so I found myself writing to you. It was a bit one-sided of course; for once you couldn't answer back! But it was such a huge help to me, when I was doing the 'formal' work, to be able to tell you and Jenn what was really going on for me. These letters became a sort of anti-thesis, a shadow work, my very own portrait of Dorian Grey. Of course, as you know I got the PhD, became a 'Doctor', and after that I got on with things pretty much as before and forgot about the letters. But then years later something happened at the Institute that reminded me of this time.*

*I suppose I had forgotten some of the things that were important to me, things I had written about in this journal. One day a young student came to see me, and she challenged me about whether anything I'd done with this research or after it with my work at the Institute, had well, really made a difference?*

*That was just the start of it, and for a few years I tried to push it away but it was like a little voice that got louder and louder until I couldn't help but listen to it. Especially with what was going on in the world. I know for most people it seems unimportant, but there are a number of us for whom the question: 'who are you really?' has become more important than ever. So with all that is going on in the world, I just felt I needed to do something. There are those that can do real, practical things to make a difference. You are one of those people. So is Jenn. I am so proud of you both, getting on with your lives. Then there are others, those aren't so suited to tending crops or building things with their hands; they have to try something else to make a difference; they are the ones who only have themselves, their words and their bodies to make a difference with. I think I am one of those.*

*I know you must be feeling all sorts of things, and protective of your mother and sister as you always were. But I wanted to try and help you understand. That is why I offer*

*you these letters. My address is below. I am with good people, who are helping me work things out. Come and see me, if you can get a permit. Let's talk. I love you.*  
*Your father*  
*Jim x*

Mike sat back. He sighed deeply and looked again out of the window. In the midst of the eco-shock, his father seemed to be having some kind of midlife crisis. He had only heard rumours about where he was; that he was living with a bunch of freaks and social outcasts; that he was some kind of pervert, had flipped into a deranged cross-dresser; that he had gone off to live with a man who was really a woman. People sniggered behind their hands. He pushed the ridiculous image of his father in a frock and a wig out of his mind with a shudder. It was all just rumours anyway. But at once he was annoyed again, at the self-indulgence of it all. His father, Jim Porter, who had been a rock, someone so utterly solid and reliable, a middle of the road, liberal Jew, an academic, a football fan, so...boring. 'It's the really boring ones you have to watch out for: they're often the real perverts', his friend Cathy had said, rather brutally. She had meant to be helpful. But Mike had liked really boring. It gave him a real sense of comfort to know that wherever he wandered, his mother and father would be there, in the same old house he had always know, lighting candles on a Friday night for the Sabbath and saying the ritual blessings for their children.

The note of the engine changed and he noticed they were climbing now, threading their way up a valley. He sifted through the pile of letters again, and began rebuilding the shattered image of his father that sat like an overturned jigsaw on the table in front of him.

### 3.

September 2007

Dear Mikey

I have been wondering about something, something that has come up for me as a result of doing this research. I wonder what it would be like if there weren't men and women anymore? If we had a different sort of world, with more choice about who we were? A strange thought I know, but it came to me recently whilst I was doing this work.

Before I say anymore, I want to say first of all how I would never want to stop being your Dad. That puts me in a quandary. I suppose I would always want to be your parent, to nurture you, it makes me wonder what being a 'father' really is – an act or an activity? People talk about 'fathering' but they usually mean 'siring'. I hope I am more to you than that.

Anyway I just have a hunch that something in the world would be set free if there weren't such solid boxes around who we are as men and women. I mean I like being a man, most of the time, but there are also a few things about it I don't like. Most of all, part of me doesn't like the way people react to me in a certain way, thinking I am this big, broad, strong, solid thing, when inside sometimes I am not.

I was wondering about this whilst in a group the other day. It was a focus group for my PhD research. I found myself really looking at the people in the room and after a while I felt like we were all living a bit of a lie. It was as if the difference between the men and the women was false, or at least, I started to notice how different the men and the women were *amongst each other*. There was as much difference within as between the men and women. I noticed for example how this one woman, Sue, was quite big and loud and even quite, well, hairy! And this man, called John, was soft and round and quietly spoken. It was true that some of the women and some of the men just followed the stereotype; most of the men were big and talked more, most of the women wore brighter clothes and talked less. But these majority who fitted, they were the boring ones, as if they had hidden a big part of themselves behind this convenient, catch-all called 'man' or 'woman'. I know I should have listened to them all equally but I cannot deny that the ones who grabbed my attention the most were those who didn't quite fit, who showed more of themselves, their quirky-ness. But even that started to break down when I looked closely; for example I saw that one man was wearing pink socks! It was as if he was saying, 'Ok I am mostly going to fit in, but at least my socks are pink!' But I had to work harder to spot these more subtle differences. For one brief flicker of a moment, it was as if the categories of man and woman just disappeared and I felt I caught a glimpse of a world that could be, where men and women are more themselves. But what is 'ourselves'?

This got me thinking; what if there wasn't this distinction? How would it be? And I remembered about this category of people who are called 'intersex'; how they are born with both male and female bits, you know, private parts. There are a significant number of these people (figures vary and there's quite a bit of debate about it, but enough for several hundred thousand at least in the world, probably). What doctors have been told to do in the past is operate on them to make them a boy or a girl, whilst they are still babies, for their 'own good'. This is because they think that an androgynous person, who is neither a man nor a woman, would find fitting in with the world we live in too difficult. So this is saying: 'it is the world's problem because the world wouldn't know how to treat them, but then the world hands this little baby the problem and says, 'it's for your own good...'

Then I remembered discussing this with you, one day a few years ago – you must have been about 6 or 7. I told you there were these intersex people and I said: ‘and you might have your own children one day and imagine if one of these were intersex – how would you react?’ And you just burst into tears! You were really upset. I really, really didn’t mean to upset you and I was really surprised by your reaction, almost as if I had cursed you. This made me realise that the world puts lots and lots of pressure on little boys and girls to conform, and then says ‘Look: boys and girls want to be different from each other’ – as if it comes from them. We *give* you the problem and then make out that it came *from* you. You have to choose. Hence why the idea of an intersex child is so upsetting to you. And isn’t it interesting that with all this pressure, some boys and girls choose not to fit in? Look at your friend Penny, who wants to be a boy, wears trousers and plays football all the time, even though she gets teased for it?

So I do wonder what the world would be like, and part of me feels trapped by the box of being a man, and I worry about you too, because you are really like me and need to express yourself in a big way, and will you feel similarly trapped? It’s not that I want to be a woman – I just wonder what options I’d have if I wasn’t always put, or put myself, in the ‘man box’. I wonder if I’d be more ‘me’?

\* \* \*

October 2007

I really enjoyed visiting this focus group yesterday, as part of my research. For a change it was a group of only men. I enjoyed the feeling of togetherness, the fun we had and all the banter and laughter, once people got through the uncomfortable silences at the start. A few of the men thanked me afterwards; one of them said ‘it was a bit like a birthday party except nobody was having the birthday!’ But between you and me, I felt a bit disappointed. You see we talked about the bigger issues and the more personal stuff that usually they say men can’t talk about. In all of the rush and busy-ness of our life at the Institute it was so nice to hear these men talk about these things, but now when I see them, hard at it, back at work, it all feels like such a dream and it’s as if it never happened at all.

Then, later on I went to another meeting, and it was such a contrast. There are so many of these type of meetings at the Institute. It starts and everyone is a bit cagey. We had a ‘check-in’. This is quite a new thing, where we are supposed to say how we are, how we are feeling, but often people are still reserved, and so am I, when I don’t quite trust everyone who is there. We spend quite a lot of time discussing why we are here, having this meeting. People seem to have their own agendas. I do too and to admit this to you makes me quite ashamed, but I want to be honest.

This makes me think about the Institute and why I am there. Generally I think it is a good place, and does some great work. Sometimes I think it is just my problem, and that I should work harder fitting in. It is like I say to you sometimes, how if you believe something deeply enough it will tend to come true. So if I believe I can do good work here I will. But life gets really difficult when I feel like I have to pretend. Especially on Mondays! I don’t feel confident or that I know what I am doing but I have to pretend I am and I do. I have to put a kind of mask on, because it just isn’t done to be that honest about this kind of thing all of the time. It causes too many ripples. Even though it is a good place, people will start to judge you.

The other day, I felt very angry. I felt like someone had judged me without much reason. It was only an off the cuff remark, but I felt really angry about it. They said I was quite smug. What is interesting is that couldn't be further from the truth! Little do they know how un-smug I feel! But I sat in this kind of rageful prison, like that story we read sometimes, about Theseus and the Minotaur? On the outside I was very calm and just carried on with the report back I was giving. On the inside I was really seething. Except I am both the hero and the rageful beast. I sat there, in the panting darkness, patting the ground desperately with my hands, searching for the red thread to help me get out of there.

Some of this is about just getting on in a place like the Institute, but some of it relates to this PhD I am doing as well. It is about how much freedom I have to be myself, within the limits of this box I am in called 'being a man'. It is about what is acceptable. The other day I was listening to the radio and this person came on who had won a prize for his artwork recently. He is a man but he is well known for dressing up as a woman. He gets asked all the time why he does this and it must be really annoying, as if it seems almost rude of him to dress up as a woman, according to the people who ask. It is as if it offends them, reminding them of something they are sure about that perhaps they shouldn't be. Yet he always seems to answer their questions with a grace that impresses me. This time he said: 'Why do I dress in these clothes? Because of the emotional range it gives me'. An emotional range. That's what it feels like sometimes, the thing I want more of. I look at women sometimes and envy the emotional range they seem to be allowed to have.

\* \* \*

October 2007

I want to tell you about someone I met today called India. This feels so important because I hope she can be my friend and she seems to understand many of the things I am trying to. You see, she used to be a man and now she is a woman. Yes, she has been both!

She said that in her view, there is something behind being a man or a woman that is bigger than both. That's what interests me. She said that people who have changed their gender, 'transgender' or just 'trans' people as they are sometimes called, they often have a sense of this bigger thing. It is a spiritual thing. She told me that when she went through her change, which took quite a while, it was like being literally taken apart, inside as well as outside, and that was very hard for her. But there always seemed to be something there that was bigger and that helped her keep it all together.

We sat in the bar at the Institute and talked for a long time. She said to me: 'You know it is quite unusual for me to open up so quickly about these things to a man.' She says that she watches people's reactions to her 'trans status' as she calls it, and this tells her a lot about people. In her view, the more open people are about this, the more 'spiritually awake' they are, 'awake to the important things in life, beyond the obvious stuff'. I wondered if this was about Descartes. Separating our mind from our body, like he did, we think spirituality might just be something we can 'think' into. But our bodies and what we do with them may be an important part of the puzzle. Eastern traditions, like Yoga, understand that. Suddenly transgenderism made more sense to me.

She told me this amazing, moving story about her experience. It was about when she was going through her transition from man to woman. She was saying how she learnt about this set of spiritual questions at the heart of gender the hard way. For example, one day she was walking along the road and some young boys, teenagers, decided to

have a go at her. They jeered and shouted and as she walked away they started to chase her. Of course, she was afraid, and they chased her down this high street and she knew that no-one would be likely to help her if it got ugly; if they started to hit her. A friend of hers, also trans, had been hospitalised by a mob like this only recently. Can you imagine this? It reminds me of Nazi Germany. Just like the Jews reminded these Nazis of something about themselves they just couldn't tolerate, so trans people seem to do the same. As she ran, these boys chased and started to throw things. So she ran into a bookshop. As she said: 'Luckily I remembered that there is something quite unique about the British which makes it unacceptable for a bunch of teenage hooligan thugs to beat anyone up in a bookshop!' And she was right! They didn't follow her in, but stood at the door. Whilst they carried on jeering, they didn't follow her in.

So here she was, in this bookshop and she felt the need to pretend that she had come in on purpose of course, so she went up to this shelf of books and picked up a book, the first one she could find, and began to read it. It was a book by Carl Jung, a famous psychologist, and it was a collection of his writings. The first thing she read was about what he called 'synchronicity', which is how things always seem to happen for a reason. And then the next page she read as she flicked through the book said something about 'how men are very scared about the frailty of their own egos, which is why they can be prone to violence'. She said she realised when she read this that when she chose to leave the bookshop, these boys couldn't hurt her anymore.

I found this story both sad and uplifting. That is the sort of person India is. It is as if she went through this change not for itself but because of the deeper person inside that she really is, that finds a different, better expression as a result. It is funny; it reminds me of that story people say about how if you try and point out the moon to a dog, the dog will always look at the end of your finger. That's what it's like with India and her trans friends. It is such an unusual, incomprehensible thing to most of us that we just look at the finger rather than seeing the moon beyond it.

\* \* \*

November 2007

India and I talked again, this time about what I means to be 'queer'. This is a word some people use as an insult, but we talked about how it could be a good thing. Being queer could mean standing apart from the crowd. We were saying how it could be that we all have a queer part of ourselves; it's that quirky bit; the bit that we hide in order to be accepted as 'normal'. This means there are a lot of queer people about! They are often hiding beneath the surface of being normal and bland, especially in organisations.

I was saying how it could be seen that Jewishness was a kind of queerness. Although most Jews hide this part of themselves to get on with normal life, there is a part of what we do, how we are that we know seems really odd when looked at by the outside world. And some Jewish communities, like the Chassids, who wear the black coats and hats, they are seen as queer, even by many Jews, who don't like the way they remind the rest of the world of what is actually our own queerness.

Of course, being gay used to be one of the main queer things you could do, but its interesting that people don't necessarily associate being queer with being gay anymore. It has become quite mainstream, even quite middle class, which I suppose is the opposite of queer in some ways. Anyone who goes on holiday to Mykonos can't really be that queer! India said something very interesting, which is that lots of trans people, once they have made the change and can 'pass off' as a man or a woman, (which means people can't tell if they are trans anymore), they often like to get on with

their settled, nice, middle class life, with holidays in Tuscany, drinking Chianti just like everyone else. Nothing wrong with that, but they also want not to be queer.

I know it sounds kind of odd, but part of me would really like to be a bit more queer, or be able to express this a bit more. Maybe that's how I use my Jewishness, as a kind of queer 'trope' (a trope is a slogan - like a newspaper headline) announcing that there is a part of me that is really quite different when I need to show this. At least I have that choice. Our Jewish grandfathers and great grandfathers couldn't really hide this. They did all they could to do so, almost desperately, like changing their name, putting on western clothes, changing their accents, hiding their Yiddish language, just to fit in. I wonder if their hard work and struggle has in a way given us a kind of choice: this ability to choose to be queer or not. I can feel both sides sometimes, an urge to throw off the strictures and be really 'queer', and at the same time, a deep urge to blend in and not be queer at all, to 'disappear'.

Being more queer is also just about being less buttoned up, being a bit more expressive of the wilder sides of ourselves, perhaps the more emotional sides. If queer is everything that the 'normal', everyday world cannot handle, then for men it could be about just showing how sad and distressed and alone and out of control we feel, as a part of our everyday experience. This isn't actually unusual. It is quite common I think – we are all more queer in this way than we like to admit. It doesn't mean we are messed up; it just means we are showing it more honestly to the world, and in doing so, we might be *less* messed up. I don't want to pretend I am not hurting sometimes. Perhaps when we bend a little we learn to be more flexible. After all, isn't it the more rigid branches that get blown off the trees?

\* \* \*

November 2007

Yesterday we went together to the war memorial. You went with your Cub Scout group. Jenn, mum and I walked down the road that had been shut off from the traffic along with all the other people. We listened to the hymns and watched the old soldiers walk past, with all their medals shining in the low winter sun. I was thinking about something that Rudyard Kipling had written. You know about him because he also wrote those 'Just so' stories we listen to in the car sometimes. Kipling's own son had died in the First World War, in those muddy trenches, like so many others. He had been out there in France for just one day when he was killed. Apparently, he was very short-sighted and needed thick glasses to see anything and they got all fogged up with the rain and wind and mud. He didn't really stand a chance in the fighting. Kipling had written:

If any question why we died  
Tell them, because our fathers lied.

I wonder what Kipling felt when he wrote that? What did he feel his own lies had been about? I wonder about my own lies to you, and if Kipling wasn't just talking about the lies you speak, like when you say you haven't been reading in bed when I know you have, or like if I have been smoking cigarette and pretend I haven't been? I wonder if the lies he meant are more about the way we live our lives, the lies we tell by who we are? The lies in what we *don't* say?

\* \* \*

December 2007

I met with India again. She said that when a child is born, they always say 'It's a girl', or 'it's a boy', and she wonders what the 'it' is, before they name it in this way! Well, when you were born I had a really strange experience of the whole world changing, not just me, or you, but the whole world. I had it when Jenn was born as well. Like there was some kind of shattering, shuddering rift and the whole world was new. Would Doctor Who call this a rift in time and space I wonder?! I mean, lots of babies are born everyday and this can't be happening with all of them? Or could it? There is a Hebrew saying that goes something like; 'He who saves but one life save the world entire'. As if every single life is in some way the whole world as well.

All my life I have wondered who I really am and yet the only time I have ever really had an idea what that might be about it was to do with being your dad. I mean I am a lecturer, teacher, researcher, citizen, taxpayer, husband, Jew...yet none of these things ever feels like the complete story and as an incomplete story they feel like not the story at all. Except being a dad. That feels more like the whole story. But not just dad as in I 'fathered' you but am *fathering* you, an ongoing activity that gives me more of a sense of who I am than anything else. Everything else seems to transient, changing such a pale shadow of what I feel like. But not that; when you were born, the world was changed, absolutely and forever, but at the same time I just took a big step to becoming something much more constant and fixed. As that Abraham Gibson poem goes: 'the feel of your tiny hands wrapped around one of my fingers, has made more a man of me than I could ever make of myself'.

Writing these letters to you and Jenn really helps me. I feel connected with you and therefore connected to myself, in a real way which is such a contrast to the work and research I do, which feels so abstract and unreal at times - in fact much of the time. It helps me be more of how I want to be, working in connection with something rather than just 'alone in myself'. It reminds me of what this philosopher Gregory Bateson asks: where the blind man's self really starts? Let's say he uses a white stick to feel his way around. Does his self start at the tip of the stick, or in the handle, or somewhere between, some point halfway down? Like this pen. Where does it become part of me, and you, where do you end and I begin? As a man sometimes we are encouraged to see ourselves as complete, 'self-made' and therefore separate, discrete entities, and that you, my children, are objects that I own, like a house or a car. I know that I feel like that sometimes: emotionally and psychologically alone in myself. It reminds me of my father, your grandfather. When I was a child I remember sometimes getting up in the night and noticing that the light was on in the living room, and my father would be in there, on his own, in the middle of the night, worrying, worrying, worrying, usually about his business which wasn't doing very well. He was trying to figure it all out, on his own, in his own head, as he watched late night TV. During that time, my mother would say, 'be good, be quiet, your father has a lot on his mind at the moment', and her voice would come into my head and stop me from walking down the stairs and asking him if he was OK.

Sometimes, when I drive to work early in the morning and I leave you and Jenn sleeping in bed, and my head is full of a million things I've got to get sorted, and I suddenly feel just like him, as if my body is turning into his body and I can understand much better now what it must have felt like for him. I feel his anxiety and loneliness in my own limbs.

But writing to you like I am now, it has the effect of being a kind of lightning conductor, making some kind of connection and grounding this energy and I feel closer to you

and much, much better, even though I haven't actually told you 'in real life' what is going on! This is what they call a 'paradox'.

\* \* \*

December 2007

I wanted to be more honest in these letters. Something urges me to talk about more difficult things as well as good things. It is a challenge, but I wanted to show you what I am really like, and not pretend I am some kind of hero. So for example, let me tell you what it's like if I have had a bad day.

Sometimes, something happens when I come home, especially if I have had a bad day. I walk up the front path feeling like an aeroplane that just scrapes into land over the perimeter fence. When I put my key in the lock it is like some kind of grounding, psychic lightning, the electric charge coming to earth, crossing from the public to the private world, 'boom' and I am full of rage. I try to keep it outside but it rolls in with me like thunder. Then things catch my eye and serve as conduits for it: a letter that hasn't been posted for a couple of days. The floor that was clean when I left it now covered with marks. 'Boom!' These trivial objects seem to be the issue but there's a deeper message here. 'Do you know, do you understand? Do you *care* what I've been through since I was here last?' Most of the time you and Jenn just ignore me but sometimes I catch a glimpse in your eye of something familiar, just like I looked at my Dad when he came home on Friday night and spilled his own rages over the dining table. I am rageful or later numb; later, when I have tried to take back the words, they are like cleared-up floodwater that leaves a muddy slick behind it. I sit with your mother at opposite ends of the sofa, safely hemmed in by silence and the anaesthetic of trash TV and chocolate.

It feels like breaking a taboo to tell you this. This is the stuff that remains private even in the family's private space. It is something we keep from our children. We suggest this is 'for their own good'. But is it really because we are so ashamed that we have turned into the very thing that we promised we would never ever become ourselves?

The other day I saw on the TV news how a Dad had flipped. Whilst on some holiday, he had picked his kids up and thrown them and himself over a hotel balcony. Every few weeks I notice a story like this and whilst of course I am appalled, like you are supposed to be, at his selfishness, his self-centred, 'this is what I made, I own them and this I can take them away' attitude, I am even more appalled that part of me even understands. There are some lines from a Paul Simon song this reminds me of:

I knew a father who had a son  
He longed to tell him all the reasons for the things he done  
He came a long way just to explain  
Kissed his head whilst he lay sleeping then he turned around and headed home again.

Will I ever be able to explain to you, this strange transformation that takes place? A kind of alienation - from what? - You see part of me remembers quite well what it was like to be ten years old, the simplicity of it, the straightforward logic. There's much less logic in the life of a grown up, especially a parent. You argued with me recently, when I was telling you off: 'Why should what you say or think have any more importance than what I say or think?' It is such a good point, but it is also wrong, not because of a lack of logic but because of the way things are, the same power dynamics that keep us all in our confined spaces of expression. Can I ever explain to you how much I would like to break out of this box?

\* \* \*

January 2008

Do you know that film, '*La Vita e Bella*', (*Life is Beautiful*)? It's about a father who plays elaborate games to hide the awful truth from his son that they are living in a concentration camp.

It moved me so much when I saw it, and I thought it was just because of the Jewish angle, but it occurs to me now that the really moving thing about it is it may be about many of us, to some extent. Do we portray our own lives as a holiday camp sometimes, in order to protect you from the truth? Today I met a man as part of my research who was so sad, so angry and full of despair. He was the head of a company and things are going badly, but not because they had done anything wrong. It was what we call 'politics' and he was going to be blamed. Now in a way this was something that he is paid for so you don't have to feel that sorry for him. That isn't my point. My point is how in this private space where he confided in me, all this emotion was going on, and yet as soon as it was time to go, he sort of buttoned up, and became so strong and resigned. As we walked down the corridor together it was like being with a different person. It was so shocking in a way, I even had this moment when I wondered if it was the same person.

It occurred to me that this is what we do: we button up all of this emotion because we convince ourselves and everyone else that this will help us get on with life better; that things go more smoothly and more safely as a result. But I wonder whether the opposite is true: because we are so disconnected from this feeling, we can do things that are quite wrong headed, plain foolish and harmful to ourselves, others and the world? And also, what happens to all those feelings? Do they simply disappear because we aren't talking about them, or do they float around, like a kind of gas, or an infection, leaking into places they aren't wanted? Maybe feeling things more, making that the foreground, would help us create a better world, a better environment? Maybe there really is a link between the way we treat ourselves and the way we treat the earth?

So my darling children, I am OK and not OK. I am a little normal and a little bit quirky, queer. The queerness isn't something I worry about – indeed it is actually something I like in a way. It stops me from believing the stories about myself; that I daily tell in the public places, because that's the habit we are all in to. Perhaps this is what the world needs: a little more queerness. A little of the truth of my life may not harm you at all – it may make you stronger? I know this isn't really talking to you but it does feel like a kind of rehearsal for when we could talk about these things.

So what kind of a man am I in all of this? A kind of man who accepts minor defeats all day long, in order to keep your space safe so that you can grow up and one day go out and do the same? But even that in a way is a kind of deceit. Because it suggests this process is only one way – that I make you. The truth is, I am as much made by you. This is what takes away my right to own your future; what gives me the responsibility to look after the place a bit better. I have only borrowed it from you. There is a vital point here that I am groping for in the dark, like Theseus – it is my red thread, my ticket out of the blackness. The real legacy I can leave you is my uncertain but persistent questioning, my inquiring 'What sort of a man am I?' In the end, isn't it their children who ultimately know the answer to this question of their fathers? Only you and Jenn will be able to look back and say with some authority: this is what he was really like. And so we may meet in the middle of this labyrinth one day. But it helps me to

ask, so thank you for letting me. Gradually through this process I am letting go, of my pride, my vanity, my sense of self-importance and standing here hand in hand with you, naked and full of nothingness.

\* \* \*

February 2008

Mikey, yesterday you said something which really struck me. You were lying in bed and you looked a bit upset and I asked you what was up. You said that sometimes you felt things and you didn't know why. You said you felt guilty and that you didn't know why; that you didn't think you'd done anything to feel guilty about. It was just there, a feeling, 'like a visitor', you said. I said to you that maybe sometimes feelings just float around, waiting for someone to have them. And then when I said that an image came into my mind:

Imagine our Jewish ancestors, this boiling, seething mass, rolling westwards, running from their homes of a thousand years, millions of people. Imagine what they felt; the fear, the anger and pain, not being able to defend your own home, being kicked out with a day or two to pack your things. You can only take what you can carry. The name you're given when you get to London is a bastard name, a translation, like 'Porter', of some eastern European slur. It means 'schlepper', carrier, because that's what you had to do: carry all your things with you. On your back, on carts, like refugees do. It's funny that now, the universal and dramatic nature of this story makes it something to be proud of. This is a name with a story, a heritage. But not then. For those that were given it, it was a name of shame. Like the names of African slaves who were given the names of their white owners, on the plantations of the west Indies, or America.

The picture skips a generation and I see your great-grandfather, my granddad, a broken, quiet man, a Russian exile. He was a socialist, who believed in the revolution and took risks for it; who fought for it, but was then nearly murdered by some communists, who despite everything, turned out to be anti-Semitic. He ran away from the conflict, to London, but found himself married to a woman whose family loved to fight! Outside he was as placid as anything, but what was going on inside? He died of a heart attack, aged 65. "He killed himself," says your grandma, my mother, his daughter in law. Then there's your grandpa, my father, who it seems had a similar distilled rage within him. Your grandma, his wife, calls him 'Mr. Malcontent'. "He was never happy." She says. He inherited the gentle, kind face of his father yet this masked something, perhaps some of that fighting spice of his mother's family, who liked a punch up and fought their way from the Caucasus to London. Yet the only punch up your grandpa liked was listening to boxing matches on the radio with his father. Jews made good boxers in those times; they were famous for it. Why? Imagine all those feelings of rage, shame, guilt, fear, etc., bottled up inside and through those mass generations, as if it were condensed like spirit through the tubes of some strange, invisible distillery.

So perhaps all these feelings, like your guilt, aren't yours. They are a by-product, or even a waste product and they sit around us, in ourselves, our bodies and our stories. Perhaps this is part of our quirky-ness, our 'queerness'. Perhaps this is what drives it or fuels it. Could it do with some kind of expression? Perhaps one day someone will find out how it can be cleared up, like the sludge after a flood, and it won't bother ten year old boys lying in bed anymore.

\* \* \*

February 2008

There is so much feeling around. Sometimes I feel like I absorb it, and I don't know where my own begins and that of others ends. Mom used to say that I look like I carried the world on my shoulders, that is why my back is bent. But that's what it feel like, that there is all this feeling around, and I just suck it up like I'm drawing from a deep well. And the work we do at the Institute, people come through and it feels like they leave this emotional baggage behind sometimes and we accidentally pick it up and the handles break, the catches open and it just sort of spills out all over the place, like dirty clothes. Everyone talks about the environment, how there is a risk of eco-disaster, and yet there's this other environment, an emotional environment that may be more at risk than the physical one. We've got some clearing up to do, there as well. Recently I heard a wonderful woman called Joanna speaking at a conference and she talked about how what we feel isn't just for ourselves. She said: 'There's a shared part of it, which we pick up and feel, sometimes for the whole world'. That's why are stories are important, because they aren't just our stories. They belong to everyone.

My father, your grandfather told me a story once. One day, he was on the London Underground, going home after work. He found himself, by chance, in the same carriage as his own father, you great grandfather, also going home. But instead of walking up to him, saying hello, he ignored him, pretending he hadn't spotted him. You see, he was ashamed of him. He was ashamed of what he looked like: an old dishevelled Jewish tailor, an exile, nodding off on the tube train. My own father tells me this story and his eyes fill with tears.

\* \* \*

#### 4.

The landscape rolled by. Tears rolled down Mike's face. Decades, worlds apart, different trains rattled across their points, the resonant feelings rebounding off the carriage walls.

It was dark by the time the train arrived at the northerly halt. The dimmed low energy bulbs hardly cast a shadow along the platform. He stepped nervously into the gloom.  
- Hello Mikey.

An unmistakeably voice and then his father's face appears, older perhaps, and a little thinner. His hair was long and his clothes...were... people stared surreptitiously.  
- Don't mind them, said his father. I am used to it. And they hugged.

Later as they ate, the six of them in the homely kitchen of the cottage, with three children dancing around the room, visiting each lap, including his own. At first Mike had been very tense, not knowing what he might encounter but after a while he was surprised by his own initial caution. More than anything, he noticed the normality of it all, a family eating together, at ease. Four adults, plus his own father and himself. At first he had been conscious of the way they seemed to describe every combination of gender and sexuality in his limited lexicon and beyond it. But the food was good, the chatter amiable and relaxed. It all felt quite familiar. Very soon he felt as if his own was the only uptight, queer presence in the room. They asked him about his life, his work, and seemed to be genuinely interested in his replies.

Later, when the children had been ushered off to bed and the various adults had dispersed to different rooms, he found himself in the kitchen, clearing up with Susan. Susan was Paul's partner, and theirs was the main relationship of the household, off which all the others seemed to hang. Paul had been a woman, but now lived as a man.

Susan had broken the silence, noticing in Mike's hesitant questioning, his attempts to fit all the puzzle of it together.

- It's confusing isn't it? She said, airily
- I didn't mean...I am sorry
- Don't be. It still boggles my mind sometimes, all this chopping and changing, so I don't see why it should make sense to a visitor. She laughed, seeing Mike's discomfort.
- Paul hates it when I call it that too, but it's my northern humour I suppose. Yes, you might find it a little disorientating. Paul calls it 'gender dysphoria' It's a kind of disorientation we feel when a key pillar that holds up our social relationships, this pillar of bipolar gender, disappears. God, it did my head in at first but you start to realise that it really isn't all that important, when the chips are down. Go on, ask me.
- What?
- Ask me how it all fits, how we all fit together. What I am, what Paul is and God knows, how your father fits into it all. I know you are dying to.
- Yes. Actually, I've got a bit of a better idea now, you see he left some letters and I read them as I came up.
- Good, well the way I see it, your Dad's a bit of a refugee. I mean he is struggling with something, some questions, and he doesn't know the destination of the journey he's on yet. We're just offering him a bit of a safe house. Like we are for most of the queerness that ships up here.
- What sort of a journey are people on when they come here?
- Well, it's usually sort of about who we really are. I mean *really*. Take me. I am quite a conventional girl really. Nice middle class northern lass (perhaps itself a

little queer, to be Northern and middle class). I just wanted to do my work, find a good man, settle down. And I have. Except that Paul is so much nicer than so many of the men I ever met. I just think it was meant to be.

- And your family?
- Oh, it's been hell! But, the kids have made such a difference. They are Paul's and mine by the way. That is possible these days. But my parents refuse to see Paul as the father, or rather as the equal parent. (Few of us can get beyond this mother-father thing yet). I am resigned to know they will never accept Paul, but I actually wonder sometimes if they'd have accepted anyone who I ended up with. It's just their way. No different really, they'd have found some other excuse. In some ways Paul's difference, his queerness makes it easier for them to feel aggrieved. This kind of thing just brings the feelings into starker relief. I think that's what it's all for.
- What's for?
- The chopping and changing, the gender-dysphoria and third-sexness. It's a rebellion against a buttoned up-ness that the eco-shock has brought out in people. Some of us feel that's the last kind of response that is needed. Like, that's what got us into this mess in the first place. It is like we shine a big bright light on all of the wobbles within people, just showing what we're all really like. They just don't like what they see, but we think it's important to show them, nevertheless. The irony is; who am I to talk? I am just a married, working mum, like so many others.
- So what about my father? Where does he fit in? Is he a dragster?
- You see, there you go! Dragsters! Yes, I know I use the word too, but that's what we're called from the outside; it's like what your father says about being a Jew, 'a Jew is what *other* people call us', he says. (It's from Satre apparently). Oh I know all the rumours about him. He has shared that much with us; what some of your family or his work colleagues think: that we are all living and sleeping together, like some grand ménage or whatever. It is funny how the outside world seems so much more obsessed with our sex-life than we are! Who has time for sex with kids around anyway? The truth is this: your father is a refugee, a lodger in the clear, queer oasis. What they are saying about him being here says so much more about them, their own obsessions, hang ups and projections than it does about our reality. The more the shit hits the fan, the more they button up, which is what your father is trying to get away from. Go easy on him, Mike. Try to understand. He is a little lost, yes some of it is just about him, going through his own process, a bit of a mid-life crisis if you like. He won't change that much really in the end. No-one ever does, in my experience. Beyond the he or she there's a pretty constant 'it' in everyone. But there's also something bigger here, something more than just about him. Your dad is just looking for a little life, a little colour in all of this greyness, that's all. Some of it is about some bigger movement, some grand statement, that's for sure. We all need a bit of that. But in the end it is as if part of him just got put in a box and we're all just helping prise the lid off a bit.

## 5.

Later, Mike and his father were alone.

- I read the letters

- Oh did you... good...did they...help?

- Yes. No. Maybe a bit. I mean, they showed me how...well, lonely you were.

- That's interesting. They seemed lonely did they? It's funny but when I wrote them I think I felt the least lonely I've ever felt. I was more at home being your father when you were little than I have been before or since. It was a good time in my life; one of the best.

- But in the letters you seemed...quite often angry, despairing...at your wits end.

- There's some truth in that, but they were just an expression of what I felt, and in expressing it to you, it was OK and it was changed. I don't think I was worse off than most men. I was just showing it a little, that's all. And in doing so, it helped. The opportunity to write to you and Jenn that way felt so...completing, like I could be whole. They allowed for a kind of balance that I think most people don't get the chance to express. And it helped me. It helped me practically. I mean I got my PhD, and I owe you that. My career went from strength to strength; I even felt that they helped us understand each other better. I didn't have to actually say those things to you...they were kind of implicit, like body language only more so. It gave me a kind of power, a location. I used that sense of location to get me places, to get us places. Now I feel like I've forgotten where I came from.

- So they got *you* places. What about *us*? They helped you, but how did it help us? It sounds like we were, kind of your therapy.

- I can see that, yes. I didn't mean it like that. I was aware that it was therapeutic to write to you that way. But that wasn't the main purpose. It was to find a way of asking the questions, in a way that mattered more to me than the research I was doing. They were and still are important questions, not just for me, but for people, generally; for men generally: it's who we really are, behind the facades we create for ourselves. When we feel stuff, we aren't just feeling it for ourselves. That's the flaw in the self-orientated, self-obsessed, therapy culture. I am not just doing this for me. When people feel things, they are picking up on other stuff too. Stuff that's happening in the world. Yes sure, it's amplified through their own make-up, maybe I am having some kind of mid-life crisis, in the end, who cares? We always seem to miss this point: We are like iron filings in the wider field of a magnet. We align to invisible forces beyond us, invisible patterns and whorls of evolution. We are still responsible for ourselves of course – I am choosing to do this, but I am also picking up on something beyond me as well. Yes it does look quite self-indulgent, I can see that, but it is also *useful*. Writing those letters enabled me to stay in touch with a truth, the queer private truths that we all carry, and I think especially those who succumb to the type of closed in masculinity that pervades the tops of organisations, businesses, the cultural and social elites. A masculinity that thinks it is self contained, 'self made'. We talk about a 'self-made man' as a good thing! It's a lie. Writing the letters reminded me who I really am; that I am not self-made; that I am made by relationships like those with you and Jenn. It was about recognising the limitations of my ability to make a difference. If I couldn't change things for 'men', could I do it for me? Writing those letters was typical of an evolutionary process. I meant them as a by-product and they became the main event. Later, I kind of drifted away from these very questions that I stood for, as if getting the PhD and promotions and whatever were *the thing*. Here I am, trying to find my way back.

- How did you drift away?

- Just getting on with things, becoming part of an establishment, at the Institute that talks about these questions of self-awareness, of learning but was I *living* it? Things started to happen that reminded me...like a young woman, a student, asking me how the things I had written about in my research had really made any difference. Finding

myself here, with all that's been happening in the world, recovering from the disasters, these questions seem more important than ever.

- But isn't this all a bit selfish? Isn't this a time when we need to focus less on ourselves and more on how we sort out the world?

- That's just it. I think in this time, who we are, who we *really* are, is a more important question than ever. You know, the day I decided to leave, can I tell you what kicked it off in me? It was talking to my accountant. Yes Mr. Money himself. I was asking him something about my taxes, and in the course of the conversation, he told me he was off to visit Auschwitz, on a kind of pilgrimage. He had even got a black market permit for it. It was then that it hit me. What was I doing? How was what I was doing answering the questions about all those people, who had died? I felt a connection. You see it wasn't just the Jews who died in Auschwitz; it was, well, anyone who represented a difference, a 'queerness'. We had an affinity. In the early 1900s, there was this man, Otto Weininger, and he wrote a book, about the 'shared inferiority between Jews and Women'. It was called 'Sex and Character'. The Nazis used it as a kind of bible, even though Weininger was a Jew himself, a self-hating, sorry young man. It struck me that the point wasn't abstract or ideological, it was about bodies. Our bodies, and how being male, maleness a kind of muscled-up, armoured maleness, was like this big tide that swept everything up in its wake, and that the clenched, anxious response to the eco-shock, that was just making it even more so. It was knocking the edges off everyone. So all of us, men, women, Jews, non-Jews, we're all becoming a kind of *man*. And the main symptom of this man was in our bodies, how we held them, how we masked our feelings and pretended we were strong. I saw it in the work I was doing, I saw it in women too, especially women in the mainstream, at work, at the tops of organisations. I don't blame them. How else were they going to get some kind of economic power, except by pretending to be more like men? This was feminism's big double bind: women couldn't win. Join in, and become this kind of *man*, or stay out of it, and stay victimised. And look at Israel: why do you think they created one of the biggest armies in the world? A big, macho, state-sponsored muscularity? And look where that led them? To me, it all seems to point to this same kind of question, about our bodies and what sort of *man* we were all becoming. And in my work, my research, I was talking about these things, but what side was I on, really? Those letters show you, I was just the same. The only thing that made a difference was the proposition of writing of them. And then I stopped even that. So where do you go next? How do you, as a man, forge some kind of ...disruption, make a difference? I accept this isn't a coherent response. Maybe that's the point. People like Paul and Sarah, their responses are more coherent than mine. Do you know how brave and strong they have needed to be, in order to stand up for who they really are? But for me, I wish there was a better way, but I think all I can do is be part of something, join this shabby, great band, and make some kind of small gesture. You see, we might get through this, the eco-shock, but what if we get through it by being less than we who we are? Perhaps if we could find more, better ways of being ourselves then there's less chance we recreate exactly the same kind of problems.

- It sounds like a kind of manifesto, a movement of some kind.

- I think it is, but it is all just an inevitable thing too, part of evolution. I am not trying to sound polemical, just to explain. It is about noticing what's been happening. It is a kind of evolution, a proliferation of things, beyond the old binary. First the hold of the religious orders on social life breaks down. Institutions like marriage don't fit the way things are. Rates of divorce outstrip those of marriage. Complex families emerge. Gay culture becomes more mainstream, but there's this interplay with the past and it too becomes quite conservative, becoming absorbed back into the binary. But then there's this flowering of diversity. Fertility technology frees up the biology. You get transsexuals, (non-op and op), transgender, TG butch, femme queen, third gender, drag kings and queens, transbois...a 'roiling, radical critique of the limits of gender roles' as Dvorksy & Hughes called it. There's Ursula Le Guin writing 'The Left Hand of

Darkness', about a race of androgynous humans, Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto. Japanese *Manga* cartoons with all-pervading intersex characters. Youth fashion cults, mystical androgyny or what is commonly called 'dragsterism'...suddenly you have an avalanche of proliferating 'types', far beyond the binary. That's the way it was going. The eco-shock just slowed things down a bit. The irony is that this evolutionary process, aided by science and technology, undermines the gender order far more effectively than any number of men's groups or women's groups. Gender binaries get separated from the traditional power dynamics. Ultimately people are asking spiritual questions, about who they really are. It is interesting that in some cultures, people who represented some kind of androgyny have been regarded with reverence, as if they were onto something, some kind of magic, like shamans. Take the 'Hijra' in India; they are a legally legitimised category, beyond male and female. There's the Siberian 'berdache', the 'third sex', who are often seen as having magic powers. It's why what we do with our bodies is so important. In the west, we think spirituality's only a mind thing. We have Descartes to thank for that. In Eastern Philosophy, spiritual evolution is a mind and body thing. That's what's unfolding here. That's the social change that's underway and why it has to be about bodies.

- So if this is happening anyway, why do you need to join in?

- I suppose I just felt a bit like my own life had become a sign of something, a sign of the opposite. At one level I could be seen as just a rather eccentric old man. Maybe that is all I am. But it could also be that it does a little something, like...have you ever heard of John Carlos and Tommie Smith?

- No.

- It was thirty years before you were born, at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico. They caused a bit of a stir. They had won first and third place in the 200 metres, gold and bronze medals. They had agreed they would use this as a bit of an opportunity. You see they were black, and they decided that they would do what became known as a 'black power salute' during the American national anthem, in the medal ceremony, as a way of demonstrating their protest about the way that black people were being treated in America. A small, significant embodied act, yet it had a huge impact. They were punished for it. Their lives didn't turn out too well because of it.

- So you see yourself as some kind of heroic figure, like Carlos or Smith?

- As I say, I could just be seen as an old man in a frock. That doesn't concern me too much. What interests me is that Carlos and Smith felt compelled. They had a choice; they didn't have to do it, but they felt compelled to do something a little different. I felt compelled. It makes me think that there's something much bigger to all of this, and I'm just a part of it. You see, all of this, the eco-shock, the gender confusion, the mystical androgyny, it could all just be a window of opportunity.

- O.K., look I get it. I get what you are trying to do. But surely people do this all the time, change things, challenge things, make a difference. I remember how you used to rock me asleep to Clare da Lune. A man and a baby, nurturing and intimacy. Surely that's as much of a protest in a way as standing on a podium? Perhaps more so, perhaps it's a little bit less macho and grandiose?

- Wow, you remember that do you? Gosh, yes that's a good one. And I agree with you. In its time, that was a good way of embodying some kind of difference. That was then, and this is now. I'm at a different stage, and so are you. All I'm doing is putting my body where my words have been. So many words Mikey. I am a man of words. Well placed, cogent wordage. But where's the grit in the oyster? My oyster. A little bit more grit was required. Something a little bit queerer. Look: in all of this, there is something I haven't been telling you so much about. It's about how I feel. That's the real connection to those letters. Writing them helped me express something, to be a certain way, to be in connection with parts of myself that were before like shut doors into locked rooms. And so does this. It's funny isn't it, how I still need to argue the case with you, rather than just tell you how I feel? As if part of me still feels rational case is more valid than a heartfelt one? I am an irredeemable academic. I just feel like I can

express more, presenting myself this way. It gives me more options. I actually notice different things. Life has more colour. I am less obsessed with sex. It's funny that isn't it? When the whole world thinks first and only that this must have something to do with some kind of sexual perversion, yet actually what I feel is far less obsessive, far less *interested* in sex, and much more open. Queerness always holds up some kind of mirror to the world. Their reaction says so much more about them. What they miss is the spiritual opportunity here.

- How so?

- Because we're opening new doors, new opportunities, being ourselves, really ourselves, instead of squeezing into the boxes we have made for each other. I mean, look at you and Jenn. Look at your *Mikeyness*. It's so good to see. There's so much more to you than being 'a man'. You've got so many more choices now. Don't believe the lies that we've all got to be smaller in order to save the planet. It's the opposite. We've got to be more ourselves, bigger, more feeling. We have got to feel it all, so that we can understand the real impact of the mess we make. We need to grow, and expand. It's what nature has always done, proliferated, diversified, adapted yes, but through diversity. I marvel at the strong, beautiful people you have become. Do you remember what India said about the 'It', before it gets named as a 'boy' or a 'girl'; that's the bit I'm interested in, in you.

- I don't feel strong or beautiful. I feel...well, anxious much of the time. I wonder if I am playing *my* part. This feels like the most important time in history. We have to find solutions. Put the planet back together, it feels like such a responsibility. How can I contribute?

- And I wonder the same thing. I know what I'm doing seems weird and crazy from the outside, when everyone is so focussed on the shock-world, but I'm looking for the solutions inside as well as out. Do you remember that Seamus Heaney poem? The one we used to read together; called 'Digging'?

- 'Between my finger and thumb, the squat pen rests, as snug as a gun'

- Yes that's it!

- 'Under my window, a clean rasping sound

When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:

My father, digging. I look down....

- It ends with the lines:

But I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and thumb

The squat pen rests.

I'll dig with it.

- It's about a son watching his father doing something he couldn't do, he wasn't skilled at, so he had to find his own way, find out what he could do.

- That's right, that's us, Mikey. I'm digging here, you are digging there. I only know how to dig like this, into myself, asking myself who I really am. Finding myself unsatisfied with most of the answers I'm supposed to have, like a 'man', or even 'a Jew'. You can dig your way. You are digging your way. I admire you so much. You don't need me anymore, not like you used to. You stand on your own ground. I love you so much. Whether you can love me, who I am now, that's up to you. I hope you can.

\* \* \*

On the train home, Mike, deep in thought, looked up from his pod, and was startled to notice that a dragster, a mystical androgyne, had taken the seat next to him. He sat for a few moments, then turned towards them, smiled and said: 'Hi, I'm Mike. Where are you going?'

### Part Three - 2220

Trem lifted the lid on the old archival boxfile. Through the dust, the date read 'letters-early 21st century'

- Before the emotional plague-height, Trem murmured. This is exactly what I am looking for! Trem's long, delicate fingers prised open the box. The seal broke with a slight popping hiss. Reverently, Trem started to leaf through. A whole jumble of papers, then something caught Trem's eye. Some letters were written in the strange, curling shapes of someone's own hand writing. Trem gasped.

- These are the ones, and began the struggle to read the old scripts.

Later, Trem met with Hong who asked what Trem had been doing down in the sub-basements.

- I found some letters, Trem said, from the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Hand written.

Trem said the last words with a studied emphasis.

- Early 21<sup>st</sup>, so? You're period! And hand-written. Well done. What do they invoke in you?

- Many, many feelings. It is so exciting. Just what I've been picking up on from that period, when tuning in, during the Cleansing.

- So, history meets Cleansing. Perfect. Our grants will be renewed if we submit this carefully.

Hong took the other younger, slender person by the shoulder and led towards the window.

- The Council has been looking for just this kind of justification for our historical hard research. Too much in this age relies on telepatho-emotional research. The current fashion is that we can tune into ourselves for all our inquiries. No-one seems to want documentary evidence. It is seen as too scientific. Good work Trem. Tell me, where are you in your birth cycle?

Trem had been waiting patiently for this question, as Hong asked it periodically and was seemingly forgetful of the answer. Trem trundled out a practised answer.

- I have just co-sired with my partners and now am gyni to another membryo. I am expecting birthing in two terms but although am favouring natural birth, predict I will be away no more than half a term, just as I was with my recently born. My partners are also re-configuring their cycles for the mem-coming.

- Good. I knew you were an enthusiastic breeder but that has never got in the way of your work. Remind me how many partners have you?

Trem hesitated, feeling out for the vibe from the headresearcher. Then slowly: I have two, both of whom present pro-andros. (Vibing: What business is *this* of yours?)

- Please don't be offended, I can feel your vibe. It is your right to feel aggrieved. I am only asking because I want to consider when the news is submitted to the Council.

Clearly I would like it soon, but also I would like you to do it, yourself. I mean it as an honour.

- Oh. Thank you Hong-sen.

\* \* \*

The room light was lowered and a slight hiss-hum was a barely audible from around the forms of the 12 or so there gathered. The hiss-hum faded, diffracted between them and seemed to emanate from and around their whole bodies. It rose and fell in intensity, at times reaching a sort of crescendo, then fading to a barely audible murmur. Trem, who was present, had heard the old recordings of the sea from the planetsurface, from the old time, before the Catastrophe, and thought that the Cleansing sounded just like the sea. The noise began to fade and for some considerable time, there was silence.

The light level rose and the tall form in the middle began to speak.

- Thank you for your Cleansings. Thank Reich for our work.

- Thank Reich - the group responded in answer.

The Council head, the venerable Sang-Yo Chan began briskly.

– So! Now our Cleansing is over we move to the lesser business, and let's hope we can get it over with swiftly because I for one am off for a holiday to the virtuals from today for a full term! I can't wait!

- Where will you be plugged? Asked another, fatter round person, in a deferential manner.
- Oh it's such a bigvibe! I am off to Italy of late 20<sup>th</sup> Century!
- I went there last term! said another. Tuscany! It was jolly. I got completely smashedoff by the wineries. It was fabjoy. Can you imagine they actually drank that stuff into their bodies, not virtual? They must have been a psycho-mess!
- Well, whyddya think we have all this Cleansing to do? Said another. I was off to NewYork recently. I couldn't believe what they were up to there! Total pissedup, mind mess.
- Ahem.

Trem was conscious that vibing impatience hadn't been sufficient to distract the Council from their reveries.

- Ah yes, Chan said, Let's return to the one external item. Trem has a request, on behalf of the Institute for External Research
- The Historico-Cultural Department, Hong who was also present, jumped in with the full title.
- Ah Hong yes I felt your vibe. Do not worry. Although we are wary of your work, it offers some important verification of the Cleansing. But of course you are aware that there are those who suggest that documentary verification of the pre-plague isn't required? That the need for it could represent a partial plague relapse in itself, coming as it does from a potential suspicion of feeling-over-mind?
- Yes your Councilhead, I am aware, but we felt that far from inviting such suspicion, it is completely feeling-sound, as it offers just another form of cultural expression, and as such represents art-over-science.
- Ah! The art-over-science-argument! Very persuasive. Good, the Council is partial to it. We are wary of the science case, for as you know, ultra-science and the squeezing of the mind-frame away from emoto-resonance and into lonely self-obsession was the ultimate herald of the mind-plague's height.

A murmur of assent ran around the gathered circle.

- If I may, Trem ventured, the documents I have found I think shed some light on the split between the private-public which plague-ridden ultra-science was grounded in. (Then, hurriedly, to avoid sounding too scientifico-historical): which we could present as high art, of course, were we to match it in with appropriate patterns of the Cleansing. It would make a fabjoy exhibition.
- This sounds good, it tugs good heart appeal, the Councilhead averred. And yes we have felt your vibe about credits Hong, and would like to venture that we are probably persuaded, are we not, gentlefolk here gathered? (There was a murmur of ascent and a goodvibe). So you can relax and tell us more. We are keen to hear, Trem-San

Later, Trem was at the crux of exposition:

- ...So, to summarise, it appears that these were a set of writings, written by hand with pen-and-ink, of a Daddy to a SonnyGirlChild. They are important art for a number of feelings: Firstly, they show the feeling of inner and outer split, the private and public that we all feel at the Cleansing and came to a head around the time of the plague height, about 2035, at the same time as the eco-collapse. Secondly, they show the feelings of unconsciousness, that the psycho-problem was given some prominence, but less so than the eco-destruct and hence why the plague was indeed discovered, thank Reich, but too late. Thirdly, they show interestingly, quite peculiar to this author, an interest in

androgyny and queerself, and a yearning to end the mummy/daddy divide which as we know now, brought about the possibility of the Cleansing art. So we have to consider that the author and those around him (the gathered council murmured and shifted uncomfortably at the use of the gendered pronoun) were dimly aware of the possibility of psycho-share and even emoto-resonance. The author...he...er...refers to a primitive type of cleansing, which they called 'check-in'. It seems though they attempted to vibrate with words rather than bodies. (Laughter gently echoed around the chamber) Yes...I know...as I say...primitive. Indeed this was around the time of the she-seers, such as Joanna Macy, and their web-talk about how feelings were not just individual, that one-feels-for-all. We even wonder whether he met her, as he refers to a Joanna. That is fabjoy exciting. It was also about fifty years post-Reich, and so the author may have read some web-talk of this work. So it all checks out....(Trem caught Tremself quickly)...Not that such historical reasoning is important of course (Trem rushed to add). But (Trem couldn't help self) it does show that such awareness of emoto-resonance was around earlier than we may have thought. And more widely shared, and amongst Daddies as well as Mummies, which is quite rare to see admitted.

- Indeed, Chan began, I do feel the letters; they appear much riddled with many feel-ranges, somewhat be-plagued but also remarkably clean in places, almost high-art, especially the love that is clear for...ahem...his...sonnygirl child. Have you cleansed this period yourself? Said Chan
- I have got near to it, around the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century and that region in Engerland that they called Sorrey. There was much plague spore there of course, but it seems there were also clearer-uppers, even then. We know of course of the psycho-practitioners...the psy-cho-logists...

The Councillors snorted derisively, as one. Trem continued, somewhat defensively

- Yes but we know that the counsellors and psy-cho-therapists were not all bad! We have seen documents that show some inadvertently enabled Cleansing, even had some art!

Hong coughed an interruption.

- I am sorry if Trem shows some young-age.

Hong was keen Trem didn't reveal too much of the scope of reasonable research they had been doing. It wouldn't look good to appear too systematic.

The Councilhead waved away Hong's protestations.

- It is no matter. Trem's art is good. It shows much feeling. I can feel much compassion to this Daddy and what the she-he divide must have been like from the merest sniff of these letters. Awful. All that angst, the boundary-confusion between self and other, the daddy and mummy-divide, the burgeoning awareness of emoto-resonance, plus the crude art of pre-plague parenting. Yet the love shines through. It is good art. It muchly deserves the credits. Organise it for display behind the high table at the great Cleansing feast on Reich's day. Thank you for your work, Trem-San
- Trem smile lit up the room, and Hong sat back and sighed contentedly.

Later that miniterm, Trem sat with Trem's own new child in arms, feeling the stir inside of the next membryo. Trem cooed, stuck out a finger and the infant gripped it instinctively. One of the letters of the Daddyman came back to Trem: something from a poem; what was it? 'The feel of your tiny hands wrapped around my fingers, has made more a man of me than I could ever make of myself'. A man. This was something Trem found so hard to understand. What must it have been like to be so fixed; so emotionally limited, polarised and plagued as a *man*? But it also struck Trem: to be made by one's child. Yes. Trem looked into Trem infant's eyes, and as Trem felt out and back towards the ancient Daddyman, this was understood completely between them.

## Interlude – Other voices on the Story

*A story has been offered for your consideration. Now comes the problem of how to 'close' the paper. The temptation is to awaken the dormant methodological issues that abound in work of this kind...(Sparkes 2006) p28*

I will come to that, but for now I'd just like to show you something of the energy and discussion this story created, within the community at Roffey Park, through autumn of 2008 and winter of 2008/9. My intention is to let the sound of these voices land first.

1)

Letter:

So to start, reading your story has evoked a lot in me. To say that it is thought provoking just doesn't capture the real experience. Rather, it is evoking and churning deep within me, with a strong sense of synchronicity, given what is happening in my life as I have read your thesis and write now. And also some sense of 'reflexivity', if that's the correct term, in that what you write about has then happened to me in reality in some way, more than it otherwise would – yes, that's about noticing better what is happening all the time because it has been brought to attention. But it is also about how the act of reading something actually re-shapes reality, and creates reality in a new way: an experience for me of "words make worlds".

\* \* \*

2)

Recorded conversation:

I've just noticed: if you have planned it or not, that you evolve in the story, and it is lovely to have the change at the end of the story around that. That person I really respect. The person at the beginning of the story I'd like to argue with but then you moved on. It seems that you have got younger as the story progressed. At the beginning you were kind of an academicky-type person who was professorial, but at the end you were a real human being.

\* \* \*

3)

Letter:

Yes, now that I think about it, my concern in the past around becoming a father has always been around whether and how I will be both nurturing enough and container-creating enough – essentially all about how I will relate to my children. Right now, while there is a small residue of that concern present, mostly I feel hopeful and excited about the prospect of relating to my children. What is making me nervous is my inner wobbliness-feeling about being a stable provider, about carrying the burden of that role, of being fixed into that role, "and what if I can't manage?" I can feel how what you have written in your thesis is playing out for me here.

\* \* \*

4) Notes from supervisor:

Things I notice

Part 1

Section 1: fractals in the opening: writing a PhD about gender by using a story of someone who is writing a PhD about gender  
Familiarity of the 'campus novel' format (David Lodge etc)

By p4 I am wondering, is Jim you?  
Story p 6 reminds me of those entangled situations, the delicacy of the place of gender  
Feels embarrassing. Notice I am trying to make judgements about who was right/wrong  
Section 2: Wondering, is this Roffey?  
Like this attempt to explicate the detail. Sounds like 2 voices of yours  
Section 3: Again, notice I am wondering if this is a real incident  
Notice the difficulty of the client relationship, how it controls, how it governs the response by the Institute  
Self-pity at the end?  
Section 4: Yearning for this kind of unpacking conversation: seldom happens, non -judgemental support. Unpacking micro-process  
Section 5: Seems a bit like self-righteousness  
Section 6: Friendship, intimacy - so feels a bit risky. The closed world of male bonding. But it's also serious, real.

#### Part 2

Section 1: Like Oryx and Crake, post-crisis. Interesting connection between resource use and conformity  
Section 2: Getting risky, Jim as your alter ego? Exploring  
Section 3: Being held in risky territory. Notice again I am wondering if this is a 'true' story. Poignant. I am thinking about normality and queerness, my constraints and fear of difference  
Section 4: Not so gripped, narrative explanation  
Section 5: Beyond the binary - I wonder if this is what 'you' are really saying. I am trying to imagine this - I can, in a vague kind of way. It feels hippy-ish, but challenging. Doubt how comfortable I would be in these surroundings

#### Part 3

Difficult to follow, work out what has happened, what the set up is.  
Somehow it seems sad, to me: being disconnected from each other (so I am noticing that my sense of interpersonal connection has the assumption of gender embedded in it), the emotional connection at the end reassures me

\*\*\*

#### 5) Recorded conversation:

No. And, I mean, some of my stuff's like it's ... well, actually the fact that I might be a relatively young female makes no difference whatsoever to me, but... well, there's just assumptions that are made about that which I kind of sometimes want to scream, "That's a load of bollocks!", you know? Who else has actually spent as much time as me, knowing that I was working on oil refineries aged 21, talking to technicians on Saturdays, I mean, *really*...?

\*\*\*

## 6) Email:

After meeting you at Roffey in January, and reading your story, I have been meaning to get back to you and can't believe how quickly the time has gone.

First to say thank you for the conversation about action learning as an emancipatory force in organisations - it sparked many thoughts. In particular about the impression I leave on people, how this may change over time, and how I am influencing and responding to what takes place in the groups I am part of.

And lastly, for sharing your story. As I read it I noticed how my response to you changed; after our conversation I had felt somewhat 'junior' and lectured at... and slightly distanced myself from you... and yet in the story you share considerable vulnerability (assuming the 'I' of the story has something in common with you). Many parts resonated with me but particularly the part about your conversation over dinner with delegates and the apparent impossibility of disagreeing, as a man / facilitator, with women / clients on gender, without being mistaken.

I also recognised the fatigue that comes from constantly being the dissenting voice in an organisation or a group, and the inner tension that arises for me when I 'tone it down' in response to feedback, but then feel compromised / complicit... As well as the central question about 'what difference am I making'?

\* \* \*

## 7) Email:

In what concerns your inquiry, what I meant is that what you shared with us last supervision, your story, and especially what you explained to me in our journey by car, opened up a new perspective on my understanding of myself, of gender; in a way, it allowed me to hold things with more lightness, enhancing my capacity of acceptance of self as I am. I mentioned "forgiveness". Well, interestingly I have found this act of forgiveness, with the implied idea of re-beginning, an important concept in my own inquiry (on 'capacity building'). And maybe that is why I used the word. You may equate it with the idea of "acceptance" of self. Not getting too tied to gender categories and concepts and what they usually mean in roles in a conservative society as ours is, anyway, was the main contribution of your ideas to me.

\* \* \*

## 8) Email:

I have read with pleasure your fictionalisation of your PhD process. Which is to say I know enough about your story to see where you want to go with it - at least I think so. And I think it is a clever device (I wonder if others would call it a conceit?) to bring to life for others the ideas you are wrestling with and trying to bring into consciousness. It is vivid.

For what it is worth, as a piece of fiction, it is the final part that I really liked. There are ideas in there for a good story. Ecoshock - cracking idea! We are all doomed!

\* \* \*

9) Email:

Hi there

Just finished reading your piece. Its gripping and quite torturous stuff! Quite unexpected in terms of a PhD. (My ignorance, probably). If not a good PhD, certainly a great novel! (I'd like 2 read more).

P.S.: Just had a chuckle: James Traeger = Jim Porter [in German]!

\* \* \*

10) Email:

Hi James

I read the piece you gave me on the flight last night and really enjoyed it. It left me feeling that there was a lot more to talk about with you, and I felt like giving you a hug.

\* \* \*

11) Recorded Conversation

It's such a shift from an academic place to a creative, highly personal place and I think you pull it off. To get to that point where the story comes out by itself is almost transcendental. The father-son stuff was the most powerful, I found it incredible moving and disturbing, I was worried about your marriage and I was really worried about you and immensely moved by it. It was so poignant. The first bit I was engaged in an academic way but in the third bit it was much more feeling very challenged by what you were saying, by my own conceptions about gender and where I did I stand on it, about ground being broken for me, in a very personal way. I have just read 'Middlesex' which I loved, I had it sitting around for ages and I was taken back into it by what you were saying, and also feeling really uncomfortable about not wanting to let go of my own gender/sexuality preference, the good bits about being female, you weren't saying to let go of it, but feeling very, very challenged by it. The androgyny was just surreal; I am still making sense of that. By the existence of difference can we ever be equal, is there always a power play but I don't want to be androgynous, I want to be a woman. Very, very challenging. The last bit I am not sure about, it was a classic apotheosis, a classic resolution. It was very Star Trekky, the limits of evolution, where evolution goes, with a touch of 1984. It's a really holographic piece of your PhD journey.

Why am I so disturbed by it? As a woman I have felt discrimination, career disadvantage, being hassled past a building site, but I've always felt, apart from when I was a child when I wanted to be a boy, I am OK being a woman, but I don't like their attitude towards me, it was that that needed to change. But what you

are saying is even my woman-ness is a bit of a prison, but it feels like a very comfortable prison.

\* \* \*

#### 12) Recorded Conversation

My response was at lots of levels. I was very moved by the middle section, where your son is coming to meet you. That was where the connection came from. Through reading it I came to understand you a bit more deeply. I absolutely loved the question, "what is the 'it', before it's a boy or it's a girl?" It is such a powerful question; everything you are trying to say around gender is around that question.

*I prefer to operate as what Thomas Barone (2000) describes as an 'artful writer-persuader' who understands the necessity of relinquishing control over interpretations placed on the story, inviting an aesthetic reading whereby readers interpret the text from their own unique vantage points, contributing their own questions-answers-experiences to the story as they read it, as co-participants in the creation of meaning. (Sparkes 2006) p29*

## Chapter Five – Taking the Action Turn

*the writer's original perception of a character or characters may be as erroneous as the reader's. (King 2000) p69*

In this Chapter I want to show you more of how the story evolved; why and how I took the turn towards using it as an inquiring tool, within a community of colleagues at Roffey Park. In some ways, I yearn to let the voices of colleagues and friends as above speak some more, for themselves. But I suggest that dumping all of this research material, the transcripts of recordings, emails and letters in front of you would look a little careless, making you do more of the work than I feel is fair. This seems to me to be *un-mentshlich*. Forgive me if I am wrong in this assumption. Instead, I provided some extracts above, and I below I take two conversations in particular to place before you, with commentary. The choice of these two should become clearer as you read on. For now, I hope they provide some sense of the depth and richness of conversations the story provoked.

I also take the opportunity to develop the characters in the gender future story further. For example, they help me to 'work' the accounts I give a little further, and close the chapter. This opens up a different dialogue, and makes a further turn of story-making and reflexivity that supports the cause of *mentshlichkeit*. Before that, I also wanted to say some more about the framing of the story as futuristic, 'cyber-feminist' inspired science fiction, in order to bring it into the community of Roffey Park, and invite participation in it.

### Who is it for?

In writing a text that plays in this narrative space, it is possible to draw together my lived inquiry into gender and masculinity of five years or more, and 'show it' to others who may be able to find it instructive in their own life and work. In writing it, I felt guided by a series of principles that enabled me to make choices as the text evolved. One of these stood out as important to explain in order to frame the others; that is, who was I writing the story *for*?

*The choice of audience, the conscious imagining of those who might read our work, will have some influence on who we are in a text. (Lincoln 1997) p41*

Primarily, as the story evolved, I had in mind that I would offer it to the community of Consultants at Roffey Park Institute, my immediate colleagues, as way of surfacing the hidden transcripts of gender within and between us, in a process that moved towards 'collaborative' or 'co-operative' inquiry (Heron 1996). This purpose evolved, but by and large this was the next phase of the research.

### Surfacing Hidden Transcripts of Gender



I have a picture postcard on my pinboard at work of an image from the Second World War, of 'Rosie the Riveter'. To me, Rosie represents the suspension of traditional gender relations caused by the Second World War enabled some working class women in America to express a different type of embodied power, due to the fact that the men were away fighting, so they were able to produce the weapons, wield the rivet guns and earn their own money. This strikes me as uncanny: a feminist cause, the economic independence of women, is inadvertently

served by the U.S. Government's need to increase war production. I recognise now how Rosie represented for me a Cyborg-like talisman; a queer, unpredictable and uncomfortable reminder of the chaotic possibilities that historical and technological forces can provoke. Rosie shows that such possibilities have always been around, ever since technology has played such a central role in our lives.

In an evolutionary process, seemingly unconnected phenomenon are grabbed and thrust together, with quite unexpected consequences, without necessary design other than to simply grow something, to 'proliferate'. So the postcard, my letters to my children, the need to 'show' my inquiry process, inviting participation of my colleagues at Roffey Park, and Donna Haraway's manifesto act as nutrients to feed the creative process of story-making, surfacing the hidden transcripts of gender.

The process of journaling, reflecting and thinking leading up to the first drafts of the story followed a kind of autoethnographic research process. In this discipline, I was inspired by Andrew Sparkes' use of Caroline Ellis's characteristics of 'heartful' (auto)ethnography (Ellis 1997). As Sparkes continues:

*These include the following: the use of systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall; the inclusion of the researcher's vulnerable selves, emotions, body and spirit; the production of evocative stories that create the effect of reality; the celebration of concrete experience and intimate detail; the examination of how human experience is endowed with meaning; a concern with moral, ethical and political consequences; an encouragement of compassion and empathy. (Sparkes 2002) p210-211*

Prompted by the inquiry practices outlined in Chapter Two, I aimed to walk along the edge of disturbance caused in me by the ideas about gender, the performance of it in my work and life beyond, and the recognition that I needed to find a form of inquiry that was symmetrical with my theme: developing a more inquiring masculinity; not just talking about it but somehow 'showing it'.

### **Using the Future**

bell hooks (sic) talks about the 'margin' as a space of 'radical openness and opportunity'. (hooks 1991). One of the evolving principles of my own research agenda in the story-writing-and-telling process was to consider the future as such a marginal space, full of possibility. I have always found science fiction inspiring, and Donna Haraway's writing (Haraway 1991) led me to the work of Ursula K Le Guin, and in particular her story *The Left Hand of Darkness* (LeGuin 1969, 1997). In it, Le Guin uses a fictional planet set far into the future to describe a race of humans who have evolved to a point where each individual can be both male and female at different times in their lifecycle.

Le Guin's book had an interesting impact on me; it helped me realise the plastic possibilities of gendered bodies. Indeed, in my imagination I had a sense of the plastic, waxy and thus pliable nature of the bodies Le Guin was describing. This inspired me to take the vision of the future I was playing with onto a much bigger scale. On LeGuin's imaginary planet, 'Winter', anyone with a fixed gender is described as a 'pervert':

*permanent hormonal imbalance toward the male or female, causes what they call perversion; it is not rare; three or four percent of adults may be physiological perverts or abnormal – normals by our standard. (LeGuin 1969, 1997) p51*

LeGuin is using an interesting, ironic device here – to draw our attention to the socially constructed nature of ‘perversion’. I compare this with Dvorsky and Hughes’ discussion of the frequency of what is described as ‘intersexuality’, where people (here on Earth) are born with indeterminate sexual organs:

*The incidence of intersexuality is disputed, and it may now be more prevalent than before due to environmental chemicals that mimic estrogen and interfere with foetal genital development (Dumoski, Meyers, Colborn 1997). At the high end of estimates, Brown gender theorist Anne Fausto-Sterling (1993,2000) has estimated that the incidence of intersexuality may be as high as 1.7% of the population., if all genital abnormalities are included. (Dvorsky and Hughes 2008) p3*

Imaginatively, a three-way inquiry space opens up, between:

- 1) A story based on my own experience, extrapolated into the future - to create the personal element that enables interpersonal connection and thereby the possibility of ‘2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiry’, as I explain below
- 2) Science fiction - which enables our imagination to consider what *might* happen, rather than what we *want* to happen, deconstructing our socialised ‘givens’ and surfacing a hidden transcript of blurred gender identities
- 3) Socio-technological forces, such as intersexuality, co-mingling with ecological crisis

It also enabled me to take Sarah Jones’ challenge seriously: how would this research process have an impact, over the longer term?

These combine to create very fertile soil for what John Heron calls ‘Dionysian’ inquiry (Heron 1996) . Using story, we can cover a lot of ground in a research process, opening up the imaginative possibilities that can disrupt dominant discourses, around gender for example. The form, as Judi Marshall says, is about *accepting and seeking to express What Is rather than What Should Be (Marshall 2007)*. In my case, it occurred to me to use the ecological crisis as a way to enhance the urgency of gender questions. The story asks: how might responses to major climate change and gender interact as interdependent yet unpredictable social forces?

Using the future as stage on which to set my story, I was still able to hold (at least a semi-) autobiographical frame:

*Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens focussing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (Ellis and Bochner 2000) p739*

During the five years or so of my inquiry journey so far, (Jewish) ancestry and its interplay with gender has become a recurring theme and using the future enabled me to consider how these ancestral forces might play forward as well as backward, in the way Ellis and Bochner discuss above. This is a critical process. It isn’t just about wondering how my life would or might turn out, but was a deliberate strategy to play with the interrelation between gender and other forces, for all of us.

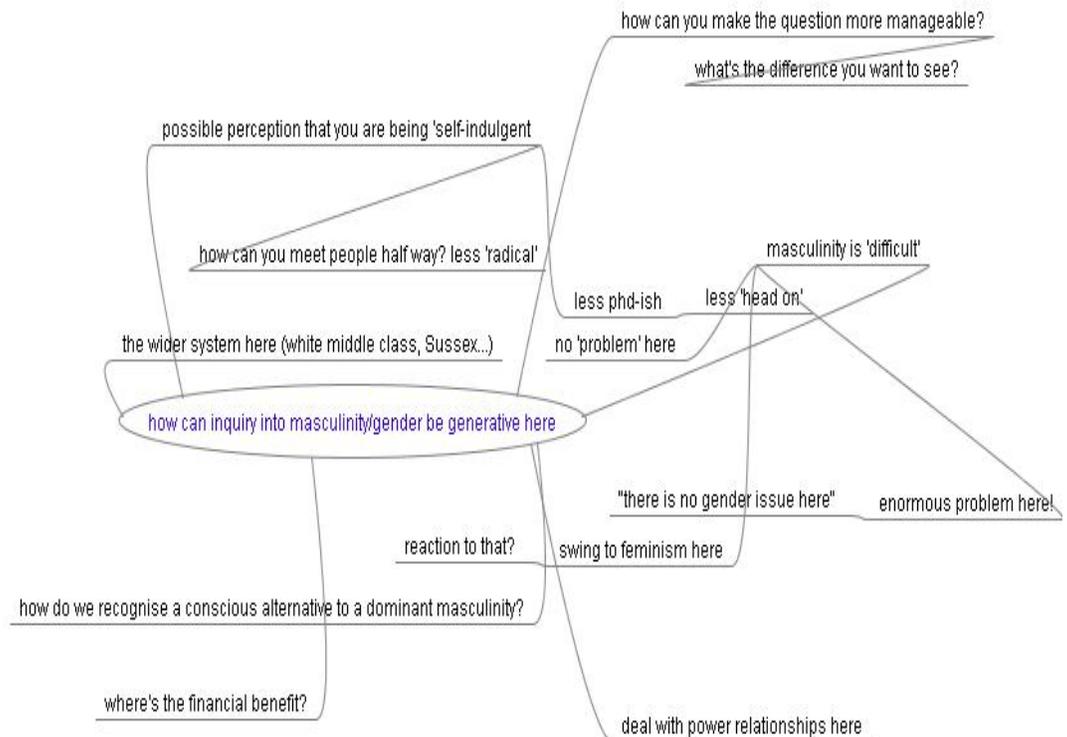
*[Critical autobiography] The term is needed to distinguish such writing from standard autobiography, because of the strength of the current cultural norms*

that 'autobiography' should be a personal, confessional, individualistic, a-theoretical and non-political linear narrative of a life. 'Critical autobiography', in contrast, makes use of individual experience, theory, and a process of reflection and re-thinking, which includes attention to politically situated perspectives. (Griffiths 1995) p70

A future-based story also invites a suspension of disbelief. This is a useful tool when opening up an inquiry space with people, especially around controversial and emotive areas such as gender, inviting participation, within a community like Roffey Park. If we are going to incite attention to politically situated perspectives, then a narrative set in the future has the power to invite people to *imagine* first, by-passing their own defensive reasoning that suggests such things 'are not possible.' It asks them to consider what *might be* possible, without saying this *shall* happen. It has never been my intention to say what will happen, because don't know! But I am deliberately advocating some interesting and unpredictable interactions between history, biology, technology and gender in a way that will fundamentally disrupt the traditional gender roles so many people hold as fixed and immutable.

### Opening up Shared Inquiry Space

Keeping issues like gender on the boil in an organisational or practice context isn't always easy. When I came to Roffey Park in 2006, I was aware that gender questions were quite hard to keep in focus in the everyday discussions. For example, in my first year at Roffey Park, I was a member of a practice group of 'new joiners', all of whom were inquiring into how we would be developing our own specialisms at Roffey. We met once a month, for a day at a time, and during this day, each of us had 'airtime' to discuss our practice, during which we received supportive and challenging feedback from fellow group members. In one such period, I offered to facilitate a group discussion along the lines of my interest in gender. The question I chose was: how can inquiry into gender and masculinity be generative here?



During the discussion, I mind-mapped the group responses, as shown above. I was grateful to my fellow group members, and challenged by the need the group was expressing for a more oblique, subtle approach, in statements like ‘how can you meet people half way?’; ‘how can you make the question more manageable’, ‘less PhD-ish’ and less ‘head on’? The sub-text of the discussion was a challenge from the group to find a way to make this more than ‘my issue’. This suggested to me that I needed to find a way of being less pushy with the inquiry, and to find a way to play with it so that people would feel more invited in. The suggestion that I deal with power relationships, and the question of financial benefit, is something I return to later.

This prompted me towards the story-telling approach and to ‘play’, trompe l’oeil like, with a hidden transcript, along an edge in which others might be more intrigued. So when writing the story, I intended it to have enough recognisable features of a parallel world to Roffey Park, where some of these issues mentioned in the mind map would be visible, without necessarily being too confronting or ‘head on’. This became a guiding quality principle, of reference to this community, in the writing process:

*The next set of criteria that are emerging as quality–cum-ethical criteria are a set I would group under the rubric of community. Although we might quibble about my name for this category, this particular set of standards does indeed reference the communitarian nature of research as it is reconceived in new paradigm work. I label it communitarian because it recognizes that research takes place in, and is addressed to, a community; (Lincoln 1995) p280*

I intended to draw the reader in, to keep the reader (at Roffey Park and beyond) interested *enough*. It then gave me the chance to use the story as a tool to open up portals of shared, ‘2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiry’, so that these gender questions were more widely shared, and not just ‘my issue’. (Reason and Bradbury 2001). I wrote and circulated the story with the deliberate intention of walking along the seam between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiries. I was aware that in a single text, I couldn’t show ‘everything’ but at least it could provide a meeting point for multiple stories, including my own. I couldn’t predict the implications of this, but at least I hoped there would *be some*. As Yvonna Lincoln points out:

*Multiple stories feed into any text; but equally important, multiple selves feed into the writing or performance of a text, and multiple audiences find themselves connecting with the stories which are told. What are the implications for this polyphonic chorus of author/selves, subjects, participants, audiences, and texts? (Lincoln 1995) p38*

I intended some incitement but not regardless of consequences. As I wrote the story, I was aware of an edge of moving outward, of ‘other voices’ speaking in the text, drawing people into the inquiry, being inclusive, with perhaps messy and unintended consequences but at least with the intention of having some research productivity, in raising the awareness of the selves we bring to *gendered* lives. But how to help the story find its legs? For that, I turned to Jim Porter for help.

### **Characters that Live**

As Stephen King suggests at the beginning of this chapter, I was surprised by the character of Jim Porter as he emerged in my story. Jim is someone who was somewhat like me but also not. His name ‘Jim Porter’ is an anglicised version of my own name (‘Traeger’ = ‘Porter’ in German/Yiddish). I found the character of Jim intriguing: his complexity, his doggedness, his compassion and his almost outrageous responses to the times around him as they related to things and people he cared

about. These are things I could say about myself, but I also think Jim is quite different to me; indeed, what is striking is that he seems to have his own life.

Can a story have a life independent of its author and almost in spite of him or her sometimes? This isn't to disown my responsibility, but to recognise that the authoring process is like the parenting process; at some point, your intimate production develops its own freewill and eventually spins off on its own trajectory. Characters lives can develop in ways which may seem surprising, and even odd, to the author. Take Stephen Kings relationship with one of his most famous fictional inventions, *Carrie*:

*I never liked Carrie ... I pitied her and I pitied her classmates as well, because, I had been one of them once upon as time. (King 2000) p74*

Stephen King is suggesting here not just that he had a relationship with Carrie within the story but beyond it as well, as it had that power to walk a line between autobiography and universal experience, as fiction does. In my own case, some of the characters in my own story took on a solidity and strength that took me by surprise. For example, I found one of the female characters, Sue (in section 4 of part 1) remarkably grounded and insightful, especially when she seemed to uncover potentially unconscious motives in Jim's behaviour; motives that he himself may not have been aware of (and I had not been aware of) towards Sarah Jones. I was genuinely shocked by what she said when she pointed out Jim's blind spot. And of course, Sarah Jones has been finding her own voice throughout this thesis. The solidity of these characters is a revelatory delight to me.

It could be argued that this is just an exploration into my own (un)consciousness, but I see it as broader than that. It showed me the power of narrative to show the nuances of reflection and action in complex, everyday situations around issues such as gender. The fact that the characters had such solidity (and not just to me) seems to me to be demonstrative of the validity of this form to show wider truths. As an author, I act as a kind of channel for these voices. Perhaps this is a sign of what David Abram calls the 'Chiasm', a reciprocal intertwining or 'criss-cross', between the sensed and conceptualised world. When stories 'come alive', it is not because they are merely vivid, it is because they *as real as the lived world itself*.

*this interplay of the different sense is what enables the chiasm between the body and the earth, the reciprocal participation – between one's own flesh and the encompassing flesh of the world - that we commonly call perception.*  
(Abram 1996) p128

The solidity of the story and the characters within it is demonstrative of the power and quality of this inquiring form.

Jim himself has even become a sort of mentor figure for me. I have developed the practice of using him as a sounding board for some of my own thinking. I have found myself wondering what 'would Jim do?' This didn't happen overnight. Initially I found him quite irritating. I promised to myself that I would never be like him, an 'irredeemable academic'. His first dialogue with the female student was too true to life; it reminded me of my own less than admirable habits.

But it was pointed out to me by my supervision colleagues at Bath that I had black-and-white views about Jim. He wasn't perfect, but he was striving for greater awareness in his actions, and that is something we very much share. So my attitude towards him softened. I find that even now it surprises me how comfortable I am writing about him as if he really exists. It is important to consider not whether this is a

simple confusion between fantasy and reality, but rather to consider, as Laurel Richardson said, what claims we stake by making such characters so real? (Richardson 2005). How does a real Jim serve an inquiring purpose?

Reflecting on that question, Jim has offered me mentoring around a particular shift in myself; that of a man 'looking in' at feminism, to becoming a man who was prepared to inhabit this territory. There aren't that many men around who can support this journey. For most men (and lamentably for many women too), feminism and the ideals it stands for are 'over there', at some distance to them, even though they may be quite sympathetic to the cause. But this is a territory I have intended to enter and even to make my own home in some way. Jim has helped me to do that. So how did this work? To demonstrate that I will show you how I kept the inquiry going, by imagining the conversation Jim and I had when we met for a coffee one day.

### **In the Café with Jim**

I arrived first and I sat in the café waiting for Jim. I was excited to meet him: I wanted to ask him about many things, and I was also nervous. What would he be like, really? How would he feel about the story? Would he feel well portrayed, or perhaps exploited? Would it work for him? Would he think it was a good piece of writing? He was an academic after all, and must have strong views on these things, as academics do. But it was important for me to meet him. I wanted his help. I wanted to stay on the 'edge' in this inquiry. I didn't want to go back into my 'head' but keep my heart in it and even get my guts involved; to move it forward and keep it risky, developmental, to explore how this inquiry process had changed me. This meant going further fearwards. I sipped some cappuccino and felt the trembling. I realised also at that point that it wasn't all about inquiry and thinking and lah-di-dah stuff. I also wanted just to thank Jim. He had helped me express something of my own experience in his story and in a way that was safe enough to be risky. I owed him something for that.

A man walks into the café and I know it is Jim, even though I am surprised by this. I stop myself momentarily. Of course it is him. Of all people I should recognise him. Yet he is dressed as a man, and that again takes me back. But who am I to question this? What really surprises me is that he doesn't quite look like what I expected. He is taller, thinner, older-looking, very distinguished, with silvery grey hair, pale skin, striking blue-grey eyes and a long, straight nose. I also notice he has very large, delicate hands; those of a pianist.

- Hello, you must be Jim.

I stretch out my hand and our eyes meet with a life-in-a-moment flicker. His skin is cool and papery to the touch. My silly, racing mind momentarily thinks papery is appropriate for a fictional character. I realise in an instant I am like a gushing youngster, and feel, almost girlish in his presence. This again, takes me back somewhat.

- Please, sit down would you like something...a coffee?

- Yes, please, I'll have...what is that? [He gestures at my cup] - A Cappuccino? That would be lovely.

Again I notice the slight stiffness, the formality. I remain on the back foot. I wonder at it: what is it with a fictional character that gives him such a vivid life of his own? I find the Polish waitress, and sort out the drinks.

- This is a nice area.

Jim speaks with a strong, solid baritone. I sit there wondering what he must look like in a wig.

- Yeah, we like it. It's great for the kids. We like the river, the parks, Hampton Court Palace. It's not too far from London. Doesn't take me long to get to work, even on the M25.

My usual spiel is useful in these sizing-up moments. I notice I am fiddling with my hat and scarf, and stop. Why am I so skittish? If I just paused for a moment, took my breath, I'd realise *I'm* the one with the authority here...

- How about you – where are you from?

- Oh, north of here.

He answers slowly deliberately, in a way which I read as 'this isn't quite what we're hear to talk about is it?' My momentary sense of authority evaporates.

- Oh.

A tumbleweed moment passes.

He turns directly to me - So what is it you wanted to talk with me about?

- Yes, yes of course. Thanks for coming. I really appreciate it. I wanted to...to [I am flustered] thank you for coming and ...ask for your help really. It's about...where to go next and, well, did you read it?

- The story? Yes, I read it.

- Ah.

I wait for a blow, which is odd, because he offers no sign of one. The blows are all mine, self-inflicted.

- It was good. You can write. I found it very...interesting.

My heart sinks a bit further. Interesting...is well...interesting. But did it *move* him?

- Interesting?

- Clearly I am at a bit of a disadvantage here, aren't I? Because it is about me, I can't really comment until I know what it is you want to know. Otherwise I don't really know what role I am playing here. I have said I think you can write. Do you want me to critique the writing a bit more?

- No!

- I didn't think so

- No. Yes, no, I mean, it *is* about you, but it's also about me as well. It's about all of us, us men, in these times. I wrote it to make wider, more general points...but yes it is about you of course, it is...

- So apart from making your 'wider' points, am I here just for you to have a good look? And if so, isn't that somewhat voyeuristic? As it was about me, then I have to say you shouldn't be surprised to hear that I found it, and I find meeting you, mildly confronting, to say the least. It's not often you meet your maker, as it were.

I feel the conversation taking a further turn that I hadn't anticipated.

- Yes, I am. Not surprised, that is.

- So unless you can give me a bit of an angle about what you want to know, then my default position will be to consider you completely off the hook, whilst my foibles are at the centre of people's attention.

I feel the need to get a serious grip. I take a swig of the foamy dregs. Here I was, starting to feel guilty, ashamed, even scolded, by a paper man. Apart from the most part of my attention, which is set off like a one arm bandit by this conversation, one still, small voice in the back of my head is fascinated by the vivacity of this character, by the transcendent possibilities of story: He lives! Emboldened, I move towards the edge.

- Ok. I accept what you say. It was never my intention to display your...foibles. I didn't ask you here to dwell on that. There were some specific things I wanted to ask you. I truly am not interested in being voyeuristic.

- No, to be honest, I don't feel like that. Sorry if I sound a little...testy, but it does take some adjusting to, all of this. Actually, something that really struck me about your story, even though it 'wasn't about you' [I noticed his eyes twinkle at this point] is the love in it. You have a big heart. That alone demonstrated something about the kind of inquiry you are in.

- I can understand if you are angry...

Jim sighs

- No, not really angry. Well, only slightly. I suppose I just feel you owe me a little. I *lived*, even if it was only in a story. And here I am again, invoked back into existence. It is all a bit maddening. What was it you called me in the story? An 'unreformed academic'? In that case, you can't expect me not to have some existential qualms about all of this.

- Yes! Exactly! That's why I asked you here; to thank you. But I also wanted to ask you some things, because I was really impressed by you, by your story. I could just do with a bit of help, to talk this all out. I see you as a mentor actually, as someone who has understanding of this on the inside, as it were. A pause as Jim's coffee arrives, and he helps himself to several spoonfuls of sugar.

- Sweetness, the perk of incarnation...Pardon the pun. Life is wasted on the living.

We laugh and the atmosphere relaxes. I continue:

- I am sorry...this is all a bit weird. Being aware of different subjectivities in the research process is one thing...

- ...but it never occurred to you that you might be treading on the toes of imaginary characters!

We laugh again and the space between us softens a little more. Jim continues:

- I suppose I just wanted you to know I had some feelings about it.

- Yes I can understand that and grateful. Surprised, but still grateful. I feel more connected. This is something your story has helped me with. Moving towards connection with people, even if it is difficult sometimes. I am pleased you feel that way...[Jim's eyes widen a fraction at this point – but I hastily continue]...I mean, I feel vindicated. This is what I wanted to talk with you about. I wanted to thank you, and ask your advice. I wanted to talk things through. I am at the point in the research process when I really need to think about the *difference* this has all made. This is *action* research after all. What change has there been in what I do, or at least in how I am? How can I show it? I thought you could help me take that turn. So I do take you seriously, if you see what I mean.

- So you want to think about the action you have taken as a result of this inquiry? What impact it has had?

- Yes, exactly. It's a bit of a paradox really, because I wrote the story to bring myself 'out of my head', into my heartfelt experience, to show the challenges I face as a man wanting to engage with feminism in my sort of world, and what this man can do about it. But what emerged, unexpected, was how much bigger the whole thing is that the individual.

- The whole thing?

- About gender, and how it can be, or will be changed; how it might evolve. I believe now it *will* evolve. Maybe not in the way I showed it, but in *some* way, an interaction between science, technology, huge social forces. My own individual response is tiny. It has left me feeling...humbled. I am humbled by the compassion in the story, and the size of the stakes. When I started all of this work with men and gender I had a real presumption that people could 'change things'. I haven't lost sight of that, but my understanding of it has

become much more nuanced. I think I was holding onto the power of individual agency, which is quite patriarchal really; well it's where patriarchy meets the Enlightenment perhaps: the 'individualised, self-motivated citizen can save the world'. One man can be a hero. It's where the idea of Superheroes, comes from. But now I can see the complexity of all of this. One needs patience, a sense of connection to a wider flow, playing a part rather than *the* part. My awareness needs to be much wider. It's even shown me the need for a sense of humour, some lightness and fun with it all.

- Yes I can see that, but is that why you needed me here?

- You know, I was just reading in a newspaper that Jack Kerouac wrote *On the Road* in three weeks, on one continuous 120 foot roll of paper.

- I never knew that.

- Yes, but he needed some things to keep him going. Coffee, cigarettes and Benzedrine. That's what kept him on his edge. Yuk. Can you imagine how he felt when he'd finished?

- One cappuccino hardly counts...

- No it's not the coffee that gives me my edge. It's you. I wanted to keep the work, my inquiry fresh. The story was an expression of a yearning; to get closer to the feelings of this journey. Until then the work was 'all in my head'. Lots of long, academic words, and talking *about* being more present than I had found other writers about masculinity. It's good stuff, certainly. Having a head is necessary. But I wanted to show more *heart*. That's where you came in, with your story. And when it was finished, I was keen not to go back into my head again, to keep on the edge. Maybe go down further, to my guts, my legs even. Jim takes a swig of his coffee.

- Go on. Say more. I'm listening.

- You see, writing your story was an attempt to bring real feeling into this inquiry, real stories and bodies, into this work. They often seem so absent in academic writing. It's ironic, but in writing about men and masculinity, the writer can be really absent. It's that abstract, academic voice. I wanted to bring the body in with the voice. Now, I'm concerned I will fall back into an abstract relationship to it, intellectualise it and disconnect from the experience. Writing the story kept me on the edge. I feel a bit stuck. I feel...perhaps even a little nostalgic for that sense of edge. As if I have to give it up to complete the inquiry. For a while I blamed you a bit, saying I didn't want to turn into you, but now I think that's not fair. I think *I'm* the one more in danger of being the unreformed academic. *You* are the one who did something different.

- Yes, it is all too easy to make these things very black and white. Most things in these questions around gender are very nuanced and paradoxical. So let's go back to that question; how has this inquiry had an impact on you? How has it changed you?

- I think it's something to do with solidity

- Solidity?

- Yes I realise that may be a paradoxical thing to say to an imaginary character...

- Careful, you'll hurt my feelings again.

He smiles at this, and I notice how upright he seems, so tall and straight. I consider for a moment how much dignity he seems to have, as if I created him to express something of the qualities I do indeed yearn for.

- Yes I feel more solid in myself. Stronger. It's as if the story showed me how much I worry about what other people think about me and how I can let go of that. So for example, I really worried what people would think about me when they read it: would they think I was weird or stupid, or would they resent being portrayed in some unflattering light if they recognised themselves in some of the characters? But the reaction was mostly positive. It reflected my own

warmth, and my own depth, grappling with the complexity of these questions. It also makes me less...ashamed...to be a man.

- You are ashamed to be a man?

- A little I suppose. I didn't realise that until now, not that clearly. But I realise how easy it is to become really apologetic as a man if you want to consider patriarchy seriously. That breeds defensiveness as well, in response to feminism. I'm the 'good guy', not like the 'other men'. It is strange that, at the same time as helping me to realise that I may have less agency in relation to these vast forces of history, the story has also made me feel more comfortable in this territory; that it isn't all women's territory; that I have a legitimate place in this ground. I know some women might want to fight me on that; that they don't want to share it with me, but I still hope to go there. Not to colonise it, but at least co-inhabit. It has helped me feel that men...that I...can have a real voice in the critical perspectives of gender, from the heart as well as the head. It's as if being a 'feminist man' (if that's the right phrase for this position) meant being answerable to all women. I just don't feel that anymore. I have my own legitimate position in this. I called it an 'inquiring masculinity' but I'm not sure that quite does it justice either. I just feel less defensive, as if I own some of this ground. I think it is defensiveness that keeps men away from engaging with these questions, in their heart and soul. I feel less answerable to 'all women'. That's interesting don't you think?

- Yes that is interesting. I noticed in the story a prevailing sense of being judged; by children, by women, by others generally. That was my characteristic. Perhaps I thought that changing my outward presentation, feminising myself, becoming a 'mystical androgyne', would mean I would be less judged, that I would then be on the good side. Of course that didn't happen!

- Exactly! People may judge me, as a man. But *this is my territory*. I have earned a right to it. The judgement is internal and I have let go of it somewhat. I wonder if that's true for other men? That they carry a sense that the standards of awareness and action around gender questions are 'out there' – as if women intrinsically hold that standard and men don't? I feel more confident in my own standard. It's like the idea of emotional labour, or like Arlie Hochschild's *The Second Shift*. If women do most of the work in their territory, it means men don't have to. It's the same with this. If women hold the standard, then men don't have to. If we are defensive about it, that's not helpful either. We need to *own* this work. Your story helped me own this work.

- So that's the awareness piece, but how does it help in the action? What does this mean you do differently?

- It's like I wrote in my journal recently. I feel less 'judged'; so for example, when a woman at work recently said 'Oh, typical men!' and she was lumping me in with that judgement; I didn't feel drawn to respond, to defend myself. In the past I might have said something like 'Not all men are like that, you know!' But I didn't because in that moment I felt calmer and I thought, 'I'm not answerable to her about this!'

- So what did you do?

- I just smiled. I just smiled, and shrugged.

- That's progress? After how many years in this work?!

- It might not seem like much. It's a trivial example I suppose.

- And she could have read that gesture in lots of different ways

- That's just it. I knew that it didn't matter, really, how she read it 'as a woman'. I didn't need to defend myself. She's a friend, and that matters. But in not holding me responsible for all men, I am not holding her responsible for the standard as a woman. That is up to me now. I need to have an active sense of whether my behaviour is sexist or not, typical or not, for my own good. This is

mentshlichkeit, staying with the edge, the struggle, owning it. How would the world be if men owned it more?

- Quite different I suppose.

- I have realised through your story, and talking to you the possibilities of owning up to male power as a good thing, it can be a good thing, an opportunity for a man with a feminist subjectivity.

- Now you sound like an unreformed academic

- Touché!

I notice again an endearing gleam in Jim's eye.

- I am glad. Actually I'm inspired. It gives me some hope. How a younger man can be unashamedly male and still face the challenge of a critical view towards male power. That is an inspirational idea.

- I didn't have that clarity about it until now, talking here with you. So I owe you again.

- You can pay for the coffee.

Later, we are standing outside the café, at the foot of the bridge, with the river glinting below. He is about to walk across it. We are about to say goodbye.

- Thank you for the coffee, says Jim

- Thank you for allowing me to 'invoke you into existence again'

- Ha! I am pompous, you are right!

- No really, I appreciate it. It has been really enlightening. I have enjoyed it. I hope we can meet again.

- So do I. You are a deep thinker. You have more to say.

- Yes, but what?

- You have more to say about the 'action turn' as you called it. How it changes what you do? And also, how have others reacted to your story: what has it done for them? Give it some legs.

- That might be hard to say. It is all so inter-connected. How do you know for sure if something has an impact and if so what?

- Yes it is hard. We know that. But it's still worth a try. You might want to just say a bit more about what others have made of it. Weave their stories in a bit more.

- Yes that's a good idea. I have thought about that. I'd really like to continue by telling their stories, continue the narrative, widening it. Maybe that's how I can show the action impact in some way. I'm not sure.

- That's what you've got to do. Don't try and be sure when you haven't done it yet. Just give it a go. Continue fearwards.

- Yes. Thank you. Again. That's really useful

- No problem. I hope we meet again.

- Goodbye.

- Goodbye.

We shake gloved hands and he turns and walks over the bridge, heading 'somewhere north', in the low winter sunshine.

### **Giving Legs to the Story**

How good does a story have to be to work well enough to draw others into the questions it seeks to explore? And when does it become such a compelling story that it ceases to be an inquiry piece and starts becoming a work of 'fiction' that we can equally hold at an objective (and thus impersonal) distance? What do people see when they read a story? What control do you have, even as the author to dictate the direction of their imagination will take?

Following Jim' Porter's advice, I want to start to explore the responses my story received as I handed it out, and how this did the work, or not, of moving towards '2<sup>nd</sup> person inquiry', inviting people to participate in the conversation around gender and masculinity. I felt I had explored the thinking behind my inquiry, the 'head' of my work, and the story had given it a 'heart' but now I'm interested in giving it some *legs*. This is after all, 'action research'. So like sending my children off to school, it was time to send my story out into the world, and let evolution unfold.

I had a deliberate intention in handing out the story 'Gender Futures' to work colleagues, friends and family members. It was to take the next step on my journey towards a more 'inquiring masculinity'. I wanted to co-inquire, to explore the fertile territory between the public and private narratives of self that is the site of the policing of gender and masculinity boundaries. How can we disrupt the commonly held narrative and so open up evolutionary possibilities? This is where the border police stand, either our own internal ones or those that control the social practices of story-making around the self, not just in literature or fictional accounts, but in everyday conversations and encounters. As Mary Gergen points out:

*"Although androcentric control over literary forms is a serious matter, how much graver is the accusation that the forms of our personal narratives are also under such control?"* (Gergen 1992) p130

As I have discussed, using a story is potentially generative in this process of disruption, but it also has its dangers as a 'heuristic'. If we go back to the roots of that word, it comes from the Greek meaning 'to reveal' or 'to discover'. So to suggest that the story I present people is a fully formed thing, in which they simply discover meanings that are inherently 'there', would be in this research method, misleading. The process of discovery around a story is more relational. The story becomes a mirror if you like, for peoples' own questions. So whilst wanting to hold people to inquire with me into questions of gender and masculinity, I must accept that their participation could take us anywhere they wanted it to, with respect to the democratic tradition of action research. (Reason and Bradbury 2001). Who am I to say what it is they must see in it? And yet I am a partner, a co-inquirer, so my perspective is valid too. This is the tension inherent in this kind of approach. It isn't bad thing – indeed it can be uplifting, educational, risky, even fun, to walk along this edge with people.

During this phase of the research I found myself being challenged to see things, themes, directions, perspectives and ideas in the story that I had never even thought of. And even I myself was surprised by what I found in the story long after I had written it. To me there is beauty in this, in opening up to the wonder of this evolutionary process. A mark of quality in this type of research, moving towards 'cooperative inquiry', is how well we hold this tension of 'convergence and divergence' (Heron and Reason 1997). This is more of an art than a science; or maybe it is better still to see it is a kind of craft, as Peter Reason does. (Reason 2001). If the story is good enough, with enough narrative potency in it, things will emerge, even if you can't predict what direction these things will take.

### **Working with Power - Who did I give the story to and why?**

Stephen Toulmin, in his book *Cosmopolis*, talks about the timely and the local nature of knowledge that we have had to become more used to, in the wake of the post-modern challenge to the Academy's foundationalist thirst for universal, permanent knowledge (Toulmin 1990).

The implications of this for the action researcher are profound. It means that we have the task (or the possibility) of locating our own ideas, and research methods within an ever-changing and evolving territory of action in the world. And in 2006, aged 41, when I joined Roffey Park Institute, I was given the opportunity in a timely way to bring my research into that community. Finding a way to do this in a way which responded to the issues that my colleagues raised in the 'mind-map' at the beginning of this chapter led to the development of my story telling skills, hence the use of the 'Gender Futures' device to draw people into the conversation. This type of knowledge development is contingent and opportunistic; taking these opportunities is the inherent skill of the craft that Reason discusses (Reason 2001).

I was prompted in this next phase of inquiry by the question in the mind map: how can I 'deal with the power relationships at Roffey Park'? This is a question crucial towards *mentshlichkeit*, being a 'good man'. Power relationships don't go just away because we have an intention to face them. They need engagement, making difficult choices between intention, action and reflection. This is a good test of *mentshlichkeit*. I am not sure what the practice group meant exactly by 'deal' with the power relationships; I took it to mean, engage, incite, disrupt, challenge, but equally, they could also have meant: be sensitive to them, finessing them, finding ways to *heal* them, helping things move on...?

Using the story as a tool of such engagement, I was aiming to practice a Foucauldian perspective on power:

*Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which the individuals are caught up.*  
(Foucault 1975) p202

In this sense, the power dynamics of a place like Roffey Park, are explored, moved, disrupted in action on those surfaces, lights, gazes and internal mechanisms, between people and in their interactions. My intention with the story was to have some impact, to stir the pot, and in so doing, hold up a bit of a mirror to these surfaces. I was very conscious that I act *within* these surfaces myself, and I wanted to craft an engagement with them, rather than plunge in creating too much of a 'splash'. What were the risks?

I was fully aware of the intensely political dimension to this. Adopting a Foucauldian mode, the 'Institute' in the story, on which Roffey Park was based is a model, as every organisation is, for a prison, expecting certain behaviours and delineating transgressions through structures, 'internal mechanisms', habits, practices and punishments. The story potentially held a mirror up to these and in doing so I was aware of my potential transgression, and possible 'punishment'. Indeed, I *hoped* for a transgression, especially around gender, even if I couldn't predict what it might be. But I was anxious as well.

As Foucault says: '*Prisons put the cop inside your head*' (Foucault 1975). In bringing what I hoped would be a transgressive story into this system, reflecting a different light on its surfaces, I felt the presence of that internal cop. There were elements in the story that, when I thought of them, brought me out in a bit of a cold sweat when I considered how they might be received. Would people think I'd 'gone a bit mad'; that I was some kind of 'pervert', or surfacing my subconscious homo-erotic gender confusion? Roffey Park was, after all, mostly a community of psychologists. God save me.

At first, returning from the Italian holiday break where I finished the story, in the late summer of 2008, I was very tentative and nervous about the story's distribution. The key was whether it *worked*; did it hang together as a work of fiction? I think my worst fear, beyond all the others above, was that people would simply think I was a bit stupid. If the story *worked* for people, and had in it for them the subtle and sophisticated levels and readings I aimed for, then I think I could face most other judgements and accusations. But to think people would see me as in some way a little stupid, a bit *gauche* and naive...? This fear haunted me the most. Was this internal judgement a signal that a place like Roffey Park uses as a mechanism of control? Or is this about the wider control mechanisms of the 'expert masculinity' that I am aiming to deconstruct? Is this why men, haunted by the spectre of an academic 'expert' masculinity, may avoid showing their 'ignorance', or (in a different 'light') avoid facing that (potentially fertile) place of 'not knowing'?

So when people started coming back to me with their views that by and large, they thought the story 'worked' (although with one exception, of which I will say more in the Conclusion) I was most relieved and was then able to be a bit more loose in the story's distribution. In fact, I would say (in a form following my content) that I started off quite demur and by the end became a bit of a tart about it, distributing it quite freely. From wondering if I was being too risky, I went to reflecting on whether I had been risky enough.

I decided that I would print off a bundle of them (about 50 copies) and give them to people by hand. I deliberately avoided emailing people, as I thought this would be judged as asking them to do more of a chore for me, whereas handing people a manuscript had the advantage of my giving it them 'as a gift', and this sense could be attached to the conversation that went on around handing it over. I was usually quite specific about what I said in this handover, along the lines of:

*'This is what I mentioned to you. It is a story. I'd like to invite you to join in with my research, by reading it. I hope you enjoy it. What sort of feedback would I like? I would prefer that you just read it as a story, like one you got for a book group or book club. So I am not looking for an academic 'critique', rather a discussion of any of the themes and ideas that grabbed you as you read it. I'd really like a coffee and a chat when you are ready, if you'd like to.'*

This script, and the choice not email the text, were part of a deliberate attempt to work with the power 'surfaces' of Roffey Park, encouraging an engagement at an emotional and experiential level, rather than just an 'intellectual' one. This was an experiment. How would people engage? I chose to manage it in this way. It was a difficult choice. Should I say nothing as I handed it over (and risk being seen as unenthusiastic, aloof, even arrogant..)? Should I say 'it's for my PhD' (and risk people feeling drawn into some intellectual 'critique'), or should I use this as a chance to practice a softer, relational invitation, to *inquire*? I intended the latter. It isn't the 'right' choice necessarily, but an example of deliberately working with the surfaces and gazes of which Foucault speaks, as part of an experiment with *mentshlichkeit*.

As a rough estimate, about 30% of people actually came back to me with a genuine urge to have to a further conversation: that's about 15 people. The interlude at the beginning of this chapter captures the spirit of these conversations. This is a claim of course, and it begs the question; did I choose the excerpts that would show the 'best' of these? I would suggest that I have no reason to hide any dissenting voices.

I had quite a number who simply responded by 'I liked your story'; or 'I really enjoyed it', and of course I would say probably a third so far I haven't heard of from again.

There is the possibility that there are a number of people out there who do indeed think I am a bit queer (meant pejoratively) or mad, but interestingly I haven't picked that up. In fact for a while, I was getting so many 'I really liked it' responses, with real *warmth* from people, that I became worried that I had erred on the side of being 'too safe'; could I have been edgier and more controversial in the story's registers, to provoke a bigger response, even some outcry?

There are a number of possibilities here, one being that they haven't read it yet of course. I was conscious when I handed it over of a sense of the length/weight of it: Double-sided printing meant that the story's 50 or so pages came out in my view 'not too thick' (about 4-5mm or so on A4 paper) but for those for whom reading didn't come naturally this may still have been too daunting.

But I recognise I was being deliberately political in my approach here. Roffey Park isn't a place where outcry sits very comfortably. My experience of 'outcry' very much informed the early dialogues of the story in Chapter Four, particularly the conversation between Jim and Daniel (see Part One, no.3). So I think I got it about right to provoke enough of a response to engage a wider dialogue and not too much that it would shut this down and just make it 'about me' and therefore marginalise it. There were some strategies in my timing and selection of people to play this deliberate game: By this I mean:

- Trying to make sure that a number of 'important' people read it, those who have influence at Roffey or beyond, in that they may be able to support a further extension to the conversation around gender. Below I focus on the responses of two people, Steve and Helena, who best fit this category
- Making sure that I gave it to people whose opinion I respected around these issues
- From an ethical point of view, making sure than anyone who had a particular investment in it, in that they had been involved in any of the conversations that had formed the basis of the story's content, had a chance to read it early on (in effect giving them a chance to 'veto' it)
- Beyond this, offering it to whoever showed an interest or might seem to benefit from it

Of course this may suggest that I deliberately avoided or skewed the readership to support a particular kind of advocacy around the questions I wanted to explore. This is a fair challenge. But in response I would argue that in terms of my research intention, which is to engage the community in which I reside in a wider conversation about issues that aren't usually foregrounded, such a political sensitivity isn't just appropriate, with a skill and grace worthy of *mentshlichkeit*, it is necessary. As Patti Lather says:

*I position validity as an "incitement to discourse", much like how Foucault saw sexuality in the attention it receives within the human sciences... a fertile obsession given its intractability. (Lather 1993) p647*

And that in this sense, in terms of the validity of my approach as a researcher, I am tracing here:

*A methodology that "comes clean" about how power shapes an inquiry, how I use disruptive devices in the text to unsettle conventional notions of the real...(Lather 1993) p685*

I would also say in my own defence, there was no deliberate attempt to deny anyone access to this story. It is pretty widely known within Roffey Park that I have written it

and that it formed a major part of my research process to invite people to read it. Indeed, it was part of the political expedient to give of a sense of warmth and invitation around it, in order to serve the wider aims of advocacy that I have already discussed are sometimes necessary in order to get elided issues onto the agenda.

I'd also say that there most potent 'risk' was in my engagement with specific key players in the Roffey game and beyond. These were people who act at the higher echelons of formal and informal political and economic power within that community, who I deliberately went 'fearwards' with, and engaged them in the story-inquiry process.

Again, harking back to Toulmin's 'local and timely' nature of knowledge formation, it is relevant that as I was proceeding with my inquiry into Roffey, during the autumn of 2008 and winter of 2008-9, the clouds of credit crunch and global recession were gathering and then breaking, a storm that had a dramatic impact within Roffey Park. Five fellow members of my 'consultant team' of 22 have been made redundant during this time. This added a further piquancy to the inquiry and also made it harder to hold in the picture. It is a reasonable (but not a comfortable assertion) that questions that are hard enough to keep on the agenda in good times are likely to be even more foreshadowed when times are bad. Having said that, there are always opportunities to be grabbed, whatever the weather. Engaging with Steve was an example.

### **Choices, Appreciation and Challenge – An Edge to Explore**

*James*

*It's 5.45 on a damp steel-grey Sunday afternoon. I'm sitting in a cottage in Cornwall bereft of telephone, mobile signal, internet access and all other interruptions (and connections) to the rest of the world. Not sure when I will next be online or in touch but I wanted to write this now, a few minutes after putting down Gender Future. I say 'this' without yet really knowing what it is I want to write, but with a strong feeling that I want to respond, to connect, to acknowledge something in what I've just read.*

*In part I want to acknowledge and honour your openness in sharing something of yourself – something important. In part I want to say – 'OK; I get it now'. Somehow my understanding of what you are doing, saying, embodying, researching ... well I've always kind of understood, but now it feels so much clearer.*

*And then there's part of me that having read your story desperately wants to tell my story – the story that no-one has heard, the bits that I struggle to understand myself, to just be able to put it out there in all its messiness – a part that just wants to connect and admires (and is slightly envious) of what you have done.*

*I wonder, was it cathartic to write it down; was it scary to hand it out; have you edited it knowing that your children might read it one day? And there are many things that I'm curious about – in particular about what (and who) is missing from the narrative. But that's my stuff !!!!*

*And there's a question that nags away at me (although again, I'm pretty sure this is my stuff). Is this really about gender? Is it really about masculinity? Or is it about identity and our struggle to allow the true essence of who we are to walk free in the world. All of us live our lives trapped within a complex web of*

*expectations, our own and others. There are many strands to this web and it seems that gender is one of these, albeit one of particular significance and one with many threads that spread out from it. But at the centre of the web is the essence of who we are, 'spirit' perhaps. And it seems strange that so much of how we organise ourselves and our societies and our lives mitigate [sic] against allowing our true spirit to roam free – and yet again, maybe that's just my stuff and my story.*

*Anyway, before I start to ramble incoherently, I want to say 'thank you' for letting me read this. I'm sure that some of our colleagues will respond more cogently than me, and engage in deep well-thought through intellectualised debate; will analyse, hypothesise and critique. I hope they do. It's a serious and important piece of work and another way of keeping the conversation alive. But I want you to know that what you've written has touched me deeply, has found its way through my personal web, and resonated with something that has become the central struggle in my life at my moment. How can I be me in the world? How do I know who 'me' really is? And what if that 'me' doesn't fit with the wants, needs and expectations of the people, the institutions and the life I have co-created around me?*

*Enough for now. Keep the conversation going.*

Steve x

In analysis of data in all research processes, selection, particularly with what is foregrounded or not, is inevitable. Here I choose to show the 'data', in Steve's letter, in full (I deconstruct it further on, as you will see). What matters is how explicit this is, and with what validity these choices are made. My criteria for making these choices are mostly to do with being sensitive to the people who have participated here, honouring their generosity in staying in inquiry with me. This seems like 'dealing' with power relationships, in a way that is sensitive to 'being a good man'. So I have mostly made choices that are intended to protect their (and my own) vulnerability. In that sense I would say that the qualities I bring to this analysis are *appreciative*, without losing the edge of *challenge*. I also aim to foreground what further enables the themes so far to unfold.

Steve had a powerful role at Roffey Park when I first mooted the story inquiry with him. Officially our Director of Bespoke Services, this made him both my line-manager and key to the operational and strategic life of the Institute. He had hired me knowing my interest in gender and I knew this was a cause with which he had notional sympathy. In fact it was with Steve's backing that I was enabled to offer and run a weekend-long 'men's retreat' at Roffey Park in my first year there. Steve not only backed it, but attended himself, and that clearly had an impact that facilitated 12 out of the 13 male consultant staff team also taking part.

I like Steve, and generally got on well with him. With affection I would describe him as a clever operator within a complex political organisation, the type of organisation I trace in the 'Gender Future' story. As such, he wasn't always popular with everyone, being seen by a number of people as a bit of a game-player. Was this evident when I first suggested to Steve that he read my story? Indeed, he was slightly reluctant:

*"You know," he said, "I'd really like you to read it to me, because I find that more accessible than reading it myself".*

I made sense of this as an attempt to avoid adding extra work to his pile, whilst continue to signal his support. This may be my unfair impression but it is within the bounds of his reputation. However, events then conspired to enable him to engage with it, as he was already in the process of deciding to leave Roffey Park, which he did in early December 2008, after over ten years of employment there.

So the story then 'caught' Steve at a very interesting time, one of major transition in his life, a time of re-construction of himself, hence his email to me above. It was also a time when, even as we talked, I was conscious of a shifting power dynamic, an equalising, with someone who wasn't my 'boss' anymore, and the opportunity this opened up between us for a conversation, which in its openness, depth and richness may have been different whilst that power dynamic persisted.

I am conscious that I am talking *about* Steve, and this brings up uncomfortable feelings, of disloyalty for example. I wouldn't want to be disloyal because actually Steve is someone who I found to be very loyal to me, and indeed has been very supportive of me in this process. For example, he granted the funding for my PhD from Roffey. So as the ferryman, I owe him in this journey. How can we explain the effectiveness of inquiry into a community without framing the political economy and setting of this local and timely work? This is another one of those 'edges' that we have to signal and negotiate. Respect vies with honesty in the sense-making as well as the story-making process.

At this point then, the classic researcher choice would be to anonymise the subjects in the story. But this misses the point in my case. I would rather continue to write 'fearwards' (Turner-Vesselago nd), working along the edge that is presented here, making respectful and honest choices about what and how to present as I go. This is a harder but perhaps more appropriate choice. So Steve, if you are reading this, you can notice how you are here, and not here. I would make no claim to say that the Steve I portray here is the 'real Steve'. It is the same for all the 'voices' that come onto the stage. As such he may only exist as another character in an ongoing play. Whatever name he is given is arbitrary, so it might as well be, paradoxically, and perhaps more honestly, his 'real' one.

### **Looking at the Story with Steve**

My initial intention with all of these conversations was to use their perspective to look back on the story together, holding it up against my own changing, distancing view. As I did so with Steve, the conversation builds and takes on its own life, and of course this takes us off in other places. Intention and intervention rarely coincide. So I offer an abbreviated transcription with a meta-commentary, to show how these conversations in themselves were an opportunity for inquiry to continue. I am aware that I have very specific choices about what to foreground (although I haven't left much out) from my conversation with Steve.

*Steve: "Reading it in one sitting, it had a huge impact on me at the time. I was projecting a lot of what was going for me into my interpretation."*

So it caught him at just the right time, in his own transition, in his own shape shifting and questioning in a parallel way to what Jim Porter was going through. The timely nature of knowledge strikes me. How I couldn't have predicted this but how opportune it was – the practice of story-telling and how it can catch people and this can be difference that makes a difference.

Steve: *“For me the paper was less about gender and more about the struggle to be just to be how we are. For me the gender narrative wasn’t the dominant one – the piece was about how we find ourselves trapped in the web of our expectations, other people’s expectations and how we lose the ability to stand back and think ‘who am I’ and just get on and be who new are. It is a more fundamental struggle than that. And I can see how that’s been my struggle of the last 24 months.”*

Looking at the story through Steve’s eyes I can see that it may have been Jim’s move to run away, or go away, that speaks to him. I have often wondered since writing this if the story is a kind of prophecy for me - how the pressure would build for me to go off and ‘find myself’ like Jim did (although I don’t feel like doing that now). But Steve was one of the role models for me as I came to Roffey Park – was he laying down some kind of template for myself, and how far is this just some kind of ‘mid-life crisis’. In some ways, Jim (and Steve’s) move to do this could be an expression of quite a traditional masculinity – that of the ‘successful’ man that yearns ‘meaning’ questions; a luxury that a feminist might argue is less accessible to women. So once again, I find this loops me back into questioning how an attempt to frame a disruptive, radical inquiring masculinity can get pulled back into the patterns, habits, practices, gender ‘performances’ that are as old as the hills.

Steve: *“Things happen that raise in me the awareness of how much I am being, how programmed myself, how the self image I have created, or colluded in the creation of, sets up expectations of who I am, a kind of a web, it becomes so ingrained in how I think and feels and reacts, that it is a huge wrench to stand back and say – is that really me? What is the real me, how can I be true to myself? It is easy to deny yourself choice, so we fit within the pattern of expectations, and it becomes easy to lose true choice. There is a need in me at some point in the cycle to Hoover that all out and look at the choices.”*

So when I look again at this story as if for Steve, notwithstanding the issue of ‘mid-life crisis’ above, I see him yearning for a change, a shift away from the person he is ‘made to be’ within the system in which he finds himself. As he suggests, men can collude with the expectations of how people expect them (us) to be and when that happens. Are these expectations part of the ‘haunting’ process of the hegemonic masculinity spectre I have described?

In this we can lose a sense of freshness, of in-the-moment choices, and become that (dominant) *Man*. So this sets up a pressure that leads to a kind of flight, and so whilst it can be seen as a luxury for (privileged) men to ‘go off on one’, it is also a genuinely felt yearning to break away from the same systemic (gendered) patterns that entrap both men and women. Was Steve finding his own practices of escape from the hegemonic haunting?

This is a huge paradox, one I have also often felt: that in my yearning to move beyond the way I am seduced to behave and be as a man, I am also potentially expressing one of my privileges; a double-bind. I hadn’t fully spotted this before, but through Steve’s eyes I can see the double-bind that the story points towards for men.

Steve: *“I move into a blank space – it is terrifying, scary but in some way better than re-creating myself where I am. “*

So is this brave. Or was Jim (and Steve) just running away? Both of them argue that they are moving *towards* the fear.

Steve: *“Every so often I reach a point where I have colluded in the creation of a lot of things that have restrained me, held me, denying me access to many things of what I want to be in the world, and I break out of them. But how much do I really learn if I just repeat this cycle.”*

The story raises a question for him: whether we really learning or just repeating habits? This is a big question for him and I am moved by the way in which, whether about gender or not, the story enabled him to consider these questions.

Steve: *“And to cycle back to where we started, there was a way in which the story was about the problem of the skin, seeing the web that holds and then breaking it, and that touched me, very deeply. And it left me with a challenge to you – is that just about gender or is this just the human condition?”*

So how did I respond to this challenge? It is one that really matters because part of me fears that the story does let people off the hook – that they can avoid looking at the gender questions its seeks to raise by moving towards the aspects of it that they want to see, and avoiding the gender challenge it presents. And yet, Steve brings the challenge back to me. And this gives me my chance for advocacy:

James: *“That’s a good question. I don’t have an easy answer for that. My whole inquiry has led me to realise how complex and rooted gender is as a system. It is an intrinsic part, a bit like saying which part of the tree is the most important part? And paradoxically I feel the need to raise awareness of the parts of the tree that are neglected. It’s like saying ‘notice the bark – it’s actually really important. I know it isn’t the whole tree but it’s a really important part that we don’t always look at.’ There has been a deliberate need in me to highlight it. But paradoxically I have learnt myself that it is just one part.”*

Steve: *“That helps, and if it is really that complex and that rooted, what do you seek to do anything about it? Is this about changing gender or is it just raising awareness about it?”*

I see this coming, and here’s the rub. And when Steve asks me this, I am really struck by a need to justify; to prove that as ‘action’ research this all makes a huge difference to the world. It is as if I feel in some way challenged, not just by Steve so much as by the world around me that constantly seeks Newtonian, causal links, and if I fail to provide them, I have failed *per se*. But I catch this defensiveness in the moment, which if I act as I have done before, would become an incitement to defensive qualification. This would throw me ‘into my head’, and prompt me to give an intellectual, wordy, ‘academic’ response. Instead, I try and move somewhere different with it:

James: *“I can go into lots of academic speak about, I suppose social construction and how languaging something is making something change and etc. etc...but...I suppose what I would say I spend most of my time in a paradoxical place – feeling much less bothered about wanting to change something, less bothered with ‘agency’ and much more willingness just to hold a place of questioning, without an agenda that it has to be ‘like this’. I think also that’s a healthier place for a man to be about this. I think men are often forced into a place of denial or defensiveness. I just have found a place where these gender questions are my questions. I am not answerable to feminism, to women or anyone. I’m only answerable to me in them. That’s a freeing experience, and if more men felt like that, maybe the world would be better for*

*women too. We'd be more questioning in an ongoing way about who we are in the world. It's paradoxical, but this is mine.*

Perhaps I didn't avoid the hook of defensiveness completely. But this opened up a new arena and further enabled an advocacy of what this story-telling inquiry process has really done for me – made me more owning of these questions, and less defensive of them. This practice is skilful, as it has more chance to draw people in:

*Steve: There's something very appealing in what you are saying, it resonates with a thought I have been having about the importance of acceptance. Can't we get to a point of saying – that's just who I am? People could just accept and sit with it; then it's as if the world changes around them. Change happens but not by the actor forcing it. Which is quite a macho thing. But far more powerful is acceptance. Quiet, passive acceptance of what is. Something magical seems to happen.*

And once again, the conversation around gender, held in a bubbling, building, inquiring register, between two men (a relatively rare thing) opens a doorway to deeper, even transpersonal questions. But have we let ourselves off the hook? Is the flight into transpersonal questions a luxury of the (successful, hegemonic) man, or a legitimate practice of escape from the spectre of dominant masculinity? This seems to me to be another one of those 'gender interference patterns' that Judi Marshall describes (Marshall 1999). Struggling with them is part of the practice of *mentshlichkeit*, without expecting simple answers. But at least Steve and I are naming it, and this is what men don't tend to do together; and in doing so, the conversation is opening up a hidden transcript.

I note that, when I showed this chapter to Steve a few months later, in order to check he was happy with its portrayal of him, he said this, in an email:

*Yes - I am happy with this...And I can also see now how the chains that have been most difficult to shake off are absolutely and clearly grounded in gender - in the expectations and manifestations of 'maleness'.*

I wonder how much this shift in Steve (and what in his acknowledgement of the 'maleness as the most difficult chains to shake off') is due to a subtle, longer term impact of this inquiry?

### **Through Helena's Eyes**

If there was one person who, before this all began, I would have said it would have been great to hold up against Steve's view of the story, it would have been Helena's. Helena was someone who I wondered hard and long whether I would offer her the story. I worried about what she would make of it, and of me as its author. She is someone whose stock was rising at Roffey Park, and in the time I have been at Roffey Park, she has had several promotions to more senior positions. At the time of my conversation with her, she held the role of 'Director of Business Development'. It would be fair to say that she is filling the power vacuum left behind by Steve's departure.

I notice the surfaces of power that are on the move here, between Helena and Steve and how the story-inquiry I was offering reflected onto these surfaces. Was this 'dealing' with the power relationships here', in the way my colleagues had suggested?

I see Helena having two distinct sides. I have had very good, open, honest and interesting conversations with her. We see eye to eye on many things, and also I have seen another side of her, which I would describe as darker, more controlling, sometimes exhibited in emails which often sound quite directive and brusque. I have given her the feedback about this and I would say that I found her open to listening. In turn, her feedback to me is that I can come across a bit wordy and academic sometimes, which fits completely with what I have been exploring here. But fundamentally, although I am bit scared of her darker side, and probably consciously or otherwise do much to stay on her lighter side, I have real sympathy for her. I see her as one of those women leaders for whom the words of Florence Geis may resonate:

*The differential expectations, perceptions, roles, and consequent behavior are consensual in society, defining them as the truth and further endowing them with value. One result is that women and men strive to display the “desirable” attributes. Another is that those who violate the stereotypes are disliked, producing a “damned if she does, damned if she doesn’t” dilemma for professional and managerial women. (Geis 1993) p38*

I see Helena as a highly proficient leader, who people (myself included) may judge harshly at times, when she adopts leadership registers normally associated with men. My guess is that she has some awareness of this and it may bother her. This was certainly the case when we discussed the story.

It was with a little trepidation that I gave her the story and again I had the conversation with her about reading it ‘as if it were for a book group’. I am conscious that I offer this story with the accompanying script quite lightly, almost playfully, and I intend by this a kind of ploy, to undermine (or is it inadvertently to underline?) my anxiety – to charm people into seeing this story as a ‘harmless’ gift, almost as if I don’t pretend very much by it. If so, this is a pretence, because I do mean a huge amount by it, but I notice this strategy as part of the living inquiry of this messy process, the ‘incitement to discourse’ as Lather calls it, (Lather 2001), and this is heightened when encountering power dynamics, like with someone in Helena’s position. It isn’t good or bad, unintended or intended; just a view of ‘coming clean’, in the half-light where intention, action and reflection meld and play like the flickering shadows of flames on a cave wall.

But I was buoyed by Helena’s initial response, in a snatched corridor conversation, which I recorded in my journal:

*“I am enjoying your story. I am being drawn into it, irrespective of the themes. I read lots of contemporary fiction and as a work of writing I found it a quality, engaging read. Let’s have a coffee and chat about it”  
“Bingo!” I think to myself. “Just what I was after”.*

I was very pleased when she said this, and only later did I reflect on the comment that perhaps, in being stroked, my ego led me to overlook: what did she mean by ‘irrespective of the themes’?

After a number of false starts, Helena and I did manage to catch up for a coffee, and this was against a backdrop of the organisation going through some tumultuous and controversial changes, in which she was a key player. To that extent, I was surprised that she chose to find the time to have a chat with me about the story I had written.

*Helena: Yes I did enjoy it. In fact I was very surprised. I don’t know what I was expecting but, you know I read a lot of contemporary fiction, really modern stuff*

*and this had a strength of narrative, a force that really grabbed me. I couldn't put it down. But it left me wondering - what is it?  
I think to myself: 'And here maybe we get to the nub of the issue about the 'irrespective of the themes' comment from before.'*

And we continue to pursue this thread and I am struck by a mental image of us walking slowly, side by side into a kind of pool or body of water together. I hold this picture in my head as we 'walk on'. I wonder what this pool is made of? The cold water of deeper, lurking questions? Was there was a frisson of sexuality in it? Or is it just entering another territory, another kind of world, a more private, submarine environment? I am not sure, but the image stays with me as we talk.

*J: How do you mean, 'what is it'?*

*H: I was impressed with the writing, so impressed but there was one thing that occurred to me. I wonder if it is possible for the story to be too good?*

*J: Too good?*

*H: Yes as if you are trying to draw people into particular themes and ideas, I mean I understand what you are getting at, about gender and so on, but there were parts of the story that really grabbed me, and I wonder if that means you actually lose the power of the gender themes because there were other parts of the story that worked so well and took one off in that direction. Does it detract by being a good story? I like fiction and yet I wondered – how do I engage with this? I mean, I will abandon a book pretty quickly if I think the author is thick, or the dialogue isn't believable or it just doesn't hang together. But here the content, the characters all worked, and so I didn't have to think about gender as a separate thing and I wonder – does that make it weaker or stronger?*

I take Helena to be complementing me on my writing, and I am chuffed by this. Her challenge about the story being 'too good' is a good one, and it concerns me. Have I 'dealt' with the power surfaces at Roffey by finessing them, and in my intention not to disturb it too much, have I felt the pool unstirred?

I also notice how this lands with me as 'important': here is a key player in my current political landscape complimenting me, giving me a real tick for talent. But is there (in the fact that Helena mentions specifically about the author being 'thick') a surfacing here of that mechanism of control around being seen as 'stupid'? Was I right therefore to fear this mechanism of control and 'punishment'? And what would the punishment have been? Would it have been simply that she wouldn't have engaged? Am I playing with this power dynamic, or *along* with it? Is this *dealing* with it?

There is no getting away from the sense of power between us. It is a noticeable in its ascent as was its waning with Steve. Yet that water, palpable and viscous, seemed to flow between us, as though describing the public/private boundaries we were on the edge of transgressing. I felt the danger of this territory and I meant then and mean now the utmost respect for Helena (and myself) in reporting it this way. This feels like an important quality of *mentshlichkeit*.

*Helena continues:*

*And so it introduced so many themes, so many ways of looking – I mean was it about gender or about sexuality? So it asked me for my views – like about sexuality and I think 'yeah – has it always been a binary for me?' and I found myself questioning about gender and how we are socialised into it. I really liked 'Part 3' and the blurring of gender boundaries and I found it difficult not to put them into categories. And I liked Part 1 and the young white girl versus the*

*older male professorial type. In the last scene I saw it like in a film, with just a screen, like a hologram and these very vague forms, almost without bodies. Is that what you meant to show?*

*J: No actually I saw them as a group of people and I saw the main character as like me, only feminine and the other character as her boss was a man - it is funny I tried so hard to make them androgynous but I still saw the more powerful characters as men and the nurturing, hard-working ones as female. I just couldn't really escape from my socialisation in my head, even if I did on paper*

I find the way in which people make a story their own a very moving and inspiring thing. But beyond this is the further possibility it opens up for me. Even I hadn't caught this until now; how in all my efforts, going through that Part 3 with a fine-toothed comb, trying to iron out all the gender wrinkles, in my head I still imagined all the more powerful characters as men and the less powerful (and more hard working!) ones as women. And the central character, Trem, I had seen as both myself *and* feminine. And here I was, talking this through with a woman in a position of power and we seemed to swirl in with the story in a transpersonal dance with it.

*H: That's funny isn't it because I had done so much with it that you haven't really intended! In my head I saw them like a loose form, sort of entities and at the head is this benign controlling power. I liked how gender has been ironed out, but yet there isn't equality necessarily.*

At this point there is a big pause, long and viscous, and I notice Helena's face perceptibly darken and colour. I tell her this, and she sighs:

*H: It's huge isn't it? So tentacled, the capillaried nature of it all. It is so hard to sort it, to do anything to make things better. Isn't it easier with, say, race – there's more public consciousness and discourse about it – I mean it's obvious – the sex organs are hidden and yet race is more visible. So how does the story help? Where do you start – it's so fucking big – why do I bother? Do I bother? How do you do your work with an organisation? It's too much, too big.  
J: I don't know. I don't know how it does. But I suppose I would ask – did I learn anything writing it? And I would say yes I did. I learnt just that: that things are this big and rooted and that therefore I feel less...compelled to sort it all out, and yet things change. Things are changing and I think it is that social constructionist thing: if we talk about it, 'language' it, then things do change, move on, we become part of a conversation. That is doing the work, rather than any great 'action plan', which is an idea that is the product of an older system, more rooted in patriarchy anyway.*

Oh no! Too many words! I notice my big, fat piece of interpretation. Did I even come across as patronising? I have a sense that I am rescuing her from the depths. Some hero! And why should I do that? Does she need my consolation in this way? Why not stay with the sense of...loss? Yet she seemed almost hopeless, and...vulnerable...and I felt drawn to put my proverbial arm around her; a big transgression, but *what the hell?* That's what I did. Did it help? What does help mean here? But something flowed as a result. Something was loosened, like a bolder at the bottom of a stream:

*H: Yes it's like the Obama thing – I read recently that whichever way we look at it, we are all becoming 'light brown' – that's why Obama is so inspiring. And these ideas do kind of take hold. In my book group, I suggested to someone in the group that they read this story, by this woman Norah...something...called*

*'Self Made Man', about a woman who spends a year as a man, and I suggested to this guy called Phil in the group and he read it and recommended it to someone else, and it ended up sort of doing the rounds, unofficially, without any promotion. All these themes about sexuality, gender, provocative stuff and it seeps in – it finds its ways in. It is interesting how stories can do that: create this undercurrent about things that have a life. Like Melissa [another colleague at Roffey], she read your story and she talked to me about it, about how it made her think about these things, and she said, it 'made me think about James'.*

*J: So there's this vibrant, private undercurrent and maybe that's how really edgy challenging stuff gets shifted, not in the public domain. It's like cabaret, playing out the underworld.*

*H: You know I've always wanted to do that here, cabaret, like a 'revue', where we could do these skits. Useful self-mockery, even some cross-dressing! It's like with the women's weekend here. I've always wanted to take it a bit further but I sense reluctance from others. I wanted to ask 'what does it really mean to be a woman'? I'd love to play with that a bit*

*J: What would you do?*

*H: I think I would dress differently...that would be start*

We talked some more about a plan which we haven't realised yet, to do a cross-dressing party at Roffey and there was a lightness and fun, flirtatious even (gulp!) to the end of our conversation and I felt the water flow around and way and the conversation ended there. I found the book she mentioned on 'Amazon.com', by Norah Vincent, called *Self Made Man*, although I haven't read it yet. Even now, and in the context of the roles we revert to in this challenging time within the organisation, the conversation has a sort of dream-like quality that makes me wonder – did it happen like this? I know I haven't captured a verbatim account of what we said (I wrote notes as we talked, but didn't make a recording, whereas I did with Steve). But I don't think it was very far from what was really said. I showed a draft of this chapter to Helena, and she agreed that it was fair account of the conversation. Interestingly, again, she specifically mentioned that the only thing she was a bit uncomfortable with was that she had used the word 'thick' (as in stupid).

It was an underwater, (underground) conversation, which in its registers, the flickering of light and dark, had a kind of healing quality to it, which perhaps is the role of transgressions like revues and cabarets, underscoring and undermining the certainties of public power plays just like Isherwood's novels did for 1930s Berlin (Isherwood 1993). I hope Helena found it useful in the same way. But how was this 'dealing with power issues at Roffey Park'?

So words did begin to make worlds here, even if there were other blaring discourses going on (like about credit crunch, global economic downturn, and redundancies), I feel hopeful that these loud voices haven't drowned out the possibilities of gender inquiry completely. Maybe for Helena it even provided a private, transgressive respite? Another question on the mind-map above was 'where's the financial benefit' and now, more than ever Roffey Park is driven by the need to make money, to survive. In the next Chapter I explore how such an inquiry into *mentshlichkeit* translates into the skill of practice for which I get paid.

I would reiterate the respect and gratefulness I felt towards Steve and Helena in having these liminal, transgressive conversations. And there is something to be said about Roffey Park, the place that pays for this inquiry, too. As my supervisor, Gill Coleman pointed out, when she read the draft of the story, there is something quite striking about a place where such conversations are possible. The conversations with

Steve and Helena weren't the only ones I had. There were a number of others with such depth and richness, as the excerpts at the beginning of this Chapter show. However, these felt like ones that, due to the power relations involved, offered good examples of the incitement to discourse I intended by writing the story.

But now there is more to be said about my practice, as a 'consultant' and how this is given 'legs' by my inquiry into such 'mentslichkeit', the supposed art of being a good man.

## Interlude – ‘So, what difference does it make?’ asked Dr. Sarah Jones?

Sarah placed the manuscript down on her desk, with a thud.

- That’s a lot to read - she murmured to herself. Reading students’ theses was daunting. She felt terribly obligated by it. It hadn’t been long since she had been in that position herself. But part of her felt insecure – what was a good job here? How did she know what would constitute quality? How was she an ‘expert’ in this? She began to read, and whilst there were details that caught her attention, as she scribbled notes in the margin, there was something here that shook her. She momentarily closed the cover to look at the title page. No, it was the student’s name she found. Yet it echoed so many of the themes from...someone else. There wasn’t a hint of plagiarism. It was very unique. But it was also so...familiar. She read on, intrigued.

A week later and there is a knock on the door. The student pops his head round the door.

- Ah. Dr. Jones. You’re in. Is now a good time?

- It is the time we suggested.

- Yes. Absolutely.

The student comes in and sits. She studies him. Similar build perhaps. Not quite as tall. Slightly wider...perhaps younger? Sarah continues.

- So you must be keen to have a chat about your writing?

She is conscious she has skipped the niceties. This is a habit of hers and her voice trails off slightly. People say she can come across a bit brusque, too business-like, too ‘transactional’. She doesn’t think she is. She thinks people notice it more, because she’s a woman. Anyhow, the student seems encouraged:

- Yes, please go ahead

- I really liked it. I don’t know you very well, but I got a real sense of you from your writing. I felt really *held*, and engaged. You’ve done a lot of work. Well done. There are some things to discuss of course.

- Yes please, go ahead. I’m keen to finish.

- Oh yes, I can remember that feeling!

A small ripple of laughter softens the space between them.

- Ok. I’ll cut to the chase. That’s very ‘me’, anyway. I’d like to start with Chapter Five.

Suddenly the window bangs shut. A lash of rain batters the glass. She starts:

- This weather!! Another month of it. Did you get here OK?

He sighs:

- It was a bit of a struggle. There were convoys on the roads, moving away from the coast. I don’t live that far but it took most of yesterday. But people were friendly enough. It is easy to hitch a lift these days.

- People do seem to be pulling together. ‘Blitz Spirit’ and all that.

She momentarily thinks of her baby son, and of her husband, not far away, safe, but nevertheless...

In the same moment, the student speaks:

- It does make me wonder of course.

- What does?

- All of this. You know. Whether it is worth it.

She finds her voice. A resolve tightens inside her:

- On the contrary. I think this work, what we do here, is somehow more important than ever. Let’s get back to it, shall we?

- Yes. Of course. You were saying. Chapter Five?

- Yes. Particularly the conversation with your colleagues

- Steve and Helena.

- Yes that’s right. I had two main questions really. One is a detail, and the other a more general point. But perhaps they are linked. [Then, remembering herself:] I mean, I liked the Chapter. I liked the interweaving of dialogues [she thought to herself...shall I

mention...? But no, not yet]. How the characters come alive; the interplay between form and content. But the first question I had was about the letter.

- The letter.

- Yes, from Steve. You chose to reprint it in full. Without in some way 'working it', as data. I wondered, why? Wait! Before you answer, are you recording this?

- No – good point. I'll switch my machine on. There.

- Good because you might want to capture this.

- Yes. So. The letter. To be honest, when I received it, I was blown away by it. What I haven't said is how unusual it was, out of the blue. I realize now that is in the background, which of course I haven't shown. So I can explain now: Steve was, is, a very private person. Behind the letter was a silence that I haven't mentioned; the silence of the lack of an emotional voice *before* he sent that letter. Part of his shtick, his persona was to be very closed about himself. As a leader, this seemed like a real strategy, his mystique. So to get this letter from him, it was like a real flood, (Oh, perhaps not a very sensitive metaphor in current circumstances), but it *was*, like, a wave of emotion, a real hidden transcript made public. It was as if the story made it possible to open up in a way that was really surprising. It was so *charged* with emotion. What I wanted to show was that charge, in full. Interesting that it didn't quite work, for you.

- I saw the emotion, but there are things in it, things he says, which could do with exploration.

- Like – what do you notice?

- The question, he asks for instance about how will you feel when your children read it?

- That's a real challenge. To be honest, it feels like...unfinished business. I'm Ok with that; quite excited by the prospect of it in fact. One day they will read this, perhaps, I *hope* they do, and then the story might have another turn. I can't imagine what that is now, but it feels like a mark of quality that the story will continue, long after this process is over. They may worry about what I might do next. Sometimes I think about that. Am I going to do a 'Jim' and disappear? But actually, I think, this thesis was my disappearing. I've spent so much time away from them, working on this. I look forward to it being over, and then I can be with them some more.

- And his challenge about who's 'missing'?

- I am not quite sure who he means. Clearly, many people have mentioned to me about my wife's absence. But I have always been clear: I have respected the boundary she laid down at the beginning of this. That's all I can say. It feels very relevant to *mentshlichkeit*, being a good man, to respect that boundary. As to anyone else who is 'missing', I am not sure who he might mean?

- No, yes, I thought he meant your wife too.

- But I am OK with that boundary. I think it might say more about Steve, and where he was going, in his relationship.

- So it was about showing the 'emotional charge' as you say, which in some way 'deals' with the power dynamic, by opening a hidden transcript, an emotional register?

- Yes that's right, although of course, the story caught Steve just as the power relationships were changing and he had chosen to leave Roffey. That's why the counterpoint between him and Helena is so intriguing. My hope is that the story inquiry process enabled some kind of transition between them, almost at a transpersonal level, it may have helped, some kind of healing. But that might be too big a claim.

- It would be hard to evidence.

- Well, it *feels* right. And Helena did say, when I showed her the draft, that reading it had made her more 'forgiving' of Steve, in all the chaos of their handover, with the redundancies and all. I'd love to believe that I am showing here how *mentshlichkeit*, being a 'good man', within the surfaces of power and its transitions is about supporting some healing; that the process that I introduced here helped Roffey in some way. It

would have been an unintended consequence, and big claim, but even if it did a little bit, that would make me very happy. Dealing with power as facilitating and healing...

- That brings me onto my second question. I wondered, you know, at the end of it all, what difference did it make? Did it change anyone, their behaviour? This is *action* research after all. I'm sorry. I have a bit of track record with this question.

The student's face was blank.

- Never mind. I am interested though. How else do you think it made a difference?

- Turning to Helena for a moment, again there's a definite hidden transcript surfacing. Clearly there is a hinting, a flirting with sexuality which is usually so taboo in organisations. I felt I had to be really respectful about that, but the metaphor of the water flowing between us (again, not surprising in the circumstances) felt like a vernacular that enabled us to shed some light on that surface.

- But what about the difference? Is there anything more?

- What was interesting was what happened when I showed Helena the draft of the chapter.

- Yes.

- She told me that, in the course of reading it, she was also multi-tasking, you know, sending out emails and so on. And there was this one email, which I was a recipient of, amongst others, which was quite strident, and it was quickly followed by another, which apologized for the tone of the first and said the same things, but in more... conciliatory style. It was later that day that we met to discuss the chapter and she said the second email was a direct response to her reading the Chapter. It's not a big thing, but it felt, somehow, significant, as if there was a small element of 'speaking the truth to power', in a way that she could hear it.

- It interesting though, isn't it, that for a woman leader, the message is, 'tone it down', be softer. This is close to my heart. Would a man have to tone it down that way?

- That's a good challenge. I don't know. This does suggest a different kind of pressure on women leaders. But she seemed to think that it had helped her. And of course, she was feeling the pressure of carrying the organisation through a difficult time, having to make people redundant. Steve had left before that. I felt for her. And around this time, I am sure now she was thinking of leaving. Because that is what she has done.

- Gosh! Really? She has left too! Oh that's interesting.

- Yes. Again I wouldn't claim that she left as a direct result of this inquiry process of course. But it was like, you know, when her face darkened and I fed that back to her? There was definitely a moment there, a kind of connection being made; maybe even slightly enlightening. I can't confidently claim an impact like that, but in this kind of work, it is that kind of synchronicity that says something. It isn't about direct causality. It may be just about being part of a stream.

- Was that when she mentioned about being uncomfortable about using the word 'thick'?

- Yes that was the same conversation.

- That's really interesting. You mention that in the chapter. It seems significant, but I'm not sure why?

- It just occurred to me that there was a bit of a policing going on. I caught it in my own fear about what people would think when they read the story; that I was stupid. That was my worst fear. And I did wonder if that was one of those mechanisms of punishment that Foucault discusses, you know, that we internalize? In a place like Roffey Park, being seen as 'stupid' is somehow really unacceptable. I have talked with a good friend at Roffey, about how she often feels like she can't live up to expectation of expert in the place. That she feels she isn't 'clever' enough. It relates to the political economy of the place; we need to show how 'clever' we are in order to make sure that we are a worthwhile for companies to spend their money with us. By and large, people's view about knowledge is that it is fixed and propositional. It is about details and 'facts', tools and techniques, rather than practices. It's what Bateson said about 'substance' rather than 'form', as I said in Chapter Two. Our 'knowledge' is in what

substance we can dissect. And then Helena mentions it when we talk about the story, and then again, as a subtext, as the only thing she was uncomfortable about in the Chapter. Not the sexual stuff, but *that*.

- Yes that does suggest something going on there.

- But then, how does this sit alongside the 'expert masculinity' that I talk about? The idea of staying with the edge of *not* knowing? And it cuts to the heart of my quandary in this PhD. What am I becoming an expert *in*? How will I cope with the expert masculinity of a PhD? Will it somehow re-create the position of expert, moving me away from the creative 'edge'? These are real fears I have. That leads me to Chapter Six.

The time had come for the student to leave. Sarah felt like she couldn't hold the tension any longer, and decided to ask:

- Listen, I know it sounds odd. But, the name Dr. Jim Porter: does it mean anything to you. I mean, beyond your own inquiry?

The student was puzzled.

- No. Er. No, I don't think so. Why?

Sarah waved away the moment.

- Oh it's nothing, really. It is just that I knew a Dr. Jim Porter. A real one. And he was also interested in gender and masculinity. And he was Jewish.

- Really!? Your kidding! That's such a coincidence! I must get in touch with him. Have you got a number for him? Where does he work? Where is he now?

The student's fumbling for a pen and paper was halted by Sarah's answer.

- That's just it. No-one knows where he is.

## Chapter Six – A Good Man at Work

In the last chapter, I have shown how I have stretched this inquiry out to engage with some of my colleagues, within Roffey Park. Now I aim to show how I stretch it further, beyond my organisation, towards those of the clients we work with at Roffey Park. In other words, how can I inquire into *mentshlichkeit* in the practice of my role in the work I am paid to do for Roffey Park?

\* \* \*

- A few days later, the student is in front of her again. Sarah leaned back in her chair.
- So now we come to the last chapter. I think this one is particularly important, because it is about you in your work. I think it is about responding to the challenge in that mind map – the ‘financial benefit’ your colleagues talked about.
  - Yes their challenge was about ‘where’s the financial benefit in this?’
  - What do you think they meant by that?
  - I think they meant looking at gender and masculinity. The discussion, as far as I remember, was about how issues at Roffey Park, like gender, only get attention if it’s perceived that they can be earned from. Otherwise they remain marginal.
  - Is that a fair challenge?
  - Yes I think it is. There is a sense of urgency at Roffey to make money, to survive, particularly heightened by the economic downturn. But for me the issue here becomes about what we are expert *in*. What do we ‘know’ about, that is worth buying? And this has resonance with my concern that I can be seduced into being the ‘expert’; that this is a particular, hegemonic spectre of masculinity I can become haunted by. Hence my use of long words. This takes a further twist with this PhD in itself. It carries with it a badge of expertise. If I’m honest, I would say I want that badge, and I am uncomfortable about that. But I also am hungry for the learning that comes with it. But which is the ‘good’ motive? Another edge - this one is really important. It has been with me all along.
  - So this chapter aims to explore how you practice staying on your edge, what did you call it, the edge of ‘*not* knowing’?
  - I’d like to believe it’s as simple as that. It’s a seductive idea. But I think there is a deeper challenge here. I think that there really is so much I *don’t* know, that I spend much of my time *not* being sure, but that in languaging things I have become good at/skilled at performing ‘expert’, languaging it (not just with words, but with my body)...As Philip Corrigan says:

*I am trying to say that language embodies power never more strongly/magically as where it renders bodies powerless. We have been colonized through the enforced modalities of required, encouraged, rewarded discursivity. (Corrigan 1988) p375*

What does he mean by ‘language rendering bodies powerless’? It is like that moment when you are standing in front of a group, talking about things, being the ‘teacher’ and you have the capacity to put an idea into words, to ar-ti-cu-late it, in a particular way that captures, ‘magically’, these eyes and ears looking at you. It’s just like Jim does in the interlude at the very beginning of the thesis, before Chapter One. How everyone, (except the young woman) just seems to lap up the ideas, because he puts them so well.

- Oh I remember that very well. But isn’t that because the ideas make sense, in themselves? They are ‘Reasonable’.
- Of course, but *other* ideas also make sense, even oppositional ones. Like Corrigan asks: ‘Whose ‘Reason’? And one day someone comes along with the ability to articulate a counter argument that makes just as much sense. (This is the nature of the academic method, after all), but before that, in that moment, when we ‘have the group’, isn’t that what Corrigan describes as our being ‘colonized’ through rewarded

discursivity'. We actually colonize, capture and turn to our own purposes these bodies? Borrowing from that Jewish subjectivity, it is like the 'dybbuk' again, a 'particular powerful spirit that enters the body of another'. The academic masculinity is all about the capacity to make that sense, to haunt in that way. Sometimes, it may be just because I am a white, middle class, well-spoken man, that I am *believed*, my ideas are accepted.

- It reminds me of something I heard about the link between 'glamour' and 'grammar' - those who controlled the grammar had the glamour. But where does this get us? Doesn't it lead to a kind of paralysis; a moral vacuum, where anyone with the capacity to articulate becomes the coloniser? Isn't this the worst kind of post-modern argument? It all comes down to fight for control of the means of articulating and distributing ideas.

- I don't know. That's a fair challenge. But there is another way of looking at it. I can embrace my not knowing. It can become a starting point for inquiry. It fits my Jewish subjectivity, because Judaism has in it a long tradition that recognises the limits of what we can know; the humility of knowing there will always be much more to know than we are in the position, right now, to understand. As it says in the Talmud:

*Seek not the things that are too hard for you and search not the things that are hidden from you. The things that have been permitted you, think thereupon.*

*These are your portion. But you have no business with the things that are secret. (Weiner 1969, 1992) p3*

- Isn't that just an old cult controlling the ignorant, keeping them under control? Another type of colonisation?

- Yes, that is one way to look at it. There must be many interpretations. The Talmud is all about multiple interpretations, other voices speaking into the text of the Torah. An interpretation I choose is to recognise the mystery; I find it a good challenge to my white, western, academic masculinity to suggest that there is so much more I just *don't know* right now than I do. It disrupts the tendency to go into the position of expert. It tarnishes the glamour of being the knower. It's actually O.K. I find it usefully humbling, and reassuring. It doesn't stop me wanting to know things. Far from it, it suggests I know 'my portion', as the Talmudic saying goes. This is about 'thinking upon the things you do know'. It is the starting point for inquiry.

- So how does this fit with being a good man and earning money for Roffey Park?

- I think it opens up an interesting challenge. I need to walk a very fine line, an edge if you like. With clients, I need to present myself as the 'glamorous knower'. Otherwise they won't want to spend money with me. So being the knower is a necessary position in order for a place like Roffey Park to survive. This is why my services are sold as a 'Senior Consultant'. But I also want to embrace a way to practice 'not knowing' as a deconstruction of white, male academic masculinity that I can be seduced into being. Between these two positions is a fertile seam, a territory to inquire into.

- It does beg a couple of questions though. Like why should Roffey Park survive?

- At one level the answer to that is easy. I am obliged to the place. It feeds me, I care about it. It feeds my family through the work I do there. It feeds this inquiry process (by paying my University fees). In that sense I owe it. Also, broadly, it is a place that supports good learning, like this. It may be driven sometimes, out of anxiety (as we all are) to bring in the cash, but it does have at its heart the motivation to do good in the world. It is a charitable foundation, with the expressed mission of '*conducting, promoting and supporting for the benefit of the public research into questions affecting the health and welfare of all those engaged in industry, commerce and the public services.*' But it's also because there are people there to whom I am attached. It is my Community, and this research has made it more so. It isn't perfect by any means, but it is worthwhile. So the short answer is: I *choose* to support its survival. Such a choice fits the purpose of being a good man. It's where I find myself.

- OK, but I have another question. What's so bad about being the white, male, academic, glamorous knower?

- I think because I see in it some dishonesty. I know in my heart that I can colonise bodies through my ar-ti-cu-la-tion. I choose to inquire into being a good man. So there is a genuine gap of inquiry here, a truly *mentshlich* dilemma if you like. I have to do both: live with being both the seductive glamorous knower and the *not* knower. That's what I am interested in inquiring into here, in this chapter.

## Deep and Wide

I aim to show through two practice accounts of my work as at Roffey Park how action research may work as a register of in-the-moment attention to a set of values, how they are lived and not, 'living life as inquiry' as Judi Marshall says:

*By living life as inquiry I mean a range of beliefs, strategies, and ways of behaving which encourage me to treat little as fixed, finished, clear cut. Rather I have an image of living continually in process, adjusting, seeing what emerges, bringing things into question. This involves, for example, attempting to open to continual question what I know, feel, do and want, and finding ways to engage actively in this questioning and process its stages. (Marshall 1999) p156-157*

I am offering an account of 'deep practice'; one that aims to show the challenges of this questioning process in some moment-to-moment detail; and 'wide practice' that sets this into contrast against an account over an extended period of time.

\* \* \*

- Ok, so what is the way you are going to 'process the stages', as Judi Marshall suggests? She's suggesting inquiry and action research can have a systematic programme too.
- What do you think?
- The accounts of your practice below. Is that what you wrote in your first draft?
- Yes that's it, pretty much.
- So it they stand as accounts, as 'data', warts and all?
- Yes I suppose they do.
- So let's go through it, together and see if we can systematically hold an inquiring gaze into it, together. Rather than editing out your foibles, let's look at them and see what they reveal, about the practice of being a good man.
- Sounds edgy! How do we do that?
- Which practices of inquiry that have emerged in the thesis so far, do you think would be most relevant to use?
- This dialogic process really helps. What Bateson says about continuing a conversation, a 'metalogue' between people and nature? He talked about how the problem at hand and the structure of the conversation can be congruent. And here's a man and a woman talking about a man's practice with an eye to gender. I'd like to keep your voice in anyway. I like your pragmatic edge.
- He said *man* and nature actually.
- Yes I noticed that too – thought I could get away with it...!
- Sure you did! You know, as a woman, it bothers me how ...*used to* that kind of thing I get.
- And as a man, trying to be *mentshlich*, I feel uncomfortable about it, never quite sure what I should do...
- O.K. Anyway, as the pragmatic woman (!), let's continue. So we fold the dialogue in. That's agreed. What else?
- I'd like to spot where I am coming from a place of 'expert' and where I am staying with the edge of not knowing I've been exploring in this inquiry, and see if ultimately I can surface a practice that helps me successfully navigate between those two.

- OK, so that's 1) dialogue, 2) expert v's not knowing. A tool and a target to aim for. Excellent. Anything else?
  - I don't think so. Apart from just looking at it as story, and inquiring into it to see what this throws up, in the context of *menstlichkeit* in practice
  - Ok. Let's go.
- \* \* \*

### **Deep Practice - The Gender Professor**

I was approached by the Head of Business School of a University in the UK. His remit was to launch a set of 'executive education' programmes. 'Executives' in this instance was a loosely defined term. By and large, it meant managers in a business setting, who would buy places on these short programmes to improve their skills as such. These programmes were seen as an opportunity to bring in some income into the school in order to support its wider teaching and research aims. My role, as a Senior Consultant on behalf of Roffey Park, was to spend two days with the faculty team, a group of specialists at Senior Lecturer and Professor level, to enable them to transform their teaching style into one suitable for a more 'executive' clientele. My work was entitled 'facilitation skills training'.

The Head of the School briefed me that this training was quite controversial, and had varying degrees of support from within the faculty. These are highly-qualified academic staff. They are being required to fulfil a commercial imperative for their employer, the Business School. Of course this imperative has behind it the ideological struggles and wider dilemmas reflecting the political economy of higher education in the 2000s. But arguably the power dynamics impinge on this group, at a local level, with quite some considerable force. In short, for some, it is seen as an opportunity to develop their teaching range; for others, I wondered whether they saw it more as a kind of exploitation; that this was another added job on their already full list. No-one other than the Head had a chance to express this formally to me. I only had only met with him before the training, apart from a brief meeting with one of his colleagues, a Professor of Gender Studies, who is the focus of the reflections below. (I had asked for some time to speak privately with all the faculty members, individually, beforehand, but this would have meant them spending more money than they wanted to on preparation time. So one of the contexts for this was of having had very little time to establish a relationship with any of them before the training began, something I was uncomfortable about).

I was aware of marginal signals of acquiescence, enthusiasm and protest. Acquiescence, in that everyone who was ostensibly on the list turned up, at least on 'day 1'. Enthusiasm, in that most did engage with energy in the training (About 10 out of the 12). And protest, in that two didn't turn up on the second day.

I wondered about my role in this scene. If their job is to become soldiers of the mercenary academic economy, my job is to be their sergeant major, encouraging and cajoling them over the top towards the guns. Of course, there are other views. It could equally be argued, using another metaphor that my role was to act as a kind of midwife, helping the knowledge they had as a faculty to be born in a new context. Perhaps there is some truth in both of these metaphors, but poignantly, the sense I had of myself was more the former than the latter.

I do not want to tell this story as if it were a fully-formed account of some victory. As I write it, I am tracking the possibilities of inquiry as they open and shut before me.

\* \* \*

- Let's pause there, for a moment and look at this 'frame'
- You mean the background, the setting? Yes. I am conscious, reading it now, of so many possible inquiry 'portals'. Actually I am squirming here. So many glaring assumptions.
- There are a few things worthy of inspection. But in inquiry, you just have to step back a bit, and be prepared to unpick the useful things, with out too much defensiveness. It is natural to feel self-conscious. The key question is: what's relevant to your inquiry purpose here? There are always aspects of an account your can interrogate. But what sheds light on your knowing 'expert' vs not knowing, or *mentshlichkeit*?
- There are number of things that really strike me straight away. All the labels for example. *Head of Business School. Senior Consultant. Senior Lecturers and Professors, Executives.*
- Isn't that just the world you move in? The relationship between status and role?
- Yes it is. I *have* to work in that world, and it is seductive (I quite *like* the status of it). The role status is the entry ticket to the game. But then how much do I get taken *over* by it? It's the entry music of that spectre, that *dybbuk* of masculine reason. So these labels might be signifiers of a key territory of the 'hegemonic' expert masculinity. I have to use the status of my role, and how am I *seduced* by it, and how do I spot it and plot my escape?
- What was the other point you wanted to make?
- It was about the tensions and conflicts in the group, between the Head of the School and those who didn't really want to learn to deliver 'executive' programmes. About being the 'sergeant major' more than the midwife.
- Yes I had some questions about that. I felt for you actually. Clearly there were some struggles here around getting in.
- Yes it felt like I had very little time to establish any relationships. They wouldn't pay for my time to do that.
- Was that deliberate? Did they deliberately try and keep you at arms length?
- No I don't think so. Not consciously anyway. I actually got on well with the Head of School. He was quite endearing, a bit bumbly. He had agreed that I should spend time getting to know the faculty. But later he said he had been leaned on to cut the budget and couldn't pay for any of my development time. I could have offered to do it for free but Roffey wouldn't have liked that. So I felt a bit pressured to just 'get on with it'.
- So you were a bit 'thrown in' to this?
- Yes it felt like that.
- So how much of a parallel is there between their sense of acquiescence and protest (where they had that) and your own?
- Gosh, I hadn't spotted that. Yes I suppose there was a parallel there. I suppose we all felt, at some level, a bit like we were acquiescing here. The Head of the School felt arm-twisted by the Dean, the participants by him; me, by the need to just parachute in and run the training. We were all 'sent over the top...' Interesting how in some way I was holding myself separate, as if they were the exploited or acquiescing ones and I was the one who was 'OK'...No wonder I felt more like a soldier than a midwife...
- Interesting. So part of your mystique is blown away. You aren't in some way squeaky clean, and I wonder if that is reflected in what unfolds...

\* \* \*

One of the people involved was a Professor of Management with a specialisation around Gender Studies. Let's call her Esther. As soon as I heard that she had such a research focus (before the course began, in our brief meeting), my interest (and my anxiety) was triggered. Interest because of course this is close to my heart, but whereof my anxiety? Was it because of my own need to 'prove' my credentials in this area? Or because this was all so archly relevant to my inquiry? Or because I was uncomfortable with the role I was playing, in the light of feminist subjectivities? Or all of

the above? I track these both because they are relevant to the events that unfolded; part of my own internal narrative.

I had asked all the course participants, including Esther, to be prepared to offer a 15 minute practice session, in which they would work with the other group members as if they were 'executive' delegates, and then receive feedback. Esther chose to offer a session where she would facilitate a discussion around the question she wanted to explore; 'Why do women find it hard to get to the top of organisations?'

I considered Esther, both before and during this session, as someone who is complying, but with some discomfort. I see her as on the horns of a multitude of dilemmas, many of which I would suggest I share, but some that I, as a man, I could not. Not in the least, my 'guestimate' is that she herself may well at times have faced the very dynamics she is inciting the group to explore with her in her 'practice' session, within and around this very group, her faculty colleagues. I am also informed by my own experience of running 'gender' courses: the uncomfortable truth is that organisations are structurally hostile to women (and other marginal groups) making progress. The literature on this abounds, for example, Amanda Sinclair argues that there are four 'stages' in 'executive culture' development that organisations need to go through in order to deal with this hostility:

1. Denial - No problem
2. The problem is Women
3. Incremental Adjustment
4. Commitment to a new culture

Sinclair's view is that it is relatively (and lamentably) rare for organisations to progress to the latter stages, 'doing leadership differently, as she calls it:

*"These are substantial hurdles to doing leadership differently. They are deeply embedded in cultural mythology, in economic structures and in social expectations. And they are reinforced in, and largely unquestioned by, the substantial annals of leadership theory." (Sinclair 1998, 2005) p179*

This 'theoretical' narrative runs a fascinating loop through the story of my work with Esther. We had briefly 'touched base' on our common interest in gender over coffee break before the training. She had mentioned Amanda Sinclair's work and I had said that I had met her at a *Gender, Work and Organisations* Conference in 2005 (see Chapter Two). I was aware that this became a kind of shorthand, a coded reference to a discourse that added weight to the space between us; almost like a field that had been momentarily electrified. It was even (I hoped – I intended) a discourse of resistance, a 'hidden transcript' to use James Scott's term (Scott 1990). But I was also aware of perhaps embodying something else in this electrified space. In my rush to show my credentials, that I had met Amanda Sinclair, was I also in fact embodying a kind of dominance, playing the game of academic competitiveness? Was her hesitancy, what I perceived as a kind of nervousness, a *reaching out* (to a fellow subversive), a *withdrawing* (when met by a competitive male fellow 'academic') or just *her*? Ultimately, whether this was in the service of a nefarious political economy or not, my heart went out to Esther, as a woman leader struggling with the paradoxes that she herself would (bravely) front in her practice session.

As we embarked on this session, I reflected on my own cynicism: that I if I was with this group, practising in this way, I just 'wouldn't go there', on *this* question with *this* group of people. My fantasy is that something would happen that would 'trigger' me; usually somebody would say something overly prejudiced, or naïve and I would get

angry. I had done this type of session many times before, with men during my time with the 'Navigator' programme, and with mixed groups after that.

So was Esther brave or naïve? In truth I never made up my mind on this one. But as she began, I was aware of sitting in the group of 10 or so people, opposite her, and willing her on, silently cheerleading. My intention was to show her great support; this was a role that I had investment in as the meta-facilitator of this programme anyway, but with an added piquancy. But I wonder how my fear for her showed up? Anyhow, for the next fifteen minutes I was aware of having my teeth firmly clamped across my tongue.

Even when we don't speak, we speak. I am not the sort of person who easily hides their emotions anyway. I am sure my face and body betrayed a whole range of highs and lows during that conversation. On reflection though, above all my guess is that what emanated from me was energy of engagement; Esther would have known at the very least that I was extremely interested in what she was doing, and I hope and have decided that this cannot have done much else but encourage her. Was I encouraging her to do the right thing, using my private self in the service of 'good work', work that 'invites the development of craft-like skills and aesthetic judgment (whether in the realm of materials, relationships, or of language)'? (Fisher, Rooke et al. 2000).

She began her session by outlining the question: 'Why do women find it hard to get to the tops of organisations?' She invited the group to come up with reasons why this was the case which she outlined on the flipchart. Although this was a practice session, her colleagues entered into the discussion with enthusiasm and from what I could see, took it very seriously. At one point, one of them, an expert in 'business process management', said that he thought women didn't get to the top because you have to be 'mean' to get to the top and women weren't 'mean' enough. For me, this was a trigger moment: a moment of supreme (gender) naivety from someone highly qualified, a Professor, who 'should know better'. Now when I look back, I can see myself as arrogant and judgemental, as well self-righteous, in taking that position. In the moment, I was 'grabbed', but again I held my tongue. I watched Esther studiously. She seemed at that point to be avoiding my eye contact (with which she had been prolific beforehand). Her face seemed to flicker very, very slightly, and she stood, quite slowly and walked to the flip chart and wrote up the words '*women not 'mean' enough*', with studied deliberateness.

My heart was beating. I said nothing (it wasn't in my remit to speak at this point) but I mentally egged her on. To what? I wanted her to let rip. Part of me simply noted that I must praise her (in my role) for *just writing up what the participant had said* - central to the core canon of good facilitation skills. I also wonder whether this was just facilitation practice session on some Friday afternoon, without very much moment to it, after all. But part of me saw this as a huge, defining, act of resistance and compliance, hand in hand, the overt transcript of playing along with this game and the hidden transcript of writing this phrase up, with a particular poise, pace, and mood; a body redolent with such irony that it seemed to drip off and pool on the floor at her feet.

*"Bodies and bodily performances – including physical stature, features, stance, gestures and voice – are central, yet ignored, elements in the accomplishment of leadership" (Sinclair 2005)*

And my own body resonated with her and part of me just wanted to laugh. And, perhaps unaware, I did.

For me, there was a field grace in the room (was it all hers? – did I in any way have a right to claim a role in this field?), an electric fizz, and the sun conspired (in my memory) to slant obliquely into the room at just that moment. And part of me knows that this group may well be an ‘easy group’ to work with around this question, and that an ‘executive group’ may be much more polarised and prejudiced in such a discussion. I felt a strong need to convey this to her; I suppose my intention was one of protectiveness – again a disposition fraught with dangers: was I being hugely patronising or a supportive brother-in-arms, or just teaching my grandmother to suck eggs, or all of these things, and more, that you can spot, which are currently blind to me?

Such ‘gender interference patterns’ as Judi Marshall calls them, (Marshall 1999) can have a paralysing impact – there is a danger that in considering all of these subjectivities we can fail to do anything. But I think what action research suggests is that we act whilst carrying the sometimes painful awareness as much as we can. It is in spite of, even because of these doubled and tripled challenges that we learn action in compassion. These intersecting concerns and considerations must galvanise us rather than paralyse us. It is, as I have described elsewhere, the making of an ‘edge’. We hold intention and intervention in an imperfect relationship and then do some more acting.

So in her feedback session, I said something like:

*“I really admire the way you kept your cool in a discussion that ranged over areas I am sure you have strong feelings about. And you may have to do even more of that with ‘executives’ because their position on these issues may be more naïve than this group.”*

In hindsight I’d like to think that I was *acting (speaking)* here with a view in my work to what Meyerson and Scully call ‘tempered radicalism’ (Meyerson and Scully 1995). I also think that there were other forces. When I look at these words I also observe an attempt at a politically astute register in our voices across the space between us. In Baddeley and James’ ‘political skills’ model, they talk about a spectrum a between ‘owl-like’ (wise) behaviour and ‘fox-like’ (clever) behaviour. (Baddeley and James 1987). The difference is the degree to which one is operating with an intention to ‘integrity’ (i.e. with an anchor in a value-base) or whether out of self-interest. This is another tension that I can see myself holding to; after all, my primary client (and her boss), the head of the business school, is in the room. How owl-like was I in my work with Esther, and how fox-like? I am conscious that this is just one possible account of the story, but what I have aimed to illustrate is the degree to which being a ‘good man’ is a process of ongoing, in-the-moment reflection with attention to espoused and lived values. I have been scant at the end of the account in showing about *how* I said what I said. My memory is that I may have aimed to mirror the studied, careful phrasing that Esther herself was showing. I intended a signal to her in this way. How it landed is harder to know. There wasn’t (has not yet been) a space of clarifying discourse between us. So often, there is indeed no such space. I would suggest that it may have landed as open-hearted, warm and helpful *and* may have been patronising, harsh, even a warning. Who knows depends on who’s looking. But I was *persisting*, acting in the face of conflictedness, and perhaps, momentarily, making a deeper connection, and rising above these tensions.

This amounts to what Wolgemuth and Donahue call an inquiry of discomfort (Wolgemuth and Donohue 2006). There are aspects of this account that leave me feeling this discomfort, in questions such as:

- Was I colluding with the system or challenging it?

- How does this account show where I 'persist or desist' as Judi Marshall describes our living in the action turn?

*"It may sometimes be appropriate to engage in wholehearted self-sacrifice in order to stand for, and so make possible, changes which require this kind of vision and courage. Alternatively, I would argue that staying in a situation beyond one's capacity for flexibility can be dangerous for both the person concerned and the system. The intending change agent becomes too much part of the system after a time and so loses effectiveness." (Marshall 1999) p167*

My sense of both my own position and that of Esther, and perhaps one we created between us relationally, had nuances of both persisting and desisting. It is in the nature of in-the-moment action and reflection to maintain attention to the discomfort, physical, psychological, emotional, that will be a *signal* of good practice. If you are uncomfortable, perhaps this is the price you pay for staying near the edge?

And, how does a political sensitivity in this way cross-cut the objectives of 'playing with' the nuances and body possibilities, as Amanda Sinclair calls them and playing *against* my espoused values of being a 'good man' (Sinclair 2005)? The attention to this question isn't a 'done deal', sorted in the process of action and the account of the action afterwards; it is an ongoing reflexive process, and it demands that we attend to these accounts repeatedly, in a cyclical, deepening process.

\* \* \*

- Ok, so I see you struggling with bringing your reflection into your practice, and my heart goes out to you, in the same way your heart went out to Esther. This is hard work, operating at lots of levels.

- Thanks

- But I'm not letting you off the hook.

- No I didn't think you would

- There's plenty here to inquire into here. For example, I am wondering about your 'discomfort', you know, as you talk about it, as a quality of your *mentshlichkeit*. Doesn't it just mean that you put too much weight by these nuanced, subtle 'moments'? I mean, part of me just wondered whether, to be provocative here, this isn't just a lot of fuss about nothing. It's like you said at one point: this could just be a facilitation practice session, on a Friday afternoon without very much moment at all'. How does discomfort here, staying on this edge of concentrated attention to the relationships, serve your work? Won't some people just ignore their discomfort?

- Yes they might, of course. But I am choosing not to, because it serves many purposes, at the core of this inquiry. I don't think *all* discomfort serves me; it is just a signal, a sign to go towards (rather than away from) what most people, dare I say most men, or at least people working according to the dominant (male) frame, might move away from. To say this is 'fuss about nothing' shows how easily we may disappear relational aspects of what we do and privilege...what else? 'Getting the job done'? What's the job? Who says? Usually 'the job' looks like something men usually do, and the 'fuss' is what women do. So to move towards this world, and to open it up, disestablishes the tendency to see these relationships as a by-product. They become the main focus. An inquiring masculinity is a masculinity that takes more responsibility for something women usually do, even if it looks a little 'queer'. It brings these relationships into the public sphere, working against the 'disappearing acts', as Joyce Fletcher calls them, intentionally attending to relational practice. (Fletcher 1999)

- But then who decides on the quality of these relationships; who assesses their quality?

- I think we have to work hard to constantly reassess these, and to *show* this work. It requires vigilance. Showing this vigilance is the quality of this work. I mean, in the light of what we were saying, I wonder now about my assessment of Esther

- How so?

- I do think she was complying, with some discomfort, but was I trying to engage her in my subversion, rather than the other way around? Maybe I am the naïve one here?

- It does seem to me that you are expecting quite a lot of ‘Professors’, as people who ‘should know better’, their moments of ‘supreme gender naivety’.

- That sounds awful doesn’t it?!

- What I am interested in is what did it lead you to do? How did you act, during Esther’s practice session, that may speak to your ‘expert masculinity’.

- I didn’t do very much during her session. It’s as I said; I sat at the back of the room, and tried very hard not to say anything. I really tried to hold my tongue. Part of me really wanted to jump in and say more about the terrible situation with women’s roles in organisations. Luckily, it wasn’t very appropriate, as the meta-facilitator, for me to do that. I was supposed to be focussing on making sure Esther was practising her facilitation skills and getting feedback. But I may have exuded a kind of superiority. As if I could see a subtext that it was unlikely anyone else was seeing (at least as clearly).

- Even Esther?

- Mmm. Ye-es, if I’m honest, even her.

- It’s interesting that you reference at least two theories and models in the paragraph after the one where you quote yourself praising how she ‘kept her cool’. Tempered radicalism...the owl and the fox...Almost as if all these theories act as a kind of justification of your own voice and position. But what comes through is that you *do* think she was naïve for raising this issue in this way, and her colleagues *were* naïve in their responses. As if there is a whole load of stuff about gender that you ‘know’ about that they don’t. And before that you make a really big claim, in the narrative, about organisations being ‘structurally hostile to women and other marginal groups’. That’s a really strong statement.

- But they are!

- There you go: making a claim to ‘know’ something that others might challenge!

- But it needs saying! I can qualify it!

- Rather than qualifying this, let’s *inquire* into it, in the context of this narrative. What does it say about ‘expert masculinity’, about what you did, and what else can be done towards *mentshlichkeit*, as you call it?

- Ok. So I need to pause and take a breath. I notice that now, I feel like I did in that situation with Esther: very fired up about it all. I want to fight you on it. I want to quote all the literature and statistics. That feeling is data in itself. I have a need to defend, to righteously point out how shitty the situation is for women, for black people etc. etc. It just *grabs* me

- Where does this come from? This ‘righteous need’?

- Good question. I don’t know. Perhaps it comes from being a Jew? After all, as a Jew, I am part of those marginal groups. Or maybe it comes from wanting to show, again, that I am *not* one of *those* men, who are oppressors. I am a ‘good’ man.

- And in your rush to prove it, you also seem to want to show how clever you are, how much you know about all of this stuff.

- Phew. Yes. That’s hard to hear.

- You know, as a woman, the impact it has on me is that it pushes me away from you. It has the opposite effect; I see you as less of an ally, because I feel less in connection with you. I see a man rushing to defend something (even if it is a feminist perspective) and I wonder – what’s all the fuss about? I mean, I *live* with it. I am acutely conscious of what women go through. I have to balance my job with looking after my child, doing all of that. But that’s it. I just get on with it. Why do you feel the need to fight this battle?

- Doesn't it need fighting? I mean inquiry is all very well, but don't we need to man the barricades every now and again?
- Yes, that's true. We need to 'man' the barricades every now and then, in a 'man's' world. But when you do, what I notice is that you move further away from me, not closer.
- So I'm in a real double-bind here. I can't protest because if I do I am haunted by the very ghosts I am trying to exorcise.
- Welcome to my world. It is full of double-binds.
- Yes, and what can I do about it? I feel a kind of despair here, a paralysis. There's nothing good I can do. But I have been here before. That fits I suppose. It is what I was trying to say about going from 'being' to 'becoming' in Chapter One. I take a position on things (even, no *especially*, on Gender) and then realise that too is a *performance* of a kind of expert masculinity. I spot it and have to pull myself back. That is *mentshlichkeit*: struggling, in the moment, with being a *mentsh*, rather than taking for granted I *am* one. It takes me out of the double-bind.
- Yes, and let's not get too black and white about this. That's a habit I have too. In your account, you quite clearly *do* things. You choose not to speak up. That's a good choice. I don't think it would have helped her for you to have joined in that battle. It may also have been fair to assume some of these things about Esther and her colleagues. But that's not the point here is it? This is about *you* in *your* practice. By doing this, now, you are recognising that in your work, and in the accounts you tell about it, there is a kind of heroic, crusading spirit that can creep in and catch you out. This dialogic process helps you to spot that. So what do you do, as a practitioner about that?
- Hmm. I am struck by not wanting to let go of the protest (will there be times when I need it?). But I see the impetus to fight this battle as a sign that a kind of expert, hegemonic masculinity starting to take me over. Looking at this account, it was there in the subtle way I framed it, as about their acquiescence and secret protest, when really it was as much *mine*. That's how it started, and then I am distracted by my own self-righteous crusading, which Esther may or may not have shared. By then this spectre has really taken hold. And only now, by inquiring into my story, can I start to let go of this and see it more nuanced. As I said to Jim in the café: my own defensiveness isn't useful anyway. It is about looking at how I do things, and think about things, about the way of thinking, of being, of moving towards, that the purpose of *mentshlichkeit* is served. It is a very subtle process. I start to claim this as my territory not by what I do, but how I do it. Now I feel sorry for trying to fight you back there!
- It's OK. You can come on a bit fierce sometimes. But when you let go of that, another side of you comes through, a more negotiable side, and then more of a conversation is possible. Surely that is growth-in-connection that Joyce Fletcher says is the essence of relational practice within a feminist epistemology?! (Fletcher 1998)
- Now who wants to show their expertise?!
- Ha! Yes. But I also wanted to show you that I have been doing some reading around your work, because I care.

\* \* \*

### **A Wide Practice - the Steel Client**

In looking at the example of Esther's story, as part of a 'deep' inquiry into my practice, I am conscious that it could be viewed as impractical. How can one sustain attention to such an edge of inquiry? This critique leads me to consider a 'wider' account: how can I track this edge over a longer period of time, in an ongoing client/consultant relationship?

*It was a long, long way down the motorway to the steel plant. Three hours of thoughtful driving. I knew the way well; it was one of those life-defining*

*journeys. These are the ones we have taken many times, not with the monotony of a commute, but more like the visit of a friend who we see from time to time. These journeys are markers; threading like stitches through our lives. They re-appear with a regularity that somehow defines us. The steel plant sits on one side of a wide bay by the sea, and when I was four years old, I remember setting off early in the morning and taking this drive across the country to visit the town on the opposite side of the bay, where my father ran a clothing factory. We'd sit on the beach whilst my father toiled over the mechanical noise. As a child I was mesmerised by the distant steel plant as it belched out its vastness and energy. You could smell the sulphurous smoke of this squatting dragon wafting over the sea. Did I know then that it would have significance to me now, forty years on?*

*This time however I wasn't going to the town. I was actually going to visit the dragon. As part of the new work I was doing, I found myself driving through the security gate and on and on and on, round this long low building that turned out to be the 'rolling mill'. It was so huge that it took many minutes to circumnavigate it. Outside it sat huge billets of finished steel, piled like the grey biscuits of some god. Round the other side, past this low, long seemingly sleeping beast was its contrasting brother, high and mighty indeed. I learned later learned this was the 'bos' plant, a place like you sometimes see in movies, where they play with big vats of molten metal. Flames leapt out from its vaulted roof a hundred metres in the sky.*

*It was all fascinating, exciting and deeply intimidating. As a consultant arriving at a place, I have developed a practice of standing tall, of physically, emotionally and mentally building yourself up to 'be' someone who can meet the expectations of this 'client', who is paying thousands of pounds for this person, this mind and yes, this body (although the latter is never part of the public transcript). I would watch my father do it in the car, when we dropped him off at his factory on the other side of the bay, those years ago. He would subtly shift during the journey. He would become more remote and formal with us. His body would stiffen up. It is a chameleon practice: if the company is bank, we become 'Mr. 'I'm all up for banking''. If it's a local authority, we become 'Mr. Public Service Incorporated'. But now what? I don't want to be 'Mr. Steel'. The last person I know of who had that epithet was a Russian dictator, the biggest murderer in history. So what to do? I will play another kind of game. I will be Mr. Interested, even 'Mr. Inquiring'? Or Just 'inquiring', with no 'Mr'. attached? Can I make that claim? Can I keep myself that loose and open, in this of all places? That is, after all, what I hope to be. I drive up to the portacabin by the sea, where I am due to meet my contact. She arrives: a smiling, round woman who instantly disarms me. 'Like a cuppa?' she says.*

An inquiry process begins with a process of orientation. How do we locate ourselves here, in this world? We are already in a kind of box, whose walls are made up of our history, pre-conceptions, prejudices and so on. Developing a practice of inquiry is about seeking to disestablish this box. In this way, it is commensurate in my view with the Jewish practice of *mentshlichkeit*. Both are about the ongoing performance and both are by definition, always unfinished; they are practices of *becoming*.

The practice of inquiry works in two directions, *into* the thing we are looking at and *into* ourselves as the seer, at the same time. There is a kind of symmetry between disestablishing this box and understanding something new and better about this world we are entering in order to act in it towards some kind of generative change (often as yet to be defined).

My intention with the story above is to give you an inkling of some of this box, as I took it with me down the motorway to meet this client in their main site of business for the first time. Part of the work of the consultant is the adept shape-shifting between different discourses about the worlds we move through, and intending to have some impact on these discourses as we travel through them. I see this as a tentative process though. My agency often feels liminal. The metaphor that comes to mind is of an interplanetary satellite that hopes to stir up the atmosphere of some planet as it goes spinning past it, rather than of an actor at the centre of a stage.

Another discourse we more often encounter is some kind of formal, orientating, 'business-case', about the 'official' reason I was there, doing this work, and indeed you might find this discourse helpful in orientating you with this account:

*I am a Senior Consultant at Roffey Park Institute, a management education institute in West Sussex, UK. Roffey Park was approached by 'Steel' [A pseudonym], to support them in the development of a 'Site Manager's Diploma Programme' ('SMD') an internally accredited general management qualification for personnel who run their steel manufacturing sites across the world, around 300 people in all. I was the Consultant who picked up this client lead and developed the relationship. Roffey Park was finally chosen out of a group of 4 or 5 business schools to work with Steel, in early 2008. Roffey developed the programme in collaboration with Steel's own internal 'Subject Matter Experts' ('SMEs'). - Roffey's willingness and flexibility to work in this way was cited by Steel as a main reason why it was chosen to do this work. The programme has 5 residential learning modules, each of 3 days duration, and these are jointly taught by Steel and Roffey faculty, in 3 locations around the world: Europe (at Roffey Park), Americas (near Steel's parent company's HQ, outside Pittsburgh, PA), and in Thailand. Five cohorts of 20 site managers go through all five modules together annually. In total, the contract is worth about £200K to Roffey Park per year, and was expected to run for around three years.*

*However, in November 2008 having suffered as a result of the global economic downturn, Steel asked Roffey Park if it could suspend the programme until the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2009, in the hope that the global economy would have picked up enough by then that global demand for steel will have increased - it collapsed to almost zero in only two weeks at the beginning of October 2008. Meanwhile, both Steel and Roffey have gone through a process of restructuring and cost saving which has resulted in redundancies in both organisations. However at the time of writing, Steel has approached Roffey Park to discuss a strategy for re-starting the programme. Global HR Director, Mr. B, expressed his satisfaction that the programme was restarting, as he saw it as key to a process of culture change and modernisation that the business needs to go through in order to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The current economic crisis only serves to demonstrate the urgency of this challenge.*

It is the type of discourse of everyday business and actually feels quite easy to write it. But my guess is it is less fun to read it. It may be at best informative but such texts can have very little emotional impact, or at least what emotional impact they have is designed to be very deliberate. There is a sort of numbness that creeps in when we talk this way, in my experience. We join the workings of a well-oiled machine, a mechanised process. We slip into this language with an unnerving ease. In doing so, do I become a kind of person that aims to give the impression of living a life of rational order and control? Yet underneath, there are bubbling cauldrons of emotion, but these

are kept private and where they do 'leak' it is with very clear demarcations of boundary.

*"[T]he formal rules that prop up an institution set limits to the emotional possibilities of all concerned. Consider for example the rules that guard access to information. Any institution with a bit of hierarchy in it must suppress democracy to some extent and thus must find ways to suppress envy and resentment at the bottom. Often this is done by enforcing a hierarchy of secrets." (Hochschild 1983, 2003)p53*

Yet you may like to notice what draws you in this 'rational account' – I know that part of me yearns to say more about the very rational process of 'cost-cutting and redundancies'. And of course, in the context of Roffey Park, I have been intimately involved in this story. I have said something of this in my work with Helena and Steve in Chapter Five. What is noticeable here is the work associated with occupying worlds associated with both these discourses, the public and the private, in inquiring what cost this may have:

*"This sense of emotional numbness reduces stress by reducing access to the feelings through which stress introduces itself. It provides an exit from overwhelming distress that allows a person to remain physically present on the job. Burnout spares the person in the short term, but it may have a serious long-term cost. The human faculty of feeling still "belongs" to the worker who suffers burnout, but the worker may grow accustomed to a dimming or numbing of inner signals. And when we lose access to feeling, we lose a central means of interpreting the world around us." (Hochschild 1983, 2003) p188*

In my role at Roffey Park, I am conscious that I am often complicit in managing these hierarchies and the relationship between the public and hidden transcripts (Scott 1990). We may argue that we do this to serve a wider cause of democratisation, and this may be earnestly felt, but in my inquiry about being a 'good man', developing an inquiring masculinity, there is a need to regularly foreground and explore the action implications of this. It is a particularly pernicious habit of men to lose the connection between these two sides to self. Remembering this connection is about staying human. Nevertheless, such public transcripts can be useful as orientation devices and yet we must notice how easily they trip off the tongue.

So an important question in this inquiry process is how we (my colleagues and I at Roffey) managed the relationship between the public and private transcripts and how far in doing so were we complicit in maintaining oppressive power structures and 'hierarchies of secrets' and how far we used this relationship for generative change.

\* \* \*

- I like the way you draw a parallel in your own story with that of your father. There is something there of the bodily experience of masculinity. The way you aim to stand tall, and yet there is that uncertainty and not knowing underneath. And then you juxtapose that with the account in the everyday language of business. But if that second account aims to manage the emotions in a particular way, then so does the first.

- How do you mean?

- I see it in it a jokiness, like your reference to being 'Mr. Steel', you seem to be finessing something...I am not sure what exactly but I feel like, again, your being 'clever'.

- But this is what it feels like. That experience of armouring up in a way to try and meet the client and impress them...

- Yes and you show how you were disarmed by the client being a woman who offered you a cup of tea. But it still feels a bit...managed.
- Isn't there always such management going on? I am trying to show the distance between the public and private experiences.
- And you do that to some extent. I just want to put down a marker that in a story, the story that you tell, there is still that management going on.

\* \* \*

## Defining Quality Relationally

I intended to widen this inquiry, considering how my own 'first person' inquiry becomes entwined in a kind of second person inquiry – what is the focus of inquiring attention for my colleagues? (Reason and Bradbury 2008). This is sometimes a complex, messy process, where levels of intentional, inquiring participation are often implied rather than fully stated. However, with one of my colleagues, Sabine, with whom I held joint responsibility for the client relationship with Steel, I have specifically invited co-inquiry and this has resulted in some of the conversations you will find below.

We had a series of conversations, in which we discussed what sense we could make together of the quality of our work with Steel, and how did we know we are opening up together a generative space of work.

In this sense-making discussion with Sabine, two key dimensions of quality inquiry practices emerged.

- Being unsettling
- Challenging the nature of knowledge – relational vs formal knowledge

### 1) Being Unsettling

*Sabine: The practical point is we're doing it because we need a client. Initially I thought: we need the money so let's get on with it. As it went on, I guess our slightly mischievous aim is to simply unsettle. The unsettling bit for them is that we're not giving up. When we worked on those three days with the HR group, we made some deliberate choices about when I would take charge. What I noticed is there was a real shift in M. from seeing me as irrelevant to finding some of my stuff quite interesting. To stuff like giving him a hug is for me - I am getting a slight mischievous joy out that. I'm thinking: 'It has at least rattled him'. Gentle persistence.*

*I made a decision that I wouldn't fall into any stereotypical behaviour, like being upset or sulking. Stereotypical in the gender sense but also because it would be an understandable reaction to have. Because of how they are treating me. They were just ignoring me. Dismissing and ignoring. Unconsciously I think.*

It strikes me that Sabine is describing something here that is very much in tune with what Meyerson and Scully call 'tempered radicalism'. (Meyerson and Scully 1995)

The challenge with tempered radicalism, with this edge of unsettling, is that it can be so subtle and carefully nuanced that one could argue we are hardly having an impact at all. We know that we find the culture of Steel somewhat of an unsubtle and hard place to be, akin to the commodity it manufactures. We know that this has a self-evidential impact of privileging a certain kind of person, a certain kind of masculinity. Steel has no women in the senior management team and none of the 300 or so Site

Managers who we are being commissioned to work with are women. Out of their internal 'design team' of approximately 20 with whom we have been working on the development of the programme, there were 3 women. Two of those were in HR roles, the 'people side' of the business, where women are more likely to be found. (One of these is the woman who met me in the first story I tell, above). None of this is surprising for a company with this type of culture.

Yet our proposition would be that they chose to come to us, at Roffey Park, because of something in our culture that they found attractive. In some way, were they looking for unsettling? This has not been expressed directly, but has it been invited, through the nuance, the private discourses that flow in the gaps between and around the formal, public transcripts? To consider this, and engage in a further cycle of action and reflection, I aim to reflect on my own experience of how we came to be working with Steel.

### **Unsettling the HR Director – the HR Director Unsettling Me**

*1) I am at a conference where I am running a breakout session on facilitation skills. It is in the early days of our relationship with Steel, when we have proposed a way of working with them and they are still weighing up the choice between us and other providers of training and development. My phone rings and I decide (once again, breaking my own agreement with myself), to answer it.*

*It is the HR Director of Steel, 'D', the key client and decision-maker. D is a big man with a powerful presence and a loud voice. I am slightly scared of him. He is very bright, bullish and sophisticated. I like him, and I find that dangerous – If I am honest I seek his approval. He is very charming, but my guess is he can also be a bit of a bully at times, and in his dealings with us and with 'M', his direct report, an HR manager and our day-to-day contact in Steel, I have seen evidence of this.*

*- James, have you got a moment to talk?*

*I hardly reply, before he continues. I know that he is on a ridiculously tight, international timetable. But I also sense this is a moment of truth. How do I know that? It is a rare thing for him to contact me and not leave this to 'M', so it must be an important moment in the relationship. He continues:*

*- It's about the SMD [Site Managers' Diploma]. You see we are considering this model of working with a business school, like you at Roffey, and well, to be honest, I just had a call with one of your competitors and it I am wondering about the whole thing. In short, do you think we're mad?*

*- That's a really interesting question! What do you mean by that, D?*

*- Well, they seemed to suggest that it is a foolish thing to do to go into partnership and there's a lot at stake here. I don't think we've got the internal resources to go it alone, not at the calibre of know-how we need for this, and I am wondering if you think this is a crazy undertaking? They seemed to be very reluctant to go into partnership like this. What I mean is, can you work with us?*

*- Oh D, I feel for you! It sounds like they might have been a bit harsh! Well, actually I don't think you are mad to think about this at all. I think far from it, that this is a really interesting, challenging thing, to develop a programme in partnership in this way.*

*- So you don't think we're mad then?*

*- No not at all. I think you are being very forward-looking. I do think there could be some real challenges. We have talked about the cultural differences between Steel and Roffey, but we said that's why you might be interested in us, because we major on the relationship stuff, what some of your colleagues*

would call the 'pink and fluffy'. But I am sure we can come up with a really interesting and useful programme that will do what you want it to.

- Thank you – I am reassured by what you are saying. I just want to be clear: is something that you want to do is it?

- Yes. D. Absolutely.

- OK thank you. I am sorry to take up your time. I will ask M to be in touch. James, I won't keep you. Good bye.

2) Later on, they have made the decision to work with us, and we are at Roffey, showing D around. It is a typical 'show off' tour, walking around Roffey showing off the grounds, the facilities etc. I am with D, the HR Director and our main HR contact, M. At one point, after lunch, D asks where he can go to get 'outside'. I ask him what he needs and he rather sheepishly says, 'Well, actually I need a cigarette!' 'I'll join you for one!' I say. He looks a bit taken aback, but quickly says, 'That'd be great, I didn't think anyone else in the world still so smoked apart from me!' 'I do like the odd one occasionally' I say. Which is almost true: my smoking habit averages about 2-3 a day.

So we stand in the courtyard at Roffey, smoking together.

- It's very beautiful here.' Says D. I wonder how our people will respond. I hope they behave themselves!
- I am sure they will. We're used to all sorts here anyway. [Laughter]
- So how will this design process work really? asks D
- There's no real mystery to it actually. We will give them a bit of background about learning theory and then it is really a case of our people and your people spending time together in smoke filled rooms, as it were! It is actually a good chance for them to get to know each other.
- Yes of course, that relationship will be critical [pause]. We'll be really relying on you, on the Roffey consultants, because our people, don't get me wrong, they're great people, but they don't really know how to teach. They are much more comfortable with a 'tell', you know, telling people the answer.
- Yes we are aware of that. But that's what the Roffey person is there for.
- Thank you. And I appreciate the company in my bad habit.

3) It is just before the first design event. Sabine and I are entertaining D. and M. at Roffey again. They are extremely anxious about the event. Over lunch, D. is in 'tell' mode, downloading his concerns:

- You must be aware that we are used to quite tight processes and procedures. They will expect things to be on time. They won't want to wait around. They also like to work hard. We are used to a long-day, hard-working culture. I hope all of your people are up for it. For example N. [Roffey person coaching the 'engineering & operations' team for the development of that section of the programme] – I mean don't get me wrong, I like him, he's laid back but will he be too laid back for our people? I hope you are coaching him to expect quite a demanding crowd of Steel people.

- I explain that we have every faith in N. That actually he is one of the few people at Roffey who comes from an engineering background himself, in the oil industry.

D. continues with his anxious download. Sabine and I sit, by and large quite still, listening, nodding, occasionally reassuring. Mostly D directs his talk at me. Sabine tells me later that she feels like she wasn't there, again. I feel like we are the mum and dad of an overgrown teenager worrying over the

arrangements for a big birthday party. Or are we more like 'yes men' in the war council of a Dictator?

4) During the first design event, D, M and I are in the corridor, outside one of the meeting rooms at Roffey, where the joint Steel/Roffey team are fulminating over the design of the programme. D and M are more relaxed. D especially. M tends still to focus on the details and all the things that can go wrong rather than right. D is slightly irritated with him: 'Honestly M, try and see the bright side for a change!' Generally, it is all perceived to be going very well. The Steel people like being at Roffey and are impressed by the Roffey people. (Even N!) They are beginning to pull together the shape of the programme and people are getting quite excited. I have explained to D. that, as we expected, we are finding it quite a challenge getting the Steel people to understand the difference between 'delivering presentations' and 'enabling learning'. He is fired up by this and we go into one of the working rooms. After about 5 minutes of listening to the conversation, D launches into a diatribe about how the Steel people need to **listen more** to what the Roffey people are telling them. 'It isn't all about powerpoints you know. There is a huge difference between people being told something and people learning something. You guys need to be more facilitative. Pay more attention to the Roffey Consultant working with you!' The Steel people listen. To me, they look slightly shame-faced, 'told off', with heads down. No-one argues.

Later, back in the corridor. D comes to me and M. and says:

- 'How was that? Did I go in a bit hard?'
- 'Hmm I say', now did you TELL them or were you facilitative of their LEARNING?' I say with a bit of a wink.
- Everyone laughs. I notice M especially enjoying the joke.
- Fair point! Says D.

5) M. has been in a bit of trouble with some of the Roffey people. He is perceived as brusque and aggressive. He definitely has a glass-half-empty style. Some of the women especially, like our administrative coordinator designated to Steel, S, finds him quite unpleasant to deal with. There is a joke going round Roffey that people turn down pointless corridors to avoid bumping into him. Sabine has kept her cool admirably with him, despite his dismissive behaviour. I feel a bit for M. I think he has an unfortunate manner but don't think he is conscious of his impact at all. I also think D. has come down a bit hard on him at times. But people are complaining about him at Roffey and it falls to me to do something about it. He is due to be at Roffey for a meeting and I ask him to come and have a chat with me. I take him into our Chief Executive's office, as it is unoccupied at the moment and is opposite mine, which has my roommate in it. I also do this deliberately because I want to unsettle him a bit. I explain that I need to see him because people are getting a bit uncomfortable about the behaviour of Steel people in Roffey:

- For example, S. is a little unhappy with that conversation you had with her yesterday. She said you were quite brusque. What you have to understand is that at Roffey, how we are with each other is quite important and I don't want people saying they don't want to work with Steel.

M is mortified:

- I didn't realise. I am sorry. It is just my way. I have been given the feedback that I don't listen at times, but it just that I have been working away on the detail in my head.

- Yes I can really see that in you - and you are very good at focussing I the detail. That is your strength I think. But you can perhaps overlook the people in that and your impact on them.

Later, our administrator, S tells me that M. came to her and apologised. She is thrilled with that.

S. says: - You know I really think he was sorry. He wasn't just saying it. It's just what they are like at Steel. They are all like that.

6) Sabine and I are talking. I say:

- You know – it annoys me so much that he comes to me all the time. You send him an e-mail and he replies to me. I keep having to make sure you are in the loop. I think I should push them on this one more. M especially should get the feedback.

- Sabine: I know. But it is really important for me not to respond, to react. In a way that's just playing the game. I think it's great that you want to fight them on it. I feel like you are loyal to me. Like a knight in shining armour. But it could also expose me. And I have my own way of dealing with it

- Me: So maybe it isn't helpful to you? I don't want to put you on the spot. It's interesting isn't it, but that in standing up to them on this I could be making it worse...?

- Sabine: In way, yes. You handle them and I'll handle the Roffey side and if I don't react and expect you to fight my battle for me, that might be better.

Later on, I am at Steels HQ having had a meeting with D and M. I chose not to mention anything about M, having talked with Sabine about it. D. picks something up from me though. Unusually, he sees me out of the building to my car. He says:

- You know, I want you to feel comfortable to come to me about any issues you have.
- Thanks D that's great
- I know for example, that M's manner can be a bit...off-putting at times. I have given him the feedback. But if he is causing any difficulties, then please do let me know. I'll have a word with him.
- No. D, everything is fine.

7) It is January 2009. We are meeting at their HQ. D, M and I are in the D's office. The programme has been suspended due to the credit crunch, which, as D put it, has 'sent our sales into freefall'. He shows me their profit and loss account for the last two quarters. It actually makes fascinating reading, because you can see the credit crunch hitting each continent in turn on its journey eastwards. First the U.S., then Europe, then the Middle-East and finally China and India, all the markets tumble one by one, like dominoes.

But, as D says, they are committed to staying working with us, to keep talking and 'find a way forward'. The programme was perceived as a success as far as it went and the Global CEO has said he is committed to it. We discuss a re-launch for 'quarter 2' of 2009. The times are grim but I get a sense of optimism in the meeting. At the end of the meeting, in the small-talk, I tell them that I am just about to go to Washington, to witness the inauguration of Barack Obama. D is animated by this and we talk about my reasons for going.

- For me he embodies a change. I am interested to see what kind of a man he is, up close as it were. It relates to the PhD research I am doing. I wonder if he is a good man.

I have only mentioned my research to them once or twice. I realise I have avoided it. It as if I made a judgement that they would find it odd, and me odd,

*being interested in 'men's stuff'. But D. seems really interested. And M. says he knows that I used to run a men's programme. He read about it in my biography. I wonder who has more of a problem with this. Me or them?*

*Later that week, D sends me an email, in response to a Xmas email, to which he had just got round to replying:*

Dear James

Just a short note to thank you for your greetings of the Season. I have enjoyed our partnership with you, Sabine and the Roffey team in the last year as we have put SMD on the map. At a personal level I have valued my contact with you including a little bit of coaching here and there which often does not happen at my level.

Finally you and the Roffey culture can take a good deal of credit from your pacy and flexible reaction to our financial turbulence causing the suspension of the program most regrettably. I hope that we can get things back on an even keel in Q2 next year.

Trusting that you have had a peaceful Xmas break with the family, and wishing you well for your trip to the U.S. for the swearing in of BO.

See you soon

D.

*Back at Roffey, later that week, I walk into the lounge and find M sitting there. He has his papers spread out and his laptop. He is dressed casually, in jeans and a sweat shirt. He sees me and jumps up.*

- *I hope you don't mind. He says. If I work here I can actually get some work done. It is so peaceful.*
- *Not at all M. Please make yourself at home.*

### **What do these scenes show – 1) About 'Settling/Unsettling'**

I am aware that this is just one telling of the story of settling/unsettling relationships between Steel and Roffey, but I see them as a 'good enough' account to show the tensions, ambiguities and in-the-moment challenges that I face when dealing with a longer term relationship, whilst holding onto my inquiry practice of *mentshlichkeit*, of good-man-ness.

I notice in this account a surfacing of the tensions I feel around my relationship with D. It is interesting that behind the 'formal contract' of a supplier/client relationship, involving the exchange of goods and services worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, is the private, hidden transcript of a relationship, in this case between two men. I actually really like D. I have come to like him in the course of this relationship, warts and all. And I think he likes me. I am drawn to him, and the relationship matters to me. In the course of doing work like this, the possibility of this kind of relationship as the hinge on which the world turns is an unsettling, generative prospect.

And in doing this 'relational practice', as Joyce Fletcher calls it (Fletcher 1998), questions are raised about the exploitation of the private in service of the public. How genuine, affirming, authentic of human flourishing are such relationships? And in the power dynamic of the relationship between D. and I, how far is it possible to push the authenticity. Is this tempered radicalism in the service of generative relational masculinity, of *mentshlichkeit*, or the harnessing of emotional labour in the service of industrial and commercial growth, 'blind' to its purpose and values, except in the

service of Adam Smith's famous 'hidden hand' behind free-market economics (Smith 1776, 2003)?

Is this 'growth in connection' as Fletcher would have it:

*"The basic tenet of relational theory – that growth and development occur best in a context of connection – is further delineated by the identification of specific characteristics of these growth-fostering connections. In other words, growth is conceptualized as occurring not in any engagement or relationship but through a specific kind of relational interaction. These growth-fostering interactions are characterized by mutual empathy and mutual empowerment, where both parties approach the interaction expecting to grow from it, and where both parties feel a responsibility to contribute to the growth of the other. The ability to develop relationally requires certain strengths: empathy, vulnerability, an ability to experience and express emotion, an ability to participate in the development of another, and the expectation that relational interactions will be sites of growth for both parties involved."(Fletcher 1998) p167*

I cannot guarantee that this is the nature of our relationship, and that at some level it isn't all held together by a commercial imperative that undermines the genuine nature of such relational practice. Or does it undermine it? As Sabine reminded us at the beginning of this section, 'Roffey needed the money'.

So I am troubled (usefully) by my own action/reaction in my relationship with D. I am aiming at unsettling, at a gentle nudging and also at being unsettled by the questions behind my own action. For example, am I brave or challenged by the idea that there are private aspects of my own life, like my work around masculinity, which I have tried to keep out of our relationship? Was this wise 'tempered radicalism', or a denial of authenticity?

I am struck by the way in which I challenged D. and didn't allow him to bully M on my behalf, as I suspected he would have done if I would have said more about M's behaviour and its impact on the Roffey system. Is this evidence of good-man-in practice? Could I have challenged him more on this? Or was my jokey exchange with him (see 4. above) around his style, one example of the 'right' kind of unsettling that has enough (but not too much) of an impact to open up a genuine relational space of interaction, to enable him, and provide him with the 'bit of coaching here and there' to take us all towards a more generative form of inquiring masculinity/humanity?

*"The subtleties associated with gender often create different experiences of the same organizational situation and present many practical problems for the way men and women interact on a daily basis. Sometimes, the difficulties created are so significant that they give rise to conscious and unconscious strategies for "gender management". (Morgan 1986) p179*

It is interesting that both Sabine and I were actively engaged in such a strategy and I had to take my lead from her that fighting on her behalf for more recognition wasn't going to be particularly useful – that in some ways had I done so, I would have been acting out quite a heroic, 'knight in shining armour' role. Because I was so triggered by this, and because I am doing *this* action research, I could have been more willing to fight this battle and I catch myself (again) finding myself potentially acting in a way which has the opposite consequence to my stated intention and values.

Once again, it is being 'caught in the act' of such a transgression, noticing it in myself, in the moment, and choosing not to act it out, or to act it out in a measured way (was

my discussion with M. in 5. above so measured?) that might constitute quality in the work of *mentshlichkeit*? I could place myself as expert and suggest that I don't get caught this way because of all I have read, done and seen in this area of work. But that's not true. I do get repeatedly caught in the act; such is the deeply ingrained nature of the spectre of masculinity. I am almost glad of it in a way, because, like Jim Porter in the *Gender Futures* story, I have the opportunity to remake myself, moment to moment. Such is the relational nature of self in an inquiring masculinity. Such is *mentshlichkeit*.

## 2) About the nature of knowledge-in-relationship

I notice in these vignettes of our work with Steel how much they focus on the small number of core relationships that hold the wider project together. The lives of many people across the world, and the relationship between Roffey Park and Steel, is contingent upon the relational fault lines between basically four people, M., D., Sabine and I. Therefore the public transcript of the programme is held together by the private, hidden transcripts of our relationships. For Fletcher, one test of the validity of our work might be to subject it to her research questions:

1. *Is there evidence that relational practice exists in this organizational setting? What beliefs, assumptions, and values do these behaviors reflect?*
2. *What are the mechanisms through which relational practice and the belief system underlying it are brought into the dominant discourse and subjected to the sense-making truth rules of that discourse? (Fletcher 1998) p168*

Looping back to my conversation Sabine again:

*J: But I come back to the fact that they make steel in dirty and dangerous environments. You wouldn't expect them to be all playful and camping about - what do we expect? What do we hope for in our mischievousness, our unsettling?*

*S: I am not sure I am expecting a huge change. I am hoping for one. Yes they make steel and steel is a hard commodity not a lot of fun to it, but what you do with steel can be quite creative. Do people who work down coal mines, also dirty and hard, have no sense of humour, or community? I am not seeing that sense of community. I am not sure that is about what they do. I think it is about more than that. I think for me, these guys are meant to be leaders and I don't think you can lead without having a relationship. I think you lead through relationships. These guys aren't very capable of having a relationship, working at a level of relating to someone. They are OK to tell someone something, to bark orders, to have a talk with someone. But I don't think they are able to relate in the sense of really understanding someone, really hearing someone or putting themselves in someone shoes, because if they could, for example, they wouldn't have these absolutely awful accidents. In order to have a relationship with anybody you have to be able to notice what you notice about you, the situation and the other person. That is what I am hoping they will be able to do and relating that back into their business environment, making something out of that for themselves as leaders. I wouldn't necessarily ever say that to anybody there, because they would think I'm crazy.*

*But that would be my aim in terms of unsettling, because for me their learning is around the knowledge thing. For them it's 'give me a puzzle and I'll give you the knowledge and you solve the puzzle'. But I think real learning comes through reflecting and noticing and I don't think they do that.*

*J: That is the relevance of the hug – if you can really relate to someone you can hug them – it's an embodied connection - all pink and fluffy at one level but at another level it is very confronting.*

*S: Well if you work on the premise that all bad stuff happens because of bad relationships, then you can only undo that by having good relationships. Learning how to relate well is the basis of making change. I couldn't say this to them but that would be my hope.*

It is of course a big claim to suggest what Sabine and I are suggesting to here – that we are the arbiters of whether people in Steel can lead through the quality of relationship. But it was to a degree self-evident in a number of factors. Firstly, the evolution of the Site Managers Diploma was in Steel's requirement for a more formalised, coherent set of knowledge areas that, as we subsequently agreed, were about turning 'Site Managers into Site Leaders'. It was also evident in the discussions with D, which he subsequently helped us to relay, albeit heavy-handedly in the Design meetings to their own Steel Subject Specialists (see vignette 4 above). But the clincher in this argument was something that Sabine and I uncovered in one of our sense-making discussions:

*S: We are tickling them*

*J: Tickling them to be a bit more human. How do we know, we are doing that?*

*S: For me, the fact they are still with us means something. Because, they could do this all by themselves. If it was pure knowledge, it's all done, it's over. If you just want this to be about the material, they wouldn't need us anymore. The fact that they don't do that and that they want to change this into something different, a culture shift, it shows that we are doing something, if nothing else other than rattle them, there is more to life than just the knowledge. That's a real nugget there. There is something there that makes them curious. That is something they don't have and they need us for that.*

*J: They will still talk to each other in very instrumental terms but actually they are still talking to us because there is something more to knowing than knowing this material.*

*S: There is a psychological contract there that we need to tease out.*

*J: Paradoxically, we can't easily clarify it, because it is not cost-able and it would scare them.*

*S: It is out of their awareness*

*J: We need to have a conversation with them about something we can't really talk about.*

*S: Unless we could talk to them about it, but it becomes about how far you can tickle. Does it become bullying?*

*J: It is inferred - when D. talks about 'the odd bit of coaching you have given me' it is very unclear, there is no clear contract.*

*S: It isn't a contract*

*J: But there is definitely something important there. A relationship. We are in a shape-shifting place, talking about instrumental knowledge, about the module content, but at the same time talking about something else. About relating. That's fascinating. It has brought tears to my eyes!*

What's fascinating about this proposition is that there Sabine and I are naming a phenomenon that sets challenges in my inquiry process at many levels. We are in a sense naming something that we hadn't quite noticed ourselves fully before; the whole nature of the relationship was based on 'developing the module content and processes for site managers development across five knowledge areas':

- Safety
- Engineering & Operations
- Contracts and Commercial Practices
- Financial Management
- Leading People & Change

Apart from the fifth module (arguably) the programme was by the time Sabine and I sat down for our conversation, complete. There was no more design work to be done. Steel could in theory, say 'thank you very much' and get on with delivering it themselves, and detach themselves from Roffey. And not only were they choosing to stay in connection with us but also, a time of unprecedented financial constraints, are taking an opportunity by asking us to re-invigorate the programme for a more 'Senior' group of leaders, and paying for this service.

As an aside: another echo of the *Gender Future* story – how unpredictable events, in this case the credit crunch (a model offered by the ecological collapse in the story) offer up (ironic) evolutionary possibilities, that are in also unpredictable but have frightening phenomenal power, much more than our deliberate action for change ever could hope for.

Once again, the baseline here could be to acknowledge the political economy of an organisation simply wanting to stay ahead of its competitors. But again, to invoke the tension that I highlighted earlier, in this 'truth' there could be the germ of a possibility for more generative, relational possibilities. But also, subject to Fletcher's criteria above, the real test of this is how far we are enabled to foreground the relational possibilities here, how far we *bring this practice into the dominant discourse and find mechanisms to subject this relational practice to the sense-making truth rules of that discourse*. (Fletcher 1998) p168

In the vignettes above, like for example in the story of the email from D. (see vignette 7.) there are glimmers, glimpses of us bringing this practice into the dominant discourse, and glimpses of us managing this in a distinctly private space, and therefore colluding with maintaining the separation of public and private that is the hallmark of the dominant discourse. That is the nature of this work; always on the edge between working within, around and against that discourse in order to challenge it.

But first of all we have to notice this relational possibility ourselves, and bring it into our own discourse as practitioners: what I am really struck by is how it took quite a level of co-reflection between myself and Sabine for us to notice that we were still 'in there', as it were, and therefore having some kind of relational impact. We may propose it is out of *their* awareness but how much is it in *our* awareness!?

This takes me right back again to the story of Jim Porter. He is challenged early in the *Gender Futures* story about whether his knowledge *about* gender actually has any impact on his behaviour *in* gender. This is a fertile edge along which I walk in this inquiry. It is also highly relevant to the Steel story, because we are standing for a type

of relational (as opposed to 'formal') knowledge and for me there is a seduction in this that relates directly to the kind of masculinity trap that Jim Porter discovered for himself.

As I discussed with Sabine:

*J: That's really interesting because part of me feels like, in order to be in that [Steel] world, I need to hide a part of myself, from myself. I was conscious of standing in the room in the first design workshop, basically haranguing them and thinking 'My God! What kind of a man am I being right now?' But actually still deciding that is what they needed. We had so much to sort out, the testing, the programme, the material, and they were faffing around and not paying attention to each other, or us, and I had to say 'You've got to do this and that!' And they responded. They sort of bantered with me but I got their attention. I had a feeling then of being 'one of the boys'. You know, I had to shout at them! In order to do that and gain their credibility I had to hide part of myself away, a sensitive part.*

*S: You have to put part of yourself in a bracket*

*J: But that suggests it is easily un-bracket-able, but I am not sure it is.*

*S: That could be tricky, in terms of staying integrated*

Staying integrated. Staying whole. This was Jim Porter's challenge and indeed is mine. Another was that of the trap of expert: was he an expert in masculinity or an expert practitioner in an inquiring generative masculinity? Similarly with Steel, am I an expert in relational knowledge or in the *practice* of relational knowledge?

Was I hired by Steel to *show* them relational practice or *tell them about* relational practice? And more importantly, how can I spot when I am being seduced by the 'expert' role conferred upon me in the work that I do?

In my dialogue with Sabine, I am struck by my assumption that the relational practice of our work is 'not cost-able'; in other words, it is hard to calculate how much it is worth in economic terms. Arlie Hochschild talks about that the 'commercialisation of human feeling', and this is a challenge to our work. (Hochschild 1983, 2003)

Part of this process of commoditisation is in that 'bracketing' of self. The story I tell above reminds me of a colleague, Geoff Mead. At a conference on masculinity, he told a story about when he was a Senior Policeman. He said that when he went to work, he remembered putting away a part of himself just to get through the day. Then one day, a few years into the role, and already quite high up the formalised authority of rank, he was asked 'how he felt' and he couldn't recall. He realised he had forgotten where he'd left the key to that part of himself he'd hidden away.

In some way, in my own telling of the Steel story, I realise that I too have had this regular experience of self-partition, of hiding the key in order to get through, to be a certain way, to survive and thrive amidst a certain dominant, masculinity. But I do believe there is a subtle 're-remembering' that can be consistently recapitulated to enable both sides of this elusive coin to be seen. We can get 'in' through such partitioning, and if we are embedded enough in critically subjective communities of practice (thank you, my friend Sabine), we can 'stay out' enough to practice relationally, rather than just talk about it. I hope.

\* \* \*

- I notice two relationships here – one with Sabine and one with the HR Director. D. Like I was saying – who assesses their quality? You suggest that your and Sabines’ ‘truth rules’ prevail. I think this stands in some way, as an example of second person inquiry, but I also think it needs *working* further.
- Working further?
- Yes – I have a hunch that something else is going on here. As I said, I notice the management of the story. I notice the story-teller. If you notice the story-teller, it tells you there may be something more going on. Perhaps it’s just an opportunity for more ‘vigilance’.
- But I was looking at the Steel example, relationally, with Sabine.
- Yes, that’s fine. That works OK. But it also begs a question. A problem I have with Joyce Fletcher’s work is if we are judging quality by how we bring the ‘private’ discourse into the ‘public’ and subjecting them to the ‘truth rules’ of the dominant discourse, who judges which is the private and which the public, and whose is the ‘dominant discourse’? In *practice*? It means we can slip into black-and-white judgements if we’re not careful. In reality, these lines of demarcation may be very subtle.
- Do you think we’re being unsubtle?
- Perhaps a bit. In inquiry terms, is there more here going on that we can be *vigilant* to?
- How can we go about answering that?
- Rather than answering that – let’s take an inquiring frame. Let’s look at the two relationships side by side, and see what emerges. Tell me about your relationship with D. For example what does the ‘little bit of coaching here and there’ signify? It seems like a private discussion popping up in the public discourse (in the email).
- The example is in scene no.4. My coaching was just a little, *nudging*; teasing even. He seemed to appreciate it, so I nudged some more. I remember him telling me how he liked to nudge *his* boss. He said that you could gently tease him but not too far. His boss didn’t have that much of a sense of humour. I remember him saying ‘*Steel isn’t a touchy feely place, - we have to keep ourselves disciplined*’. I took that as a signal for the fact that he appreciated a bit of nudging from me, but also that I shouldn’t take it too far.
- What would too far have looked like?
- Good question. Perhaps if I had been too informal. Too relaxed. Perhaps even too open and ‘touchy feely’. That’s what it felt like.
- So what I notice is that there is a very subtle management of relationships going on, between two men. And it is brought into the public discourse in quite subtle, deliberate ways (like by that email for example), and then here’s you and Sabine making a very strong judgement: ‘People in Steel aren’t very capable of having relationships’.
- You’re right. I think Sabine and I are colluding there. I think though that that’s about our relationship. I have let her take the lead in sense-making there. I even noticed that at the time but chose not to challenge it.
- Why not?
- I’m not sure.
- And you make a choice, at one point, for her to manage the Roffey side of things and for you to manage the client. What was that about?
- That was strategy to help us manage the way in which she was feeling marginalised and ignored.
- Yes and at one point you say that this is about being ‘tempered radicals’. Although you do ask the question about whether this was really just another way of saying that you are hardly having any impact at all (what’s the difference between tempered radicalism and just being insignificant) - that’s good stuff, but in this strategy, how are you actually colluding with what Joyce Fletcher calls the sense-

making truth rules? You are just allowing her to fade into the background. How much is that about bringing relational practice into the dominant discourse? And isn't this just a strategy for managing your everyday work.

- It was a strategy that worked at that time. It helped her to manage her frustrations and now she is much more in the foreground. I notice that now, she has as much to do with the client directly as I do
- But there's something there, isn't there, about a kind of collusion between you? It's as if you think – 'because I am doing this sense-making with a woman, it is inherently more relational and therefore more critically subjective.'
- Phew. You've got me there! I think there is some of that going on.
- So tell me more about your relationship with Sabine
- We get on very well. But we didn't always. We came to Roffey at about the same time, and for a while, our relationship was quite unsettled. There was a stormy-ness between us. But we worked on it. It led to us looking at our backgrounds
- Howso?
- She's German and we talked about how our German and Jewish identities seemed to be a source of tension between us.
- So how does that play out now?
- I feel quite...protective of her now. Hence wanting to fight on her behalf. The knight in 'shining armour' role'.
- Yes you talk about being 'really triggered' by their treatment of her.
- It annoyed me that they were marginalising her.
- How were they?
- By focussing so much of the work through me. Sometimes, she would send them an email or something, and they would reply to me. So I wanted to challenge them on that, but then we had that conversation (see 6.), and I realised that if I had gone in there, guns blazing, I could have behaved in a way opposite to my intention. It was a good spot I think. I was glad I didn't do that because I think it may have taken away her power
- Her power?
- Yes, she needed to stand on her own there, not rely on the man to do it for her. It is a bit of a hall of mirrors isn't it? In choosing not to be her 'Knight in Shining armour', maybe I am being it. In giving her a lot of room to make sense of things, maybe I am also patronising her. And then there's the way in which our German/Jewish dynamic make me wary. And then how this has an effect on our relationship with the client. I have a sense of Sabine and I turning this into an 'us and them' – *we* are the ones who understand relationships and they don't. *We* are unsettling them because they need that from us.
- So what impact did this have?
- I don't know. Perhaps not any. No - perhaps this is just 'noise' that we create between us. It is something that goes on quite a bit at Roffey. We talk about working 'relationally', which means we spend quite a lot of time looking at our relationships, or managing strategies around them (like this one with Sabine) and meanwhile what happens with the client becomes, sort of, peripheral.
- So they are paying for you to have your noise together?
- Yes, but our noise is just a parallel of theirs. They've got their own noise. What comes up now is that I am conscious of negotiating myself between these different worlds. Firstly there's the world of Steel and my relationship with D. I admire him and how this work throws up the possibility of valuing my relationship with him. It creates a glimmer of a possibility for becoming more relational with him, as Fletcher defines it. But separate to that, there's another frame here, which is to do with my relationship with Sabine, That's about the working relationship with another colleague at Roffey. It is about inviting her into my inquiry. I am struck by a sense of living in quite a different world with her and with Steel people.
- So what do you do between these two worlds, relating to *mentshlichkeit*?

- Right now, it makes me feel tired! It is very tiring being these two different people. I relate to Sabine in an intense, complex, emotive world, the world of Roffey Consultants, and I relate to D. in a different register, more transactional, but with a kind of subtle play *towards* being a bit more relational (a 'little bit of coaching here and there'). It is exhausting shape-shifting between these two worlds.
- So what does that say about *mentshlichkeit*?
- I am not sure, but it says something about bringing all these different layers of self, types of self, shape-shifting between these worlds. That is a practice that this inquiry has thrown up. I really recognise that. I get home sometimes and I am exhausted, and I wonder if that is because I have had to live in so many worlds, being so many different people. Perhaps that is a sign of quality here. That working towards *mentshlichkeit* is about being prepared to shape-shift. Perhaps the dominant masculinity doesn't flex. It is as I describe in Chapter Three, the 'shifty, protean Jew' (that Otto Weininger hated) is another way of characterising what we all have to do to be 'mentshlich' - shape-shift and flex in innumerable relationships
- And isn't that just what your father was doing, as you drove down the motorway with him in the car? You watched him physically change as he shifted into work mode.
- Gosh. Yes. That's a surprise. It suggests that there isn't much difference between us, after all.

## Conclusion to Chapter Six

In the discussion with Sarah above, many new perspectives have emerged. Other portals of inquiry exist of course, which you may have spotted and I am open to this conversation. My intention was merely to invite another subjectivity, (in this case Sarah's), and I have found it consistently fascinating and surprising how 'storied' voices like Sarah's have found their own authority in this way. My hope is that they will be as real to you as they are to me. The above conversations with Sarah, interwoven with my practice accounts, have thrown a new light on relational practice at the heart of *mentshlichkeit*, and the need to work and re-work the sense-making, which is a vital practice in inquiry, bearing in mind a sensitivity to the relationship between knowledge, power and multiple perspectives. They help me disrupt my own voice of expert, a practice of critical subjectivity central to *mentshlichkeit*, being a good man.

There is no easy conclusion to this practice – it is by definition suggestive of a process that challenges the (complete) hero-narrative of self-made men that *showing* the restless practice of constantly re-making the self is in itself enough in the context of an inquiring masculinity.

But the final paragraphs of the conversation with Sarah brought into light a key perspective of this part of my inquiry, relating especially to my work at Roffey with clients. It was the tiredness I felt; the sense of exhaustion that came up as I reflected on the constant re-making of self, that I share (uneasily) with my father's. Is what we do so very different after all?

*"One of the most important basic processes in organizations and one of the easiest to observe, is how people communicate with each other, particularly in face-to-face and small-group situations. The process consultant must be aware of such processes because they are central to the establishment of his relationship with the client in the one-on-one situation, and they are likely to be the most salient aspect of the kinds of settings in which he will find himself early in the relationship."* (Schein 1969) p21

Compare this with:

*“What is new in our time is an increasingly prevalent **instrumental stance** towards our native capacity to play, wittingly and actively, upon a range of feelings for a private purpose and the way in which that stance is engineered and administered by large organizations.” (Hochschild 1983, 2003) p20*

My work as a ‘consultant’ occupies an interesting territory in relation to these above quotes, especially in the light of my own inquiry, and this sense of tiredness that arises in the conversation with Sarah.

Edgar Schein is a key figure in the field of consultancy and organisational development. He incites the Consultant towards what he calls ‘process consultancy’. This is a critical response to the more instrumental, pseudo-objective/scientific approach to this work, which draws on what Schein calls the ‘doctor-patient’ or ‘expert’ models of consultancy. In these approaches, the consultant offers a rarified, ‘objective’ analysis of the organisation, as if they are able to adopt a non-stance; one in which their mind is in Cartesian disassociation with their body. Schein rescues us from this calumny by invoking relationships and their exploration in the course of our consultancy work. In this way, the process consultant uses something more of *himself* [sic] in administering to the ‘improvement’ of the client’s world. I wanted to be one of those consultants who would be more ‘human’, using *something of myself*, developing earnest and engaged relationships with my clients.

What Hochschild is rightly pointing to in her work is the critique of this view as in some way a colonisation of the private sphere. It relies on the assumption that our private selves are free for use; our emotional meter is running in the operation of our role as consultants. Therefore, the private self is harnessed for ‘useful’ work, and even men can find a register of emotional expression more useful, especially if it yields earnings:

*“Gender is not the only determinant of skill in such managed expression and in the emotion work needed to do it well. But men who do this work well have slightly less in common with other men than women who do it well have with other women. When the “womanly” art of living up to private emotional conventions goes public, it attaches itself to a different profit-and-loss statement.”(Hochschild 1983, 2003) p20*

When I look at Schein’s work in the light of what Hochschild is claiming, I get a bit of a cold feeling. I can find no examination in it of the ‘he’ who might choose to use ‘his’ own feeling world, ‘his’ private self, in this service. For me, this represents a blind spot; a fascinatingly absent ‘body’ of inquiry into the ways and means of the emotional life we open up in this way, like another tool in our box, and even more, what price there may be to pay for self and others in this art? No wonder I feel so tired, sometimes, in the course of this work.

The conversation with Sarah has stopped me short. In my work, and my yearning to be a ‘Consultant’, I have played on this desire to be a ‘slightly less common’ man. I have skilfully (I hope) worked the edge of private, emotional expression, this ‘womanly art’. And yet, if it has been in the service of quite traditional organisational and personal profit motives, and therefore quite instrumentally wrought, how radical a shift does this managed heart represent?

I realise that my yearning to inquire into the public/private nexus is precisely to see if this art can be taken a bit further: can I stretch it beyond a breaking point? Will I make a break *through*, whereby I am no longer just being a ‘nice man’ in service of old

fashioned ends, but a truly *good* man, in service of the values I espouse: to go beyond, to disrupt, to *own* the post-gender campaign body and soul?

*A mentsh lives by a code of honor, goes against his self-interest to act with nobility and decency, and is more concerned with pursuing his convictions than success.* (Blach 2000)

So this brings me back to the starting for this chapter; in the inquiring space between the 'glamorous expert knower' and the 'not knowing', I have found a tiredness, a tiredness that I sometimes bring home to my children on a Friday night, an echo not of the *future* but of the *past*, of my own father's similar tiredness. This is surprising, and in many ways illuminating. It suggests to me that inquiry has some life in it, because it often throws up the unexpected in this way.

In terms of *mentshlichkeit*, of being a good man, this is a humbling experience. Once again, I am thrown into place of surprise, of genuine uncertainty, of *not knowing*; a subtle reification of my own performance as a father, compared to that of my own father, has been exploded. In some ways I am back where I started. This is not a bad thing. I feel liberated, and filled with wonder.

As Jim Porter wrote to his children (see Chapter Four):

*The real legacy I can leave you is my uncertain but persistent questioning, my inquiring 'What sort of a man am I?' In the end, isn't it their children who ultimately know the answer to this question of their fathers? Only you and Jenn will be able to look back and say with some authority: this is what he was really like. And so we may meet in the middle of this labyrinth one day. But it helps me to ask, so thank you for letting me. Gradually through this process I am letting go, of my pride, my vanity, my sense of self-importance and standing here hand in hand with you, naked and full of nothingness.*

## Conclusion – Where next?

*'All real living is meeting' – Martin Buber, I and Thou  
(Buber 1958)*

*Lisa: Congratulations Dad! Admitting your ignorance is the first step to  
overcoming it.*

*Homer: So do I have to take the next step?*

*Lisa: Yes Dad.*

*Homer: Doh!*

*(The Simpsons, 2009)*

## The Difference That Makes a Difference?

I return to the question that Sarah Jones has persistently asked me through this thesis. What difference does this make? What impact has this research process had, and how do I assess this quality? This is *action* research, after all.

In the introduction I invited a judgement of validity in this research process in describing action research as about the 'quality of our acting' (Reason and Bradbury 2001). I would point to the richness of the story, and quality of the conversations it provoked, as a demonstration of this validity. I also invited you to consider some questions for yourself, and would invite you to consider how participating in this process has landed with you in relation to these:

- How has it moved you?
- Where has it met your own experience?
- How has it helped you by informing you about your own action?
- What paradoxes and dilemmas has it supported you to act in the face of?
- How has it made you 'usefully uncomfortable'?

Another mark of quality I would celebrate in the course of this inquiry has been the development and honing of critical subjectivity, particularly in dialogue. Again, I would admit that this is a knowledge practice I have stumbled upon, rather than designed, and for which I am profoundly grateful. The characters in this story have been as much of a gift as the relationships in my life that have inspired them.

I am confident that there have been *differences* in the course of doing this research. I would challenge the idea that they are a direct effect of this cause. I could start to make that link, but then we would be back in the territory of a post-modern critique of an account that starts to tell its heroic story, post hoc. To side step this, I would suggest that there have been changes, subtle, nuanced shifts and *differences* that have been working their way through, contemporaneously with this research. Whether they are the 'difference that makes a difference', to quote Gregory Bateson, I think it is too early to say (Bateson 1972). But I would track these differences at two levels.

At one level, I see these differences working on a very local, personal scale, in my own practice and relationships, for example, at work. I notice I have *more* of the inquiring conversations and dialogues, the type of which you have seen throughout this thesis. And counter to that, I think I am having *fewer* conversations like the one Dr. Porter has with his student, Sarah Jones at the beginning of Chapter Four. Or at least, where they are happening, I think I spot them and am more likely to bring them back to a place of 'growth in connection', as Joyce Fletcher calls it (Fletcher 1998). I am not claiming this as an absolute, but as a trend. I aim to continue to be vigilant to it. The work of *mentshlichkeit* is to be wary of when the *sheydim*, the ghosts of a dominant

masculinity creep in and start to assert that they are the finished article. Such work is always unfinished, and about maintaining the practices I have described here, and developing them further. I would suggest that the quality of this assessment comes through the evidence of the conversations I have shown you.

I am also noticing, at the level of my practice as a facilitator and teacher, more of a confidence to push towards the *not knowing* rather than the knowing 'expert' position. Like in the dialogue I started to develop as a practice in Chapter Two (see Practice 3), I am working at being more negotiable in my knowing, recognising the challenges I get from students and colleagues as an opportunity to inquire, rather than as a time to assert my passionate position. Again, I would suggest this as a tentative trend. But I am consistently inspired by David Abram's proposition that we are all, in the (human and beyond-human) world, made of the 'same flesh' (Abram 1996). So I am starting to see my voice as *more* than my voice, and the voices of others', conversely, as mine, at least more often. This has enabled me to be more participatory in the exploration of what there is to know, in the course of doing my work. The quality of this can be assessed in this text only partially, through the sense you get of me in the stories I tell, and in the way I have caught myself 'in the act' as 'expert', and brought myself back to the edge of not knowing.

I do hope that my story had some sort of an impact on the community at Roffey Park. I know that it has had some, for individuals, because I had many good conversations as a result. I have shown some of them here. I also suggest, tentatively, that a few of the decisions people such as Helena and Steve have made were influenced, or at least supported by, their participation in the story, even partially. But I would also own up to a disappointment that the storytelling process didn't have *more* of an impact at Roffey Park. Perhaps, in my anxiety, of 'how I would be seen', I erred on the side of caution? Perhaps I could have been bolder with my challenges; in aiming for a subtle, 'tempered radicalism', I ended up making little impact at all (Meyerson and Scully 1995). On the other hand, I decided to drop this story into the pond that is Roffey Park, to see what ripples it may make, at a time when that pond was stirred up, drained, re-filled and dredged by a number of major events, such as the global financial meltdown. In that light, maybe I didn't quite find enough of the difference that will make a difference here.

This does suggest to me that when you want to keep issues like gender on the agenda in such times, you may have to shout louder than I have been prepared to do, at this time. I return to the conversation I had with Sarah in Chapter Six. Maybe there are still times when the only thing that will shift entrenched positions is the quality of protest. I haven't let go of that entirely.

There is however another level at which we can consider impact of this type of inquiry. Contrastingly, this is not at the personal, but rather has a much larger stage, and is highly systemic and global in nature. I do not claim to have agentically 'caused' any difference at this level, but I would suggest that the research outcomes of this inquiry, particularly in the cyber-gender themes that emerged in the storytelling, tap into large-scale, global trends. As I said at the beginning of Chapter Five, I am not predicting *what* shall happen in the course of gender evolution. I can't possibly predict that. But I am suggesting that things *shall* happen in this arena, at a societal level. Evolution will do its thing, culturally and techno-biologically. Indeed, where these two meet, there will be surprising outcomes, that will challenge the fixed, bi-polar positionalities of gender. In fact, this is already happening. As I write, in the summer of 2009, the newspapers are full of commentary about the young South African athlete, Caster Semanya, who had her gender (I say 'her', because that is apparently what she wants to be called) cast into doubt by her victory in the 'Women's' 800m race at the World Athletics

Championships. I will not go into the debate here at length. Suffice to say there *is* a debate, and it is throwing the whole of the ‘intersex’ conversation into the foreground, ‘storming the stage’, as James Scott suggests these hidden transcripts do, from time to time (Scott 1990). Of course, this storm may rage and then disappear, (and for the sake of poor Caster, I hope it does), but it suggests that there may be an underlying, perhaps accelerating discourse about the nature of gender, which may disestablish received gendered roles further. And this may well be accentuated by biotechnological innovations which are emerging. As a sign of this, even conservative commentators, like Dominic Lawson, are making some surprising pronouncements:

*In the spirit of diplomacy and fair play, let this column offer a solution to these embarrassing difficulties which continue to vex the Olympic movement...an action which will cut the Gordian knot of ambiguous sexual identity. Let there be no male or female athletics championships, divided with the rigidity of South Africa's former apartheid laws. (Lawson 2009) p14*

I recognise that this may be somewhat ‘tongue in cheek’. Nevertheless, I notice the serious subtext of the gender ‘divide’ starting to take on the same quality of ‘criteriology’, as Andrew Sparkes calls it, (that is, an arbitrary distinction made for the sake of socially-constructed differences) as the enforced race rules of a former fascist state (Sparkes 2006). Such parallels with cyber-feminist fiction are too compelling to ignore. And of course, I might never have predicted that Sport would be one of the cultural arenas that would force the issue, but with hindsight, it seems obvious that it would, considering the spotlight it throws on bodies.

I cannot claim that such change is as a *result* of my story here. That would be ludicrous of course. But there is a noticeable symmetry, or at least a synchronicity, convincing me that, from a research point of view, what I have been discussing here is at least timely, and a predictor of things to come.

Finally, as a father, has this made a difference? I hope so. I wondered about this one long and hard. In this research, have caught myself consistently measuring myself against my own father and finding that, contrary to what I might claim, we may not be very different after all. But I don’t have a problem with that now, because in the course of this work, I think I have learned that my father is a good man.

So this returns me to the question: how does this relate to the practice of being a good man? What about the practices of escape from the haunting of the hegemonic masculinity? For that, I would like to tell another story.

### **How it Usually Plays Out**

Heron and Reason (1997) talk about the use of ‘critical subjectivity’ to enable the inquirer to keep his or her feet on the ground with the relational knowledge they are developing:

*“Critical subjectivity involves a self-reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing.” (Heron and Reason 1997) p282*

One of the ways I have done this is to regularly pass my work through the filter of a friend and colleague removed from my world either of Roffey Park or Bath University. This has been Denis Postle’s role for me. Denis has an interesting position in this work; he is an independent figure on the edge of the academic/therapeutic life-worlds. I first met Denis because he was a tutor on the Post Graduate Diploma in Humanistic

Psychology I completed, 1991-1993. He is known for editing an online journal called 'ipnosis', <http://ipnosis.postle.net/>.

As it proclaims, 'e-Ipnosis continues to be an independent source for information about the imposition of a tickbox culture of state regulation on the psychological therapies'. Denis claims an orientation of a radical who has understanding of the established orthodoxies of The Academy, society and government. He claims he is motivated by the will to uncover abuses and hierarchies of orthodoxy. I chose to work with him because I hoped he might hold me to account around the development of my inquiry. He might 'hold my feet to the fire' if I was becoming too 'academic' in my approach. Ultimately his interest and orientation is around a challenge to dominance of 'expert' knowledge, in particular around what he calls 'psycho-practice'. He also knows some of the people involved in the faculty at the University of Bath, including Professor Peter Reason, and John Heron, the Godfather of cooperative inquiry, with whom he has worked since the 1970s.

I have regularly visited Denis since 2004, for alternative 'supervision'. Denis lives 'offshore', literally, on an old sailing barge, on the River Thames in Chiswick, London. My visits have often felt like an interlude in another world, one well-placed to look askance at the one in which I normally reside.

I sent Denis the 'Gender Future' story and looked forward to as rich and poignant a conversation about it as ever. Buoyed as I was by a positive reception in mostly everywhere else I had sent the story, I had no reason to fear Denis' reaction.

I was somewhat taken aback, however to receive this response:

*I don't know how to handle the relation between writing dialog based story telling and the demands of a PhD. I.e. How much knowhow do you have to demonstrate. The latter seems to be in the driving seat to an extent that for this reader undermines the reading experience. Most of the time you seem to be on some cusp between an academic article and a perfectly viable story.*

*And not until this reading have I seen what might be supporting this and how you might move towards some sort of composting.*

*Two points ways of describing the same thing:*

*That it is perhaps a quite strongly masculine piece of writing – that defies I imagine, your conscious intention. How so? (and does it matter?)*

*Well from this fiction writer's perspective, with the exception perhaps of the opening scene, it seems (ref Deborah Tannen) very much, **report** talk i.e. one way giving out. And there is perhaps too little of what amounts to **rapport** talk i.e. talk that is to do with sustaining relationship. I understand you may reject this as making me part of the problem! But I thought I offer you it anyway.*

*Of course you may intend the father's very long letter sections to be simply informative but once you start on dialog as you do with this story I would argue that there needs to be a significant dramatic event that switches us into 'reader of letter mode'. Perhaps through their existence being flagged up several times earlier i.e. threaded through in a minimal but eloquent way so that when we get to them we are keen to find out what they contain.*

*And for this reader (I bear in mind the caveat above) they are way to [sic] long.*

*I hope this proves useful  
Greetings Denis*

I was shocked by Denis' response. It felt overly critical and I was hurt by what felt like a lack of any kind of regard or warmth. In short I concluded that he hated it. I stewed for a while. Could I just put it down to 'his loss'? Was he just too challenged by the gender themes in the story? Did they affront his sexuality or identity in some way? That would enable me to dismiss his challenge as in some way 'his problem'. Gradually however I came round to a more inquiring view. There was clearly something here worth inquiring into: particularly the (what felt like) accusation that I had written '*a quite strongly masculine piece of writing – that defies I imagine, your conscious intention.*' Ouch. Too much truth there – a real resonance with a recurring theme in my inquiry so far: finding myself back in the gendered patterns I might claim I was in some way 'above'.

So I was compelled to meet with Denis and talk about this. Back on his boat, floating on the tide, we had a long discussion. He had misunderstood my need for feedback, thinking that the story was still a work in progress rather than 'an action in itself', and as such a fixed thing. He also acknowledged that he had been overly critical in his comments and that sometimes, as he said himself: '*I underdo positive regard*'. I checked out with him whether he was simply threatened by the gender/blurring in the story and we tossed this around enough that I believed him when he said he was not. We left on good terms, but I still had a sense there was more work to be done, both ways. Later that week, he sent me this email:

*Hello James,*

*I was saddened by what feels like a dislocation of our long-standing relationship and I wonder how it might have come about.*

*Reading your American piece [see Appendix Two] perhaps takes our story on a little. It was interesting and in a counter-transferential way revealing of how I might well miss some of what you've been saying in the story.*

*I found the Obama account very lovingly done and echoing the texture of opinion and freezing cold (the BBC people had blankets over their knees while doing interviews) that emerged from TV coverage I'd seen. The ground level account from inside the crowd and the scale of it was welcome.*

*I had another, perhaps more pertinent, reaction to the Washington text. As I got to the bottom of the first page I tripped over a sentence in which you appeared to have written 'I should know that, doing a PhD **is** the embodiment of masculinity'.*

*'Hold on', I thought. And read it again. It was my sentence not yours. I'd somehow transposed 'in' to 'is'. What this might mean could take us on another journey.*

*My first thought is that it is part of my story to tend to see 'PhD' as a badge of status, i.e. a step on a ladder of 'expert' dominance. Not because it is inevitably so but because this is usually how it plays out.*

This is usually how it plays out.

Denis' words are particularly poignant. My intention with this research process, and this thesis, has been to find out the practices of inquiry and of living that can resist the spectre of a type of hegemonic, or expert masculinity from taking over, from haunting me. Yet how does this usually play out? How *will* this play out in my life? Ultimately, in terms of quality, isn't the way this plays out in my life the main test of the validity of this research process?

I went for a long walk. Everything was buzzing round in my head; the texts I had read, my supervisor's notes, Denis' challenge, my own discomfort with what felt like an increasingly self-absorbed stew. Walking has been one of the practices that helped me get back into connection through my body and with the World, to which I hoped all of this would be of some service. Whilst walking I considered that key question of quality: *How will it all play out?*

As I walked along the river, in the evening sunshine, I wondered what on earth this had to do with everything I was seeing: the sparkling river, people lounging on boats by the lock, a cricket match finishing, a father hooks a small fish out of the river and his small children gather round to poke it. How does what I am doing here relate to all of that?

Then it came to me, and suddenly things seemed to link together: the story in Chapter Four, something that Jim had said in the Café, my intention to respect Steve and Helena in their discussions with me in Chapter Five; Sarah and her thoughts turning to her husband and baby in the storm. It was right there, in what Trem had seen in Trem's baby's eyes; to 'be made by one's child'. And why had people at Roffey Park generally responded so warmly to my story? There was something here I had only just spotted. And it was even in the way Denis had voiced his thoughts. How could I have missed it? It seemed so clear now. It was what I bring, I hope, to the one role in my life that really 'makes' me, that is being a father. It was love.

As I walked along the river, with this sense welling up in me, I passed a young boy, about my son's age, walking in the other direction. I noticed that he was silently crying to himself. He wiped his eyes and sniffed back his tears as he marched along.

- Are you OK? I asked him

But he carried on walking, and threw a stone he had been holding at some nearby geese, which thankfully missed and plopped into the river.

I don't know why he was crying. It could have been something very trivial, or something really painful. I don't know. But I am crying now as I write this. It seems to have such synchronicity; it is timely, as if the 'Practice of Reflection with the World' has yielded a clear message. I wanted to help him, to put my arm around him, wipe his tears and find out what was up. But I didn't, and besides, there are some restraints on 45 year-old-men putting their arms around children they don't know. I just watched him for a while, as he walked away.

I don't know why he was crying, but it just seemed to speak to me of the need for love. What else can I do? What else do I *want* to do, in my work or my life? What else really makes for *mentshlichkeit* anyway, being a good man? It feels scary, egdy, saying this right now. I notice the cop in the head, and wonder what judgements you will make of me? But actually, that doesn't matter. This is what I *want* to do. This is the turn I realise I have made in this work; the turn towards love.

*This is usually how it plays out.* I take Denis's warning very seriously. I offer the practices below as a list, a marker of what I feel, in straightforward terms, I would say, right now, give me a space of resistance to the way it usually plays out. These are the

things I do, or have done herein that I think give me a chance to play it out differently. These are my current practices of *mentshlichkeit*. These are all practices that can be judged in terms of the quality of inquiry I have been applying here:

- The practice of persistence with a set of questions
- The practice of owning gender concerns - this territory is mine
- The practice of being consistently moved by the hidden stories, made more public
- The practice of allowing some disruption in the even flow of my (male) voice
- The practice of making characters real/making real characters, who speak different voices
- The practice of bicultural awareness
- The practice of discomfort as a sign that there is some new learning to uncover
- The practice of letting the stories tell themselves – creating a fertile space for a storied consciousness
- The practice of love

And if there was one, above all the others, that I thought had the power to really resist the way it usually plays it out, it would be the last one.

\* \* \*

- So the love-turn eh? People may not love you for that!
- No that's a risk isn't it? To love without expecting love in return. Can I live up to that, especially in my work? And not expecting it in return feels like a good challenge to the 'glamorous' male academic, who needs the love of the group to feed his ego.
- Does that mean you have to look at the definitions of love, the texts, the sonnets...?
- Oh God no! I am wondering about the *experience* of it. What about a loving critique?
- Feels risky.
- Then that must be a good thing, don't you think?
- We'll see...

\* \* \*

Sarah turned to the pile of letters sat on her desk, with a note:

*You'll know what to do with these.*

*Best*

Jim

The rain lashed against the window.

She placed the letters in the archival boxfile. For a while she considered what to write on the lid.

- Less is more. Let them speak for themselves.

She wrote: 'letters - early 21st century', and placed the box of letters on the pile of crates that were earmarked for the basement.

Then she found her coat, turned off the light and went home.

\* \* \*

They sit on Hampton Court Bridge. The river glints below. The world is on holiday around them: kids with ice-creams; people messing around, not just in boats on the river below, but also on bikes, in cars, by train, on foot, every which way. The two men sit side by side on the parapet overlooking the Palace; the still, small centre of the world. One of them, the younger of the two, is smoking a cigarette. The older one is taller, silver-haired, and has a straight back and an almost aristocratic bearing. He is speaking.

- I am proud of you, of what you have done. You certainly gave it some legs. At least you tried, and found there aren't easy answers, but it is all about action, in the end, in the face of the dilemmas, difficulties and paradoxes

- Thank you.

The smoker draws deeply on the cigarette and flicks the ash towards the river. The older man turns his head towards the smoker.

- So?
- Yes indeed: so?

The smoker turns his head away and squints towards the sun

- SO? Says the older man again, more pointedly

The smoker sighs, and speaks as if admitting defeat. He continues:

- Oh, I don't know... So many words. Too many words. The rest is about doing.
- Yes. It is done, and now there is more to do.

They continue to sit in silence, a silence that is as deafening as the rush and roar of the humanity around them.

\* \* \*

I have lived this inquiry in this shape for six years. What I have shown here is a glimpse of all of that life and the possibilities of persistence towards a set of questions. Now this persistence will take on another shape.

My purpose was to 'show up', to respond to (and later to own) the challenges of feminism, to move towards and stay with this and other discomforts, and to build a relational practice of knowledge whilst working along the edge of disturbance this discomfort creates. Ultimately it was to explore the possibilities of the action turn in the midst of the paradoxes that this discomfort dislodges. In all of this, I have held the possibility of defining being a 'good man', of *mentshlichkeit*, in this light.

But it leaves me with a threshold still to cross. This is the threshold to the rest of my life, with an intention to live with as much freshness, and in-the-moment *inquiry* as I have done in the past six years, yet with the growing burden (an interesting word to use) of a formalised title, an academic masculinity, having climbed up another ladder of expertise (or expert dominance, as Denis would challenge). Will I be seduced into *knowing about* and lose sight of knowing *within*, or even *not knowing*? How will this play out?

This is a challenge I take very seriously. It has bothered me, discomforted me ever since I completed the *Gender Future* story in the autumn of 2008. I don't think there is much more to say about it. It is up to me now, in the words of my 'mentor', Jim Porter, above, to see that it is done, and then just get on with what more there is to do.

But there is a hope for me; all is not lost - indeed far from it (of course). As a Jew, and as a man, I accept that I am not 'self-made'. I have my wife, my family, my friends and community at Roffey Park and beyond, and above all, my children, Max and Jess, to thank for helping me realise that there will always be more *doing*, in the work of *mentshlichkeit*.

I am so much more grateful for that, and for them, than I can ever say.

*Thus the constructive process is inspired by partial happenings, fragmented memories, echoes of conversations, whispers in corridors, fleeting glimpses of myriad reflections, seen through broken glass, and multiple layers of fiction and narrative imaginings. In the end, the story simply asks for your consideration. (Sparkes 2006) p4*

## Appendices

### Appendix One: Reflective Letter-writing

I offer two examples of the writing-to-my-children letter-writing inquiry practice I developed, which lead to the *Gender Future Story* (see Chapter Four).

#### 1) Show and Tell – Where Story and Ideas Merge

From (Adams 2006)

*Frank (1995) encourages us to live with stories, to engage with them emotionally and viscerally rather than to just think about them. This idea guides my project. However, in the spirit of Krippendorff (1995), I wish to re-language Frank's notion. I seek to find what the opposite side of the coin looks and feels like: living with theory. I argue that such a move may further collapse the theory-story binary that haunts the halls of many university settings.*

*For example, my life feels like a tension between showing and telling: I live through the moments of my past that appear without emotional engagement and dialogue; I also live with moments loaded with feeling and conversation. Furthermore I experience my connection to my dad via a relational paradigm. (Bochner 2004, Yerby 1995).*

My response: 2/3/08: Show & Tell:

Show (1)

*My son Max, (9), asks to speak with us, after his sister has gone to bed.*

*"I want to tell you how I feel," he says. "I don't know why but I just feel sad. Or a bit guilty, and there is no reason for it, but I feel these things and don't think I deserve to be happy."*

*The next day, we are riding bikes together, on the way to Kingston, along the river. We are on the way to the shop that sells his latest obsession, which is 'Warhammer' toys.*

*"How is that feeling of yours now?" I ask*

*"Well it's like a black piece of paper that has nearly been completely covered up by lots of white pieces of paper that are the good things. The black piece of paper has almost completely disappeared."*

*"But is it still there, underneath?" I ask*

*"Yes," he says, "It still is."*

Tell (2)

*"Perhaps this is just about growing up" I tell him "You know, life seems so straightforward and simple as a child. But when you grow up, you start to realise how complicated everything is."*

*"Yes", he says, "It is".*

Show (3)

*It must be 1974 or thereabouts. I am 9 or 10 years old. I am riding in the car with my mother and father. Dad is driving. We are on the North Circular Road,*

*a regular route of my childhood, driving past Neasden, where I was born, on our way back to Ealing, where we now lived.*

*I want to tell my father and mother something. Something of how I was feeling. "It is like I am leaving something behind, and I feel bad about that. Like I am a bad person for leaving behind being a child. It is hard to explain, but I feel like I shouldn't stop being a child anymore, like I am betraying my childhood". "Oh don't be silly", says my mother. "Everyone needs to grow up. "It's fine, don't worry." "I don't really understand that at all." Says my father. "You're fine."*

Tell (4)

*I feel awkward remembering this story like this, and have tried to re-remember it, as if it was different, but all I can really recall is a sense of reaching out to get my mother and father to understand and feeling like they didn't, that they were quite dismissive. I don't think they meant to be cruel or harsh, but maybe it was something they just couldn't relate to, and maybe they were just keen to reassure me, and shoo away the ghosts, by saying 'this isn't anything.' There is a danger here that I propose my response to Max's approach to my wife and I is somehow 'better' and that may be disrespectful of my parents in this story. I believe they thought and intended to do their best for us. And maybe Max also feels, in the haste for me to make sense of his experiences (see tell (2)) that I don't quite 'get it'. Intergenerational understanding will always be challenging. What strikes me here is the similarity of the two stories, the universality of the boy wanting to express something of this cusp between childhood and adolescence. And that metaphor of the black piece of paper, the metaphor of doubt. It is such a powerful metaphor for me, especially as 'paper', and 'text' are so intertwined – the marks on paper (electronic or otherwise) that are some kind of articulation of a way out of the complexities of the world, created though power, authority, control, materialism, gender, race, culture, and all set against the inevitability of growing, ageing and death.*

*So my son is telling me, showing me something here, a liminal moment, so well timed, like a distant bleep from a far off star captured by chance on a radio-telescope. It is a signal I can't quite pretend to read yet but it feels vital and relevant to this inquiry. I am so grateful and proud of his ability to articulate this. And I wish I was better equipped to make sense of this message. Being, becoming a man, finding out what sort of man I am, and playing this tape backwards, to check that I have not become the very kind of man I said I would not be, and then realising that being or at least symbolising and embodying a dominant masculinity is to a degree an inevitable process, because I have this big white body, embedded in a big middle class white lifestyle is all a painful realisation, one of my own black pieces of paper, I've been trying to dig down into my accumulated mound of scrunpled heaps of paper and find. And being that man to some degree, accepting it, and then taking steps, in the moment, to remember I am not him too, through such glimpses and then acting as if I'm not, again liminally, by biking somewhere with my son, and trying desperately to understand and not dismiss his feelings, these are good things that somewhat ameliorate the impact of being 'the man'. And I recognise I can never understand, not really, because I am 'the man' as well as a disruption of him. But it is never 'either/or'. I have to accept that I am both, and have been both, the big white bully who 'tells', and the open softer, reddier, bloodier, naked-alongside-him one who 'shows' something slightly different.*

*So the black piece of paper (and there are pieces now, many of them gathered over the years), still lurk, and I wouldn't say I gather them up and embrace them. But I can just about live with their enduring presence.*

*And as for you, my boy: I wish I could take away the piece of paper so you could live your spotless life a little longer, as perhaps my one parents wishes, in their shooing the dark away. And I don't. I celebrate, I exalt in your finding this depth, this darkness within, this shadow. I am delighted you find in your depths the darkness as well as the light. And doubly so, I am overjoyed in you ability to articulate this, and I know that you will choose one day not to do so, to me, and that will be painful –another spot of black ink on my own pristine sheets.*

*So perhaps this is the cruellest turn of all: Far from wanting to protect you from this pain, part of me yearns for it in you, as fathers have done over the years and centuries when they have set their boys loose and alone on the mountainside. No change there then.*

## **2) Inquiry of Discomfort – and a Narrative Conscience: Towards a quality of nakedness in my writing**

*Herein, we argue for conducting emancipatory narrative research with the explicit intent of transforming participants' lives by opening up new subjective possibilities. The argument is situated within the theoretical traditions of postmodernism/poststructuralism and feminist and queer theories. Drawing from Megan Boler's (1999) pedagogy of discomfort and Gubrium and Holstein's (2003) active interviewing, we propose a narrative research method called an inquiry of discomfort. This mode of inquiry challenges conventional understandings of qualitative research that posit the researcher as passive recorder of an individual's experience. Instead an inquiry of discomfort emphasizes the proactive and transformative potential of research projects for both researcher and participant. This approach to research inquiry fosters a specific kind of transformation: the creation of ambiguous and flexible subjects as touted by a pedagogy of discomfort. The aim of an inquiry of discomfort is to identify and promote an intentional and conscious shift from dualistic, categorical and entrenched positionality to a more ambiguous engagement with social reality. (Wolgemuth and Donohue 2006) p1024*

and:

*In the writing of autoethnographic research, the relationship between the researcher and his or her significant others becomes a primary locus of ethical action. Relational research ethics, informed by a narrative conscience, calls the researcher to embrace new layers of complexity in the search for the right story, written with care, while offering narrative and dialogic methodologies for dealing with the dilemmas that come with the territory. (Poulos 2008) p46*

My response: 3/2/08:

*So in standing for some kind of difference between then (father) and now (father)...how do I really know? I can suggest all sorts of anecdotes to suggest "improvement"...(Today we lay in bed cuddling and telling jokes, on a Monday morning I waited to go in late to work in order to see you walk down the street*

*to school. I waited on the street corner to see you walk through the gates. Fearful that something might happen to you, I turned back one last time to check that you had gone in safely.) No doubt my father would not /did not do that for me, but many fathers did and do. I am not that special. How could this become more of an 'inquiry of discomfort' (Wolgemuth & Donahue 2006), a shift from 'dualistic, categorical and entrenched subjective positionality to a more ambiguous engagement with social reality'? In other words, (and boy, does it need those other words if I am going to help you understand!), it would be so easy to demonise my own father and hold myself up as some kind of paragon, something so special, but perhaps engaging in a project towards gender change is messier, and I might have less to prove and more to simply hold myself up, as a kind of model and better to show you that I am no 'better' than your 'Grumps', your grandfather., and that to 'kill him off' in this way would be part of a very old tradition indeed. You, or at least the grown up you, might be more helped by a partial, difficult, honest, uncomfortable me, who doesn't know, but moves towards that disturbance, both within and without, of not knowing?*

*Perhaps it isn't up to me to show you how 'good' I am but rather to show you how I am, to hold this disturbance and nakedness up to you as the best I can offer? Maybe that in itself would be more helpful and 'emancipatory' for you?*

*So I am sitting here, enjoying the warmth of the radiator by my knee, writing to you, imagining you at my age, wondering with a huge surge of joy in my heart what you will make of this man, your father, who calls himself a 'Consultant', and yet who spends a fair bit of his time feeling alone, afraid, anxious, staying on the edge of this disturbance, when all this is what he has to offer; a space of not knowing for sure, in hope, and nakedness.*

I offer these two pieces as evidence of the developing edge of inquiry I was learning to walk along; and to use an alternative metaphor, as musical scales that informed the quality of the story as it emerged, in choices I made around form, methodology and content.

This was a very practical as well as a very 'deep' process; for example, what was interesting about my own responses was that I chose to write them in my own hand at first, as this seemed to enable a more direct emotional connection with the themes I was exploring. This practice continued into the writing of the story, whereby I would write a section of dialogue in longhand as a first draft, and then re-write (often with considerable evolutions in the themes and content) onto keyboard.

## Appendix Two: Praise Song for the Day - 1.20.09

I don't usually do heroes. It's not my cup of tea to follow blindly. I normally stay reserved and circumspect, at the back of an arena. I'm all too ready to seek their feet of clay. So why did I go 3500 miles to follow a hero into Washington DC? This is what I am wondering at the airport before my plane left. Sometimes our actions and their consequences can seem disconnected. But they are like stitches through life's fabric, disappearing and re-appearing in turn. We can book a flight and months later get on the aeroplane. Between the stitches, I wondered if I'd made a mistake. I have an idealistic and a sceptical side to me. At the airport, the sceptic was winning. On the TV in the Departure Lounge, they played Obama's speech live as he left Philadelphia by train, following Lincoln's trail to Washington. People around me seem serious, even a little uncomfortable. Could it be that we have woken up to the myth? After all, who in the UK can't think of Tony Blair without a flinch?

The world also looks like an even darker place, between the optimistic November of Obama's Victory when I booked my ticket, and now. Gaza has burned again and the economy plummets. My own father's health has been bad. No-one can see the bottom. It isn't a time for frivolity. But is it a time for joy? There is, to use Obama's own word, the audacity of it all...

I fly west, into an eternal sunset, arriving in the early evening. I feel my scepticism melting a little as I cross the border at Dulles airport. I came through here before, two years ago. There is a noticeably different atmosphere now. Last time I felt thoroughly checked out. This time, I feel checked out and welcomed. Is this the Obama factor? I find my rental car and drive down crazy roads towards the Capital. American highways unnerve me. People can overtake you on both sides, and it seems to me, even above and below. There is a profusion of road signs, none of which make much sense. It suggests that offering too much information can reduce one's sense of choice. I drive grimly towards anything that says 'East' on it. I find my friends' house and even now I have no idea how I did it. Bob and Gail live in Alexandria, Virginia, about 10 miles outside of the Capital, across the Potomac River. They are intelligent, left-leaning, middle class professionals. They live in the small, Democratic enclave of Hollin Hills, in a modern style house. They leave their front door unlocked and their only security device is a rusty sign in the window that reads 'beware of the dog'. They have no dog. These are Americans who do understand irony.

The next day is Sunday, D-Day minus 2, and I meet my friend Rob on 7<sup>th</sup> Street. Rob is the prime mover of a group call '7 Go West' ('7GW'), a group of friends, mostly civil servants in various UK Government Departments, inspired enough by Obama to make the trip. Sometimes they call themselves 7GW '+' and I am the '+'. Most of them come from a background in diversity, both personally and professionally and they are people for whom these things matter. They have linked up with Doreen Lawrence, mother of Stephen, for whom they are working to organise a ticket into the inner enclave for the event itself on Tuesday. Rumours abound about where these can be found. We meet in a giant, Obama-store, selling all sorts of stuff in homage of The Man. T-Shirts, bags, badges (or 'buttons' as they call them here). I even find condoms, with 'change is coming' on the packet. The place is vast and heaving. There is a sort of frenzy and again, I feel my balance tip towards the idealism. For black people like Rob, there is a hugely significant shift going on that Obama doesn't just symbolise – he makes. It is summed up in the phrase on one of the T-Shirts which Rob particularly admires: 'Obama: the end of an error'. Whatever Obama says or does now, it is who he is, and what he is that has already done so much. I should know that, doing a PhD in the embodiment of masculinity. I know that my body says so much, before I even open my mouth. Obama has already done so much and this is what the people are picking up

on here. And yes, people everywhere are making good money out of his face. In a recession, why not? God bless America.

As Rob and I queue together to pay for our chosen tat (said affectionately), my scepticism reasserts itself. In Rob's hands I notice a couple of medals he holds with a picture of Obama's face on them. At least, it is supposed to be Obama's face but I am not so sure, and neither I suspect was the guy in China who made them.

- Me: Honestly! Put those back. He looks like more like the Uncle Ben's rice guy
- Rob: That's the trouble with you white folks: you all look alike to us too!

We laugh and so does everyone around us. This is the miracle of Obama. Something has shattered. It is as if it isn't colour that has divided us; it is a more transparent substance, like a pane of glass, which has prevented us from really touching one another. People from different backgrounds have lived too long in an uneasy, polite truce, not really talking about *the thing*, the issue of race in all of its complexity. Now perhaps Obama is helping us touch, and talk, laugh, even argue and work it all out. This is necessary, because there is some working out to be done. Everyone, everywhere in Washington is talking about race. Not in a whinging way, but in a joyful, celebratory, challenging, truly *engaged* way. It is so intoxicating and such a relief. Perhaps people are also listening to each other. Rob puts the medals back on the shelf.

There is a 'We are One' concert by the Lincoln Memorial, but we can't really get near it and anyway, we are content to sit in a really good bar with a TV, eat some great American food and talk about Obama. I meet Ben, an African American who works at the Pentagon. 'All I have ever done is serve my country, without question. Now I hope I can be prouder of what it does.' We are so sceptical of patriotism in the UK. Here, it is more of a given, and I'm beginning to wonder if that doesn't make electing Obama all the more remarkable. Perhaps a black man can be a true American Patriot, in a way that challenges us: can we make the parallel claim at home?

Afterwards, Rob and I go for a walk along Pennsylvania Avenue, the route of the presidential parade where the buzz and excitement is intense. People are thronging back from the concert on the site where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made his famous speech, and tomorrow is the 19th January, the anniversary of his birthday and a national holiday. No-one can ignore the significance of this, when history conspires with change so perfectly. It is MLK's dream we are now living. Rob shows me a videoed interview he conducted as part of a vox pop of the inauguration that 7GW are collecting. It shows a black woman, talking about how she was there at MLK's 'I have a Dream' speech, all those years ago. In fact, she says, MLK was losing the crowd and then someone, standing near her shouted out: 'Martin, tell us about your dream!' And he did.

We walk against the good natured tide of people flowing away from the Concert. Rob asks me if I'll help interview someone and I agree. 'We could do with some white people', says Rob and we pick out someone. He turns out to be from Florida, he is 'so pleased he can be proud of America again', (a recurring theme) and he is gay. Rob and I are in a fervour as we wander; of course Obama's arrival isn't just about black people, it's about everyone and anyone who symbolise difference. I read in the Washington Post (19/1/09): 'It's the beauty of Barack Obama', says black senator Ricky Hendon (D), who wrote the book, *Black enough, White Enough, the Barack Obama Dilemma*. 'He's a good compromise person, probably because of his heritage'. Rob says: 'It is precisely because of his mixed race heritage that Obama is so special.' Obama called himself a mutt, a mongrel and this is a celebration of mongrels. Ultimately, we are all 'compromise people', a grand mixture. I find this helpful. Too

often, I can slip into 'being Jewish' as if that is all I am, rather than just one important part of who I am. After all, do I look Jewish?

It isn't all peace, love and understanding. We are reminded from time to time that this is a gargantuan crowd and such a crowd can become a mob. Outside the White House there is a crush of people. Someone stands on the fence to get a photo. A Policeman bellows: 'Get down, you idiot!' The mood darkens immediately. There is a pervading menace here if you want to see it. The 'first family-elect' smiles at us behind bullet proof glass. Apparently the Security Services ordered many tons of the stuff when Obama was elected. Siren wails and the beating of helicopter blades are constant. You do get the impression from time to time that a vast (mostly white) cohort of grey-suited men will heave a huge sigh of relief when this mutt crowd buggers off and leaves them to their military industrial complex in peace.

The next day is MLK's birthday and I wander along the Mall, the big grassy open space that runs about 2 miles between the Lincoln Memorial and the Capitol. This is where we would all be standing tomorrow. The authorities have banned camping overnight so people can't claim their territory yet, but you get the sense that most people, like myself, were checking out the angles. Dotted along the Mall are 6 or 7 enormous TV screens, dubbed 'Jumbotron', and people will mostly cluster around these. They were playing the 'We are One' Concert from the day before on a continuous loop. It is sunny and snowing intermittently. I walk passed the Washington Monument, the great needle in the Mall's centre, where a Revolutionary Communist Party speaker bellows about 'hypocrisy' to a tolerant, disengaged crowd. The ground is strewn with rock-concert detritus, mostly the remains of the 'must have' article of the crowds in these conditions: beside all the Obama-tat there was a profusion of 'chemical handwarmers', which look like disused tea-bags and work by releasing a menthol-like chemical to give frozen digits a little respite. It is cold, and getting colder. A Kenyan acapella music group sings enchantingly for a small crowd of us. They are superb; one of my highlights. I recorded them if you want a look.

I walk past the World War Two Memorial which in its grand overstatement, seems to lack something, and the Vietnam Memorial, which in its understatement, says everything. It is a black granite-lined slit trench, carved with all the names of the US Service people who died. I have seen it before, but it is still achingly poignant. I realise I am deep in thought because Alistair, the 'other white guy in 7GW', as Rob calls him, leaps out at me from behind a tree and for a moment I think I am being mugged. But I am with friends again, as if by accident. It can only happen like that in a vast crowd. There are negotiations about where to next, some people go off in search of the fabled tickets and I go with Rob, Alistair and a young, fiercely bright and funny protégé of Rob's called Nathan, towards Arlington, not for the famed Cemetery but on a different pilgrimage. We head towards the metro stop that will take us to another kind of mall, where we are to do what one must do when in America. We go shopping.

That evening there is a buzz growing in intensity. All sorts of rumours are afoot: People won't be allowed to take in any bags at all, the metro will sieze up, security will be so tight that people won't get in, no-one will turn up because of the cold, the cellphone system will collapse...The latter is the only rumour that comes true. I plan my route. I aim to take the blue line metro to Arlington and walk over the only open bridge passed the Lincoln Memorial and onto the Mall. Bob, Gail and I share a bottle of champagne and talk for hours about all things related to Obama, America and Britain. They are very fond of Britain and Gail is a recognised expert on Tudor history. They also say how they, once more, feel they can be proud to be American. Gail has kindly organised a lift for me to the Metro, with Laney and David. David is the advisor to Ted Kennedy on Healthcare reform. I wish I had had more time to talk with him. But in the

car, all we talk about in the darkness is how cold it is and what routes we can take in. The Metro stop is at the end of the yellow line, so we are lucky as this gives us a better chance of getting on. It is 6am and it is already packed. We squeeze in but are separated and I never see David again. I hear later from Gail that he couldn't get into his office in the State Department where he would watch the Parade, because the Secret Service isn't there to man the entrances to the building. They are all too busy watching out for Obama. David heads back home instead to watch it all on TV.

I am packed in tight in a metro car and everyone is talking. The question is all about where we have come from. Everyone is covered in Obama-tat. I am wearing a gift from Gail: a big grey Obama T-shirt on which is printed the date 1.20.09 below the man's face. 7GW have all decided to have this date tattooed on various parts of their anatomy, before they return to the UK. I demur and Rob, rightly, calls me a chicken. 7GW are coming in from where they are staying on the other side of Washington and my contact with them becomes increasingly intermittent. In the metro car, I win the contest for the furthest travelled. People are 'surprised' and 'honoured' that I have come all this way. It occurs to me that my plan to change Metro lines for Arlington is doomed. I cannot move. It is time to follow the crush, letting it take me where it will. It is not unlike the worst kind of journey in the London rush-hour, only much, much better-tempered.

The crowd surges forward with me at its heart, onto the platform at L'Enfant Plaza, one of the stations nearest the Mall. The throng is immense but moving slowly upwards. As one, we make our way towards the Mall where hundreds of thousands are gathered already. The 7<sup>th</sup> Street entrance, which marks the boundary between the ticket-holding crowds and the free-loading masses of which I am one, is already shut and we are forced westwards to 14<sup>th</sup> Street. It turns out that this isn't that far and I am suddenly spewed onto the Mall, about halfway between the Capitol and the Washington Monument, which puts me just inside the first third or so nearest the Capitol. I am about 3 Jumbotrons back. I find a slightly raised patch of ground that was once grass, but is now part of a dusty field. It is 7.30 am. The inauguration process starts at 11.30am. I stand on my patch for the coldest four hours of my 44 years.

Let me say something about the cold. I only do this because it is hard for someone who has not stood in one place for an age in sub zero temperatures to imagine what it is like. I am well dressed for it. I have on thermals like my grandfather used to wear, several thick layers on top of this, all beneath my voluminous Obama T-shirt. On top I wear my big wool-lined leather flying jacket, scarf and hat. But this is simply not enough. It might not have been enough had I been doing press-ups. I have food in my pockets but I can't taste it. It becomes merely survival rations. I try not to think about needing to pee. In fact it helps that my thoughts have slowed to a crawl. The amiable chat around me when we first arrive quietens to a murmur. Occasionally someone says. 'God' (or more colourful language) – 'It's cold!' You know that scene in Titanic where Kate and Leonardo are in the water together and all the voices start to go quiet? It was like that. Only colder.

But through gritted, chattering teeth, I learn that I am standing next to an African-American couple who have come in from Florida. They also say that at last they can be proud to be American again. (Heard that before?) They tell me they are thrilled to be here, even if they were wearing shorts and t-shirts in the shade the day before. During the course of the long cold-soak, he says, to no-one in particular. 'I just can't believe it, it has hit me again. There's a black man in the White House.' Americans really do talk like this a lot and I have to say, it may sound corny to us reserved, cynical Brits, but actually we could do with a little bit more of this unbridled optimism. I am really moved by it. Later I make Bob and Gail laugh when I say 'the thing is; you

can tell everything about Britain from the fact that we use the word 'quite' as a superlative.'

Behind me are four young Jewish students from George Washington University law school. One of them is a wit. Later when Bush appears on the podium, he shouts out 'Four more years!' There are two young, keen photographers from Ireland. It has dawned on my through my ever slowing synapses that this isn't really just about Obama. It may sound 'American' to say it, but it is about all of us. Ich bin ein Amerikaner. The phone system is down and although I manage to raise Rob once, I must be content with the fact that he and the rest of 7GW are here somewhere, but I never did actually find them. It later turns out that they were within a hundred yards of me the whole time.

The time passes in a sort of dream, and we are slowly defrosted by signs of life on the Jumbotrons. Dignitaries are arriving. Like most events of this type and scale, there is a theatricality to the increasing fame of the faces on the screen. The great build up is well done. The crowd responds more and more enthusiastically as various faces appear, many of whose identity I have to ask my new friends to explain to me. They even show the guy who successfully ditched the airbus on the Hudson River in New York the week before, who had a special invite with his family to the ceremony. The crowd go wild. It is a time for heroes. Perhaps it's just that we finally understand how cold that water was.

Ted Kennedy got a similarly enthusiastic response. When he was taken ill at lunch, people around me saw it very symbolically, like a passing on of a baton. Only George W. Bush draws a 'boo' out of the masses, but even that has a kind of pantomime geniality to it. No-one cares anymore. Today he is, quite literally, history. Later, as the helicopter carrying him and Laura to Andrews Airbase passes over our heads, people wave a gleeful goodbye.

Then the Man appears. There is a sort of booming thunder that sweeps up the Mall, over us and all the way to the Capitol steps. It is an amazing noise. Startled, I even look up for an aeroplane. I can see fighter jets circling high above us, but this noise came from beneath and within us. It was unbelievably loud and the only way to stop one's ears from exploding was to shout along.

Most of the next bit I assume you saw on the TV. It really was quite different there though; colder of course, but more than that. Apparently, when the first men on the moon, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, got back to Earth and heard about all of the fuss that had gone on across the world about their trip, Buzz turned to Neil and said: 'You know, I think we missed the whole thing.' Yesterday, when I got back I watched the BBC's coverage of the inauguration on I-player and had the same feeling. Who was there? I spoke to others afterwards, who had tickets, but even they, like me, watched most of it on the Jumbotron. What day did we experience? And who was really there, or not? We all were there; we all became the eyes that saw ourselves.

In fact, the whole thing goes very fast once the ceremony begins. Only later, having thawed out in a bath at Bob and Gails' that I actually start to remember what I saw. It's funny what catches you. The thing that did it for me was the poem after Obama had spoken, by Elizabeth Alexander. Of course I more than welled up several times during Obama's address, but what breaks me open is one simple line in *Praise song for the Day*. It was, 'Say it plain, that many have died for this day.'

Afterwards, having said our goodbyes, I wander about the Mall, realising that all the exits are blocked and no-one is going anywhere fast. Once more I submit myself to the

crowd, and find myself going along 14<sup>th</sup> Street which leads onto the highway bridges towards the Pentagon and Alexandria, right past the Jefferson Memorial. Perfect. They are closed to traffic and it is great to be part of a huge mob of people walking along the six-lane expanse of road, legally trespassing a place you would normally fear to tread, in the sunshine. It is a strangely post-apocalyptic scene; an anti-disaster movie.

Movement makes us all warmer and we talk some more. The man next to me, wearing a boiler suit, is unemployed, but he doesn't see Obama as the answer. 'He talked about responsibility; I don't think it's up to him; I think it's up to me, but I hope he can help.' The woman on the other side works for a software company. 'Four years ago, my friend phoned me and told me to turn on the TV. Obama was speaking. She said that he would be the next President. So when it happened, I had to come. Yesterday though, it was really cold and I nearly didn't come, but my friends insisted. They said I had made the trip for them. They said Obama speaks to us all and you've got to hear it.' Both of them are young and both are white. They make me think about all the people I am here for too. I think of my son and daughter and hope.

We walk about four miles along this long, curving highway, back across the frozen Potomac River and into Crystal City, which is a rather dull place but it had two truly great things in it: a metro stop and a Starbucks.

That evening I go to a gentle inaugural party in Hollin Hills with Bob and Gail. I chat to a man who originally came from Nebraska. He is eldest of three sons and his father had seen him as the one to take over the family farm. He tells me: 'He was devastated when I became an accountant.' It's funny how life turns out.

Early next morning, my journey to the airport is pretty nightmarish, travelling ten miles in the wrong direction on a crowded highway when you've a plane to catch makes you quite panicky. (I'm using the British superlative there). Obama could do something about the road signs, although somehow I don't think it'll be high up on his list. But I made my flight in good time. It may have been fatigue, the scary highway moments or the soppy movie, but I find myself moved again on the plane. Or maybe having read the Washington Post and The Times and experiencing that Buzz Aldrin feeling, I am able to take in the full global sweep of what I witnessed. It may be just an over-welling of hope that I still feel. Obama called it the 'audacity of hope': something we feel not in spite of, but because of the darkness we feel surrounded by.

Don't get me wrong: I don't feel like I've lost all of my great British sense of perspective. No-one understands the ridiculous better than we do and it is still refreshing to see the funny side. The moment when the honour guard performed the ceremonial 'shutting of the helicopter door' for George and Laura tickled me greatly.

I cannot help but be touched by it all, though, and greatly uplifted. A small moment sums it up for me. On the Metro, on my way back from the Mall, tired and thawing, I caught the eye of an old African-American man. It could have been one of those awkward, pane-of-glass-moments, but instead of quickly looking away, he and I held our gaze for quite a while and smiled. It meant a lot. Obama said it himself: the cynics have failed to understand that the ground has shifted beneath them. My cynicism shudders backwards. My optimist bathes in some light.

## Appendix Three: The Viva (The conversation continues...)

### Introduction

I submitted my Thesis in October 2009. It was examined by:

- Internal Examiner (For the University of Bath): Dr. Chris Seeley
- External Examiner (From the University of Exeter): Professor Andrew Sparkes

Being an 'unusual' thesis, possibly transgressive in both form and content, I had a long time to fantasise (and worry) about what the examiners might make of it. Finding a date for the Viva that everyone could make pushed us back to 1<sup>st</sup> February 2010. This gave me plenty of time for doubt, forgetfulness, anxiety, hope, further reading, reflection and inquiry. By happenstance (or was it just in the inimitable timeliness that has persistently punctuated this project?) I was invited to do some consultancy work in Jerusalem in January 2010, and this teed me up nicely for the approaching Viva. Going to Israel brought some of the questions of my purpose in this work into sharp relief. The significance of this will become more apparent below.

Of course, the choice of examiners hadn't been random. In the spirit of 'coming clean' I would admit to (and indeed encourage in others) an artfulness about that choice. As with all such processes, let alone 'post-modern' ones, where validity becomes a key contention (I wonder perhaps whether this should be in the nature of *all* such examinations?), together with my supervisor Dr. Gill Coleman and Professor Peter Reason, we considered this choice carefully and made what I come now to realise was a very wise, quality choice.

*There is further the issue of who decides who is a competent and legitimate member of the interpretative community. The selection of members of the community to make decisions about issues of truth and value is considered crucial for the results in many cases, such as the selection of members of a jury, or a committee, to examine a Ph.D. candidate or an academic appointment committee. (Kvale 1995) p32*

It has been common practice at the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice (CARPP) at the University of Bath for PhD examiners to discuss and agree lines of inquiry before the Viva. In keeping with a Centre that held open a space of participatory and consensus-based approaches to truth and validity, it is traditional for these lines of inquiry to be sent to the candidate before the Viva. Thus the notion of a 'Viva-as-defence' is deliberately morphed into a more generative (but nonetheless rigorous) process of 'support and challenge'. In short, the examination of the thesis can then be a generative continuation of the conversation, another cycle of inquiry. For me, it led to an incredibly rich and useful conversation, for which I am very grateful.

I thought (and was advised) that it would be useful to show some of this conversation, in the thesis itself. So I offer you both Andrew and Chris's comments and questions, and my response, in full, as evidence of, and a tribute to, the participatory tradition of excellence in knowledge development and legitimation that is the hallmark of CARPP.

I hope you find it useful, stimulating and a further spur to your own inquiries.

\* \* \*

*From Dr. Chris Seeley and Professor Andrew Sparkes*

27 January 2010

Dear James

Here are our comments and responses for you in preparation for Monday's viva, which we are very much looking forward to. Your thesis is strong and creative, and we are in clear agreement about the key issues we want to discuss and learn more about on the day:

- **Issues of embodiment**
- **Issues of validity / judgement criteria**
- **Issues of connecting up masculinities and the ecological situation we find ourselves in now and how this links to your purpose and intention.**

For each of these three issues we anticipate that we will ask you to add in some short paragraphs to comment on and deepen your articulation of these issues in the work. These will be small minor modifications and we do not anticipate that we will ask you for any more additional writing than this to complete your PhD successfully. You will see in our detailed responses to you later in this document some more detail about our questions of you on these issues.

We are also interested in exploring – in discussion with you – some more depth around passive Jewish masculinity, and, of course, where this work will take you in the future.

We strongly recommend that you bring an audio recorder to the viva as we suspect that you might want to transcribe some of the conversation and use it directly for the additional paragraphs we will be asking you to write.

We hope this sounds do-able, encouraging, clear and interesting for you. We think the additions will add something for the field, you and your readers.

Now, on to our more detailed comments for you.

*Andrew first – who is also sending for you the two attached papers to help with the next stages.*

### **On Mentshlichkeit – An inquiry into the practice of being a good man Responses for James Traeger from Andrew Sparkes**

A fascinating, thought provoking, and original thesis that explores the multi-layered complexities of gender identities over time and in different contexts. The author utilises various representational forms to achieve his stated goals, one of which is to illuminate and problematise not just what he thinks (as Jewish father, son, husband, PhD student, worker at Roffey Park, and so on), but also how he thinks about key issues in his life in relation to the subject positions he inhabits. This tactic is risky in that it rejects the traditional linear pathways that lead to authors telling the reader what he/she should know in favour of operating as an artful-writer-persuader who trusts the reader to engage with the text from their own positions and invites them to think with the stories

offered rather than just about them. This may be disturbing for some readers but is clearly welcome by others – including myself. For me, the tactic of using the ‘interludes’ throughout the thesis to playfully disorientate and re-orientate the reader worked very well, especially with regard to signalling the fragmentary and performative nature of the illusionary selves we think have at our disposal within a culturally imposed repertoire. Likewise, I found the manner in which the ‘chapters’ worked with various concepts and theories from a variety of disciplines to be insightful and challenging.

Of course, a thesis of this kind stimulates numerous questions. I would like to offer two as a starting point for our discussions at the viva.

1. Throughout the text, the author hints at the problem of **judgment criteria** for this kind of inquiry. For example, on page 11 he offers some thought on how the reader might engage with the text to ‘measure its quality’. Likewise, on page 202, the author reflects on certain features that might act as a ‘demonstration of this validity.’ In this regard, does the author feel comfortable with the criteria he has suggested be used to judge the thesis? Have they been achieved? How have they, subconsciously at least, shaped the telling/showing in the work itself? What other criteria might there be that could be used for this thesis and those of a similar kind that will follow in the future.

2. While the author is applauded for seeking to be an **embodied presence** in the text – does he think he achieves this? If so, in what ways are his notions of embodiment played out in the stories told and the theories and concepts he chose to work with?

In Chapter 3 the author notes the irony of him yearning for an embodied inquiry while exhibiting the (Jewish and male) characteristic of disappearing. After this, he speaks of his desire to become more embodied in his writing. As he says, “I have bombarded you with words. These are words I am enthusiastic about. I love these ideas”. Does this love of ideas, however, lead to the promotion of a cognitive stance over other more sensual possibilities? For example, might the text be accused of being dominated by the cerebral and the visual rather than by ‘lower’ senses, such as, taste, smell, and touch? How might the text have been produced to engage the full range of the senses as a way of evoking the feelings of the flesh that are evident in so many of the stories provided and the reactions to them?

And now Chris’ responses:

*Responses for James Traeger from Chris Seeley*

**1) Issues of form:** first, I want to write in appreciation of the forms you chose, allowed and developed for this work. I am particularly taken by the ways in which you have created forms which mediate between this potentially “hot” topic and yourself, your co-inquirers and your readers. I would welcome more meta-commentary on the nature of this mediation, and am reminded of Rumi’s “Story Water” (“*very few can sit down in the middle of the fire itself*”):

*A story is like water  
that you heat for your bath.*

*It takes messages between the fire  
and your skin. It lets them meet,  
and it cleans you!*

*Very few can sit down  
in the middle of the fire itself  
like a salamander or Abraham.  
We need intermediaries.*

*A feeling of fullness comes,  
but usually it takes some bread  
to bring it.*

*Beauty surrounds us,  
but usually we need to be walking  
in a garden to know it.*

*The body itself is a screen  
to shield and partially reveal  
the light that's blazing inside your presence.*

*Water, stories, the body,  
all the things we do, are mediums  
that hide and show what's hidden.  
Study them,  
and enjoy this being washed with a secret we sometimes know,  
and then not.*

As I read, I had the sensation of this “*secret we sometimes know, and then not*”. You mentioned a particular quality of gaze Jim cultivated through drawing people – a gaze that was beyond gender. And, on various occasions, you mention a sense of fleeting knowing... it made me think of *fleeting+gaze=glimpse*... glimpsing the possible like seeing something out of the corner of your eye. I appreciate this.

*More on form* – The ways in which you have mingled your *imaginal reality* with your *experienced reality* are sophisticated and engaging (for example, I was especially thrilled by the meeting of Jim and James). I would like you to meta-comment on this more clearly from within an action research and **validity** frame as I think you have an important contribution to make here. You do it already – especially when you write about plotting vs spontaneity. You bring some new insight into the extended epistemology which I would like you to claim more explicitly as being valid.

As a reader, I learned from both of these realities equally. I did, however, find myself yearning for being shown more frequent insights into your own micro-experience and practice. I have to read a lot before I get them. On several occasions, for example, you bring readers to the brink of diving into your **embodied experience**, only to back off again. When I did get your actual lived experience - the Obama piece (why relegated to an appendix?), your early mention of your heart, you doing a jig, your visceral excitement at some of the theory, the phenomenology of holding your tongue when Esther presented – I felt both myself and you more present in the work. I want to

encourage you to be even bolder in dissolving those abstract boundaries between public and private space (“decompartmentalisation”).

*More again on form* – I found the future “Trem-world” intellectually interesting but rather clinical and less engaging. Everything was all very much under control in that world, quite Trecky and to my eyes, masculine again. Clean... white... er, cleansed... (for an example of future writing with a juicier, muddier feel, see Ursula LeGuin’s “*Always Coming Home*”).

*And one last thing on form:* late on, you outline your six practices. I think this sense-making is currently underplayed and could benefit from being more clearly framed, signposted and used – maybe earlier on as framing for some of the other pieces. How might you point towards this hard-won knowing more boldly in order to help guide and inspire others?

**2) On purpose and intention:** I feel that there is another level you can get to and state more explicitly in terms of your intentions. This doesn’t need to be a big thing, but I feel you are touching on it rather obliquely at present.

This work of learning to question and dismantle “his masters house” from the inside out, as it were, strikes me as being incredibly important for our times. How the global “haves”... those with unearned privilege (with white Western males at the top of the tree)... step back or aside from that unearned privilege whilst retaining and expanding meaning in life? That you are bringing this hidden transcript into the light is a worthwhile political act. So, can you be more politically explicit in why you seek to question the nature of masculinity at all? Can you say why unbridled un-self-reflective masculinity is important in terms of causing eco-shock / social insecurity, in the same ways as you imply that broadening and freeing up the “emotional range” (I was thrilled by that Grayson Perry quotation about enabling a wider emotional range through cross-dressing), and the behavioural flexibility for men (and anyone, for that matter... which leads me to want to talk through what Steve said about this work being about human evolution per se...) is such as liberatory gesture? I applaud wholeheartedly this aspect of your work and read it with joy and my own sense of liberation and possibility to transgress gender and other norms... And transgressing the patripsych (which I found a very useful way to distinguish masculinity from maleness / being a man... sometimes in your work I felt these distinctions blurring around – the idea of the patripsych gave me a kind of notion to push against)... And fear of being “punished” for transgressing the patripsych (Grayson Perry, I think, is referring to this when he talks about “tramp fear”).

**3) On Manhood, Jewishness and Fatherhood as a trio:** This is a rich nexus. I wonder if you have worked the Jewishness and fatherhood elements of your inquiry in as comprehensive and integrated way as you might. In the development of *mentshlichkeit*, I am interested in you being more explicit about the relationships between the social conditioning, (earned/unearned) privileges and power issues in the nexus of these three.

How do these differences, when they are making a difference, play off against one another? For example, being a white Western male may offer you some unearned

privilege, and how might this play off against the sometimes underprivileged position of Jewishness?

What is the difference that is making the difference in any given situation – how do you know and how do you find yourself acting in response? What does your Jewish heritage tell you about acting for change, acting for a good life from a position of being (in Robert Chambers' terms) a global lower?

How is the Jewish patriarchy related to the patripsych? How do you find that transcendent third position (of radical openness and possibility) which is not (just) in response to feminism but transcends all the –isms? Where does this leave you as a father in terms of being true to the historical legacies which you inherit, whilst questioning and reshaping the possible futures for both of your children?

**4) Power:** as you suggest a various points, gender issues are inextricably linked with power – gender is often a “difference that makes a difference” – and a basic, material difference at that. I was surprised that the thesis touched on these issues but did not engage in any sustained depth into the relationship between the patripsych, gender and power (over the “Other”). I found that your exploration of the dynamics of power as they are (micro-practiced) are as yet underdeveloped. As a reader, I found myself wanting to be shown more about how the elements of power available to you – whether earned or unearned privilege – played out, intentionally and otherwise. It seems to me to be central to this work that you are trying to question and dismantle inappropriate use of power-over which may (un)consciously be used by or available to men / or through masculine behaviours (notice again there we have this potential blurring between men / the masculine). *This issue of power is something I would like to touch on in discussion but am not asking you to dive into for another piece of writing.*

#### **5) Responses to your own questions:**

*Has it moved me?* I was moved in parts – most of all, with compassion through the two old men on their separate trains: first, your grandfather and second, the black guy in Washington.

I was moved with good irritation when the double binds get mentioned and as Helena's predicament gets described.

And I was particularly moved and enthralled by the meeting between James and Jim. The meeting of these worlds (reminded me of “*The Time Traveller's Wife*”).

*Where has it met with my own experience? How has it helped me by informing me about my own action? What paradoxes and dilemmas has it supported me to act in the face of?* All of these questions evoke the same responses from me: The desire to transgress the patripsych and the tacit fears associated with “not being normal”. With the practices of surfacing hidden transcripts. The facilitator's practices of biting my tongue.

*How has it made me “usefully uncomfortable”?* It has reminded me about just how far we have to go. That men seem differently trapped in the web of our own making than women. And that our liberatory gesture / yearning overlaps towards a transcendent third space. But for me, that that third space is juicy and messy not clean and sorted.

That I am constantly colluding with all of this and that the collusion is driven by deep set fears...

## Addressing the Questions Posed by Andrew and Chris (The scared yid tries - again - to break out)

Addressing:

- Issues of embodiment
- Issues of validity / judgement criteria
- Issues of connecting up masculinities and the ecological situation we find ourselves in now and how this links to your purpose and intention.

I begin with:

*In the bright, cold morning: look at the sky, through the pear tree branches, slurp the bitter-tasting, smothering-my-mouth coffee ('I want more!' it shouts), the slippy, blue, blue, blue Chelsea mug, wait...withhold, suspend, suspend, wait one moment longer...then act, write, get more coffee, that moment of extra suspension allows a sense of wonder to flood in. The Chiasm is opened. Connections flow.*

Here's a phrase about validity/judgement criteria I like:

What is the validity of the validity question? What is it about this: "legitimation mania"? (Kvale 1995)

What does the Academy seek in its urgent quest for validity? Is it about the validity of knowledge or is it about its own validity? Two points come to mind:

- Does a business school, like Roffey Park, (beyond a limited offering of formal qualifications), seek to affirm its own existence as its main criterion of validity? Its focus is internal, and validity is judged in terms of whether it supports its own (financial) survival – 'do people want to buy another management programme from us?' I notice this strong subtext to the final chapter; in particular the 'Steel' story. What legitimation is this? Perhaps the key legitimation in this work has been about bringing me home to Roffey Park, becoming more fully connected here? If so, (how much longer) do I want to stay? I seek a criterion of honesty here, of 'coming clean', *in the half-light where intention, action and reflection meld and play like the flickering shadows of flames on a cave wall.* (p163).
- What do Universities fear when they question the validity of post-modern/subjectivity-based approaches as legitimate knowledge? Chaos? Or just the messiness Chris invokes? A loss of purpose? Do they fear the realisation that their sacrosanct role, the legitimation of knowledge, may have been wrested from their grip, long ago, by institutions such as global business, the mass media or the internet? (And is the Church laughing on the other side of its face at this, saying, "Now you know how it feels!?")

As I write this, I feel a sense of fatigue. Maybe a good story stands just because it is a good story? Yet, as a practice of quality relevant to *mentshlichkeit*, I seek to hold tensions...so what is my way back into engagement with this? How do I put aside my fatigue?

*My own position is that conversations about criteria are important to the interpretivist community, if for no better reason than to engage and elaborate a complex and interesting dialogue and to create a space for a shared discourse wherein we might discover a new community of interpreters. (Lincoln 1995) p276*

I am prompted to engage, and would want to respect and honour this yearned for clarity; these lines in the sand that people are earnestly struggling to draw, whether

locally or universally (as I write that, the image of Tony Blair at the Chilcott Inquiry and a line in the Iraqi desert comes to me...what does a validity discussion have to say about *that?*). I looked back over my thesis and read the papers that Andrew sent to me. I recognise their open-handed gesture. I felt slightly ashamed of my petulance...I do have further energy for a complex and interesting dialogue...

The Story looks more closely at its own possible Judgment Criteria...

Jim and Sarah sat together in her office, looking at the thesis. Out of the corner of her eye, she looked at his face. It seemed more lined than before. She wanted to reach out and touch it. Would it feel as papery as it looked, or slightly rough where the stubble came through? Like her father's face had done, when she had stroked it as he lay in the hospital.

- I like it, she said

- So do I... he said, and added: of course! [and they both laughed a little]

- But you know what is troubling me slightly

- I guess it's the same for me

- Has he been explicit enough in his validity, his judgement criteria?

- Indeed. So what more could he have said?

Jim sat back and she watched him smooth down his long grey hair that had been ruffled by leaning forward. As he did it she could smell a kind of oil he must have rubbed in. Again she had an urge to touch him. She noticed this, noticed the taboo, and let it go. I'll write about it later in my journal [she thought].

He spoke.

- I wish he'd said more about making connections as a judgment criterion

- Connections?

- Yes, as a piece of writing it is so full of connections. He bridges so many gaps. Holds so many tensions. Between genders, between the 'fictional' world and the world of 'action', between the plotless world and story, trying so between himself and the reader, and then himself and these characters that take on their own life, between him and his own children. The main emphasis of *mentshlichkeit* seems to be about holding the tensions, making connections between them, wrestling with them. And that seems to fit with this practice of challenging the myth of the 'whole male self' and also of reflecting with the world. It fits with *mentshlichkeit* and the Jewish masculinity, that is not 'self-made'. Can you have a judgment criterion that is around the quality of connectedness? At the end he also asks validity questions of the reader, trying to make connections with them too. The body/self as a site of connection.

- Yes and it fits the evolutionary perspective he touches upon. A kind of bridging, connecting quality, the Chiasm, that makes connections and this helps life proliferate. The capacity for 'not knowing', so that new connections can be made. This is a good definition of generativity, giving life, 'real' and 'storied', all these options for growth and proliferation.

- But it's as if sometimes, he doesn't quite make it. He seems to sink back into himself. Hence the lack of sensual embodiment, which he himself laments. It's as if there is a quality of 'breaking-out' in it. Maybe that in itself is a quality criterion – the voice breaking out of the box of conventions? And it can only go so far. He only goes so far. It's like he uses his bi-cultural (Jewish) history as a kind of rocket motor to power him through this gravitational pull of convention, but he doesn't quite make it. He ends up in orbit of it, at best. So there is a partial breaking out. Maybe that's what he sought? After all he wanted, needed, to stay tied to certain communities, conventional communities, like his family, like Roffey Park. Unlike me, he has stayed at home. At least so far...

Why didn't Sarah touch Jim? Does this say something about the territory of embodiment? Through the frame of gender, this sensual (and sexual?) territory feels

very risky. What are the reasons why I failed to get more present to the embodied in my writing? Am I just too much of a scared yid?

A scared yid. I offer this is not as an excuse, just an elaboration. If I am *promoting a cognitive stance over other more sensual possibilities*, it is because I might be too scared of doing more towards these possibilities here (like Sarah was). This may just be about me (not letting myself off the hook), but it also maybe signalling a perspective on these sensual possibilities from the position of a particular 'global lower' as Chris says, (citing Robert Chambers). In other words, if, as a Jew, my intellect gets in the way of my body, it could be because it has long been there as a shield against the blows.

Developing this, there was a word in Andrew and Chris' wonderfully rich commentary that really grabbed me, that may inform this further. It was 'passive', as in 'passive Jewish masculinity'. Had I used that word? I checked the thesis thoroughly, even using the 'find' function in MS Word. Nope. Not there. It wasn't my word. This perhaps takes us on another turn that helps in addressing some of their questions.

*Passive. The word landed as a blow. I felt it in my guts. All sorts of thoughts, feelings and sensations rush in: Passive: A blow, here in my stomach, ouch, shame, wanting to hit back, Holocaust, Israel, tears.*

Calling on my own 'shared community of interpreters', I ask my friend Martin, another self-confessed 'scared yid', whose ability to make connections with his own body I admire, what do the words 'passive Jewish masculinity' say to you? He says:

*First time you said it, I felt something in my face then my belly. A tingle around my nose, then the energy went down, lit up my stomach, then the tops of my thighs, [he sweeps his hands down in a kind of arc from his chest to his thighs]. I am not sure what to make of it. What comes to me in words? I don't like it. It is negative rather than positive. The little scared yid comes to me. The slightly comedic Jew, oppressed, neurotic, short, weedy, the Jewish accountant. Like Jackie Mason's joke about when the car breaks down. He sees the non-Jew get out, gets under the hood, fixing it. He just says to himself, 'It's stopped. Where's the nearest Goy?' [non Jew]. He's intellectual, disembodied, big brain. Impractical. He calls a gentile to sort it out. It's that double thing. The 'who has power over whom?' story. I'm the one with the money; I don't need to get my hands dirty. I'm so clever I'll call the muscular non-Jew, who I resent, but who I also feel superior to. We project our hostile feeling out to them and then see their hostility to us.*

In early January this year I went to Israel on business. So this is fresh in my mind. It perhaps says something about how this may continue to play out, and perhaps 'how I connect up masculinities and the ecological (and other) situations we find ourselves in and how this links to my purpose and intention'. So forgive me for another diversion into the (safer) territory of ideas...

Yuri Slezkine, in *The Jewish Century*, writes about the Jews as archetypal 'mercurians'; shape-shifters on the edge of 'apollonian' (non-Jewish) society. The mercurians were what he calls 'service nomads', attached to a trade, book, or role, required but (often) despised by their fixed, agriculturalist, apollonian 'clients' (and vice versa), who are attached to a land.

*The Jews, Parsis, Armenians, Eastern European Germans, Overseas Indians, and Overseas Chinese were not only more literate (on average) than their*

*clients; they were acutely aware of being more literate - and thus more knowledgeable and more sophisticated. (Slezkine 2004) p29*

So these service nomads were often seen by their settled, land-based, Apollonian clients as physically weak, inferior and 'passive', but also feared by them for their flexibility, knowledge and artfulness. In turn, these service nomads allowed this view of themselves as passive and physically weak, because it served them, as a mirror of their own sense of their intellectual and storied superiority. But this did not mean that they didn't fear the blows too, from 'Ivan', the model of the threatening Russian male, the classic Apollonian:

*Either way, they would all take a justifiably dim view of Ivan. If one values mobility, mental agility, negotiation, wealth, and curiosity, one has little reason to respect either [Apollonian] prince or peasant. And if one feels strongly enough that manual labor is sacred, physical violence is honourable, trade is tricky, and strangers should be either fed or fought (or perhaps there should be no strangers at all), one is unlikely to admire service nomads. And so, for much of human history, they have lived next to each other in mutual scorn and suspicion – not because of ignorant superstition but because they have had the chance to get to know each other. (Slezkine 2004) p29*

I would add that they have got to know each other 'in a certain way'; and that my purpose is to disrupt this way. Slezkine goes on to suggest that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was the 'Jewish Century' because we have 'all become more mercurian', and the Jews in particular, with the notable (and significant) exception of the Holocaust, have thrived in a modern world more suited to mercurians. But then there is Israel. Israel, in this analysis, is from a time out of time; from a yearning of Jews to revive their own Apollonian myth. At a time when (nationalisms aside), the rest of the (Western) world is becoming (at least in theory) more mercurian, mobile, professionalised, negotiable, knowledge-rather-than-agriculture based, some (most?) Jews see their future is secure only in their own 'secure' land, with their own certain Apollonian dream fulfilled, in the land of Israel.

So how does this link to my inquiry? In my reaction to the word 'passive', there seems to be another vital connection to be made. I make this connection to non-Jews who are the main readership (so far) of my stories and writing. I don't believe that your use of the word, 'passive', is intended to hurt me, though it does. But rather than sinking back into the blow, taking it as an acceptable accompaniment to the story I carry in my community about your brutish artlessness, I reach out for mutual understanding. I have discussed the idea of a self-made man being disrupted by the idea of a Jewish man being 'made by his community', but until now, that has always carried the subtext, 'made by his *Jewish* community'. I make this hidden transcript more explicit now, because I see this as part of a world project:

- I challenge Zionism because I want my children to live as proud Jews, head held high in a more-than-Jewish world. My own children will not be safer in a 'secure' Israel (far from it) but in a world where *all* children are safe. This is the world I hope to help make.
- I challenge the self-made man, not just within my own Jewish world, but in the false boundary between *all* men and their rest-of-worlds. I once heard Peter Reason talk about how when we throw things 'away', where is 'away'? That 'away' is part of me. I am part of it. It, you and I, in the words of David Abram, 'are of the same flesh' (even if that flesh has considerable range of memories). (Abram 1996)

I reach out to you, to touch you, but I need you to know that I am still (somewhat) a scared yid, attempting to break out of (but not break *up*) my Jewishness and my masculinity, so that a proliferation of both may emerge.

Where does this takes me now? I see solutions to the ecological challenge served by the more immediate crisis of divisive nationalisms (such as Zionism) and the false divide between self and other. In my own (small) world, I would like to continue to tackle this in a several ways:

- In my everyday world, I would like to continue to serve for a better mutual understanding of the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. I hope to let go of my defensiveness (but not my fear perhaps) so that what it means to be a Jew is better understood by the non-Jewish world and vice versa. Roffey Park has been a good stage to set this play. Whether it continues to be or not....
- This means adherence to the criterion of 'coming clean', so... a very discomfoting connection is made...is the shame I felt above a victim's shame, for colluding with a system that tolerates violence as part of the status quo? We feared Ivan's blows but they were a price we paid for supplying our services...but then there was the Holocaust...
- In my Jewish world, I think it is time I tackled Zionism in some way, more directly. Again, I do not do this to create division, or to charge in like some 'hero', but to do some inquiring, healing work. How could I take the same quality of persistence I have shown towards gender questions into this territory? It is to engage, to make connection, to allow a stuck story to become unstuck, and to proliferate. When I was in Israel recently, my hotel bedroom looked out on two walls: the old wall of the city of Jerusalem (that I was supposed to look at), and the much newer, taller and uglier wall that separates Israel from Palestine (that I had to crane my neck to see). I know which one I'd most like to take a hammer to.

As an aside to all this, (or perhaps as another validating 'connection') in Jerusalem I bought a colourful, Druze-made Yamulka (head covering) for my son Max. For the last two weeks, he has been wearing it every day to School. I find this incredibly moving and timely (not to mention scary). Is he already doing much more than I am, I suspect, to embody a move in any of the above trajectories?

## Bibliography

In the story sections, I have avoided including references, as I felt it would detract from the narrative flow. In recognition of this, at the beginning of this bibliography, I include the few references (and their locations) that relate specifically to works I have cited within the narrative, where they haven't been cited and referenced elsewhere in the text:

*The Myth of Mars and Venus*, book by Deborah Cameron (see p93): (Cameron 2007)  
*A Doodle at the Edge*, poem by William Ayot (see p94): (Ayot 2003)  
*On Dialogue*, book by David Bohm (see p95): (Bohm 1996)  
*Fight Club*, book by Chuck Palahniuk (see p108): (Palahniuk 1996, 2006)  
*Slip Sliding Away*, song by Paul Simon (see p123) : (Simon 2000)  
*La Vita e Bella*, film by Roberto Benigni (see p124): (Benigni 1999)

The fiction set in 2220 (see in particular p133) was inspired in part by the work of Wilhelm Reich and also the biography of Reich by his son, Peter. In particular two works had an impact on my thinking:

*Listen, Little Man*, by Wilhelm Reich: (Reich 1975 (1948))  
*A Book of Dreams* by Peter Reich: (Reich 1974)

Abram, D. (1996). The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More Than Human World. New York, Pantheon.

Adams, T. E. (2006). "Seeking Father: Relationally Reframing a Troubled Love Story." Qualitative Inquiry **12**: 704-722.

Allison, H. E. (1999). Immanuel Kant. The Great Philosophers - Introducing Great Western Thinkers. T. Honderich. Oxford, OUP.

Alvesson, M. and S. Deetz (2005). Critical Theory and Postmodernism: Approaches to Organizational Studies. Critical Management Studies - A Reader. C. Grey and H. Wilmott, Oxford University Press.

Ayot, W. (2003). A Doodle at the Edge. Small Things that Matter. London, The Well at Olivier Mythodrama Publishing: 45.

Baddeley, S. and K. James (1987). "Owl, Fox, Donkey or Sheep: Political Skills for Managers." Management Learning **18**(1): 3-19.

Baker, P. (1998). Real Men Can Have Feelings. The Independent. London: 13.

Bateson, G. (1972). Steps to an Ecology of Mind. San Francisco, Chandler.

Bem, S. (1974). "The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny." Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology **42**: 155-162.

Benigni, R. (1999). *La Vita e Bella* (Life is Beautiful). Italy.

- Biddulph, S. (1995.). Manhood - An Action Plan for Changing Men's Lives. Sydney, Finch.
- Blach, B. (2000). Learning Yiddish - the complete idiots guide. New York, Alpha/Penguin.
- Blackmore, S. (2000). The Meme Machine. Oxford, Oxford Paperbacks.
- Bly, R., Ed. (1990). Iron John: a book about men. Reading, Mass, Addison Wesley.
- Bohm, D. (1996). On Dialogue. London, Routledge.
- Boyarin, D., D. Itzkovitz, et al. (2003). Strange Bedfellows: An Introduction. Queer Theory and the Jewish Question. D. Boyarin, D. Itzkovitz and A. Pellgrini. New York, Columbia University Press: 1-18.
- Boyarin, J. (1996). Thinking in Jewish. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Brown, A. (2004). Mentsh - on being Jewish and Queer. Los Angeles, Alyson Books.
- Buber, M. (1948, 1994). The Way of Man. London, Routledge Classics.
- Buber, M. (1958). I and Thou.
- Butler, J. and S. Salih (2004). The Judith Butler Reader. Malden, MA, Blackwell.
- Calás, M. B. and L. Smircich (1993). Dangerous Liaisons: The "Feminine in Management" Meets "Globalization". Business Horizons: 71-81.
- Cameron, D. (2007). The Myth of Mars and Venus - Do men and women really speak different languages? Oxford, OUP.
- Cheung-Judge, M.-Y. (2001). "The Self as an instrument - A cornerstone for the future of OD." OD Practitioner **33**(3): 11-16.
- Clandinin, J. D. and M. F. Connelly (2000). Narrative Inquiry; Experience and Story in Qualitative Research. San Francisco, Josey-Bass.
- Collinson, D. L. and J. Hearn (1996). Men as Managers, Managers as Men: Critical Perspectives on Men, Masculinities and Managements. London, Sage Publications.
- Connell, R., W (1995). Masculinities, Polity.
- Corrigan, P. (1988). "Viewpoint the body of intellectuals/the intellectuals' body (remarks for Roland)." Sociological Review **36**(no 2): 368 - 380.
- Dvorsky, G. and J. Hughes (2008). "Postgenderism: Beyond the Gender Binary." Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies, Williams 229B, 300 Summit St. Hartford CT 06106 USA IEET-03.

- Dyer, R. (1997). The White Man's Muscles. The Masculinity Studies Reader 2002. R. A. a. D. Savran, Blackwell: 262-271.
- Ellis, C. (1997). Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Emotionally about Our Lives. Representation and the Text. E. Tierney and Y. Lincoln. New York, SUNY.
- Ellis, C. and A. Bochner (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. Handbook of Qualitative Research. D. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, Sage: 733-768.
- Eugenides, J. (2002). Middlesex. London, Bloomsbury.
- Faludi, S. (1992). Backlash - The Undeclared War Against Women. London, Chatto & Windus Ltd.
- Faludi, S. (1999). Stiffed - The Betrayal of the Modern Man. London, Chatto & Windus.
- Fisher, D., D. Rooke, et al. (2000). Personal and Organizational Transformations through action inquiry. Boston, Edge\Work Press.
- Fisher, D. and W. R. Torbert (1995). Personal and Organizational Transformations: the true challenge of continual quality improvement. London, McGraw-Hill.
- Fletcher, J. K. (1998). "Relational Practice: a feminist reconstruction of work." Journal of Management Inquiry 7(2): 163-186.
- Fletcher, J. K. (1999). Disappearing Acts: gender, power and relational practice at work. Cambridge, MA, IT Press.
- Foucault, M. (1975). Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison (translated 1977 by Alan Sheridan). London, Penguin.
- Fox, K. (2004). Watching The English - The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour London, Hodder.
- Frank, A. (1995). The Wounded Storyteller. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Geis, F. (1993). Self Fulfilling Prophecies: A Social Psychological View of Gender. The Psychology of Gender. A. E. Beall and R. J. Sternberg. New York, Guildford: 9-39.
- Geis, F. (1996). Self Fulfilling Prophecies: A Social Psychological View of Gender. Gender in Thought and Action: 9-39.
- Gergen, M. (1992). Life Stories: Pieces of a Dream. Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self Understanding. G. C. Rosenwald and R. L. Ochberg. New Haven, Yale University Press  
127-144.

- Gibson, A. (2002). Violently Tender - Performance Poetry, Pen Press.
- Gordon, G. (2007). Towards Bicultural Competence - beyond black and white, Trentham Books.
- Griffiths, M. (1995). Feminisms and the Self: the Web of Identity. London & New York, Routledge.
- Grint, K. (2005). "Problems, Problems, problems, the social construction of leadership." Human Relations **58**: 1467-1494.
- Grosz, E. (2004). The Nick of Time - Politics, Evolution and the Untimely. Durham, Duke University Press.
- Gustavsen, B. (2001). Theory and Practice: The mediating discourse. Handbook of Action Research: Participative inquiry and practice. P. Reason and H. Bradbury. London, Sage Publications: 17-26.
- Haraway, D. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature. New York, Routledge: 149-181.
- Harman, H. (2008) Foreward to the International Centre for Women Leaders Report. **Volume**, DOI:
- Haywood, C. and M. Mac an Ghail (2003). Men and Masculinities. Buckingham, Open University.
- Hearn, J. (1992). Men in the Public Eye. The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies. London, Routledge.
- Heron, J. (1996). Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the human condition. London, Sage Publications.
- Heron, J. and P. Reason (1997). "A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm." Qualitative Inquiry **3**(3): 274-294.
- Hoberman, J. (1995). Otto Weininger and the Critique of Jewish Masculinity. Jews & Gender - Responses to Otto Weininger. N. H. a. B. Hyams.
- Hochschild, A. (1983, 2003). The Managed Heart - Commercialization of Human Feeling Bekeley, University of California Press.
- hooks, b. (1991). Yearning: Race, gender and cultural politics, Turnaround.
- Isherwood, C. (1993). The Berlin Novels. London, Vintage.
- Jackson, A. Y. (2004). "Performativity Identified." Qualitative Inquiry **10**: 673-689.

- Jacques, R. (1997). *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Reflections of a Pale, Stale Male. Managing the Organizational Melting Pot: Dilemmas of Workplace Diversity.* London, Sage Publications: 80-106.
- Kafka, F. (1916). *Metamorphosis. Metamorphosis and other stories.* London, Minerva.
- Kimmel, M. (2006). *Manhood in America - A Cultural History.* New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- King, S. (2000). *On writing - a memoir of the craft.* New York, Simon & Schuster.
- Kvale, S. (1995). "The Social Construction of Validity". *Qualitative Inquiry 1(1): 19-40.*
- Lather, P. (1993). "Fertile Obsession: Validity after poststructuralism." *The Sociological Quarterly 34(4): 673-693.*
- Lather, P. (2001). Validity as an Incitement to Discourse: Qualitative research and the crisis of legitimation. *Handbook of Research on Teaching, 4th Edition.* V. Richardson. Washington DC, American Education Research Association. **Fourth Edition:** 241-250.
- Lawson, D. (2009). No Sexing Please - let's all race together. *The Sunday Times.* London. **23/8/09:** 14.
- LeGuin, U. K. (1969, 1997). *The Left Hand of Darkness.* London, Virago.
- Lincoln, Y. S. (1995). "Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research." *Qualitative Inquiry 1(3): 275-289.*
- Lincoln, Y. S. (1997). *Self, Subject, Audience, Text: Living at the Edge, Writing in the Margins. Representation and the Text: re-framing the narrative voice.* W. G. Tierney. Albany, SUNY Press.
- Linstead, A. and S. Linstead (2005). *Gender as Multiplicity, desire, difference and dispersion.* London, Routledge.
- Lusher, D. and G. Robins (2009). "Hegemonic and Other Masculinities in Local Social Contexts." *Men and Masculinities 11(387): 387-423.*
- Marshall, J. (1995). *Women Managers Moving On: Exploring career and life choices.* London, International Thomson Publishing Europe.
- Marshall, J. (1999). "Living Life as Inquiry." *Systematic Practice and Action Research 12(2): 155-171.*
- Marshall, J. (2007). *Finding Form in Action Research. Handbook of Action Research.* P. Reason and H. Bradbury. London, Sage: 682-694.
- Martell, Y. (2003). *The Life of Pi,* Canongate Books.

Meyerson, D. E. and M. A. Scully (1995). "Tempered Radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change." Organization Science 6(5): 585 - 600.

Mooney, B. (1999). Are Men so downtrodden they need lessons in how to cope with women at work? The Mail on Sunday. London: 41.

Morgan, G. (1986). Images of Organization. London, Sage Publications.

Moustakas, C. (1981). Heuristic Research. Human Inquiry: A sourcebook of New Paradigm Research. P. Reason and J. Rowan. Chichester, Wiley: 207 -217.

Mulder, T. (2007). Trembling. International Association of Facilitators Annual Conference - Europe, Edinburgh.

Mulholland, K. (1996). Entrepreneurialism, Masculinities and the Self Made Man. Men as Managers, Managers as Men, Critical Perspectives on Men, Masculinities and Management. D. Collinson and J. Hearn. London, Sage: 123 - 149.

Palahniuk, C. (1996, 2006). Fight Club. London, Vintage.

Pease, A. and B. Pease (1999). Why Men Don't Listen & Women Can't Read Maps, Pease Training International.

Pease, B. (2000). Recreating Men - Postmodern Masculinity Politics, Sage.

Poulos, C. N. (2008). "Narrative Conscience and the Autoethnographic Adventure - Probing Memories, Secrets, Shadows, and Possibilities" Qualitative Inquiry 2008:14: 46: 46-66.

Raab, N. (1997). "Becoming an Expert in Not Knowing - Reframing Teacher as Consultant." Management Learning 28(2): 161-175.

Reason, P. (2001). "Participation in Writing, Carving and Teaching." ReVision 23(4): 44-48.

Reason, P. (2003). Choice and Quality in Action Research. World Congress of Action Research, Pretoria, South Africa.

Reason, P. and H. Bradbury (2001). Inquiry and Participation in Search of a World Worthy of Human Aspiration. Handbook of Action Research: Participative inquiry and practice. P. Reason and H. Bradbury. London, Sage Publications: 1-14.

Reason, P. and H. Bradbury (2001). Preface. Handbook of Action Research: Participative inquiry and practice. P. Reason and H. Bradbury. London, Sage Publications: xxiii-xxxi.

Reason, P. and H. Bradbury (2008). Introduction. Handbook of Action Research. P. Reason and H. Bradbury. London, Sage: 1-10.

Reich, P. (1974). A Book of Dreams. London, Pan Books, Picador.

- Reich, W. (1975 (1948)). Listen, Little Man! Harmondsworth, Mddx, Pelican.
- Richardson, L. (2005). Writing A Method of Inquiry. Handbook of Qualitative Research. N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, Sage: 923-948.
- Rowan, J. (2005). "Achilles Heel and the anti-sexist men's movement." Psychotherapy and Politics International 3(1): 58-71.
- Sacks, J. (1997) Love, Hate and Jewish Identity. first things **Volume**, 26-31 DOI:
- Schein, E. H. (1969). Process Consultation: Vol 1: its role in organization development. Reading, Mass, Addison Wesley.
- Scott, J. C. (1990). Domination and the Arts of Resistance - Hidden Transcripts, Yale.
- Seidler, V. J. (1989). Rediscovering Masculinity - Reason, Language and Sexuality. London, Routledge.
- Seidler, V. J. (2005). Explorations - Gender Sex and Power at Work, Gender Sex and Power Bristol July 2005.
- Seidler, V. J. (2006). Transforming Maculinites - men, cultures, bodies, power, sex and love, Routledge.
- Seidler, V. J. (2007). "Maculinites, Bodies, and Emotional Life." Men and Maculinites 10(9): 9-21.
- Senge, P. M., A. Kleiner, et al. (1994). The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: strategies and tools for building a learning organization. New York, Doubleday.
- Senge, S., Jaworksi and Flowers (2005). Presence Exploring Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society. London, Nicholas Brearley Publishing.
- Simon, P. (2000). Slip Slidin' Away. Greatest Hits - Shining like a national guitar. London, Warner Label.
- Sinclair, A. (1998, 2005). Doing Leadership Differently: Gender, Power and Sexuality in a Changing Business Culture, Melbourne University Press.
- Sinclair, A. (2005). "Body Possibilities in Leadership." unpublished - received direct from author - a.sinclair@mbs.edu.
- Slezkine, Y. (2004). The Jewish Century. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. USA
- Smith, A. (1776, 2003). The Wealth of Nations. London.

- Sparkes, A. (2002). Auto-ethnography: Self-Indulgence or Something More? Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature and Aesthetics. A. Bochner and C. Ellis. New York, Altamira Press.
- Sparkes, A. (2006). Embodiment, academics, and the audit culture: A story seeking consideration. *Emerging Approaches 2006*, Hawkwood College, Stroud.
- Strozzi-Heckler, R. (2007). The Leadership Dojo - Build Your Foundation as an Exemplary Leader. Berkeley CA, Frog.
- Torbert, W. R. (2001). The Practice of Action Inquiry. Handbook of Action Research: Participative inquiry and practice. P. Reason and H. Bradbury. London, Sage Publications: 250-260.
- Toulmin, S. (1990). Cosmopolis: The hidden agenda of modernity. New York, Free Press.
- Traeger, J., L. Willis, et al. (1999, 2006). Navigator Men's Development Workbook. Stroud, Hawthorn.
- Trungpa, C. (1973, 2002). Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. Boston & London Shambala.
- Turner-Vesselago, B. (nd). Freefall: writing without a parachute. Toronto, The Writing Space.
- Unger, R. K. (1999). Outsiders Inside: Positive Marginality and Social Change. Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Boston Massachusetts.  
 unger@brandeis.edu
- Weiner, H. (1969, 1992). 9 1/2 Mystics - The Kabbalah Today. New York, Macmillan.
- Wex, M. (2005). Born to Kvetch - Yiddish Language and Culture in All of Its Moods. New York, Harper Perennial.
- Wheatley, M. J. (1999). Leadership and the New Science : Discovering Order in a Chaotic World. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.
- Wolgemuth, J. R. and R. Donohue (2006). "Toward an Inquiry of Discomfort." Qualitative Inquiry **2006, 12; 1012**: 1022 - 1039.