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UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

Department of Management
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**ON BECOMING AN ACADEMIC: AN
AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S TRANSITION
FROM INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT TO ACADEMIC IN MANAGEMENT.**

SUPERVISOR: HUMPHREY BOURNE

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A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements
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Abstract


My thesis has an accidental quality about it. Beginning as a fairly conventional inquiry into the life course of independent management consultants, I was diverted by a combination of conscious and unconscious influences from this purpose towards a more intimate exploration of my experience of becoming an academic, a life changing process that paralleled, again somewhat accidentally the emergent course of this thesis.

Relatively little is known at the individual level about the inner workings of this conversion process from independent consulting role to management academic. This narrative represents the insider story of one person's migratory journey through the conversion maze, and makes a contribution to knowledge in its revelation of understanding of this life world, which should enable the more sensitive design of future conversion structures and mechanisms.

This thesis contains within it, as a play within a play an account of the experience of constructing an emergent PhD; at one level this is a PhD about writing a PhD. Written in narrative, autoethnographic form, this thesis troubles the boundaries of accepted assumptions regarding management PhD practice. This disturbance is problematised within the text, and commentary is made on the relevance and validity of narrative as a vehicle for PhD delivery. This challenge to traditional PhD representation comprises a departure from standard management research practice; and the use of autoethnography - which is fully explicated - makes claims to constituting a contribution to management research methodology. The original theme of life course of independent consultants is not altogether lost, and along the way light is shone into the little researched life trajectory of this distinctive grouping.

Disclaimer

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University of Bristol's Regulations and Codes of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidates own work . Any views expressed in this dissertation are those of the author.



11/12/08

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Secondly, but second to none, my acknowledgements to my wife Louise for all of her support and freely offered gifts of love, patience and attention over the last three long years. She has sacrificed not only our time together but also her kitchen table. Not greater price could any woman pay than that. The kitchen table I mean. Louise has also unflinchingly put aside jealousies of madam fud – as my PhD has come to be known – to support, read, critique, edit, assist with layout and otherwise love into life this sometimes intransigent and stubborn beast.

Thirdly, acknowledgments to my family for all of their direct and indirect support. To my mother for her unflagging belief and more recently her appreciative reading of madam fud, to my sisters and brother for their reading and inspiration, and in particular to my sister and study buddy Nuala who has helped me to know and learn where her humanities PhD on Virginia Wolfe intersects at various points with my project. Also to her husband Roger Hancock for his wisdom from an Education / social science perspective.

Fourthly to my collaborators, the independent co-creatives for their wholehearted engagement with this project at every stage, from the research conversations through to being such patient and critical readers of considerable chunks of this material. This project would simply not have been possible without this deep level of engagement and support.

Fifthly to the students who have proved so willing to share in the 'writing as inquiry' adventure, and who have given a great deal of themselves while taking bold and significant risks in the process. Not only have these students immersed themselves in the writing project, but they have also proved of immeasurable assistance through their critical reading of many of the autoethnographic materials in this document. This appreciation is extended to my students and colleagues in South Africa as much to my students here in Bristol.

Sixthly and lastly, acknowledgments are extended to the wider community of independent co-creatives, and to other random readers, who have given time and thought to reading and extensively critiquing key chunks of this narrative. Again, this diversity of feedback has enriched the text; it has given me confidence when I have been doubtful, and it has reminded me of how wonderfully helpful and supportive people can be when I have the humility to ask them.

Beginnings.....

The genesis of this project.

This thesis did not begin its life as an inquiry into 'becoming an academic'. In fact at its inception the principal connection between this project and the world of academia was confined to the fact that I had decided to locate a piece of reflective life writing - that I had for quite some time been curious to pursue - within the framework of a formal PhD. The life writing in question concerned my wish, in my mid-fifties to take a break from my consulting work to allow me to step back and endeavour to make sense of a career spent treading the boards as an independent management consultant. I surmised that the framing of this reflection within the structure of PhD research, conducted at my local University (and also, with a pleasing symmetry, my alma mater) would provide a discipline and order that would make this writing impulse more likely to materialise into printed reality than if I had proceeded to write freely and instinctively without any discernable external framework.

The realisation that I was on a tentative trajectory towards full-scale employment within the academy occurred midway through completion of my PhD, when it became apparent – somewhat to my surprise – that there was an growing fit between my skills, interests and inclinations, and what the academy in general, and my Institution in particular were wanting and needing from new academic staff at that time. This realisation of 'fit' was reinforced by the supportive feedback received from those whom I had invited to read the selective extracts of this thesis by way of testing and validating my approach. This feedback indicated that these readers could see - far more clearly than I - that at the heart of my generalised research into consultants' life transitions lay a compelling autobiographic story chronicling my emergence as a (particular type) of academic. They believed that this narrative comprised a significant 'insider story' in its own right, relating as it does a previously undocumented story in management. Furthermore they sensed that my narrative uncovered a broader theme of practitioners navigating their way towards the academy that chimed with a recognised national need for more seasoned management practitioners to migrate to management teaching if the current projections of demand for the same in the UK were to be fulfilled. Thus were these readers envisioning that this research project would not only make a contribution to knowledge for understanding of an interesting and relevant social phenomenon mediated through an

unusual narrative research method, but that it could also – as a piece of applied research - constitute an important contribution towards the understanding and development of this theme of 'conversion' from practice to academia.

My first response to this interpretation of my research and to this assessment of its potential utility was one of some incredulity. However I was sufficiently trusting of my readers' instincts to experiment with this direction of travel in my ensuing structuring and shaping of this piece, by way of assessing the fit of this interpretation with that which was emerging thematically through my writing, while resisting urges to force the fit. As I proceeded with this assessment of fit, my confidence and belief in this interpretation of my work grew as I began to 'write into' my transition into academia and also as I began to share elements of this story with individuals who were on a similar trajectory to myself, that is to say exploring alternative management research approaches, in particular narrative methods while conducting part-time masters or doctoral studies. These fellow travellers were most affirmative of my insights and strongly encouraged me to pursue and even publish these materials, as they felt that this writing comprised a story rarely told from an insider point of view, and that this account had resonated with them, leaving them feeling less alone in the world as they struggled to express their experience of pioneering alternative research channels which differed radically from those normally deployed within the management canon.

One aspect of this writing that particularly attracted these fellow travellers was my chronicling of the 'downs' as well as the 'ups' of this hit and miss process of becoming an academic. They identified with my accounts of the painful process of reluctant abandonment of a cherished research idea or approach, when the abandonment was either coerced or self elected, or a mix of both; and then of the elation experienced when this same idea is resurrected again in its original or modified form, to be accepted or even embraced this second time around. It seemed that this process of discarding a line of inquiry only to pick it up once more was a common experience. They also identified with my accounts of how it felt to be personally 'fitting' and 'not fitting' within the academic milieu, and my accompanying tales of compromise and accommodation, of resistance and of defiance. They could also see themselves in my accounts of my unsatisfactory pursuit of conventional research approaches that worked for other academics but not for me, particularly where those approaches were founded on making claims for universal scientific truth.

Justification for the research as seen from a wider perspective.

As we fellow travellers talked over the process of 'conversion' to academia (the term 'conversion' with all of its damascene nuances is the academy's appellation, coined by the Advanced Institute of Management, and not my own) we observed that the academics establishment's exhortations to convert to academia are largely conveyed by means of pointing to the worry of an increasingly aging and embattled population of out of touch management teachers who have little incentive to engage with twenty first century practice; to the inadequacy of replacing these aging teachers with greenhorn PhDs; to dramatic graphing of demographic decline of teachers mapped against steeping demand curves fuelled by mass influxes of overseas students, and finally to suggestions for structural career pathways that would entice us outsiders in.

We felt between us that while these exhortations had some impact – not least in informing us that there was definitely a place for us at the academic table, and that we were wanted and needed, at least for macro socio-economic reasons if not for our intrinsic human worth - that the persuasive power of these objectively based devices were eclipsed by the impact of sharing our personal accounts of transition, which appealed to us in a very different ways to the academy's blandishments. This narrative appeal was clearly more immediate, more intimate, and spoke to a different part of our beings, the part that could imagine making that journey with all of its accompanying twists and turns.

These conversations with fellow travellers assured me that the relating of my joys, trials and tribulations via this narrative project was beyond pure self indulgence; and that these accounts did have resonance, bringing succour and inspiration as they did, not only to myself, but also to those on the path, in addition to bringing insight to seasoned academics who were charged with mentoring newcomers along a similar career arc. At a simple level it seemed important to these putative 'converts' to have at least one piece of written witnessing to the fact that navigation through this conversion process is possible; and that this navigation doesn't have to be conducted entirely on the academy's terms.

Furthermore it was clear that the encouraging of others to write into their personal experiences of transition in similar vein to my own account was to prove a highly enabling tool for their transition. This journaling not only elevated their awareness of transitional dynamics, but also produced documentation that they could share in whole or in part with

each other, and with their supervisors to enable them those that were influential on their journey better to understand what it was that they were experiencing.

The more I explore this conversion phenomenon, and the complexities of it, the clearer it becomes to me that this conversion process is a fragile transit that can be aborted at any point along its route, rarely to be recovered, or not without some considerable effort. It occurs to me that the building up of a number of insider case histories, taken from different points of departure could constitute a significant contribution towards understanding of this phenomenon. This account could be the precursor for the building up of just such a library of accounts – a collective ethnography - the aggregate of which could be deployed in all manner of ways to assist all stakeholders involved in the transition process to be sensitive to the precarious dynamics that are in play.

The significance of the appellation 'On Becoming'.

The titling of this thesis 'On becoming an academic' of course pays homage to Carl Rogers (1972) and to his generation shaping book 'On Becoming a Person'. This homage is paid in no small part because Rogers exerted a profound influence on my personal development in my twenties and then beyond, not just through his writing but also in his ushering in a world view where guilt was downplayed and empathy and wholeness privileged. This transformational impact of 'Rogerian' thinking and practice occurred not only in my life but also in the lives of my fellow travellers and 'baby boomers' too, many of whom have recently joined with me at various stages of this project – after long periods of detachment from each other - to become co-creators of this research process.

My appropriating of Rogers' 'on becoming' epithet feels apposite at a number of other levels also, beyond serving as a tribute to his seminal influence. One is that my positioning of 'becoming' before the word 'academic' in my title frees me from some of the instinctive recoil I feel when I am labelled an 'academic'. This recoil is no doubt something to do with my contrarian resistance to being labelled or boxed no matter what the category. But it is also specifically to do with the fact that - just as I revelled in the liberation I experienced when shedding my attachment to the much vilified label of 'management consultant' as I stepped out of that role and became a PhD student - so I was in no hurry to jump head first into another stereotypic pit labelled 'academic'. The stereotypes attaching to 'academic' that cause me to push back would include that of the detached, antiseptic, critical scientist, as well as that of the remote, iconoclastic,

supercilious don. (And there are of course positive aspects of the academic stereotype that have attractions for me including the associations with life long learning, the generation of intellectual excitement, theoretical discovery and dedication to the pursuit of truth). However, and in a mood of uncharacteristic submission I need to cede that labels are inevitable, and that furthermore - given that I was becoming someone who researched and taught and administrated in a university - that the 'academic label' was unavoidable. So attaching the term 'becoming' to the academic label works for me as it breaks away at least in my mind from the stereotype and implies a direction of travel rather than a box, a pathway that I can in part create and make my own in the process of defining and negotiating my niche.

'On becoming' also resonates for me in the sense that Rogers was in the van of the eponymous Rogerian movement that was deeply encouraging of the virtue of all human beings making a journey towards becoming a 'fully functioning human being' in all of one's unique unapologetic fullness. This Rogerian philosophy has served as an important personal and professional guide for me over the years, (although I have harboured some reservations as to the universal applicability of 'unconditional positive regard'). As a development of this encouragement towards wholeness, I am attracted towards the notion of becoming my own variety of a 'fully functioning academic' – as opposed to a dysfunctional academic? - within the broad framework of tasks and ethical practice intrinsic to the role. Within this reframing this 'becoming' constitutes a continuous process which embraces backward turns, journeys up cul-de-sacs with all of their frustrations as well as the more mechanistic, progressive acquisition of competencies so neatly and selectively desired by Human Resources professionals.

A plea for allowance and acceptance.

In addition to these reflections on my intuitive attraction towards the Rogerian notion of 'becoming' I speculate as to whether my attraction towards the phrase relates to my reaching for acceptance, in that the becoming implies a phrasing that pleads for a degree of allowance, of latitude and forgiveness, whereas to say 'I **am** an academic' would imply that I immediately expose myself to scrutiny as the fully-formed academic article by other accomplished academics. This exposure would feel risky in an academic culture that is inclined towards punishment, and where the 'impostor syndrome' (Clance & Imes 1978) is rife in the sense that no one ever feels quite good enough but dare not say so; and where the trend towards an Research Assessment Exercise induced audit culture reinforces this

sense of unworthiness. The message embedded in Sparkes narrative (2007:528) 'Embodiment, academics and the audit culture' - concerning the tribulations of his embattled antihero Jim the Head of Department in his struggles with the audit culture - is that 'I am not my cv. I am so much more than my cv'. My plea for allowance in the process of becoming would resonate with this cri de coeur. My academic being needs to exist beyond the confines of a CV or of a job description.

If this allowance were not there, then it is likely that the trend towards a box ticking performance management culture would most likely discourage or even repel potential candidates such as myself for academic 'conversion'. No matter how well structured the academic career paths, practitioners are not going to be invited into academia if they perceive it as the same kind of performance management prison that they are attempting to liberate themselves from in industry or commerce. A large part of my quest chartered within these pages relates to my finding a space where I can best demonstrate my potential; or rather where I can shape and negotiate a space for myself within the academic tent, rather than force fitting myself into a mould that is unlikely to sustain as a container for my talents and ambitions.

This research focuses on the inner rather than the outer journey.

In my journey through this passage from consultant to academic I have experienced a process of profound transition and change in my life. There have been significant structural changes in my life, including that of my gaining a permanent academic job and going on a payroll of an organisation other than that of my own business for the first time in many years. My adjustment to the pressures for institutionalisation has been by turn liberating, difficult and often comical. Switching life roles and constructing a fresh identity out in the world has proved both stretching and illuminating. The external structural changes imposed by this transition have been paralleled by more subtle internal shifts. Bridges (1994) in 'Managing Transitions' emphasises that satisfactory transit through change has much to do with internal psychological adjustments as it has to with the adaptation of external factors. Bridges observes – and I would agree – that these necessary internal adjustments vary from person to person, and there is no set formula for the transition through this adjustment process.

Much of this narrative is concerned with describing and analysing this process of internal invisible shape shifting - those subtle shifts that have occurred over the last four years as I

have tried out different persona in my search for myself within an academic setting - rather than to do with a charting of the externalities, although these structural changes are not to be discounted in their influence upon the overall transit. At various points in this narrative the interplay between internal and external shifts is clearly charted.

Finding myself as an academic.

My supervisor gifted me the phrase 'finding myself as an academic' as we mused on the nature of this emergent project, and the phrase has continued to serve as a source of reflective richness ever since. I believe this phrase has proved apposite because the process of conversion, or of convergence, is far more than simply stepping inside of a role description. I enjoy the sense implied by 'finding' that there is somewhere to go look for this mysterious entity called 'me as an academic', some rock under which the secret lies, if only I were to overturn the right one. I am also aware that of the seduction of this notion of the preordained, pre-existent sense that my fate is formed, and that it is simply my task to discover what that may be.

'Finding myself' also implies a discovery process whereby I discover niche at this stage in my career through life. As I reflect on previous experiences of such discovering in my life, it occurs to me that I have found niches in the past and that they have served for a while, but in the end they have proven transitory. I also notice as I grow older that I am at one and the same time more accommodating yet also more discriminating with regard to what I will and will not allow to be attached to my 'new becoming'. I have found splendid niches before and learned that they do not last forever. What dawns on me as this story unfolds is that the creation of this niche really matters to me at this life stage, and that there is the possibility that it may be the culmination of seeking a role that allows the containment of my accumulated abilities and wisdoms. It may well be that what I am seeking is the sum of all previous perches. A perch that might even be nearer the top of the forest's canopy.

The academic's role is often described as a metaphoric three legged stool, where the rhetoric suggests that the legs of research, teaching and administration are roughly equivalent. Setting aside the realities of this supposed equivalence for the time being, the chronology of this narrative begins with the initial discovery of my research niche, leading in turn to the emergence of my teaching that was in the first instance to a large extent research inspired. This study is relatively silent on the administrative roles associated with these two 'legs', perhaps because administration is relatively familiar territory for me.

Finding myself as a researcher.

At first I was deeply uneasy during my early adventures into research to discover that the world of 'scientific inquiry' in business schools had not seemed to move on much since I was last a student in 1979. The alternative niche of narrative inquiry that I was discovering served in many ways as an antidote to what I regarded as the sterility of this scientific approach. This narrative offered an alternative or at least a complement to the more traditional forms of management research, and certainly troubled the edges of what is acceptable as management research.

This thesis tells the story of my discovery of autoethnography, and it is delivered in autoethnographic form, as an example of the same, and as an insider story. The name of this research practice is derived from 'auto', the self; 'ethno', of the culture; and 'graphy', the study, most usually a written study. I discovered that auto-ethnography is one tradition among a number that nest within the field of 'naturalistic inquiry'. This simply refers to studies that are conducted within their natural setting, where the researchers themselves may well be a part of that community, as opposed to standing outside, wearing metaphorical white coats.

Within this storying and re-storying, themes are surfaced and explored. These themes are then taken for a walk in the outside world, among fellow consulting 'co-creatives' who are invited to conjoin their narratives with mine, as well as to reflect on mine own journey. Within the research process these accounts from my old world are then shared with academics and students from my emerging universe for contrast and reflection, and by and by these two worlds find a confluence in their respective sense making. In this way accounts are layered, folding and finding a shape and a place together as the collective narrative unfolds.

One research output from this is my study of the transition of 'independent co-creatives' through their life course. This study is included within this thesis, in part by way of example of the research approaches I experimented with while finding my perch. I then chart how this generalised study of consultant transition gains sharper focus and narrows in on my specific transit to academia.

Problematizing the PhD process.

A salient aspect of this storying is that the gaining of my PhD assumed growing prominence as I became aware that I needed a doctorate as a job ticket; and that - given my chosen method was flying in the face of a great deal of academic orthodoxy - then there were real dangers that in my choice of method I was jeopardising my own chances of success. I was sawing off the branch that I was precariously perched upon. While recognising the necessity of gaining a PhD as a rite of academic passage, I felt unable to change research tack. I chart my uncomfortable occupation of the horns of this dilemma whereby I was attempting to achieve the seemingly irreconcilable objectives of satisfying conventional requirements whilst at the same time attempting to disrupt the very discourse that unquestioningly supports those conventions. Through the exploration of this dilemma I problematise the issue of pursuing a PhD in Management through unconventional research processes. In fact I problematise the issue of a PhD. In the process of investigating the paradoxes and contradictions that surround the accreditation and validation of the interpretive research approach I offer guidance and perhaps illumination to others who would choose to follow this route. The dissertation is written in autoethnographic style in part to 'show' as much as to 'tell' (Frank 1995) how such a self-reflective account may be constructed, allowing experimentation with a form that to my mind best suits the inquiry in hand.

Finding myself as a teacher of 'reflective practice', and of narrative research method.

Discovery of this narrative method has released in me a passion to assist others to grow to value and learn this practice. This passion was reinforced by my understanding that for me one of the best ways to truly learn and test my understanding of something is to teach it. And as I facilitated the use of narrative method as a research and inquiry tool, I discovered for myself and others that it worked simply at the level of making sense of ones life. My involvement in the teaching of reflective practice has given birth to the evolution of a teaching role and style that has attracted students towards it and has also attracted new colleagues to travel alongside me in the teaching of this method.

The circle is completed by research into teaching practice.

This teaching or learning facilitation role - particularly among mid career students - has concerned the facilitation of learning to apply 'writing as inquiry' (Richardson & St Pierre 2005:959) approaches , which have made quite an impact as a complement to traditional

learning approaches. These pedagogical developments have in turn guided me towards researching into management learning and teaching, of which this thesis and my associated MEd represents the points of departure. I originally thought my research might concern my old world, but now I find that it has more to do with informing my new world, albeit through sometimes importing or modifying approaches learned from previous practice.

Who has the agency over the discovering? Who is running the show?

I have been freely using the word 'discovery' but there are some that say that this method and approach of autoethnography is not in fact discovered, but that through some mysterious process it finds you (Ellis, in private conversation, University of Bristol seminar, April 2007), often as not when you are in search of something else. There is also the suggestion that, in the process of finding you, this method also finds ways of coat-tailing on your agency to spread the narrative word. This then begs the questions 'who is running the show?' And 'is the writing writing you?' Some novelists speak of the curse of the main protagonist leading the development of the narrative, where the novelist is powerless to do anything else but follow. Others say that in this surrender lies the ultimate gift. Within this thesis the role of synchronicity in shaping and guiding narrative – both in research and in teaching practice - is uncovered and explored.

A significant element of this researcher's insider account lies in the relating of how the creation of these interlocking nests of stories have come together in the fashion that they have has profoundly affected the course of the author's life. This nest of stories speaks to the exhilaration of breakthroughs, to moments of profound exhaustion; to highs of confidence and to dark valleys of doubt. Part of the telling touches on liminality, those moments of betwixt and between, where the thesis has teetered unsteadily and this writer has been profoundly unsure as to where it may be headed next. It speaks to those things that I have been able to migrate or adapt to my new world and those things that I have had to leave behind in the world of consulting. It charts my uneasy occupation of the neutral zone (Bridges 1994) where indeterminacy has had to be faced and of powers of the support of others when the road has felt dark.

In fact it could be claimed from this study that there is some evidence that these stories were and are writing my story, just as I write their story. And the story that is written does

not remain on the page alone. The chronicling of this transition has proved highly influential in manifesting this life transition.

A thesis without a finite ending.

It is apposite that this thesis has morphed into some thing different to that which was originally intended. This metamorphosis is congruent with the emergent method that is being followed and is being researched, where the narrative finds its own unique shape and direction. In many ways it is a thesis that folds back in upon itself. It is an emerging story that tracks the process of emergence. It is a reflection on reflectivity. A doctoral study about writing a doctoral study. It is a narrative on narrative method, and an autoethnography charting the writing of an autoethnography. As such and in alignment with this emergent philosophy, this thesis does not have a finite ending, or at least one that you would recognise. It simply continues to roll as a nest of interconnected narratives; narratives that are both consciously and unconsciously layered.

Let us begin at the end.

While this piece that I write now is styled 'beginnings', it would be a conceit to suggest that it was written at the beginning of this study. It is written of course, near the end, after this process of 're-search' and discovery has cycled through many generations of expression, many life forms and iterations. After an abortive structured start based in formal academic expression, I have allowed this research to find its own life, and to follow its sometimes meandering direction. It developed a narrative turn (Denzin and Lincoln 2005)) early in its genesis, and as it grew into sturdy life began to reach beyond this single narrative, to develop a 'narrative about the narrative', or 'writing stories' (Richardson and St Pierre 2005:965) where my research journal gained equal prominence to my formal research notes. Doubtful at first as to whether there was any legitimacy at all in this 'double narrative' (De Certeau 2000), my confidence in its relevance grew to the point where there were times when this 'narrative about the narrative' became more important than the substantive narrative that was my ostensible research focus. The substantive narrative and associated research question has also been subject to a series of metamorphoses, before it settled on this theme of 'on becoming an academic'.

It was at this point of the emergence of the double narrative that I realised that I needed to widen the scope of this inquiry, going beyond the study of the substantive theme alone –

whatever that might have been at any given point in time - to embrace an exploration of the applicability and relevance of ethnographic and narrative research methods in management research. The reason for this was that I became increasingly aware that I was experimenting with a variety of research forms rarely witnessed in management research, and that this study may well offer a methodological contribution to knowledge as much as it might offer a substantive one. In addition, these parallel areas of inquiry were not hermetically sealed one from another. Indeed, there was evidence of much harmonic resonance between the foregrounded major study, and the emergent 'study within a study' of the method that was revealing itself.

Within this narrative inquiry, there have been stages, particularly early on, where my personal narrative was foregrounded. I discovered myself located in the roles of both research subject and research instrument. Suddenly, I found myself in search of self, in search of me. Somewhat diffident and defensive of this positioning at first, I have grown increasingly comfortable with this ipsative focus. It was 'emic', (Pike 1967) wherein the self constitutes an integral part of the knowledge construction process. This self orientation was to give way in turn to the next stage, which involved researching the values transitions of fellow travelling 'independent co-creatives', (ICCs), though the separation between self and others in the development of insight was never watertight. I noticed that in this ebb and flow, our stories began to overlap and sometimes to fuse, to the extent that I was writing a narrative using the 'we' rather than the 'I' word, inhabiting that treacherous world of sweeping generalisation.

The deeper I have peered into these murky waters, the more I have come to realise that the world I am looking into abounds with paradox and contradiction. If narrative inquiries are concerned with 'wonder', as Leitch (2004) suggests, then I grew to realise that there is perhaps a puzzle, a mystery at the heart of this inquiry. This is not a logical examination of a thing that lies on a dissection table, but instead it is an exploration of what lies beneath, what is in the shadow. As such, this research has less in common with classical 'cold scholarship' and more to do with 'warm connoisseurship' (Sparkes 2007), more to do with that which we as mature practitioners discern to be of enduring interest and value.

A false ending.

Eighteen months ago, I thought I had finished this study. In fact, I knew I had. That sense of finality, of completion was palpable to me. I had spent six months creating the reflexive

narrative 'Outside View' which is included in the attached portfolio. I was to learn though, that while I may have completed this narrative to my satisfaction, within the broader scope of my research this piece was merely a fractal - and that I had not written a PhD. What I had sensed and seen was in fact a false horizon. What has ensued since that realisation has been a roller coaster of exhilaration, engrossment and also at times of frustration to the point of near despair. In the course of that time, I have pursued an emergent method (Alveson & Willmott 1996, Alveson and Johansson 2002, Megginson 2004), building layer upon layer of my own and others accounts, engaged in an episodic journey that has grown through variations on the themes of personal transition and ethnographic methods in management. I have grown to learn that these different layers enable different 'Ways of Seeing', (Berger, 1996) a different 'point of observation' (Wheatley 2001:65) on your journey, where the perspective deepens. And through this process there has been the momentary illusion of enlightenment, of insight and breakthrough, when I have felt that I have entered the zone, where the 'flow' (Csikszlmenthalyi, 1992) has felt that it has guided my work and I have been an instrument of that flow, working in its service as much as determining my own research direction.

I have learned as I have gone along that this iterative method can yield something of aesthetic beauty, as can the loop pedal on a musical instrument that immediately plays back that which has just been played as a background to the melody that is newly emergent. It can also create a monster that is out of control, rampaging around, a Frankenstein's creation consumed by its own improbability. I have been an explorer, my own cartographer in world where you are given a map with nothing on it, and are told to go way out yonder and discover. Something that has really helped in this has been the support and engagement of others, helped my sanity as much as anything else. This invaluable support and reality checking has also helped to keep the ugliness down a bit. Principal among these supporters has been my discussants who have become co-creators in this epistemic journey.

Structural implications of troubling the boundaries of the conventional PhD.

As I have tested the boundaries of the conventional PhD format in following this emergent direction, I have been strenuously advised at a number of points along the way by academics who know the inside track that I can do the 'fancy experimental stuff' later, once I have the security and authority of a PhD behind me, but not within a PhD. I have been stubborn and arrogant enough not to be cautioned by this, in part driven by a sense

of 'no time to lose' that embarking upon such a project in mid life brings, and in part through a natural gravitation towards subversion. This decision to pursue the unconventional has introduced extra tensions. On the one hand I have consoled myself that I am engaged in an experiment, that result don't matter, and that the testing of the research process – even to the point of destruction - is all. On the other hand, I felt increasingly towards the end of this PhD process, where I stand now, that the world is watching and looking for failure with a sceptical eye. As much as I am aware of this pressure, recoiling from it, I also realise that I am the architect of the same.

This dissertation does not follow the regular structures or conventions of a PhD, though the equivalents of these traditional elements are discernable within this alternative structure. For example, substantive theory, beyond that relating to method, is addressed, where the governing principle has been to let the theory fit the data, rather than the data to be force fitted to the theory. In line with ethnographic tradition, I discover that I am a theoretical magpie, picking up shiny interesting things from an eclectic base. For this reason, I draw upon a wide range of literatures, but do not have a conventional literature review chapter. Instead, references to a variety of literatures are woven within the body of the text. After considering many options for ordering this dissertation, I have decided in the end that the sequencing of the chapters should follow the chronology of emergent events as they occurred within the inquiry. Once the autoethnographic piece draws to a natural close, I then change writing gear to reflect in a more detached, academic manner on the conclusions that might be drawn from this study, and on the contributions that it might bring to the management academy. These reflections and conclusions are summarised in the attached 'Postscript'.

I have learned that research of this nature is highly provisional, and that many of the decisions made are arbitrary, including the choice of how the text is presented to the reader. While the chapters are presented in the order that they are, they could equally be differently ordered. I am also aware that I have no control over the order in which the reader may chose to attack this text, and I have no doubt that you the reader will choose to browse in whatever order you choose. The reader no less than the writer is allowed to be a magpie. I would like to believe that the text is robust enough to allow this browsing approach in fairly random order. Beyond that, the reader is not assumed to be passive in this. In the spirit of interpretative inquiry; the reader, as much as the discussants, is active in the co-creation of knowledge. The wish would be that the reader engages with this text from whichever positioning they choose to occupy, be it as examiner or as interested

experimenter. The reader will choose their engagement, and any feedback of ideas is warmly encouraged. If engagement means something as simple as the reader being encouraged to write, or write in response, then that is significant in itself.

The mixing of genres.

At one point in the completion of this dissertation, I was struggling with the mix of genres in this piece. The deconstruction of my self-narrative, and my ensuing journey post engaging with fellow ICCs in collaborative inquiry, meant that I was left with reconciling deeply personal autoethnographic writing that nested alongside abstracted, intellectualised theorising relating to both the substance and the method of my work. These two genres did not sit alongside each other easily. Leitch (2004:16) describes them as the rubbing of 'cheese grater against flesh.' There ensued vigorous internal and external dialogues regarding strategies to accommodate these seemingly irreconcilable universes. My colleague Ann Rippin challenged me to consider that the way through this impasse might be to write the entire piece in 'writing as inquiry' genre, as a reflexive, retrospective sense making piece. This was an almighty challenge, and I spent much time wrestling with this decision. I think the dilemma was resolved when I shared a paper with my supervisor and he thoughtfully commented that the paper lost its way when I moved away from my reflective voice and tried to force the pace by 'being clever'. This telling feedback made up my mind, though the degree of challenge in following up this ambitious intent has been considerable. This decision has demanded that I remain as far as possible aware of my positioning at each stage in the process, and critically conscious of my engagement with the text as it unfolds.

It may be important for the reader to know that, just as the research has tended to circle, to be a cursive process, then so too has been the writing process. This text has been through many generations of drafts and false dawns. It has been in turn 'messy writing' (Bolker 1998), dirty, anecdotal, colloquial, formal and impenetrable. Parts of it still remain so. This has in part been because I have been following a process of 'writing as inquiry' (Speedy 2005, Richardson & St Pierre 2005) rather than planned writing. For example, this 'write up' has been so much more than a process of describing the research once it has been conducted. This has been a voyage of discovery, frustrating and blinding by degrees. Taking this messy writing to the point of some coherence – at least to the point here I have sensed coherence - has been quite a task. In retrospect I don't know if I would

recommend the emergent discovery approach to anyone unless they have considerable resources of fortitude and the ability to deal with high indeterminacy.

One reason for paying attention to the quality of writing of this text has been a concern for the aesthetics of the dissertation. Aesthetics matter because the criteria for evaluating qualitative inquiry go beyond contribution to knowledge alone. (Speedy 2000, Guba & Lincoln 1989) Other factors come into play, not least that the act of reading should be a pleasing and pleasurable experience for the reader.

The use of a 'Portfolio' to contain examples of 'creative analytic processes'.

The pursuit of this emergent method has meant that, in volumetric terms, two or three PhDs have been written in the creation of the one that you have before you now. It is well understood among practitioners that emergent practice and discovery writing are excessive practices, and I have with some regrets (and some relief) left many off cuts on the study floor. On the other hand, there are pieces which are good examples of the 'creative analytic processes' (Richardson and St Pierre 2005: 962) that I have engaged with that illustrate the various experiments that have contributed to the completion of this thesis. Some of these examples I have included in a Portfolio, which the reader may wish to browse at their leisure.

The widening of readership through interesting and useful research.

Another motivation driving the attention to aesthetics – long before I knew anything about the criteria for qualitative inquiry – was my strong desire to write a PhD that would be read by a wide audience that would include prospective doctoral students. To achieve this goal of readability across a wide audience, the subject matter would not only have to be interesting and useful, but the medium would need to be such as to draw the reader in, and then hold them there.

This wish for a wider audience is not – I don't think - entirely driven by conceit, or by narcissism. It is in part because, when one commits to new purpose in mid-life, then one wishes for them to have impact. They matter. There are fewer opportunities for second chances at this life stage. More importantly to me, I am firmly of the belief that the primary beneficiary of this study should not be me alone as the researcher who gets the glittering PhD prize. I believe that it should serve a wider purpose, and to some extent be

challenging of received wisdom and practice, to which end it needs a wider readership. I am also impatient to break away from a growing academic tradition of impenetrability where the audience is regarded to be almost exclusively other academics that know, speak and read a specialised language.

This audience beyond academe would include my fellow ICCs, their networks and onwards and outwards into the wider world to many interesting places. I am aware that I am not in control of that distribution. One colleague has already used a part of this research in the development of novice ICC's, attracted by the telling of an inside story that shines light on to the mythologies of malleability and mutability of values. I feel sure that other interests will pick it up as we go forward, and that prospect is motivation in itself. Interest had also been aroused among students of ethnographic method.

I have understood from early on that reaching a wide readership does not imply that I expect that readers will sit down and swallow this massive tome in one sitting. That would be an unrealistic objective. What I have experimented with during the writing of this dissertation instead is the progressive release of research materials as they have developed through a variety of media and venues to test out my ideas, and to give them an airing. This dynamic testing and validation has become an established habit within this research practice, and has become the key in determining the forward direction of the research. This wide and sometimes random distribution has also become an indispensable part of the process of taking the research beyond the confines of 'me', and beyond academia, as others have vigorously made their enthusiastic and often unignorable contributions. Sparkes (July 2nd 2007, in private conversation) talks of the power of 'passing on' of texts from one reader the next as one criteria to judge the impact of the text, where the author receives often random feedback from strangers who feel moved to comment on the piece. This has certainly occurred to me in the process of pulling this thesis together.

This testing has established a pattern of intensive lone time and introspecting, punctuated with passages of wild 'out there' time, when sense has been made with others, whose support uplifts and transports. These breakaways from the solitary have proved highly satisfying and uplifting, where my writings have been validated and my confidence has grown, after moments alone when nightmares and doubts have stalked.

PhD writing as a life changing experience.

Part of the break from the solitary is because I wanted this PhD to be an enjoyable experience for me, all the way through, or at least for it to have proved deeply profoundly satisfying by the finish. I did not want it to become what Sims (2001: 132) describes as 'donning the hair shirt which academics don at their entry to the profession, symbolised so well by the continued and excruciating process of the PhD'. I did not want it to be drudgery or to be excruciating, even this final passage, when everyone who has been there says that the point of completion and write-up, you will just want this pain to be over, and your life returned. In part this wish for each stage to be enjoyable was because I was growing to learn that this research would never be over in the sense of tied neatly with a bow. I was nonplussed early on to discover that most academics seemed supremely indifferent to my findings and were more concerned about my academic apprenticeship, and the extent to which I was learning professional academic practice. I was accepting of this urge, even welcoming of it, but at the same time I was wishing for this to be a satisfying experience that delivered a useful contribution or two, as well as being merely a stage gate or a rite of passage.

Related to my enjoying this experience was an early realisation that a PhD should be a life changing experience, or else why would anyone commit time and effort to such a pursuit, particularly at a later age and stage of life? I embraced this notion of life change, taking it to heart while setting out on a course with few bearings in relation to where it might take me, but with an implicit belief that it was headed somewhere. As it has transpired, this PhD has steered me to a most unexpected place, and to a career change, which is to a lectureship at my alma mater, University of Bristol. This turn about in events requires that I learn to apply the lessons learned during this apprenticeship, not least the rigour and application that must be allowed if I am to transit through journeyman status. This apprenticeship is not an option. But beyond the formal requirements of this lecturing role, this position also gives me a wonderful platform to extend this experimental work, both in substance and method. It also means that the pressure is on for me to deliver a fully formed PhD which will make an impact on the academic as well as the ICC practitioner communities.

The pressure to finish has been quite galvanic. This ending process has meant much discarding and some necessary losses, in fact more than I realised. I have grown to understand that there is considerable waste involved in this writing as inquiry method.

There has also been the acceptance that this will never be finished, that it will always be full of holes. It is still a work in progress but I trust that for you the reader that navigating your way around proves to be worthwhile exercise. Start where you will, and travel well. I offer no apologies if this is not entirely coherent, or hung together perfectly. Efforts have been made for coherence but I leave that to your judgement. Much of my training has been to make things neat, tie them up with a bow. Well this isn't that way, but I trust has its own internal logic.

A Chance Discovery Disrupts the PhD Discourse.

'The only difference between reality and fiction is that fiction needs to be credible'.

Attributed to Mark Twain, as so many good quotes are.

Discovering the writing as inquiry process: the genesis of this thesis.

My original dissertation topic – before it metamorphosed into this study of becoming an academic - was born of a long standing curiosity into how values shift and transition over a person's life's course, a curiosity driven in large part by a fascination with my own life's course as much as through disinterested academic interest. This curiosity was aroused by the fact that there have been discernable moments in my life when I have been aware that my values - those qualities that I hold dear, and guide my thoughts and actions - have shifted significantly. And there have been other times when those values have swung back again, towards their original point of departure. I have often speculated as to whether this oscillation has been a result of my somewhat free wheeling, independent life style, or whether my life style has been a result of my propensity to allow my values to oscillate. There is clearly a dynamic interplay between these two tendencies, though the relationship between cause and effect is not always easy for the person experiencing them to detect. I am also aware that people who have followed a life trajectory similar to my own have experienced parallel patterns of values swing and transition.

Attempted definition of the Independent Co-Creative (ICC) population.

My original aim for this project, then was to investigate this phenomenon of values shift over one's life course for a cohort of my ICC consulting contemporaries whose lives were characterised by such values swings, in an attempt to discover what it was that made us distinctive. My first task then was to define who 'we' were. It was tempting to apply the label 'management consultant' to this population, given that at various points in our lives we have performed that role, and that it was through a consulting role that many of us met. However as I reflected on the many other roles that we had fulfilled in our lives it became apparent that there was so much more that we had done besides management consulting. Searching around for a descriptor that would adequately describe what it is that this difficult to pigeon hole cohort do, and in attempt to capture the essence of our

practice that transcends the bundle of tasks transparent in each of our roles, I came up with term 'independent co-creatives' (ICCs). Uneasy with this label at first I tried it out on a number of populations including the ICCs themselves, and most respondents were satisfied that this worked as a descriptor. As I have lived with this term over time I have grown more comfortable with it too, though not completely so.

This ICC population in my definition embraces those who conduct an independent practice where creative solutions or process pathways are developed *with* the client rather than *for* clients. The majority of this cohort have been management consultants for a significant part of their careers. But I have discovered in the course of my early inquiry that the identity of 'management consultant' is by no means pervasive for this cohort. For many of us consultancy has been a convenient container to express a wider purpose at various points in our lives, and of course to earn money. In addition to consulting, we ICC's have manifested ourselves in this world in a variety of entrepreneurial roles such as marketers or 'ecopreneurs' (Phillips, 2006) for innovative 'green' products; film making; setting up a western riding school in the USA; coaching of all types including sports and musical coaching; the creating and running of conference centres and retreats; involvement in the creative arts at many levels, including working with a string quartet, and managing an Irish band; and for many of us a passionate involvement in environmental projects, well before green issues became in vogue.

We each of us have engaged with education and learning at a variety of different levels, both formal and informal, conventional and alternative, for adults as well as for young people. We have also - with varying degrees of success - been the creators and developers of significant intellectual property matter (IP), this IP often relating to these educational endeavours. Our interests and passions have also led naturally and somewhat inevitably towards involvement on a number of political fronts too, often in the van in the 'crisis of representation' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005:18) , or on environmental issues, but this political interest has rarely been executed in a formal political role. A review of our various histories also reveals excursions into a variety of therapeutic and advisory roles, including sex education. One characteristic of the consulting practiced by ICCs is that it demonstrates a strong element of action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001). This is social research where a diagnosis of the situation is worked through with clients, rather than imposing a standardized solution upon them.

I also notice among my fellow ICC's that, while we start out from quite distinct places with regard to our values and our life positioning, over the course of our lives we tend to gravitate towards a similar values orientation. This values orientation includes gravitation towards freedom, excitement, stimulation, and an openness to change. It occurred to me that this phenomenon of converging towards the same value was beyond coincidence and I was interested in the process whereby this gravitation towards shared values occurs.

ICC capacity for values shifting can provoke strong reactions.

It was hard to avoid the fact that this capacity for values shift among ICCs attracted a fair degree of critical comment from others whose life paths and values have been more constant than our own. This commentary is largely sceptical of our capacity to metamorphose our values over time, referring in pejorative tone to our 'chameleon nature', and to the shallowness of our beliefs, as if our adaptability were an indication of lack of moral compass or steadfastness. This is more than a casual observation borne of prickly defensiveness. Each time that I mentioned the original aim of this dissertation to those outside of my cohort, the reaction has been the same. A knowing smirk indicated that they know all about the ability of co-creatives to shift values positions at will, dependent on the audience, and dependent on what is at stake. While I believe I understand some of the reasons why such a reaction is provoked, there was a part of me that wanted to uncover the truth in this, and to - if it exists - a counter-narrative that offers an alternative explanation for our values malleability other than fecklessness. This wish to explore and narrate this 'insider story' was a strong part of the original motivation behind this inquiry.

Self inquiry as a starting point for this study.

My wish then was to conduct a study of a cohort of ICCs of the same generation as me, more or less, and whose lives had followed a similar trajectory. Having assembled a preliminary listing of names of people whom I believed fell within this category, I decided that my start point to this project should be to attempt to chronicle my professional life course first to assist me in mapping out the terrain, before I moved onto surveying my cohort. And then something happened in the process of composing this personal memoir that was to entirely supersede my planned research into ICC values and life course. This study did emerge in the end and is included in this thesis, (see the chapter entitled 'The life course of independent co-creatives') but not in the original form that I imagined it being

in, nor as a centre piece of the study. This is how I remember this fateful diversion happening.

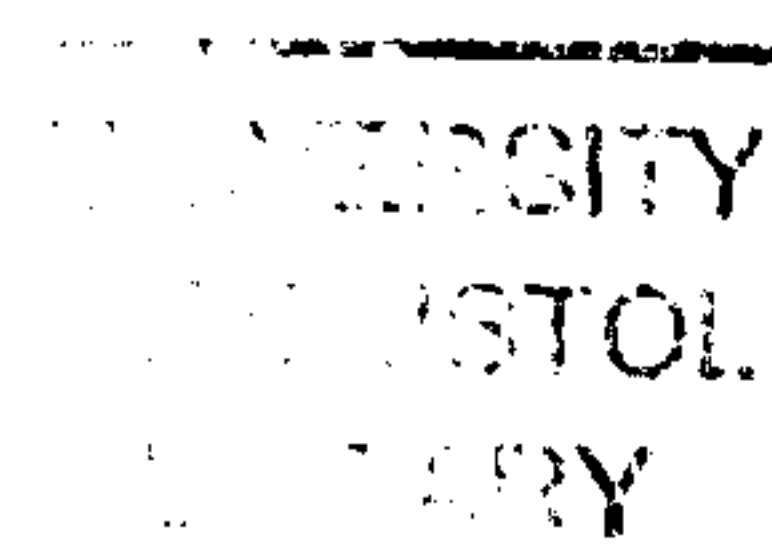
A chance discovery disrupts the PhD discourse.

My first attempt at researching my developmental journey was written in what I believed to be an 'academic' style, which I trusted would satisfy the University's expectations and requirements. This objective view would be achieved through writing in the third party passive voice, and by excluding the personal, concentrating instead purely upon the professional aspects of my life. This strategy was to be mapped on a linear time line, attempting to chronologise the precise sequence of developmental events and turning points in my professional career. I was soon to discover that despite this self imposed methodological rigor, I was experiencing increasing difficulties in assuring the quality of my memory. Also, it was apparent that what was appearing on the page, while deemed worthy by those who had read it, was in their and in my (reluctantly assenting) judgment essentially dull and rather ponderous. Here is an extract from the same, to example the full awfulness of this pompous style.

The chosen start point in time, late schooling, and attending university was a somewhat arbitrary decision, and governed by an intention to limit the scope of the study to remembered professional history rather than personal prehistory. This is not to suggest that early development is unimportant, and the potential remains for the scope to be widened to include revisiting that era if necessary

A further early decision was to confine this inquiry to professional, or 'formalised' developmentally related experiences, rather than to adopt a 'whole life' approach, thereby excluding personal life stages and the events and learnings held therein. This decision was predicated again by a wish to limit the scope, and did not exclude the later introduction of personal experiences should the arguments for that inclusion prove compelling.

Throughout my life I have maintained a personal journal. Reading my journal entries from that time reveals evidence of increasing frustration with this research strategy. Despite great effort being poured into it, the entire project seemed terminally mired. Just before the point at which, it seemed, I was likely to sink beneath the factual weight of my study, I experienced a significant, unwanted and completely unexpected personal interruption in



my life, an occurrence so unsettling that it threatened to deflect me completely from my already beleaguered purpose. Increasingly, my personal journal began to pen a relationship between entries concerning this dislocation, this sense of loss and those entries relating to the process of constructing my life narrative. Painful personal memories were opened which could not find a place in the professional history, but which found a voice in the journal. This voice spoke to transitions in my life journey that did not make any immediate sense in professional terms, but pointed to some persistent underlying patterns that I had hitherto been at pains to avoid.

At this point of pain I abandoned the contrived chronology, instead allowing the prose to run freely. What I was writing was in part about the pain itself, in part about the limitations of my research method, and in part about my life story.

I thought my research quite abandoned, forgotten; forgotten that is until at some moment in the process of reflecting in my journal on what had come to pass over this last traumatic week, I heard a voice somewhat independent of myself chattering falteringly about recognising some patterns amid the unfolding impasses, turmoil and inner emptiness that accompanied this unfolding drama. This voice referred to my superficial reading of auto-ethnographic method, which suggested that auto-ethnography really comes into its own at times in life, either on a large stage or small, when events are painfully disrupted, where there are struggles and blows, and where chaos and incoherence reign. Much of this seminal work related to studies of stigma, and of ostracism.

I queried whether this writing had any healing value for me, and I reflected that it had, and that benefits were felt in the clarity and resolution it brought to my thoughts and feelings.

Heartened by this authentication in the literature of this narrative turn, my journal entries continued to flow in this confessional fashion unabated for a week or more, weaving together the personal and the professional, the past and the present, intermingling thoughts and feelings. I learned that ethnographic wisdom suggests that there is power in 'unmasking' oneself, in revealing vulnerability and showing your true face and feelings. Perhaps this writing is an act of 'unmasking'.

I was sufficiently reassured by the responses to my sharing of these writings with selective intimates to decide to offer my writing, tentatively, to my supervisor, as the raw material of

my PhD; or at least as some evidence that my original project had not been abandoned completely.

I shared this writing with the utmost hesitation with my supervisor, who (to my relief) was generous and compassionate, encouraging rather than censorious of my approach. This led to a conversation with him as to how it felt for me now, to be partly in academia yet outside of the consulting fold. This conversational shift from the general to the particular brought up some uneasiness, and I detected sudden and disconcerting feelings of vulnerability in sharing uncertainties with an authority figure that I did not know well. I was comfortable in my research talking about consultants other than me, and in generalisable terms; I was in that moment less than comfortable discussing myself, and my feelings. My supervisor suggested that I was now writing an autoethnography, and, as well as reading up about the method, that the best advice he could give to me would be keep' weaving'. By this he meant weaving the personal with the professional; the theory with the practice, the past with the present.

As I deepened my reading I learned that ethnography seeks to give 'voice' to the hitherto voiceless, and wishes to democratise institutions that were considered systemically oppressive. Strong arguments were made that conventional research vehicles could not represent these voices. Indeed, traditional scientific research methods were identified as significant maintainers of institutionalised oppression, in that their agents were complicit in the process of 'silencing'. The alternative invoked was idiomatic expression that best captured the 'lived experience' of the participants in the research. These authors were keen to demonstrate a strong moral centre, locating themselves broadly within the post-modern movement.

The 'participants' in the research are seen and treated as co-creators of the research, and of meaning making, rather than the passive subjects of a traditional scientific process. A criterion for success in this field is that the research should benefit the participants as much if not more than it might benefit or advance the career of the researcher. The benefits for the writer would include therapeutic release. The suggestion was that most autoethnographic writing is driven at some level by a need for personal epiphany, (most often experienced through 'transformational moments') and also to facilitate the healing of past and current wounds and hurts for others

While savouring the richness and variety of these descriptions of naturalistic inquiry, serious doubts were posed in my mind as to the appropriateness of this approach to inquiry into the world of management consultants. Stretching my imagination to the point of snapping, I still could not visualise management consultants as an under-privileged voiceless minority, disadvantaged from all sides and powerless to influence their fate. However, as I wrote myself into the ostracism and marginalisation I was feeling as a result of my loss, and as I reflected on the doubts and vulnerabilities that I have heard expressed by colleagues in the past, it was quite possible for me to begin to understand ways in which independent Management Consultants were outsiders, and certainly easily sidelined. As I wrote, I discovered that a home-grown philosophy was emerging in my mind which needed clarifying and grounding in something external, authority or not, in order to make sense of it.

Philosophical basis of writing-as-inquiry.

The philosophical basis of my approach was discovered in a naïve way, stumbled upon as much as intentionally sought. Through my later reading I discovered that there were significant philosophical signposts to my naturally discovered approach. It has long been held in existential thought that we 'can only access the past through the present.' This belief was certainly evidenced in my experience of constructing my story, and is echoed by social scientists and poets alike. 'We read the past by the light of the present, and the forms vary as the shadows fall, or as the point of vision alters.' (Froude 2004:63). A paradox was at work here, where I found that the more I let go of forcing recall of the past and trusted the present, the more of the past was freely and evocatively delivered. What was required, I discovered, was an abandonment of conventional constructions of history' echoing Kierkegaard's (1941:24) view that 'Life must be understood backwards but it must be lived forwards.'

This narrative explores the reality of living life forwards, but understanding it backwards. In the midst of these tensions the narrative drives relentlessly onward, playing its part in the existential struggle to move life forward. The sense while writing the auto-ethnography was that I was living at least three days in one day, processing yesterdays experiences and the memories evoked therein; re-writing the notes from the day before, and crafting the narrative from the day before that; while attending to the experiences of today, still keeping a weather eye out, anticipating the events of tomorrow.

At the time I was completing this autoethnography I was encouraged to attend creative writing classes, where I found myself engaged in fierce debates about creative writing as therapy – A.S. Byatt (2003) is firmly of the view that the two are inseparable in creative writing classes – and the distinction between fiction and autobiography. It became increasingly apparent as I experimented with my writing - and as I observed my classmates do the same - that the process of finding your voice, of writing ourselves into our prose, with an authentic voice, was central to all of this discovery and learning process, and by no means easy to achieve. However, great dividends were to be gained from the discovery of voice, and the separation of ones inner voice from others dominant social discourses. The act of committing words to paper was to recall Weick's (1979) quotation of E.M.Foster's (1956:101); 'How can I know what I think until I see what I say?'

With regard to operationalising this research strategy, I discovered that, for writing as inquiry to work, I needed most of all to trust in the process, and to resist premature critical editing. I also discovered that discipline and a degree of persistence were required. As I proceeded deeper into the process, I noticed that as I allowed the space and the mood to develop, a sense of 'expanded time' descended on me. I felt enlivened, my senses heightened. Artificial distinctions of time and its conventional boundaries and constraints began to evaporate. My wife would return home in the evening, finding me sat in the same place as she had left me in the morning, to inquire 'How were your days, dear?' I noticed that whereas at the earlier stages of my inquiry I was keeping sometimes three journals, including a personal journal, as well as research notes and a more complete book of conclusions and propositions, now these were merging into one. I had the sensation of entering a polychronic space (Hall 1976; Schein 1985), where the past, present and future were becoming indivisible. I was experiencing flashbacks, codas, reverberations from the past as ghosts and fragments of memory assumed vivid reality, and sought to find a place on the written page.

This passage speaks to the 'writing ritual', to the process of capturing the ebb and flow of the writing life, evoking the feeling of 'wording your world'. It captures the interplay between the external stimulus and the interior reflexive response. It demonstrates that the nearer you move towards a sense of your 'inner process', the greater the likelihood that you find 'your voice'. This is the moment where synchronicities are invited. It speaks to the metaphoric power of the everyday; of the passages where the writer is quite stuck; and to the moments when the 'inner critic' relents to the pleas of the 'inner sweetheart', and the flow returns. This is where the writer moves towards a deeper space, bringing

breakthroughs in connection and understanding. It charts the elusiveness of the writing process, the fear of losing thoughts, ideas, and memories, of the safety in knowing that they will always be there. It captures the moment when writing has occurred without the author noticing, of that mysterious moment when it seems as though the piece is automatically writing itself.

As I proceeded more deeply into this mystery, day-by-day, week-by-week, the process of immersion became at times entrancing. It was, I grew to realize, the space where I wished to be, little else mattered as much as staying in that space, at my table, reflecting and writing. The daily writing ritual assumed an almost sacramental quality, brooking few interruptions or distractions, where day-to-day urgencies and demands fell far into the background.

At this point it felt as though I was writing in confluence with life. I felt that I was mindful of the subtle relationship between past, present and future, and the blurred distinctions between the same, rather than trying to take snapshots of isolated incidents and occurrences that would hopefully explain things, when in fact the likely result would be more polarised contention. I became at peace with my muse.

In counter-balance to these blessings, the process was also to prove confronting, and in some ways extremely unsettling. A number of the themes that I was exploring were profoundly questioning of my identity and sense of life purpose. Fierce doubts were raised, and my authenticity, which I held dear and which had remained up to this point somewhat unquestioned, was now deeply challenged, at times threatened at a core level. This was a difficult transit to navigate, and the temptations for flight were considerable.

Together with this periodic disquiet there was also a mild panic rising as to when this writing might end, if indeed it ever would. If this were a PhD, and it carried on at this rate, then it would need to be delivered to the external examiner in a truck, as I was gently reminded by my supervisor after two months of writing. The days passed by, then the weeks, while the words piled up, one upon another, sentence upon sentence, paragraph upon paragraph, notebook upon notebook. I edited as I went along, I allowed the random piles to accumulate. I feared that there might be no end point, that all of this may prove indeterminate, yet I also trusted that the ending, the landing, would find itself.

At that point in the narrative the research and my private diary had melded into one. There was no sense of an end point, simply a trust in the process that this writing would be guided eventually towards a resting place where coherence and synthesis would shine through. If not, then the experiment would simply be deemed an exercise in randomness.

Without any recognisable map, it seemed that the writing process provided me with a direction that I was following without it ever being fully visible. I was pushing to read that which was below the surface. (I sense now that I can see that road map, as I write my account of it, but only through the rear view mirror, in retrospect.) The process delivered me theory without my knowing that such theory already existed. It assisted in rendering my tacit knowledge explicit). It enabled me to discover and to craft theories for myself, theories for which I have now abundant understanding and attachment, together with an appetite that reaches well beyond the 'theoretical.' In some instances it opened up whole bodies of theory to me, such as Interpretative Inquiry, and Critical Management.

In totality, and in linear time, I persisted with this approach almost exclusively for nearly four months. (Given the nature of the sense of expanded time, and the historical period that I was covering, it felt considerably longer than four months.) This writing was subject to continual editing, eventually resulting in an 80,000 word narrative manuscript. (Extracts from the product that this extended writing activity produced can be found in this document under the chapter heading 'An Outside View', while other extracts relating to the excavation of personal memory, and the role of synchronicity in the same can be found in the Portfolio section of 'An Outside View'.

By some mysterious process, the writing also steered and guided me towards its own ending, and then forwards towards the next stage in the research process. Throughout the writing-as-inquiry process there had remained the persistent metaphor of 'crossing the bridge', a metaphor that was reflected in the actual crossing of a number of historical Bristol bridges each day as I made my way towards my office. My supervisor said that I would know when I had ended, when I had crossed the bridge. Although I was skeptical of this advice to surrender to the arrival of the moment, I did recognise that moment when it arrived. And it so happened that that moment was precisely juxtaposed with the totally unexpected and somewhat miraculous healing of the interruption that had triggered the writing-as-inquiry in the first place. Life thereafter, at the surface level, was to continue as if the interruption had never occurred, as it has not been mentioned or evidenced.

The role of synchronicity in the writing-as-inquiry process.

As I proceeded further into the density of writing-as-inquiry, I was inescapably and often palpably reminded of the working of 'synchronicity wheels' within the process. Jung, (1972) the creator of this word, defines synchronicity in the subtitle of his work as an 'acausal connecting principle' which defies normally understood rules of cause and effect. He contends that that which we might dismiss as coincidence is in fact the result of 'universal forces' aligning around an event or circumstance. Jung goes further in his description of the stage of 'individuation,' where an individual is able to shape events around them through the mysterious interplay between their consciousness and the 'collective unconsciousness' around them. Scientifically unverifiable, these notions are easily dismissed, although quantum physics is providing tentative evidence to support the existence of 'multiple worlds' and 'parallel universes.' These forces have also found contemporary management credence through the work of Wheatley 2001; Stacey 1996; Wilber 2001; and many others.

Openness to one's dream states is key in Jung's exposition of materializing synchronicities, and is most definitely reinforced by my experience of crafting this piece of narrative writing. There is little doubt in my mind that the pursuit of 'writing-as-inquiry' has accelerated/-invited synchronicity; and that the phenomenon itself has greatly enhanced the process of meaning making within the narrative. It could be argued that the frequency of synchronicity is in part validation of the method. There is little question that, from my location within this writing process I grew emboldened to expect, in fact to put attention on the manifesting of synchronicity. I was also aware of moments when I seemed to be forcing it, and nothing pushed through.

My writing process was diffused with examples of synchronicity, of my being led towards rather than intentionally seeking out people, texts, artefacts, memories that linked and connected to my narrative purpose. The writing-as-inquiry process of slowing down, awakening, of allowing the 'tortoise mind' as opposed to the 'hare brain' (Claxton 1998) to come into play; the process of becoming aware of the signals around me, immeasurably assisted the process of summoning synchronicity, of manifesting the clues and stimuli I needed for the narrative to drive forwards. I became less sceptical, bolder, playing with strategies for summoning synchronicity, for teasing it, for allowing it, for surrendering to it.

These strategies included listening to music, reading old letters and journals, visiting old and unfamiliar places, meeting up with complete strangers as well as old friends, attending to their words and music as it surrounded and enveloped me. Sometimes these journeys were intentional; more often than not they were random. My chance excursions included allowing myself to be guided around record shops, charity bookshops, libraries (where relevant books seem to fly off the shelves towards me); walking in crowds alone, channel hopping radio stations in the car, when surfing TV channels, or just walking the streets or on a beach or a cliff top. I was delighted and often humbled by the various gifts and insights these apparently mindless pursuits delivered. One realization that dawned was that it was futile to attempt to 'force' the manifestation process, nor to expect it to occur continually. Sometimes these random trips yielded nothingness. More often though they provided potent metaphors that enlightened and enlivened my understanding.

An example of one of these synchronicity moments was to lead me to the notion of 'slender threads' (Johnson 1998: xi), an idea which in itself strongly aligns with Jung's thinking, relating synchronicity to the process of making life and career choices.

One indulgence I have been allowing myself since discovering my treasure trove in the attic has been to be permitted a lucky dip into one of my archived boxes at moments either when the writing goes well, and a reward is deserved; or when I feel blocked, when a scrap from the past may prove to be the exactly the inspiration and guide needed to move the writing along. As the recording of the Melvyn Bragg opera the 'Hired Man' reaches its redemptive endnote, I climb up to the attic from the kitchen, where I stick my hand in a box entitled 'Letters 1999'. This period was a time of distinct turbulence in my life, leaving me a little fearful as to what might appear in my hand. What I pull out is a typed letter containing a pasted fragment of a book by Robert Johnson entitled 'Balancing Heaven and Earth', written in 1998 and sent to me by a friend in 1999.

This gift pulsates in my hand. It is all I need from Pandora's attic today. I had repeatedly wondered during this time where this fragment might have been, as I imperfectly recalled it, and knew that its wisdom mattered. What I have been recalling, inaccurately I now find, as 'dangling threads' were in fact the 'slender threads' that was the working title of this book. This is the soul food I need to settle my restlessness today. It feels as though making connection with thought processes from back then will make a significant contribution towards today's inquiry.

Johnson defines slender threads as '...being in the right place at the right time, meeting someone who steers you in an unforeseen direction, the unexpected appearance of money or inspiration just when they are most needed. These are the mysterious forces that guide us and shape who we are. They are the patterns that give meaning to our experience. Whether called fate, destiny or the hand of god, slender threads are at work bringing coherence and continuity into our lives. Over time they weave a remarkable tapestry.' (Johnson 1998: xi)

As I reflect upon my research, I realise that the entire project could be construed as the pursuit of a series of slender threads which have directed the research process. At a substantive level, much of what has been learned relates to the effects of following (or not following) slender threads in life, and the influence of these choices on personal values. This 'fascination with the road not taken' (Sutcliffe 2007) is not shared by everyone. Sutcliffe suggests that 'the seduction of such alternative realities stems from our sense that the present, not having been avoided, is inevitable.'

The writing as inquiry illustrates how the process of writing has prompted the uncovering of moments in my past where 'sliding doors' were faced, and illustrate how I chose one over another. A more recent example of this was my somewhat randomly walking once more through the doors marked 'University of Bristol' in 2004, after 33 years away. That impulse has led to many discoveries and life changing directions which would not have occurred had I chosen to walk past those doors and walked down the road instead to say, PriceWaterhouseCoopers opulent offices; or simply bypassed both, and had simply kept on walking, perhaps towards the Suspension Bridge.

An earlier chapter of 'An Outside View' relates to the process of my gaining work through my career, and the threads that led to that work. This chapter reveals that far from this work sourcing being an intentional process that my client and associate networks have indeed been built through the pursuit of slender threads. As much as this evidence of slender threads was true in my life, so too did the slender thread phenomenon run for my informants also, who quoted many vivid examples illustrative of the same. I notice this slender thread process strongly at work through my assimilation into the academic community, which has been by no means a planned process.

Johnson continues ‘...what is required in life is wholeness, not goodness. What is required for more wholeness is different for each person, and it changes moment by moment. This requires realigning yourself each day, each hour, each moment. The way to approach life is through the extremely small things. You can feel in your body the difference between an ego decision and a Self-decision... I think that the slender threads are continuously present; it is just our ability to accept them that varies. Life is not meaningless; it is overflowing with meaning, pattern, and connection.’ (Johnson 1998:103). This final phrase certainly resonates with me, in terms of the metaphoric power of the last few weeks, of the manifestation of right clues and of the phenomenon of wise guides presenting themselves with perfect timing, just when I was most lost and in need.

The Journey Out.

This dramatic discovery of writing as inquiry, and the related phenomenon of synchronicity, had radical implications for my angle of attack upon my substantive research question. At an intuitive level, it felt exactly the approach that I needed to follow. On the other hand, I had little notion as to how to sustain such an approach though the long course of a PhD, or how to defend it. I was also made aware through conversations with my supervisor that I had the opportunity to pioneer an alternative approach to management research method through the pursuit of writing as inquiry, and through the concomitant reality that I was destined to follow an emergent approach, particularly if synchronicity were to be privileged and explored in this study. There was a certain inevitability about this pursuit of alternative methods which implied that the inquiry needed to become a study of my emergent method in addition to being a study of the cognate or substantive field of consultants life transitions. A corollary of this was that this twin focus would require a delicate balancing act between attention to form and attention to substance, where there was likely to be an ebb and flow between the two. Clearly the path that I was embarking upon was many layered, with many twists and turns on the way.

Richardson and St Pierre (2005) assisted my understanding that there need not be a dichotomy between this autoethnography and the pursuit of rigorous analysis. They state that 'Any dinosaurian beliefs that the "creative" and the "analytic" are contradictory and incompatible modes are standing in the path of a meteor; they are doomed for extinction' (2005:962).

They continue...

' Creative Analytic Process (CAP) ethnographies are not alternative or experimental; they are, in and of themselves, valid and desirable representations of the social CAP ethnography displays the writing process and the writing product as deeply entwined; both are privileged. The product cannot be separated from the producer, the mode of production or the method of knowing (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005:962).'

Already, then I was accessing some strategies to assist my understanding of the relationship between method and substance, between means and ends and their congruency. This reading was also furnishing me with ideas of the wide and rich variety

of CAP that I could deploy in my research, and was certainly encouraging me to act boldly within this research paradigm. This growing excitement was to lead me to search for further literature in the specific field of 'writing as inquiry'. What I was to find that while there was a profusion of literature being generated by educationally based and social work academics, that there was relatively little in the field of management. I was not too disheartened by this however, as it seemed that many of the ideas and approaches that were being generated within education and sociology were highly transferable to management. I perceived no technical or methodological barriers to this transfer.

These ideas suggested to me many opportunities for innovation in management, but it was clear that while there may be no technical barriers, that there were likely to be strong managerialist resistances provoked by even the suggestion of the deployment of such CAP methods. This anticipation of resistances begged the need for me to pioneer infiltration strategies for these alternative methods, which would not only mean that I might gain access to the field, but would also avail me the opportunity to reflect upon the effectiveness of this infiltration, and what we might learn from that. Such an exploration of legitimation strategies would be entirely consistent with the wider 'action research' (Reason and Bradbury 2001) philosophy underpinning this study, where pragmatic considerations of the political are quite as valid as inquiry into the purity of micro-method. And I was already aware that I would learn a great deal from education and sociology literature about disrupting the discourse of the academy, and of infiltration strategies, which I was already finding exciting to read and hear about.

I was to learn from Speedy (2005:403) that 'distillation and description' are different from 'explanation or analysis'. She emphasises that form is not all, and that the substance must contribute towards knowledge if this writing as inquiry approach is to work, otherwise it will be heavily discounted as being highly superficial. I learn with some excitement that writing as inquiry involves the disrupting of accepted written forms, and that the fact that I had been doing some of this disruption in my writing already was in my view a healthy sign. Speedy indicates the nature of the disruption thus

'All texts, such as those in this journal, are edited, selected, pruned and spruced in order to draw the eyes of the reader towards certain spaces. Writing as a form of inquiry (as opposed to the 'writing up', a kind of mopping up process at the end of an otherwise apparently already completed study) makes these representational practices as explicit and transparent as possible. It is a form of research that uses writing both as a research

tool or craft in its own right and/or as a method of re-presenting the words of participants' (Speedy 2005:403).

I began to understand through this reading how it might be to seek descriptive evocative evidence. I was to learn from Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) about three "moments" in the writing process: these three moments are defined as describing, storying, and questioning, moments that, taken together, are seen to make up the 're-storying' process.

Van Maanen (2002:713) suggests that it is not necessarily helpful for researchers to learn "how to write down" their reflections or "how to write up" their results. What should be more helpful is learning "how to write." He posits qualitative writing as an 'active struggle for understanding lived meanings of the lifeworld'. This struggle requires that the writer be attuned to others and their voices, and to the way they speak to us. He states that 'These words need to touch us, guide us, stir us' (Van Maanen 2002:713).

As I poured over this literature I was swiftly realising that I was committing to a long period of discovery writing that was going to challenge me to the highest degree, in fact probably to my core. I was growing to realise that I would never write up in the conventional sense during this dissertation, and that I was up to my elbows in this disrupting discourses business, even though I was not consciously following a post-modern turn. There I was at the age of fifty-five deeply in the process of learning how to write. Which by implication meant that I was in the process of unlearning how to write, or learning to unwrite. I recognised that I had massive scope for experiment, and for making mistakes. Writing as I was committing to do it – and it felt like a strong and demanding commitment not merely a passing fancy - was beyond the process of dressing up the research after the data collecting and the theorising been done. The writing was *the* raw material and possibly the finished product. I realised that not everyone would understand or be sympathetic to this approach; that it would take some persuasion, and that I was likely to meet many who would pour scorn even on the attempt to pursue this discovery writing turn.

My emergent learning strategy.

This high sounding title belies the fact that as I remember it at the time, there was little strategy beyond the learning gained from the preceding chapter which indicated that perhaps the best thing I might do is to get out of my own way and to be attentive to the

slender threads, and within that the working of the synchronicity wheels. After all, I still had at that point two more years or so of my PhD time to play with. I knew I would be going to the field at some point, to talk to some other independent co-creatives but right then my wisdom said to be attentive to the signals within and without, and not to rush a thing.

I was aware that I was following an action research track of some kind. I was not theory driven alone, but at this stage I was still dealing with my immersion in the experiential stage (Heron, 2001) of the action learning cycle. There really was no need to rush things. And if I had a plan it was that I knew that at some point in time the next stage of the Heron action learning cycle, the representational, would come along, and that I had already made a decision to deal with through the use of writing as inquiry and CAP. That as I remember was as far as my strategy then went. Now the time had come for the writing task to commence, without my knowing how long it might last, or when I might need to surface once more to inhale deeply on methodological oxygen.

What follows this chapter are significant extracts from 'An Outside View', my experiment in autoethnographic writing completed in four months between February and June 2005, at an early stage in the construction of this thesis. (The remainder of 'An Outside View' can be found in the Portfolio). This then was my immersion experience, and was to guide so much of what was to emerge thereafter.

An Outside View.

Between discipline and Desire... an apprentice ethnographers tale.

This title was stolen from a painting by Martin Naylor, located by the entrance of a recently installed contemporary art exhibition in the Museum next door to our university. I discovered the painting and its title while wandering somewhat absently, endeavouring to make sense of the internal wrestling match that my research at this stage had become. The tensions between the passions to learn to express, to evoke, to discover, counterpointed by the academic requirement to structure, defend and explain, were perfectly captured for me in the painting itself.

This piece resonated for me as, in reading into autoethnographic practice, I was generally uncomfortable with some of the claims made as to the cathartic impact of the interventions themselves. The suggestion was that most autoethnographic writing is driven at some level by a need for personal epiphany, and also to facilitate the healing of past and current wounds and hurts for others. I did not find it easy to locate that need for catharsis inside myself, as a driving force for my research. In addition to these concerns, I was growing irritated by the level of academic abstraction many of the writers felt they needed to resort to justify what seemed rather self evident representations of reality. At this point in my reading the 'discipline' of autoethnography seemed to be in danger of extinguishing the 'desire'.

As I became conscious that my writing and thinking had taken a narrative, interpretivist turn, I began to notice a change in the writing itself. What I was aware of was that, in the act of writing I had become more observational, more reflective, and more alive to and in relationship with the words on the page. I also noticed that I was beginning to frame the correspondence as a piece of 'research' in the loosest sense, or at least as a significant component of the inquiry that was occurring, with myself as a central participant.

A parallel realisation was the discovery that 'epistemology', which until that point I was relating to largely as an arcane academic device, was beginning to assume a vivid reality for me. If epistemology is the unfolding of the relationship between the knower and the

known, then I began to sense that process as separate, and recognisable, rather than occurring at the level of the assumed. I was given confidence that the best platform for understanding what was in front of others and me in this circumstance was a 'constructivist' one. The epistemological basis of this constructivist approach would be one we accept the existence of multiple realities; we understand that we each are partially situated; and we accept that our social world is actively constructed by our feelings and thoughts, rather than passively received as 'objective reality.' On that basis, all parties work to co-create their understanding of the emergent reality, rather than have the external researcher impose it.

The benefits of adopting a constructivist approach were reinforced when I selectively shared my recent dramatic loss with a few people close to me. As I shared my story I noticed that in many ways these friends and family were layering their narratives upon mine. It was not difficult as I listened to them to notice what their worldviews were, and my mindfulness of my ways of knowing and interpreting the world made it easier for me to converse. I felt more able to separate opinions and advice from a fuller inquiry into the presenting dilemmas and choices. What was becoming clear was that I was dealing with an existential struggle, an attempt to move things along for a while rather than to fix on absolute truth, or to seek an absolute solution that would guarantee happy endings all around.

I continued to journal..... At this point it felt as though I was writing and in harmony with the ebb and flow of life. I felt that I was mindful of the relationship between past, present and future, and the blurred distinctions between the same, rather than trying to take snapshots of isolated incidents and occurrences that would hopefully explain things, and then vindicate action. When in fact the likely result would be more polarised contention.

On return from my holiday, I bumped into my supervisor, and after some most enjoyable social niceties the conversation gravitated towards my upcoming tutorial. He suggested that if all I had to report was that I was 'stuck,' then that was ok, that was what we would work with. I wondered if I was stuck. As I pondered this, I felt that I wasn't entirely stuck, and that something had happened to deepen my understanding since we had last talked, although I could not immediately put words to what that deepening might have been. With a quick intake of breath, and without stopping too long to question the wisdom of so doing, I found myself relating this story of my loss, and how the experience had helped me to ground what had previously been theoretical – my understanding of the power of narrative

- in my own lived experience. The story of the connection between the two seemed to come out all of one piece, and with surprising coherence. Reflecting on my vocal narration of this story to someone outside of the drama reinforced my growing sense that learning and insight had in fact occurred, and also that some healing has happened along the way. I reported to my supervisor that I was valuing autoethnography at a deeper level, and from a very different perspective than before. I also indicated that I felt confirmed in my choice that autoethnography was a relevant vehicle for my research inquiry.

As we talked about research strategy, my supervisor picked up from my story the theme of 'stigma', and of the experience of being 'outside' of conventionally acceptable norms, or outside of a social system of which one would crave membership. He related this theme to my proposed research into the relationship between the development of 'Big Ideas', and the impact of those 'Big Ideas' upon consultant's values. His suggestion was that there might well prove to be a correlation between consultant's enthusiastic take up and advocacy of new ideas, and the extent to which those consultants feel the need to defend against being marginalised or ostracised by the client and/ or peer group mainstream.

This led to a conversation about how it felt for me now, to be in academia and outside of the consulting fold. This conversational shift from the general to the particular brought up some uneasiness, and I detected sudden and disconcerting feelings of vulnerability. I was comfortable talking about consultants other than me, and in generalisable terms; I was at that moment less than comfortable discussing myself, and my feelings. Perhaps I had revealed enough for one day. I was silent for a moment, then realised that my mind had wondered to my reaction to two otherwise anodyne pieces of mail that were in my inbox that morning, awaiting my attention along with a couple of hundred other post holiday emails. One was a newsletter from a consultancy I used to work with, the other a flyer promoting a talk being given by a one-time colleague. The style of both of these mails seemed so self-assured, so confident, so proclaiming of the rightness of these folk to be centrepieces on the consulting stage. I fully realised that they were marketing documents, but all the same my internal reaction was a hostile one, wanting to shout out, 'it is not really like that, the reality is different'.

I shared with my supervisor this tale of the inbox, and of the strength of my reaction, without processing it too much further. He listened, and returned once more to the outsider theme. Part of me was really engaged with this conversational turn, another part was fearful. Did I really want my research, and therefore my writing to go down the road of

exploring experiences of outsidersness, (a number of examples of which I could easily identify), and was I ready to unmask the rawness that lay suppressed beneath that memory? We agreed that we would pick up on this theme again at my tutorial the following week.

I returned to my reading, anxious to seek wisdom on this issue of disclosure, and found that most of the ethnographers accounts of their writing process point to the moment where they face the choice of revealing personal truths, or avoiding them. I have dwelled on the significance of that choice point since, and no easy answers are emerging. Apart from the personal disclosure aspect, there are also ethical issue to consider. What is clarifying for me is that if the ethnographic turn is to be taken, then it will require quantities not only of both discipline and desire, but also of courage, for that turn to be completed.

The visit to the museum reminded me of my last trip to a gallery, where I unexpectedly learned something useful about getting started in creative activity. My trip was to the Tate to view Anthony Caro's astonishing installations of structural steel, some the size of major buildings. After the viewing I read that, even though Caro never now works in clay, he invariably gets started on his sculptures each morning by 'chucking about a large lump of clay', before he gets out the welding torch and the tower crane and starts on the serious stuff in steel. The clay sticks to the walls, the floors, the ceiling, clothing, everywhere, until some shape emerges and the creative juices begin to flow. Perhaps this piece of writing is my lump of clay, though the real thing does sound a lot more satisfying.

Shortly after this viewing, Peter Clough, an ethnographer from the University of Belfast visited the university, and he was also working an artistic metaphor. He reminded us that great artists (such as Caro with his clay) paid their dues at life classes before they embarked upon abstract expression. The analogy here was that while newcomers to social science may well be tempted to skip the equivalent of life classes, their research abstractions might be emptier than if they had served their time with focus groups and reliability coefficients. The students would also be a whole lot more likely to gain a PhD, if they knew the language in which to defend their methodology, for there is no doubt that the more unusual the methodology, the greater the scrutiny of the underlying epistemology will be. This insight helped me to know that this issue of quantitative or qualitative was not an either/ or, and it was a salient reminder that the logical positivist school that I had been raised in as an economist needed at least familiarity and acknowledgement if I were to proceed further down my chosen interpretative track. What

it didn't help me with was in the prioritisation of my learning, or the best way to gain that learning.

Clough also openly reflected on this issue of the balance between positivist and constructivist orientations, and pondered that auto-ethnography walks the line where it could be considered 'neither good writing nor good science'. The encouragement he gave was to practice writing as much as possible, from as many angles as possible, and with as much feedback as possible, until you sense that you are 'finding your voice'.

This plea for authenticity resonates strongly for me, but it is also daunting in prospect. As I write this piece, it is difficult to know whether it is with my 'voice' that I write, or whether it is me attempting to write in the style of the auto-ethnographer. Whichever it may be, there is no doubt that, to use this piece as an example, that the process of writing this has created a clarity that was not there, post my supervisory conversation, when I was left with a jumble of dissociated thoughts and sensations. This writing has generated insights and connections that were not apparent when the conversational threads were left dangling. What is on my mind at the moment is that this style of reflexive writing may not fit the house style of this university, or more pertinently that of an external examiner.

For example, when I attended an induction course in the first term, I was told that as long as the logic of my arguments, supported by the warrants for my claims, are clearly organised and laid out on post-it notes, then the manuscript 'should write itself'. I notice from my subsequent reading that ethnographers recoil at this notion, and would not trivialise 'writing-up' as an after-the-fact process that tidies up the 'real work'. The ethnographers claim that the process of writing is an act of creation, and if one is open to the process itself, then that is where the most learning and breakthrough will take place. They do not abandon the need for the organization of work, but they do valorise writing as a valid inquiry tool.

Ethnographers also encourage the keeping of a 'research diary.' This diary needs to be more than a chronology of activity, and writing such as this piece you are currently reading concerning my research experience, and its relationship to my personal life would legitimately be included in such a diary. Indeed, some researchers privilege the writing of 'writing-stories' highly, to the extent that quite a number of successful auto-ethnographies are the 'story of telling the story' rather than the story itself. When I first heard of that idea, I thought it very strange indeed, but now I understand the process better I can fully

appreciate why the author would take that turn. For the benefit of my supervisor's health, it may be important to say at my tutorial that I don't plan to take that turn myself- just yet.

There are times though when it seems to me that what is in my diary more accurately captures my 'voice' than my attempts at writing in an academic genre. The challenge would be seem to be to impose structure, or artifice, without losing authenticity of voice, and hopefully without losing the readers interest.

What other learning needs and plans do I need to show evidence of at my forthcoming tutorial? In addition to ethnographic writing skills, I need to develop the more familiar skills of academic analysis, of critical reading, of literature review, and the disciplines of academic writing. Some argue that the development of the two in parallel can result in damage to both. Others would say that it would have similar benefits to learning an additional language. I imagine that in the harmonic emergence of both practices lies the confluence between discipline and desire. This lump of clay has now been thrown around quite long enough. Time to prepare myself for my tutorial.

The first person to respond to my invitation to read the 'discipline and desire' piece was my wife Louise. She agreed to read it that evening, but only if it were readable and not trying to be academic, which was voluble feedback indeed on my previous efforts. It was heartening to hear that she found it both moving and evocative, and that yes, it did sound like my voice. My eldest sister, Susi, phoned later, to share her impressions. She has worked with me often in the past, and has had experience of my professional writing in a number of contexts. She confirms that it is evocative, elegant, and in her view a good example of my skills in weaving together themes and concepts into a narrative. She found it readable, and was actually not that concerned re authenticity. Her view was that I have many voices, a number of sub personalities, and that this one sounded just as real as it needed to be for the aspect of me that was being expressed.

She picked up on the theme of 'outsiderness', and reflected that my hearing loss over the years may well have intensified my sense of being outside; at times being literally outside of the conversation, a place where naturally the extrovert in me which is strong would most wish to be. She was reminded of Elliot's 'Four Quartets' (1943), and their theme of 'memory and desire'. Mostly she was transported to a conference we both attended six years ago with a consultancy group I was working with at the time, and which she might have joined as an associate.

At that conference she introduced the idea of the contrast between 'rut stories' and 'river stories', based on the work of Markova (1992), an organizational mythologist. These two very different ways of narrating your life captivated the participating consultants at the conference, and other agendas were abandoned as the conference room resonated with the echoes of consultants stories, and their similarities and contrasts. I remembered this event too, as powerfully resonating with my cohorts, and asked if she could find and copy me Markova's original article. Reassured by this feedback that I may just be on the right track, I edit the piece once more then wing it off for my supervisor's consideration.

Tutorial morning.

I am up early that morning, somewhat apprehensive, and feeling that this meeting matters. It is not negligible, not to be discounted, it feels as though much hangs on this in terms of the future direction of this research, and therefore to some extent hangs the direction of my life. I have asked to move our meeting forward in time to accommodate a medical appointment that has come free for me later that morning. This he agrees to, though it means that we meet in the common room, which is where people commonly meet and drink coffee, and therefore has a fair amount of through traffic. We settled in quite happily while Gloria our cleaner finished her breakfast toast.

He begins by offering me a copy of his PhD. I had asked to see this, as I had never seen one before, and my appetite had been whetted by his upgrade paper. He hands it over to me with some degree of ceremony, explaining that beyond a stray request to the British library from an anonymous researcher, I am the first person outside of those involved with its creation to see his PhD. I am touched by this, and smiled inwardly at the words 'first person'. I look inside and observe that it is indeed written in the first person, rather than the passive person. He declares that wherever possible he prefers to use the 'I' idiom, and that he feels that his PhD speaks from a very personal part of himself.

I ask of the process of creation of this now very solid and present tome, and he takes me for journey through the dramas and crises, the dark nights of the soul and the moments of breakthrough that accompanied its birth. He says that a colleague told him that of course he would never finish it. This rather final judgment had proved to be a primary motivator during the most becalmed and stuck periods, fuelled in large part by a defiant desire to prove this doubter wrong. He reflects that yes the fud has changed him, and that was a

fine thing. You do not expect to embark upon such a venture without believing that it will profoundly influence your life. He conjectures that a vital part of the PhD process is to notice how it changes you, and the course of your life. A silence falls between us.

As I place his PhD on the table, he raises my 'Between Discipline and Desire' paper. He pronounces that he likes it. I am profoundly relieved. He likes the simplicity, the fact that it is written from the heart, and also says that it is well written. He contrasts it with my previous offerings, and concludes that whatever had happened to cause this metamorphosis in writing style and content to occur, that he wished that sea change to persist. He feels that the writing is addressing what is occurring beneath the surface, and that it has a powerful reflexive quality to it. He notes also that the story was well woven, mixing personal experience with intellectual argument to illumine each other. He is in accord with Dermot, saying that there is a good explication of methodology, and that a influential defence is made for the use of the auto-ethnography approach in my research.

As our colleagues move in and out of the room, largely unnoticed, our conversation flows with real intensity and enthusiasm around a variety of themes and concerns. We talk of the impenetrability of much academic literature, of how some it seems designed to exclude rather than draw the reader in. We touched on the lives of consultants known to us, and of their stories. I relay Susi's feedback on my paper to him, and he senses that her thought process and approach shares much in common with his wife, a therapist whose work is based in psycho-synthesis. I talk of Julian, a long standing colleague and friend, also of psycho-synthetic persuasion, and of his belief in the healing quality of story telling. We mention family history, and family memoir. And we agree on the futility of attempting to separate the personal and the professional in our story telling, for they each will remain indivisible.

Time flies, and my medical appointment draws near. I am pleased that our conversation seems aligned, and I inquire as to the next steps. He says I think you have started this now, this PhD, this auto-ethnography, keep weaving. I ask about inserting 'layered text' in parallel to my narrative; he says no, keep weaving the theory in among the narrative. I ask of the insertion of others voices, he says that is fine but ensure that you weave them around your own. He reminds me that this auto-ethnography is precisely that, an evocation of my story, and principally for my self-enlightenment. He reassures me that I am not to be too concerned about the epistemology of subjectivity and interiority. He notes that as long as it is understood that the basis is subjective then the science is valid.

He reminds me of the Australian woman who gained a PhD through the submission of songs, captured on video, and supported by art and artefacts. He catches the mischievous glint in my eye, and fearing perhaps that my offering may mutate to a sea shanty forebitter recital of the life of a consultant's lonely life on the stormy seas of commerce, he shows relief when our Head of Department breaks the spell by entering to inquire if he may use the room. We say that if fine, we are just leaving anyway. He asks how my fud is going. I mutter that I am fumbling in the dark as usual. My supervisor contradicts this, saying that perhaps as a result of this tutorial, we can now see our way up the interpretivist mountain.

Designing the way forward.

As I sit at my desk, I feel excited, still noticing the release that I experienced through this morning's conversation, and sensing that I need to ground that sensation of future propulsion towards some sort of plan. It is difficult to think about what needs doing first, and of where to start.

My colleagues in my department express a strong and some what metaphysical belief in the notion that, once you are following a particular line of inquiry, and if the power of the inquiry is strong enough, then it is likely that the piece of reading you need is more than likely to fall off the shelf for you. And it may fall off the most unlikely shelf also. When this idea of synchronicity was mentioned at a recent research methods workshop, quizzical looks abounded, yet I intuitively believe this notion to be true. For example, some power drew me towards the painting of 'between discipline and desire'. That instance may have been pure serendipity, or it may have been other. I look forward to discovering whether this phenomenon plays out during the course of the next few weeks and months, I do know with some certainty that you cannot force synchronicity, or feel disappointed if it doesn't happen.

The outsider theme has been strongly endorsed by all who have read my first piece and who know of my life, and this is a theme I have strong appetite for developing. I am also very conscious that along the way other themes will emerge as I get into the writing. It is predictable that they will emerge, but it is not predictable what these themes will be, or how influential they will prove to be in terms of shaping the direction of my research. I need to be alive to the possibility of additional themes emerging, and I also need to

defend against those fresh ideas driving out the original themes that were the founding impetus for the research.

Whatever the theme, I know now more surely that what I need to be examining is 'interruption stories', stories where the smooth passage of life breaks down, where the struggle occurs, and where difficulty needs to be faced and a new order created. In the course of this, courage will be needed to face up to the truth, to be truthful in memory, and to commit to a prose that accurately if painfully reflects the choice points and the impasses. Amid all of these options, I am still no clearer as to where to start. It could be that I simply choose one strand at random, and follow it. That notion at first seems absurd, and extremely un-management school like. Yet there remains an attraction simply to follow the thought and to see where it ends up, as surely as artist Paul Klee took his 'line for a walk.'

One emergent thought is that this journal could become the document. This journal could also be the device that weaves meaning around existing themes, as well as teasing out emergent themes. It could explicate the methodology. At this point, I feel I have sufficient trust in the process to allow this 'dear diary' method to take me as far as it may over the next few weeks, and to see where it might deliver me. It does have a double loop learning feel to it, where one learns about the process of learning itself through a review of learning from our experiences. To pursue this journaling option may also be to issue an invitation to serendipity, to coincidence, and to synchronicity. It will require openness to the process, and require a trust in life to deliver. There is simply no predicting what the next few weeks might deliver. This will be a challenge of weaving, of synthesizing past, present and future. The better woven it is, the more likely it may be it allows underlying core processes and structures to reveal themselves. Stacey's (2001) strange attractor might announce itself unbidden.

A difficulty will be to stay in the here and now, being attentive to self, while engaged in the activity of writing up yesterday, or the day before, when yesterday might have been spent in the process of excavating 30 years ago. And at the same time there will be a requirement to keep a weather eye on the future, and to keep moving the research along. I now see that in my research over the last nine months into my life's experiences, there has been a distinctly circular feel to the process. I read in Schein's book about the notion of polychromic as distinct from linear time, and it may well be that my experience has been more polychromic than I visualized.

There is also the question of how this record relates to my habitual practice of keeping a daily 'private' journal. I need to decide whether these run in parallel, or whether they become merged together. If they merge, I need to be alive to the danger that the intimacy, the privacy of the personal diary may be lost, and that in that process I lose touch with a 'conversation with self'. If the intimate remains in the public book, I need to be alive to the feeling of nakedness, of being unmasked. Practical considerations push to the fore, such as whether I have the time to run both journals, and also how it might be for my journal to escape the form of a bound book and be committed to disk.

A morning of phone calls.

I awaken from a deep and dreamful sleep to remember that tomorrow, Sunday, is my eldest sister, Susie's sixtieth birthday party, which we are hosting at home, and that food must be bought and arrangements made. The planning of the celebration is punctuated by a series of calls from various branches of the family, mostly related to the party, and some also with regard to belated feedback on my recently distributed 'discipline and desire' writing.

The first is from my sister Nuala, number two of my siblings, who rings to apologize on two accounts, one that she won't be making the party, as she has already celebrated this fulsomely with Susi in London, and secondly that she has not read my paper. She has recently just completed a Masters on the subject of Virginia Wolfe, and the role of gardens in her novels, and that for the time being she is allergic to the written word. She had, however read the title, and suggested that a key principle guiding garden design is the balancing of the tension between lyricism and restraint, the reconciling of opposites, of the yin and yang in Jung's archetypal world. Design cannot be all restraint, as Versailles regimented austerity would give testimony to, as opposed the flow of Fontainebleau as it flows within its underlying geometry. The literary analogy she reaches for that is that of Alexandrine verse, held rigidly in its straitjacket until Racine divined its liberation through his lyrical counterpoint.

Listening to this musing rather than responding, she reveals the thought that for art to work, it needs both 'simultaneous loose and tight qualities'. I ask her if she has heard of Tom Peters, she says no. I explain how Peters revolutionized business thinking in the 1980's, and that one of his essential principles for business organization design was that it

must demonstrate 'simultaneous loose and tight qualities', in terms of its balance between control and the liberation of ideas and practice.

We talk of the nature of subjectivity, and of its expression. She expresses that reflexivity is quintessential in Wolfe's writing, that much of her reflection was 'writing about the writing process, and the nature of the stream of consciousness'. We talk of family memoir, and of the work of her namesake, Nuala O'Faolain (1996), an Irish author whom I discovered in San Francisco, and whose autoethnography on being raised Irish Catholic, and on being a writer, has had a profound influence upon us both. (The title 'Are You Somebody? The Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman' captures rather wonderfully her struggles with identity, and also the accidental nature of how penning one hundred words about herself developed into hundreds of thousands of words of self exploration). Without further ado, she passes the phone over to her husband Roger, an educationalist who works for the Open University, and who has read my paper.

He speaks of his own experience of doing a PhD at Sussex University, and of the strong and welcome encouragement he received to write in the first person, and to write from the heart. At that time, Thomas Kuhn's 'The Structure of Scientific Revolution'(1962), which claimed that the main purpose of much the way science was constructed was to keep newcomers out. He said that he forbade his students to use the word 'expert', and that he would strongly advise me to do the same. This thinking resonated with an email I read this morning from Julian, who is a senior assessor for therapy students. He was indicating that a most common complaint of his students was that academia forced them to 'jump through hoops' that were unnecessary and which constrained their creativity. His resolution for them was to seek both scientific and subjective rigour, without faking it.

In addition to recognizing the 'outsider' theme in my life, and indeed in his own, he also detected a theme in my life of crossing boundaries and disciplines, quoting several occasions when I had stepped into his world to see a number of issues from a different perspective. He saw this ability to cross boundaries as a key consulting skill, and he encouraged me to pursue my interdisciplinary instincts.

The next caller is my mother, who needs no academic encouragement to indulge in story telling. It is her natural milieu. Today's top story, and it is sad and also hilarious, is of a funeral she attended yesterday of an old acquaintance at which not one member of the deceased family spoke to her life or her passing, instead leaving the wording to the priest,

who had also buried my father in the same church fifteen months earlier. My father's funeral by contrast was characterized by a rich mix of eulogy, of ritual and of celebration of a life. My mother speculated that with growing number of great grandchildren she was gathering around her, that by the time it came for her to pass, the priest and the coffin would be up there for weeks. In fact, she thought that it would be such a good party that she wouldn't want to miss it.

I suggested with some seriousness that she might want to organize such a party well before she left us. She says she hears that I have been writing my story, and that she wants to read what I am writing. She says that she hopes that I am not writing anything rotten about her. She shares a memory of my reading until late at night, often under the blankets. And that I was most often was material that was off my curriculum. Often books borrowed or stolen from my sisters. Interdisciplinarity indeed.

I lean on The Saturday Independent while fielding these calls. I now open it at random to discover that Paolozzi has died, the artist who donated his amazingly chaotic studio lock stock and shrunken head to the museum of modern art in Edinburgh, to be a lasting reminder of the randomness of the artistic process. Will Self carries a piece on pilgrimage. He writes of the work of the remarkable agi-prop artist Mark McGowan, whose pilgrimages include 'sailing' in a shopping trolley called 'Ocean Wave 2' from Peckham to Glasgow. The purpose was to collect gifts from the English to give to the Scots in reparation for the William Wallace fiasco. He failed after 17 days and 65 miles, citing bad weather and poor equipment. Will Self muses on how McGowan brings enormous will-power to bear upon absurdist missions with impossible objectives, and surmises that 99% of journeys we undertake in life are wholly without merit or purpose. I am wishing at this point that my pilgrimage might just fall into the remaining 1 %.

The phone goes yet again. It is the birthday girl herself, Susi, to talk of arrangements. We also talk of my tutorial, and of where to from here with my fud. She thinks as we talk of a friend of her, Gill Bell, from her time in Oxford. Gill's PhD became a narrative on the subject of the 'incommensurable paradigm' of being a woman with an alternative perspective in Oxford academia. I am reminded of the American grand doyen of autoethnography Laurel Richardson, whose journey into transgressive writing was stimulated by a similar experience of outsidership. We talk of pilgrimages, and of alternative endings, a topic we frequently return to. She quotes the poem of the Irish poet Eavan Bolland who writes of quilt making as a metaphor for a life, and who notices that

when the quilt is made, there is enough material left on the floor to construct another life, an alternative history and reality. I feel moved to share that Ann Rippin in our department at the university is pioneering work into management aesthetics, where she utilizes quilts to depict the narrative and often the foundation stories of these corporate enterprises. Susi reflects that I am in interesting company, where I have ended up this time around. It does not jive with her image of a management school at all. None of these calls feel like interruptions. They feel woven together, indivisibly, weaving the past, the present, and glimpses into the future, of wished for breakthroughs and also of endings.

My life in one hundred Words.

The day of the writers' autobiography and family memoir class has arrived. That is to say that the day has arrived, while my participation is by no means certain. The course is very popular, and over subscribed, the administrator tells me, and that there is a long stand by list but no one has at yet dropped out. In response to my suggestion that I pitch up and see what happens on the day, I am told that this would be unusual, and that I would need to negotiate that with the teacher. To assist my credibility as a writers course gatecrasher and infiltrator, I don what I imagine to be my Samuel Beckett outfit of austere black polo neck with black blazer. The net effect may well be to resemble a defrocked priest. I decide to go to the gym beforehand, where I am warmly greeted by the young woman who often works Saturdays, and whose apparent enchantment with life would uplift anyone's day.

As it transpires, infiltration proves simple enough. A greeter at the door performs her eponymous task to the letter, and our teacher, Sarah, is happy to accommodate me, given that there are many yawning gaps around the table where people should be. I am pleased to be included, thinking of the chain of serendipitous events that have led to my being here at all this day, most of those events including casually picking up leaflets from places where I did not intend to be. She asks me to put my name on this 'thing', referring to a long piece of cardboard folded over in the middle. I share with her the knowledge that in the USA these devices are known as 'name tents'. 'Oh,' she says, 'then Tracey Emin would like them', referring I imagine to the artist's work 'All the people I have ever slept with', where her bed-mates names are written inside a rather small but apparently much populated tent. 'Slept with', in my understanding, means exactly that, rather than sexual partners. I conjecture as to whether I dare go public on such a listing. All of the people I have ever slept with? All of the colleagues? The clients? The strangers? Given that so

much of my work has been located in hotels and conference centres, the wider definition of tent may well generate an embarrassingly long list.

Sarah patiently checks the register as people drizzle in. just as she is about to begin, a man, and there are few of us here today, rushes in, apologizing for his absence, and asking whether he should be here. He is assured that his presence is welcome- as long as he pays – and Sarah gathers around her considerable presence and begins by saying that she intends to enjoy herself, as her belief is that if participants are enjoying the experience, and that if she is also, then it is most likely that the learning will be enduring.

She continues in compelling vein on her understanding on the nature of writing about self, and about the past. I guess my academic colleagues would consider this her laying out of her ontology and epistemology. She emphasizes that she is still learning about the process of writing family history. She considers that this project is not so much about the past as about recreating the process of living. It is a research project, which concerns knowing about oneself in 'the now'. This research requires the rediscovery of past selves through the subjective process of reflexivity, of bending over backwards on ones experiences and discovering what lies therein. The research process is best understood as an adventure, as a journey of discovery wherein we recover selves, integrate selves, and begin to understand the relationship between past selves in the development of our identities.

As she speak of identity, she refers to the feeling of 'outsideness' which we all of us must surely feel for much of our lives. If we look at it closely, we are mostly feeling that we don't fit, though we seldom admit that, even to ourselves, as we are often covered in shame. She observes that finding things out about the past can be painful, often eviscerating. Courage is needed for to successfully traverse these painful episodes, but it is necessary to travel through then if integration is to be gained. She also indicated with a smile that the experience can be intensely pleasurable, as the past is excavated, and its meanings divined. The more we write, the more we will discover. And the more we write, the more we need to read, and to read critically, not purely for pleasure. This makes sense for me, as I think what I have learned this year about critical reading, and how that practice has enlightened my understanding of the text in front of me.

The first exercise she sets for us is to consider the question ' why am I doing this autobiography/ family memoir project?' This is certainly a pertinent question, given that it

relates to the purpose of my auto-ethnography. What I write on the page in front of me, without too much censoring, comes out as follows.

'I want to write my autoethnography because the time has come to open up and heal the fractures of the past, bring light, and dance with the shadows'.

Sarah asks us to read out our purposes in turn. I am taken by the variety and range of responses, which include doing it for others; because I am obsessed with the past; I am the old keeper of family memories, I am the recorder; to record unique things for others to treasure; to help my children understand why they are what they are; to reflect aspects of those I love, to be a tribute to them; for others to be helped by this story; to catch it while you can; because my son has told me to do it; because this story is too good to miss.

As I read mine out, I reflect to the group that it seems far more selfish than theirs, and that beyond a small twinge of guilt I feel all right about that orientation. I also notice that I am attracted to most of these alternative purposes, and that quite a number of them work for me too. In fact, on close re reading, all of them do.

Our next exercise sounds like a real stretch. It is to 'write the story of my life in 100 words.' We are encouraged to do this in the present tense; to honour the inner as well as the outer; and to stick to the rule of exactly 100 words. We are given ten minutes for this. Get writing. Seeming an impossible task, this is what flowed onto the page, interrupted only by sedulous counting.

'My Glaswegian adventure is ever under my nose. I feel my sisters and my brother close, tight. My learning is guided by their whispered present. The wandering is here and will always find its unique direction. Intensity's urgings have been ignored at their peril, while some others see them as peril itself. I relish this uphill climb, less for the view from the top than for the reflection that rests there. I crave my life mate, I also travel alone. I reach back, continually wording my world.. Some friends checkout, or are in the queue. The spirit lives free.'

We listen in silence to each other's stories, hear the emotions and the hesitations, the apologies for the quality of the writing, notice the satisfaction of having delivered ones saga so economically. The stories are very moving. I am struck by the degree to which so many of them are fracture stories, interruption stories. I speculate as to whether it is that fractures and disconnections drive us to write, and that we have a select group here; or

whether it is that all of us have a fracture story to tell, and that writing is an excellent way to access and heal. I feel myself entering a place of intense personal excitement and attention as Sarah stands back and reflects upon this life story exercise. She talks of the power of reading aloud, saying that this act gives power and a different reality to our hearing of our writing, knowing you have a witness. It is similar to the feeling of seeing a piece of writing in print, neatly copied out. 'It makes it posh', she says. She talks also of the power of using the present tense of bringing an immediacy to the past. This use of the present tense was encouraged as regular exercise when we first began a piece about the past, given that we could always rewrite it in a different tense later.

While vocalizing your story has its own power, she stressed that there is something about putting words down on the page that helps bring out the pattern behind and within the story. Part of that pattern is to notice your own internal editor, to be alive to what you leave out, to the selection process. A life brings its own pattern where nothing is straightforward. She explained that the imposition of formal strictures, such as the '100 words rule', brings discipline and structure, which brings me back to the tension between lyricism and restraint. A suggestion is made that in our selectivity, we might gain by picking up one aspect of the story and following it, or picking a person and following their journey. In the process we should move from undifferentiated to differentiated, revealing the pattern more clearly. This advice chimes exactly with my much earlier studies of Gestalt in the 1970's. she encouraged reading into the gaps between stories, to travel into the valleys, allowing another story in.

We are returned to the theme of finding the courage to face what is painful and difficult. One way to deal with this is to play with your resistance, to see it as something to explore as you journey in the recreation of your earlier self. She mentions the phrase 'finding your original face'. I am stopped in my tracks by the phrase 'original face', I know they come from a favorite Van Morrison album I have, though it is difficult to have a favorite when you have about 30 collected over the years. This album is called 'Too Long in Exile', released in 1993, when I was living in South Africa. I played it in my car endlessly, while cruising along the Atlantic winding coast road at dawn and dusk, between work and home. At times the experience did feel like too long in exile, a painful reminder of my outsidersness, at other times I was exquisitely alone there, never wanted to leave that sense. The track is from 'Before the World was Made', and as far as I remember to goes

And its mirror after mirror

No vanities displayed

I'm just looking for the face you had

Before the world was made

Your original face,

Before time and space

Your original face.

I played it to my sister Susi when she visited Cape Town in 1994. As usual, she found an apposite alternative reference, saying that the phrase 'original face' receives many mentions in Buddhism where it represents the true essence of the Buddha. She mentioned that it also has a Christian tradition, where it is venerated as the face of the Immaculate Conception painted by God. It relates to unmasking, which I now realize is a powerful notion in interpretive practice. And she mentions an Italian phrase that they use when they haven't seen someone for quite some time, and they have aged. The Italians say 'you have grown into your face'. I wonder if I am growing into mine, and if my original face might be pushing through yet.

Sarah setting the next exercise, which is to analyze a poem, helps me understand that I have fallen into a valley and discovered another story. Or two. I regain my attention, though half of my attention is still on Susi's 'face' stories. The poem is by a young woman struggling with the experience of growing up the daughter of a famous artist. I now see that the poet is Eavan Boland, the same poet recommended by Susi, who wrote the quilt poem. I am ceasing to be surprised by these divine conjunctions.

What she requires us to do now is to pick an age between 10 and 20, and to write briefly about an experience at that age. Again, the encouragement is to write in the present tense, to capture sensations, and to use the poet's eye for detail. Again, we have little time for this and we are not to worry about the quality of the prose, just to get it down. I choose sixteen.

'It is midnight, and very cold, the wind cutting through my entirely inadequate school duffle coat as I descend from the truck by the Chepstow turn off, which is where he leaves me. It is a long way down from the cabin, but I attempt with what I suppose is the nonchalance shared by all practiced hitchhikers. I am clumsily dragging my small respirator bag with all my worldly belongings in it behind me. A journal. A pen. A copy of 'To the Lighthouse', the novel of choice for any introverted soulful escapee. And a couple of pairs of socks. No razor, but there again I didn't need one. Not for a while anyway. It's raining again. My duffle coat is embarrassing enough without it smelling of wet cat. I will never get another lift ponging like this.

I reach the slip road up to the suspension bridge and gasp at its majestic height and span. I will cross it rather than seek a lift on the Welsh side, I am impatient to get to England, to my new life. A plaque says the bridge was opened by the Queen six months ago. I hate the queen. I hate the royal family. I hate the Catholic Church. I love Fredrick Engels. And Bob Dylan. And Joy with the wild red hair from the second desk viola but I am not allowed to see her anymore, her dad said. What a soul crusher he is. And I hate my mother. It is good to know now that this evenings argument will prove to be our last. She will be such a mass of self recrimination when she finds me gone. Serves her right, she should have seen it coming.

I put my toecap on the footplate of the pedestrian footpath as my passage across this redemptive bridge begins, as I move towards my new life. There will be nothing pedestrian though about this journey. I am bathed in pervasive yellow neon. A police car approaches from behind, I hide behind a pillar. They had already caught me this year, middle of the night, cycling home from Joy's, when I had scaled a drainpipe to her bedroom window. I was taken back to my parents. What ignominy, as my sisters tut-tutted and secretly giggled. And Joy's dad found out. I will show them all.

I am halfway across, the wind slices through me. I look over the parapet at the depths below. It is a long way down. But England beckons, I see the lights of Avonmouth now. I try to light one my eight remaining Players No 6 –short size- but the wind forbids it. A blubbing sob arisen unbidden and unwanted from a deep place in my chest. I have eight and threepence, and I feel hungry, very hungry. And a bed would be nice, but I have left that bourgeois life behind now, to seek much higher rewards, to make such changes for the better for the world, and god it needs it.

I need to make a plan. The first plan of my adult life. It is a bit pathetic to wait until you are nearly seventeen, but there you are. I will of course travel the entire world by the end of the year. But as a jumping off point I will go stay with my sister Nuala in Leicester, where she is a student. She understands me, she has soul. And she smokes. And she has a boyfriend who smokes who my mother doesn't like. She is seriously cool. And she will hide me away for as long as I need to raise the funds to disappear forever. The trucks splash by as I smile to myself and think that the Queen really has no idea what she has opened up here.'

Sarah does not require all of us to read our stories, just a few. She talks of the how it is, that exercise in imagination, to go back in time, surrounded by the world as was then, to open the doors of perception and glimpse inside. Reassurance is given that the writing of auto-ethnography does not necessitate the capturing of every day, but that it is important to note which days you do select, and to pay attention to how you weave the stories together. We play with suggestion that we play with the notion of writing as an outsider, an interloper upon our own as well as others lives. I think of moments in time that I would wish to put to paper, and others that I might prefer to avoid, or simply fear that I would not have words enough to describe them. We are left before lunch with a reminder of the intense concentration that is summonsed when writing, and that very often it gets you in touch with a very deep aspect of your being.

I feel that sense intensely as I step out into the sunlight in Berkeley Square. I find myself in the middle of a very busy, noisy and colourful wedding, yet I feel quite detached from these jollities. I am in an altered space, in writer space, after this morning's experience. I reflect that I am spellbound by Sarah's narration of her workshop, by her certainty as to what it takes to be a writer. I am also admiring and commending her facilitation skills. She is dealing with very sensitive and tender material here, with a group seriously searching for something, and she orchestrates this beautifully. Perhaps I had not expected a writer to demonstrate such skills, in addition to being highly literate. I find a café that I do not know for a sandwich, listen to some slow jazz, and find myself drifting back to that deep space once more.

This afternoon we are asked to list those things in our past which we weren't good at. Sarah points to the shame that attaches to incompetence, and also to the humour that is released when we name and describe these experiences. There is no harm at all in presenting such phenomenon comically. I find a couple of examples.

'I wasn't good at handwriting, and I was good at English. Oh dear, they said, it is such a shame, that your hand is never as fast as your agile brain.'

'I wasn't very good at stopping myself from crying myself to sleep, in secret, when I was sent to that cold catholic school in Cardiff, after the freedom I enjoyed in my comprehensive school in Leicester. The tears were wretched from deep inside. I was so full of shame, and put on a brave face for my parents, who were doing everything they could, but I so wanted my old life back.'

As these stories volleyed around the room, the recognition was shared as each experience built upon the other. Much of the emotion was discharged as laughter. We were reminded that in essence the spirit of comedy is to release painful moments in the past when we have felt invalidated.

The conversation moves away from the topic of humiliation towards a more general discussion around ethical issues concerned with auto-ethnography. We speculate as to how the opening up of old hurts, and the causes of those hurts, could cause hurt to others. Sarah acknowledged that hurts do last for a long time, and that we need to be cautious and sensitive around them. On the other hand, very few of us are likely to be widely published, and we can be selective as to who see our text, or can anonymise our writing. Sometimes it is all right to be disloyal to people in our lives to stop protecting them. It is not healthy to continue with the 'silencing patterns' that may have inhibited our expression to date. Much of these decisions hinge on the degree to which you wish to be honest with yourself. We were reminded that the primary audience for such work is ourselves, and the primary beneficiary. It is our story, no one else's, and we must write it as we will.

Finally we move to the subject of what it is we imagine we will find most difficult about this writing project. Many of my classmates talk of anticipated difficulties around time management, stylistic devices, location for writing, organization of paper work and archives. I do share some of these difficulties, although in my current situation I am blessed with ample time and good support at home, none of which I take for granted and all of which increases my sense of responsibility to discharge this project well.

My difficulties centre events in the past which I will find difficult to write about. I list some of these, and recoil somewhat at the thought of committing them to paper. Tales of betrayal, both of betraying, and of my being traduced of trust violated and of hearts quite broken. Of abandonments, of removals, of being removed. Of financial debacles, of the mixing of work with family, and with other intimacies. Of physical breakdowns, of threats and of recoveries. All of these stories will be told in time, as my voice becomes clearer and stronger.

That evening, I discover that Louise has been reading Nuala O'Faolain's auto-ethnography (1996), and that she is captivated by Nuala's life, and by her vibrant writing. She loves the idea of Nuala beginning a short piece on her self to introduce a book she is writing, only to find one hundred pages or so later that she is still recounting the story of her life. I share my excitement with my days learnings, and read some of the pieces I have written in class. This brings up family memoir material for us both, and we enjoy the detective work implicit in deconstructing family stories, myths and mysteries as the conversation like the wine flows long into the night.

A sunny morning after the creative writing class.

I am up and about early this morning, going through the ritual of setting up the kitchen table as my writing space, while knowing inside that, after the exertions of the last few days, today will not prove to be a rich writing day. I have a reason to be at home today, anyway, awaiting the delightful Kevin the world's most helpful mechanic, who is picking up the Alfa for its roadworthy test. If writing is not going to occur today, despite going through the rituals, then there is no shortage of lightweight administrivia to push around, and of course there is always the Tantalus of backlog of the weekend's newspapers sitting winking at me invitingly.

I recall my supervisor recommending an article in the Saturday Independent by Fisk that exposes the retreat of academic writing into defensive impenetrability. Absolved of any guilt thanks to my supervisor's mandating of newspapers as compulsory text, I put the admin to one side and salvage the article, finding myself immediately drawn towards Fisk's attack on the 'preposterous claptrap of exclusion.' Fisk cites a conversation with a French professor who explained to him that 'if we don't dress up what we want to say in

this silly language we are told we are merely being journalists.' This thought makes a lot of sense to me. I imagine the last thing an academic would want to be known as would be a journalist.

I reflect on my own relationship with journalism, my mind wheeling back to that time when I was six, hearing again my father on scrutinizing my first written story proudly proclaiming 'Son, you are going to make a fine journalist.' I remember my near miss at getting a job as a cub reporter on the Western Mail, and the disappointment attached to that. I dwell, too on the reality of management consultancy, where, despite the promise of getting to the causal bedrock, so much of that activity is journalese, pushing around the ephemeral, the consultants as much as the clients becoming captivated by surface dramas. Quite often the consultants role is to be willingly at the centre of rumour control. I have clearly teetered on the journalistic edge for much of my life.

This writing of this auto-ethnography itself could be construed as pure journalism, or as a form of drama documentary. It is little wonder that interpretivist scholars, if they are to retain their academic license to operate, need to build up such elaborate intellectual defences before they begin to reveal their naturalistic work. My supervisor paused during our tutorial yesterday as we pondered as to whether the submission of an account such as this would stand alone as a PhD submission. The evidence from Speedy in the Education Department suggests that it would, should her amalgamated criteria, or similar, be applied. My supervisor explained that his hesitation was to do with the fact that if I do continue with this narrative turn, then I could effectively be lost to the Academy. He acknowledged that this might be more of a concern of his than of mine, but that it would be worth my bearing in mind.

Fisk's article continues to describe a moment when he addressed a group of students, to say that that the way to widen Universities influence is to stop using the 'poisonous language of academia.' He reports that this statement was met with rapturous student applause and silence from the university staff. At this moment I feel that if I were at that lecture, then I would be caught between the rapture and the shuffling. The rebellious part of me wishes to conjoin in the overthrowing of the barricades, another more thoughtful part wishes to learn the language of academic discourse, to demonstrate humility and beginners eyes in that pursuit.

'Nesting among the other newspapers is a review of a book called 'Irresistible Empire' by de Grazia (2005), whose theme is the 'coca- colonization' of the world. The review notes that she identifies five elements in the process of American consumer domination. Four of these elements are immediately recognizable, these usual suspects including Globalization being a disguise for monopoly control of trade. The spurious democracy of brands. The export of the Niceville concept of political society. And Peace. But the other surprise factor that is quoted is 'the perversion of European intellect through the repellent jargon and bogus methodologies of management consultancies.' Should the gravity of that statement be proven to be true, then my research takes on new meaning, and would reinforce the notion of adopting a macro political dimension to this study which would assist in contextualizing the micro world of my own lived and recorded experience. Interesting that I discover this thought through reading a journalist commenting on the work of a serious academic.

As I await Kevin, I scroll through my emails seeking with high anticipation my invite to this week's departmental star attraction; the delivery of a presentation by Professor Stephen Linstead, on the topic of 'Realistic Fantasy'. My excitement around his visit is three fold. The first is that the invite promises to introduce us to a creative ethnographic approach to organization research. Steve's attached resume certainly suggests that he walks in the worlds of both high academic respectability and in pioneering alternative methodologies. I greatly anticipate witnessing how these two worlds find resolution in living practice. The second attraction is his subject matter which concerns the Radio Ballads, a series of radio programmes written by Parker and MacColl for the BBC between 1957 and 1964. The purpose of these ballads was to raise consciousness and to allow the listeners depth immersion in the lives of ordinary people. Songs from these programmes have been highly influential in my life, as has been the work of MacColl more generally. As I grew up in the Sixties and into the Seventies, I shared the deeply held belief that folk songs could make a difference. This difference we believed would push through both in preserving the old by capturing the experiences of our forbears and also in ushering in the new order, often in protest form. The times they were a-changing indeed.

I have a belief that I heard some of original Radio Ballads at the time if their original broadcasting but this may be fanciful. I certainly heard a radio tribute to the programmes recently, and was greatly moved by the poignancy of many of the themes and songs. While browsing through a record shop in South Africa - when I lived there in the 1990's - I found a collection of MacColl's songs, put together by his family after his death. I

devoured this music, so redolent was it of times past. I believed that my South African friends were simply indulging my post colonial nostalgia by listening along but then I was to discover that were very taken by the music too, recognizing in its plaintive cadences a real cry from the heart from the voiceless, a subject of course dear to both the black and white South African liberal soul. I discovered that the only reason it was on sale in the first place was that the album is entitled 'Black and White,' named after a song written shortly after the Sharpeville massacre in 1963.

The third pull towards the event was that I know Steve. I know he features in my life, and I know he plays an important part in my history, but I can't locate him. I wish him to have been at that seminal Organisation Development Network (ODN) conference at Buxton in 1982, but I feel that he wasn't. I know he was at one of those conferences, but I also feel that I had another association with him, and that I then lost him. So he matters to this story. I say I am going to meet him, though I am not sure of that. In fact, I am somewhat nervous about approaching him. He may not remember me. He may remember me for reasons I would rather not be reminded of. I might be mistaken altogether. I may be trying to force synchronicity here, which is never going to work. My attempts to summons Steve from the past are interrupted by Kevin's cheery ring on the doorbell. I surrender the Alfa, asking Kevin to pay especial attention to the exhaust pipe, while at the same time noticing that I am in danger of disappearing up my reminiscent own. I retrieve my satchel and head towards the river walk and my date with the past.

I blink in the spring sunshine. It is a lovely day and I feel light and easy at the prospect of the event that lies ahead. The mood of the mid morning pavement is entirely different from the usual tempo of my walk in at 8 o'clock with Louise, and being here on this pavement alone feels different, more contemplative. On the yellow suspension bridge between the fury of the Bristol to Bath road and the peaceful luxuriance of the riverside footpath, three men are busy painting the trelliswork. We have noticed their handiwork on our morning walk before, but because of the timing have never met the painters. I congratulate them on this painstaking work, and say how it makes a difference to our lives. They are pleased to hear that, and we exchange pleasantries about their work, and the results of their endeavours. I speculate as I cross to the river path on the other side how little I am inside real jobs, of how it feels to be within a job, day after day. And to see a tangible result at the end of the day.

Abutting the river on the right hand side of the path are a series of small engineering workshops, their back doors open to allow heat out, and to allow me a view inside of their closed world. I peer in, hear the steady pounding of machines, the scream of cutters, the pervasive smell of dirty oil and burning metal. The sensory impact is strong, jolting me into recollection of my innumerable experiences of working in such places in the past.

Dramatic steel works, belching Bessemer furnaces, dark foundries, cramped small tool shops, swaying oilrigs. I doubt if am equipped to recreate in words the sense of how it was to be around those manmade forces, or to capture not only my experience, but the fullest experience of those that were closest to the claustrophobic heat. I have recently been able to recite well enough the management practices that prevailed, the economic abstractions that brought these entities into being, but not convincingly to speak to the lived reality.

The whole engineering scene, although I was around it for many years, was very alien to me, and I think I inhabited it like an alien. It was never my passion and I believe that those around me know it. It was not possible to fake passion for deep engineering stuff. To me that entire world felt terribly cramped and trapped. In contrast I liked the world of construction, of road building, of furniture removing. I needed to be out and beyond, needed to exercise my freedom, and I believe I still do. I begin to hum MacColl's 'Free born man of the travelling people', an evocation of enduring meaning and beauty for me.

The far end of the footpath, which has been closed for several weeks due to a fire, is today open, and I rejoice that I can once more reach Temple Meads without having to compete with the exhaust fumes and noise on the Feeder Road. Today is a trying out day for rescue dogs from the Dogs Home, when prospective new owners take them for a tentative walk. This beauty contest always looks as though it will end in tears, as these dogs have not been pre-socialised to charm and delight. What they have learned is to fear humans, and to elect outsidersness. I notice that the construction work on the underground sewage plant, which I have not seen the progress on for a few weeks during the diversion, is now backfilled and nearing completion. What was a vast gaping canyon is now a number of simple manhole covers and a small ventilation shaft. The workers busy themselves finishing the final fitting of a grill over the shaft, while a group of managers stand nearby, apparently oblivious to their men's efforts, caught in a self satisfied conversation between themselves conducted in what might seem a different language to those on their knees fiddling with the grill.

A cynical part of me is reminded that it is normal for management to turn up in droves to collect the accolades when the job is over, the glory going to the non-participants. So the hole is filled and we will walk over the sewage plant once more, oblivious very soon to what has been removed, what internal changes wrought, what processes cleansed. A parallel thought occurs that, at the end of this autoethnography, this personal excavation, I will somehow back fill what has been exposed, and I will seem no different to my outside world. What I do wish to believe is that important shifts will have been made inside, even if they remain invisible to those outside.

I pass from riverside peacefulness through the cacophony of Cattlemarket Bridge, trains braking above, suffocating cars and trucks trapped beneath, spewing exhaust as they queue to pass through a single slow light. The traffics sudden movement causes me to pick up the pace, a reminder that I have been lingering too long. I stride out towards the University, deciding today to pass down Corn Street, as it promises the colours and allures of the Organic Farmers Market day. Are these ecopreneurs, I silently inquire as I salivate over their produce, could they be fraught with values congruency dilemmas, or are they simply small business people keeping their stalls orderly and inviting? In this summer sunshine they appear quietly purposeful, and quite undisturbed by any tensions other than the shifting of their wares. I consider purchasing some fresh fish, then decide against it, arguing that the burgeoning smell in the midday heat might just bring too much verisimilitude to Steve's evocation of 'Singing the Fishing.' I head up Park Street as Great Tom booms out a measured twelve, summoning me towards the double oak doors and the welcome cool of the vaulted hallway.

The Linstead lecture on Critical Realism.

I find my colleagues and a man whom I believe must be Steve in a lecture room in the Wills Memorial Building, overlooking Queen's Road. He is setting up both projection and sound equipment, neither of which is behaving itself. I don't recognize him. It may be that I have dreamed him, as I perhaps dreamed hearing the original Radio Ballads. He is now fully set up, and ready to go, but a recalcitrant door keeping a whiteboard covered stubbornly refuses to stay secured to the wall, and repeatedly swings in front of the screen. Steve sighs a resigned sigh, after all his efforts to get started, saying that 'It is always the low tech that lets you down'. The Northern tones, and the implicit irony resonate immediately. Now I feel confident that I have a connection to this person, and to his muse. Fasten your seatbelts, this should be quite a ride.

Steve begins by interweaving his understanding of the intellectual bases of qualitative inquiry with an elucidation of the approach of Parker and MacColl. He relates to us that Parker was accused by critics of belonging to the school of Social Realism, a charge that he hotly denied, as in his own mind he did not align himself with kitchen sink drama at all. Rather, he was at pains to stress that their work was fantasy, albeit a fantasy that has its basis in the lived experience of the people it portrayed, and that is supported by those peoples recorded voices, unmediated by a narrator. The charges of Social Realism persisted, Parker eventually being fired from the BBC in 1972 for holding left wing views that were unpalatable to the management then. As Steve develops his theme, it is evident that he feels great warmth and compassion for these two pioneering stalwarts, as well as towards the working class heroes that they valorise.

The tempo changes, as Steve segues into a improvisation on the theme of interpretive method. He declares that what captured him about the work of Parker and MacColl is that they created a music that 'stepped out of the lives of the people.' They were comfortable with navigating between fantasy and reality, between living our dreams and dreaming our lives, looking for fissures, for cracks between the spaces. There was no sitting on top of data here, but the capacity to move in and around it, to tackle elusive issues, to explore enchantments and emotions. They proved unafraid as the ballads moves towards the 'inexpressibility of negative emotion.' There is a seamlessness here between the words and quotes on the screen and Steve's riff. This is no wooden re reading of words on a PowerPoint slide. He talks of the ontological dilemmas of capturing the life of another, the epistemological challenges inherent in representing and incorporating the life of an entire social system, of the need for reflexivity, and of the craft required for the ethnographer to have presence, without that presence collapsing into narcissism, or self identification with the subject in question.

We are now fully immersed in the Radio Ballads themselves. Steve plays whole songs and fragments of songs, explicating the techniques of layering of words and music, the repetition of stanzas for reinforcement, the capturing of the poetic rhythms and gruff cadences in the voices of those working people. The intention was for these voices to run through the ballads like 'Blackpool through rock'. We learn too of the need for valleys in song writing, to have a relatively flat narrative passage where nothing much occurs prior to a crescendo. I find the quality of my listening to the song 'Shoals of Herring', which I know inside out, quite different in kind to my listening to another song we hear which is

unknown to me, which is taken from the ballad *The Big Hower* about the pre-socialisation of a young miner. One I am hearing sentimentally, almost automatically, anticipating each line, while the unfamiliar song catches my throat with its innocent sweetness and poignancy. The montage, the continuous overlay of voice, of music and of Steve's empathic commentary is beguiling.

Next we hear the 'Song of a Road' a ballad depicting the building of the M1 motorway in 1959, a huge frontier adventure that was in its time as innovative a project as the early railways or canals. Yet the voices of management are so flat so pedestrian, uninspired, so literal, and so wooden in tone, that Steve suggests it is actually quite impossible to listen to them for more than two minutes without wanting to scream from frustration at their tedious technical recital. He contrasts this example of historic management speak with the metaphorically rich diction of the workers. My picture of the modern day managers around the sewage works this morning springs to mind, of the evidence of their living in a different world and speaking a different language from the workers. We learn that one difficulty of getting too close to these managers was that 'Song of the Road', the least successful of the Ballads, ran into a classical ethnographic trap of the compilers becoming seduced into commenting on the techniques, the 'how to' of road building, rather than letting the voices speak for themselves.

Steve's passion shines through as he relates his own research adventures in tracking down the original Ballad tapes in Salford museum, and through that archiving process moving closer to the hearts and bones of Parker and MacColl. He concludes with the thought that for an ethnographic approach to satisfy it must describe four 'moments', the poetic, the aesthetic, the ethical and the political moments. Strangely, as he defines the poetic moment, he refers to the inspiration of Ricks, the same English lecturer who so entranced me as an undergraduate in Berkeley Square thirty-five years before.

In Steve's view the Radio Ballads had been highly successful in evoking each of these moments. Its successors, drama documentary, reality TV and the like, which it was the precursor of, have struggled to match the power of this ground breaking series despite the power of improved technology to do so. Steve trusted that his own son et lumiere had opened our eyes to the possibilities that were open to us through utilization of technology.

As the presentation diminuendos to a close, we the audience find it difficult to transition from the mood created by this show towards question and answer mode. I listen attentively as Steve is asked how to square the romanticism intrinsic in such an

interpretive approach with academia's requirements for rigour and evidence. Steve agrees that this is contested territory, but sees no irreconcilable division. It is possible that we intellectually justify our approach, yet express it poetically. He is emphatic that unless we have the courage to continue to experiment, and to take the risk of putting forward experimental work for evaluation, that this plane is not going to move forward.

On that note we break, for thoughtful conversation over sandwiches. My colleague Mary says that she never realized that 'Shoals of Herring' was written in the 1960s; she thought it had been in our heritage forever, which was testament indeed to the authenticity of MacColl's song writing. After some hesitation, I decide to abandon reticence and introduce myself to Steve. He says that he thought he recognized me, believing that he identified my voice as I posed a question. I ask him if he had been to the Organisation Development Network conference in 1982. He says he went not in 1982, but in 1984., and that the reason he was there was because I had invited him. I am quizzical, and he explains that we met earlier in 1984, in the summer in Sweden, at the University of Lund, where we both attended a conference on Organization Culture. This is a remarkable revelation. I feel elation that I have at last found the missing piece, or rather that Steve had found it for me.

As we dwell upon this historical common ground, I recount a memory of how intellectually advanced those conference papers were at that time, and how little of that thinking seemed to be out and about even now. He recalls rather more earthy matters, such as my fighting off a drunken Swedish sailor late one night, of vodka, carrots and bananas party that continued through the lightest of nights to meet the dawn at about three a.m. A tale of two crazy ethnographers who ran a bookshop in the quietest middle of nowhere in Sweden paradoxically named the 'Exploding heart of the Universe'. Steve is still in touch with the French part of this duo, going to suitably unusual party he threw in Paris a few years later.

I am thrilled and delighted to have these doors of perception opened. We talk briefly of our lives since. I remark that my memory of Steve is that he was always on the edge. He rejoins that actually he has always been on the edge of the edge, and that it has been good validation lately to be given a DLit in recognition of his contribution to the expressive. Now it is time for him to leave, for a conference in the Watershed down town on urban renewal. I thank him for the benediction of day, saying that the subject was beautifully woven, representing as it did an ethnography within an ethnography, his ethnography of the Radio Ballads which are themselves a series of ethnographies. I drift away from the

room to the tunes of MacColl in my ears and a celebration of a mystery that has been solved, and on the way a fine old colleague rediscovered.

My mind is a swirl and my heart full as I make my way down the hill. I am feeling too restless to sit at my desk, need to move, to absorb what has occurred here. As I find my way down Park Street I am carried by my recollection of MacColl's rich life, of his acting in street theatre since age of 15, founding the Theatre Workshop with Joan Littlewood in the 1950's, of how intellectually talented he was without the benefits of formal education. He was truly a freeborn man, clearly disinterested in the baubles and external rewards that fame had to bring. I reflect also on Steve's life. I know little of it post 1985, but I imagine that just as MacColl was a role model for so many, and continues to be, so too must Steve be a serious inspiration and mentor for others. What was impressive was the degree to which he has internalized his epistemology, as evidenced by its natural and passionate representation. Just as MacColl's miners and fisherman had a cadence and lyricism all their own as they spoke, so too did Steve in his evocation of their lives and times, demonstrating his voice with flair, compassion and imagination.

I notice from his biography that Steve is currently a professor of Critical Management, which I find both surprising and encouraging, given the immediately accessible and personal nature of his presentation. In the course of my research I have come across the Critical Management tradition, and while I have enjoyed much of the thinking, including the rekindling of my interest in Marxism, many of the writers I have encountered in that tradition have been extremely impenetrable. Robert Fisk would have taken no enjoyment from wading through their material. This presentation gives me hope that it is possible to express Critical Management in very practical and evocative way, just as MacColl, coming from a Marxist tradition, was able through his songs to raise consciousness and represent the working classes in a way never heard before.

I have recently discovered that of all the academic management traditions, the school showing most interest in consultancy right now is the Critical School. I talked earlier this year to a renowned consulting guru who knew about, and was most derisive of Critical Management. I believe I now begin to understand why, as it threatens much of Management Consulting orthodoxy. Much of what Management Consulting sees as healthy worker participation, Critical Management would frame as 'colonisation of the affective domain' (Willmott 1993:517). I think of the shame I felt this morning, watching the workers patiently plying their trade, while I observed, and believe that the pursuit of some

Critical Management thinking could assist both in mobilizing and resolving those feelings of mine that relate to 'real work', while at the same time providing a framework for exploring the wider political influence of Management Consulting, as enunciated by the 'coca-colonisation' notions I fell upon this morning.

My passion for evocation through song has always been strong, a love born in family tradition and since my teens and beyond nurtured through the work of the likes of MacColl, Cyril Tawney, A L Lloyd, the Copper family, Martin Carthy all of them on and on as they sing their tales from the past. And of the modern troubadours that followed in their wake, Dylan, Christy Moore, Andy Irvine. I am also forcibly reminded of the powerful emotional impact that Mervyn Bragg's musical, the 'Hired Man' had on me when it was first staged in the same year I met Steve, 1984.

What I had not understood so clearly until today was that what I was intuitively attracted towards could be described as ethnographically sourced, and lyrically depicted. I notice how well they each interweave the four 'moments', which causes me to ask how this writing of mine would stack up against those moments, were the moments to become the criteria. My response is, not particularly well. As I pass the Hippodrome, I fantasise as to how the engagement of friends and colleagues from the song writing and radio play worlds might bring a very different feel to this expression. My supervisor has referred often enough to the spectre of the sung PhD by the Australian anthropologist. I am beginning to understand why such an approach would be attractive.

I peer through the window opened by the reclaimed Lund experience, seeing myself in a final plenary session making an impassioned plea for the need for bridge building between academia, and the proportionally much under represented practitioners of culture change from consulting, and from industry. I could imagine such an idealistic plea being made today, and it being met with a similar silence by both camps. I play with the sliding doors, and speculate as to what might have occurred if Steve and I had remained close, what changes in direction might have been effected in my thinking and in my life. I surmise, also, that had I not walked through this door marked PhD I would not have remembered Steve, never mind have reclaimed him. I make a commitment to grasp this slender thread, to reach out further, and discover where that might lead, not only in the reconstitution of the past, but also in the determination of the future. In addition I resolve to reach out to other mentors from my past, to Pedler, Megginson, Boydell, et al to invite them on a

similar journey. I also resolve to listen afresh to my archived music, to be in touch with the memories and sensations that arise in that process.

I am over Bristol Bridge and on my way home when the jolly waltz on my mobile phone wakens me to the here and now. It is Kevin, to tell me that all is well, that the car is ready, exhaust and all and that he will drop it off soon. The mention of exhausts reminds me, after today's revelations, that I feel far less likely to disappear up my own apparatus than seemed likely earlier in the day. I head towards the sanctuary of the river path humming the overture as it formulates from my soon to be written fantasy musical. As this show is about consultants, it could still be called 'The Hired Man', but with a twist. The possibilities into the future are endless.

Research Themes and the Creation of the Theme Attic.

I had 'woven' 'Outside View' for all I was worth, and I thought it complete. I was not at all sure if it comprised an acceptable PhD, but it was complete. So there was a degree of exaltation in this, a pervading sense of triumph in completion. But this also becomes a painful story, so painful in retrospect that I am not sure if I really want to write it. The pain relates to what occurred after the narrative was written, nay lovingly crafted from the personal undergrowth would be more like it. 'Writing without fear' did not mean write without pain, but through the pain of writing I was rewarded with self revelation and catharsis. At that point I shared the narrative or rather parts of it with the world at large, and the world at large was kind and deemed it good. But then academia, or rather my slice of academia said this is lyrical and evocative, but it also said that this is not a PhD, not in its current form, nor is it every likely to become one if I carry on writing in this fashion. It is just going to get fatter and fatter. So academic wisdom said to me ...

'Go excavate some themes. Go themes finding. There are bound to be some in there somewhere. But for god's sake don't find too many. We think we are growing to know some things about you and this prolixity of yours. This thirst for words and complication needs reining in. Go find some themes and make them not too complex and most of all not too numerous'.

Now my narrative had been constructed from the ground up, where the themes were living, where they were gracefully tended, where they were loved into life. And there were the theory pieces, including the writing as inquiry method and theory of method pieces. All of these had been chewed over, swallowed then subsumed into the mulch. These theories, the method theories and the substantive theories, were woven as far as I was able to understand them into the text. I did not make a great song and dance about them, I was not ever sure if I did them well but I did what I could to unobtrusively assimilate theory and themes within the story. And if a reader were to recognise them for what they were that was great but then that didn't really matter. I knew they were there. And they were not plagiarised.

So I was hurting, and I was also exhausted from giving birth to 'Outside View'. But I felt that I had no where else to go, no defence for just leaving the text alone just as it was, for letting it speak for itself, or for simply allowing it to dwell in dark silence for a while. And I am also quite dutiful at heart, and so off I went to theme discover, to theme dream, to

theme make. I returned with what I guessed were a humble seventy-six or so themes. I felt laughed out of court by revealing this number. Dismissed for writing this folksy stuff. I was told that for any sort of reasonably manageable inquiry this expansive listing would need to be significantly reduced. So I went ahead and did violence to what I perceived to be the delicate filigree of my themes. And this is what I came up with. In the end there were sixteen or so themes. Which for my later research I worked to reduce to six, and then to two principal themes, while the rest bubbled away in the background. Well in truth I know not what these themes were doing, but I can't imagine they were best pleased. I refer in the title of this chapter to my 'Theme Attic', suggesting that these discarded themes were not completely lost, but were rather stored up somewhere for future consideration.

There was pain in this theme of excavation, but after a period of recalcitrant hacking away at it the frustration and pain were slowly replaced by a curiosity as to the nature of the themes themselves, and to the nature of their relationships one to another. As the pain subsided so came the fresh realisation that I liked these themes. They became my familiars. I embraced them and wanted them close. These were the shadows that I had to box with for a while, so I figured that it was best that I get to know them intimately, inside and out. I had found them, and I would make something great out of them. But they were not the whole and they never could be. The map is not the territory.

The naming of the themes.

The themes that were fighting for space in mind and my heart included those of the notion of life course, or the career to life. Nestling next to this theme was that of the evolution of personal values over this life course. There was the theme of management 'big ideas', and of the impact of those big ideas on life direction and on values. Besides that there was independence, authenticity, and it's reciprocal 'faking it'. There was the separation of the professional from the personal, of the public from the private. There were conjoined themes of priesthood and pilgrimage, of the role of the chronicled life in the execution of this pilgrimage. And in the process of this chronicling there surfaced the themes of synchronicity, of spirituality and of liminality.

Take this piece about faking it. It is quite illuminating ...

I want to convey some of the sense of what was going through my mind as I discovered and played with these themes. Here are my journal notes on my discovery of the 'faking it' theme, and some idea of where that stream of consciousness was delivering me....

The theme of faking it has played strongly as a musical continuo to this entire research enterprise. Faking it has come in terms of expressions of how it is to play the game and what happens when you stop playing the game. It has commented upon appearances, about how we will actually dress to appear to be the right part. Appearances may be deceptive but they also work. Faking it relates to the chameleon nature, to the wanting to be liked, to presenting ourselves whatever's required at any given moment. It's about form over substance, smoke over mirrors; it's about the presentation of a surface sheen. This surface sheen is PowerPoint shiny that indicates presence of the masters of the universe. Sometimes the identity is actually stolen to perpetuate this myth. There are overtones here of the performing arts, for the consultant it's showtime, we're on. There's a consultant winging it, performing under the amazing MSU, make stuff up. This is what happens when we're faking it, and much of what we're doing is happening in the shadow.

Behind this there are the interiority themes, there are themes that what's occurring behind the scenes when we're not faking it, when we allow our inner world out, when we show our vulnerability and where we are to use the word authentic. We're not at this point afraid, well we may be afraid but it doesn't stop us anyway from revealing our identity crisis, from talking about value conflicts or compromises that may be occurring, and the personal and professional dilemmas that are embedded behind this. We're prepared to talk about our shadow and how we manage it. We do not liberally at this point talk about detachment; we talk about the price that's required to be paid to achieve detachment or true Independence.

There is also the theme of priesthood, of vision, of mission, of calling which has been touched upon elsewhere but certainly runs through.

It's also been interesting as I live in and enter and play with the world of academia, to notice that as much as I observe the faking it and authenticity crises and dilemmas in the consulting world, I also noticed that it has parallels in the academic world also.

Academics spend a lot of their time identifying, distinguishing, differentiating how they'd be

different from consultancy world but I also see many similarities, I notice that ways in which academics might choose to word their worlds and the arcane expressions they might use to do that, the obscurantist expression. I also notice the hierarchies and I notice the fashions within those hierarchies in terms of who you know, who are the heroes and villains, what narratives are running what are the rhetoric and who are the esoteric language creators. I also see that just as much as I faked it in consultancy I have the potential to fake it in academia, to do a geographical as they describe it now in Alcoholics Anonymous, where you take your physical self elsewhere in the hope that your inner problems get left behind; when in fact these problems resurface in the same or different disguise in a different territory.

Early responses to 'An Outside View'.

The process of validation has evolved as the project has unfolded, following the guided missile as opposed to the blunderbuss metaphor, where the validation is sought early in the process, as opposed to leaving it to the end. The first stage of this validation process was to share early drafts of the text of this autoethnography with those close to me, to seek their opinion, (and probably their reassurance). The next stage was to share with my supervisor. Having navigated those early stage gates, I then shared the text more widely in a number of different media, including public readings of extracts of my text within the university at seminars and at outside conferences. The feedback from these seminars was most educational and encouraging in shaping the forward creation of the manuscript, and in the editing of what had gone before. These readings also included discussion of the research method, which widened the seminar conversations where the narrative and autoethnographic method was in the foreground.

Once the autoethnography 'Outside View' was complete, I grew more ambitious, taking the work outside of my home university to a number of Management Conferences, colloquia and seminars across the UK. Rather than conduct a straightforward reading or delivering a slide show at these seminars, I experimented with delivering the content in dramatic form, speaking directly to my lived experience of constructing the narrative. This developed to the point where I engaged on a number of occasions with 'Readers Theatre', where I dramatically invited my audience towards my performance. Again the feedback was constructive, encouraging and formative. It was noticeable that each time I delivered the narrative, whether it is my life and values narrative, or my research method narrative, the story came out differently on each occasion. Equally clearly, it was noticeable that with each successful reception of my work, I grew more open in my disclosures, and less fearful of censure or of vulnerability.

Around two years into this project, I shared this experience of writing-as-inquiry with a doctoral conference at St Andrews. As an aside, the process of coming to share it at all was quite a synchronicity story in itself, as it was a Scottish doctoral conference, yet I had somehow been invited, while living outside of Scotland. I nearly didn't go, as I had many pressing things to attend to, and it was a long way away. However, intuitively it felt important that I go. On arrival, I was somewhat dismayed to discover that I had been pre-allocated into a syndicate group that was focused on marketing, which was never of

primary interest to me. I asked somewhat boldly if I could swap groups, and in doing so found myself a ready swapper. As a result, I found myself in a largely 'emic' based research group, comprising experienced managers and consultants attempting to make sense of their own experience. Part of their struggle was to decide how much of the writing-as-inquiry style was permissible. Here is a fragment of an exchange of emails between me and the syndicate tutor post the event.

Dear tutor, It was a gift to spend the day - and evening with you Tuesday. It was an excellent piece of synchronicity to end up together in the same syndicate - to discuss synchronicity - and I learned a great deal from you.

Dear Daniel thanks for the feedback. I was also very happy to find myself in a room of researchers who were so personally engaged in their work. Leonard Cohen recently remarked that he had been lucky enough to be paid for his work, rather than having had to work for his pay. Having said that he was also courageous enough to take the risk, and pursuing one's own work is definitely a risky business.

The group reported that my sharing of my research approach had been most reinforcing with regard to emboldening them to do the same. Their reflections on my writing as inquiry approach were most helpful. They absolutely saw the power in writing thoughts and impressions down, of journaling. They averred to the impossibility of separating the personal from the professional in such inquiry. The spoke to the liberating effects of disclosing writing in releasing one to speak openly of deeply personal experiences. They perceived my level of disclosure as high risk, but they could see that through reflection and practice that it came out quite fluently. This in turn encouraged them to be disclosing, both in our conversation, and in their writing that would follow. They said with regard to my research conversations that they could well imagine how my having been through the writing as inquiry process and having repeatedly related my discoveries would have both encouraged my informants to open up, and would also have sensitized me to the inner meaning of their narrative.

They also reflected on the process of entering the zone, of sensitising yourself, of the heightening of consciousness where connections are spotted and made. They said that it was re-conceiving research. All of us were very moved by the experience. It was extraordinary, in the moment and inspiring.

Another example would be my writing of a chapter in outside view entitled 'The Linstead Lecture on Social Realism', which was contained in the previous section, 'An Outside View'. (This narrative comprised an account of a lecture by the said Professor Steve Linstead of the Critical Management School at York University). I had known Steve well back in the mid nineteen eighties, but had lost touch with him since. On a whim – and recognising the power of slender threads – I decided to send this narrative to him. This is a part of a long and generous response from Steve.

Dear Dan,

Re: After all these years ...

It was very moving to read your account of my presentation, and what a beautiful piece it was. I remember when we were at Lund (at an Organisational Symbolism conference in 1984) we all went up to your room to listen to the latest Van Morrison, and he understood slender threads! Unfortunately I am going to have to shut off the music your piece set off in me to mark some exam papers! But just one thought that struck me – the idea of life being too full of meaning not empty – was to remind me of Deleuze's position that in reaching towards fullness and 'multiplicity' we become not more recognisable and distinguishable, but increasingly imperceptible, for the wholeness mitigates against identity, or at least identity in the impoverished way we have come to understand it.

Steve.

This response represents one among many that I have received as a result of sending out or sharing my work and awaiting whatever might be returned. It is certainly to my mind a good example of what serendipity or the slender threads can deliver. This feedback was not only reinforcing of my text and of my approach. It also yielded the powerful insight on identity that is contained above at precisely the moment that I needed such wisdom, as I pondered the multiplicity: identity: values malleability conundrum. It was also to feed a re-connection to Steve that has maintained since.

Testing the writing as inquiry approach with willing students.

The next stage of my emergent validation process was to test the validity of the writing as inquiry process with writers other than myself. My decision was to conduct a small-scale

experiment with a group of post-experience master's students, who agreed to assess the potential benefits of writing-as-inquiry in large part because they were curious and attracted towards it, based on our earlier shorter experiments in class mentioned in the previous chapter. As a result of this writing experiment, which we now somewhat institutionalised and entitled 'Developing Reflective Practice', a number of these Masters students have decided to adopt autoethnography as their primary or secondary research method. These are students whose intentions were to research into areas where a subjective contribution would prove beneficial. This communal writing activity which began back at that time now continues into the foreseeable future.

This section below captures my journal record of the experiential learning gained from immersion in this writing-as-inquiry process. As the reader will note, the substantive theme being explored through the medium of writing-as-inquiry was that of 'mentoring and coaching'.

It was remarkable to observe the different directions taken by the students' self directed narratives, and the many layers of experience that they related to. A theme common among the narratives was that the authors selected, as their point of departure, an 'interruption' in their normal schedule, which in turn stimulated reflections on the role interruptions play more generally in our lives. These interruptions were in their nature either a memory of personal dislocation remembered, or a more general one occurring within their organisations. Richardson (2003) (Ellis and Bochner 1996) in their academic writing on the reflective process are keen to emphasise that interruptions, or dislocations, are the stuff of autoethnography. As such, they should be welcomed rather than seen as unwelcome break in 'business as usual'. Without this prior academic insight, our students stumbled upon this realisation naturalistically; their various narratives witnessed the capturing of a rich picture, of a rich inner and outer world that the academics predict would occur through the experiencing of an interruption. These evocative descriptions were enlivened by the inclusion of the type of telling detail that draws the reader in towards the narrative. We concluded that closely observed, identifiable detail has great narrative power.

We – the students and the facilitators - became aware of the power of the prose as the flow of our stories gained momentum. We noticed the weaving, the interplay of thoughts, impressions and ideas, and were fascinated to gain a glimpse into the web of thought, the stream of consciousness that represents our elusive inner dialogue, our moment-to-

moment sense making. This weaving effect worked best when there was an internal and external modulation between external stimulus and internal reflection. Indeed, many of our stories had an element of journeying to them. We travel, and as we travel, we take our readers with us. The kinetic power, the physicality of movement served us well, also, where physical movement was used as a descriptive device, such as in cycling, walking, running, boxing, piano playing, driving a car, all of which were analogies utilised in the reflective accounts of mentoring and coaching.

We observed how writers sabotage themselves when they approach the writing task, sometimes by saying 'Hey, wait a minute, who do you think you are, an author or something? Hey, but this is too good, what is flowing from my pen here. It is embarrassingly good. But hold on a minute, 'they' might think I am showing off. I need to write less well.' We talked of 'writing blocks', and of how we can get in our own way as writers. We alluded to the insidious, undermining role of the 'inner critic', and we reminded ourselves of the need to release the 'inner angel', to counteract this dominant critic, and to nurture the development of our product. One thing that did not work for us, we decided, was aiming for written perfection. That is not to say that perfection is unattainable. But it is unlikely to occur through attempts to force it into existence. It would seem that perfection is more likely to manifest itself when we are 'in the zone', rather than trying to force it along.

We noticed how the writing stirs surprisingly deep emotions, in our selves and others. Feelings so powerful in fact that sometimes we stopped during our writing and reciting process, hesitated, somewhat dumbstruck in the face of these emotions. But it was also clear that when we wrote through the 'impasses', then breakthroughs occurred. There was a therapeutic quality, a palpable sense of emotional release as the words flowed onto the page. When we became 'stuck' in the feelings that were surfacing, one strategy that seemed to work was that of 'writing through' the emotional material. It proved possible to achieve a high degree of intimacy and personalisation through letting things flow. We compared the granularity of this prose with the normal 'objective' standard of writing that we endeavour to achieve for our academic pieces. We contrasted the woodenness of much of the academic writing that we encounter with the sparkling quality of these spontaneous efforts.

Some of our students seemed unable to get off the hook of 'Beginnings, middles and endings'. That eternal formula seems to have been with some of us forever, stubbornly

refusing to shift. For others it came naturally to write Samuel Beckett style, without recognisable endings or beginnings, penning a life of perpetual 'middle'. We reflected on what might be driving this 'beginning middle ending' ritual, especially those of us that seemed addicted to the same, and concluded that it seemed deeply installed in our hard wiring, despite the indeterminate evidence of life to the contrary.

When reflecting on travelling through our life course, we concluded that all of us need to deal with a degree of 'stuckness', of indeterminacy, of unwelcome interruption. We concluded that our lives were not all about neatly tied up three part dramas of identifiable beginnings, middles and endings. This conclusion would certainly resonate with post-modern philosopher's view of the world, and provides a challenge to us unreconstructed 'beginnings, middles and ends' recidivists. It certainly challenges the idea that adult learning can be tied together neatly, with a bow.

One of the writing exercises we set students was to write about our earliest experiences of coaching. This invitation, which was deliberately vague, was subject to a wide range of interpretation of coaching that released insights into coaching that we believed would not have occurred if we had been asked students to take a purely 'professional', detached view of the subject. Much of this writing was transgressive of the received managerialist view of the benefits and power of coaching, and was clearly written from the heart. This transgressive writing stimulated a revelatory critical view of coaching that would not have emerged had we pursued a more conventional invitation to comment on 'coaching at work', or been asked what the Human Resources professionals perspective on coaching might be..

These reflections on our spontaneous discovery of a rich critical theme gave rise to a 'meta theme.' This meta-theme is the discourse of how we become attracted towards, and grow to accept without question that which is managerially fashionable, or the current vogue. This also exposed the related theme of how we reflexively seek 'how to' solutions, without fundamentally asking the questions 'what is going on here? In what way am I being manipulated now?' Perhaps this subtle, unconscious process explains how we are so often grabbed and then trapped by new ideas in the first place, seduced by the 'how to', by getting it right, rather than asking, at a deep level, the question 'Why?'

My Time in the Twilight Zone.

As I became more deeply immersed in my second year of full time doctoral study, I became increasingly aware that it was becoming difficult to keep my attention away from the issue of my future career beyond that of being a full time student. Apart from anything else, my rate of spending was eclipsing my optimistic budgets set one year ago, at the beginning of this enterprise. This sobering financial reality was coincident with my being approached by several head hunters checking my availability for a number of interim and full-time posts. This was flattering and timely, but on the whole my feelings regarding the conversion of these opportunities into a career reality were distinctly mixed.

On the one hand the invites seemed to offer a dignified way out of my foray into academia, when part of me was feeling post the writing of 'Outside View' that there was after all not a good fit between my approach and what the world of management research was looking for. On the other hand, there was a part of me strongly resisting prematurely aborting this academic adventure, in particular wishing to persist with the writing as inquiry approach, which I felt I was making more and more my own. I found myself in a liminal space vacillating between two worlds.

One of these head-hunter approaches was from a major government department looking for someone to head up their internal Organisation Development division on a full time basis, working from London at executive level on a considerable salary. I approached my first interview for this post with a challenging mind set, convinced that I would prove to be too high a risk for them to even consider employing me, but that it would be worthwhile exercise to test whether they ready for me in my full uncompromised glory. To my surprise and pleasure they were prepared to listen further to my radical ideas – in fact they seemed to like them - and I progressed through two further levels of screening to a full final panel interview in Whitehall. This selection process occurred over two or three months, proving both a distraction from my studies and also an eyebrow raiser for me with regard to the world's perception of my capabilities.

This final panel interview was a stimulating experience conducted at a high strategic level and under considerable pressure. While I was aware that the head of strategy and the head of change management who were on the panel were tuned into my responses to their mini case studies and rapid fire questions, the HR representative was continually

pulling the conversation back to 'realities on the ground', and the 'needs of the department going forward'. I was to learn later that in the final analysis that this HR voice held sway. She had decided that I was 'too academic' for the job. I smarted at this, after all of my years of successful OD project implementation experience.

On my return to my studies – aware that university was perhaps after all my new life - I was aware of a persistent questioning of me and of my approach by colleagues within academia. Perhaps the interview had left me sensitive to questions about my degree of fit, or maybe the scrutiny of me and my methods had intensified. These questions centred on whether I would ever be able to become sufficiently detached from solution seeking to view a problem in an sceptical or critical fashion, given my background in solution-centric management consulting. This stereotyping hurt. It felt that maybe my honeymoon period within the academy was over and now the truth was being told, so at this point I was beginning to feel distinctly unnerved. It would seem that I was no longer practical enough for practice; and not academic enough for academia. I had slipped into a twilight zone. I had travelled too far into academia to go back to my old world; yet not far enough in to be accepted and embraced as a member of this new community. I was acutely aware that I was experiencing all of the disorientating effects of inhabiting Bridges (1994) transitional 'neutral zone', caught between incomplete endings but without a clear view of a new world in sight.

At this point of trepidation a welcome slender thread offered itself. There was a fixed term lecturing job going in our department and it was suggested that I might put myself up for this. My initial reaction was to doubt whether I was in anyway ready for a full time academic post, nor was I sure if a career in academia was what I was looking for. By way of assisting my decision making process, my supervisor had noticed that there was a conference being run by the Advanced Institute of Management (AIM) on the topic of 'Business to Academia conversion', and suggested that I might want to go along and hear what they had to say. After all the conference was free. (The AIM is a high level body dedicated to improving the quality of management research in the UK, and along the way aims to build stronger bridges between research and practice; thus it is hardly surprising that 'conversion' would be high on their agenda.) The invite did seem to be fairly and squarely targeting the likes of me, and I decided that if nothing else I decided that this fishing trip would help me understand what the dynamics of 'conversion' would entail.

In the event the conference was a revelation, to the extent that as I look back I feel that this event comprised a significant tipping point in my career decision making process. By way of framing the event, there much sharing of high level information pointing to the fact that projections for supply and demand for management teaching at business schools over the next 10 years indicated that there was a severe shortfall on the supply side. Furthermore there were growing reservations as to the lack of real world experience among teachers at business schools, where the career trend increasingly was to bring in young newly qualified PhD's who are theoretically capable but who have little or no practical experience.

We were to hear of ways in which government and grant awarding bodies were prepared to fund the conversion process and to encourage business schools to take on apprentice converts. Most interestingly of all, we were to hear of the 'real politick' of academic careers, where myths that we tyros held close to our naïve hearts were de-mythologized. These myths included provocations such as 'teaching is what matters'; 'my research will benefit from my practical management experience'; 'being a good institutional citizen will be rewarded'; 'conferences are where I can showcase my research'. It was most enlightening to dig beneath these myths as each was comprehensively debunked and to discover what really mattered to academics as they pursued their careers. And what really mattered rather depressingly seemed to be summed up in the phrase 'research output', or rather more colourfully 'staying close to the rats'.

I was also fascinated at this conference to listen to some really interesting first hand accounts of managers' migrations from business to business school, including reflections on the upsides and downsides of that transit. One of these insider stories included a recitation of one the presenters unnerving experiences of being neither fish nor fowl, of feeling betwixt and between the worlds of business and business schools. This experience of inhabiting the liminal middle ground exactly mirrored how I had been feeling post my recent Whitehall interview and my subsequent unsettling return to university life. I was growing to realise that perhaps such personal uncertainties came with the academic territory.

Included within the day was a one on one coaching session for each participant with a seasoned academic, where we had the opportunity to talk through where we might be situated with regard to this conversion process. I discovered to my surprise during this conversation that I was further down the road than I might have thought - especially given

my management learning and facilitation background - and I was strongly encouraged by my coach to take consideration of conversion further. While it was unlikely that I would qualify for grant support as I was too far into the PhD process, I was aware that my department was likely to be advertising for a lecturer in the ensuing few months, and that it could be a good idea to put my hat into the ring. When I tested this possibility with my department, I received strong support to accelerate a trajectory that would leave me well placed at screening stage, though clearly no guarantees could be given. This was my first experience of academic 'box-ticking'. I was reminded that central to all of this was completion of this doctorate.

This converts conference – and the possibility of employment within my own institution – certainly galvanised me into action. I threw myself into gaining my Teaching and Learning accreditation, and was fascinated to discover what learning lay therein. I also took every opportunity to gain teaching experience, and to in particular to experiment with the teaching of 'writing-as-inquiry', which was after all my passion as well as my research interest. As I pursued these teaching opportunities, I became aware that one class of mid career professionals that I was working with were resistant to my liminal role. They were deeply uneasy with the ambiguity surrounding my status, and needed to know whether I was a teacher or a researcher. And if I was a student researcher what right did I have to teach? And was I not in fact experimenting on them? This resistance was not openly displayed by other cohorts but it was an unsettling experience. In fact it took a review of my relationship with this cohort eighteen months later – en passant as we conducted an end-point evaluation of their experience of the whole degree - to explore and release the emotional tension surrounding that ambiguity. They felt that my competence had grown with my taking the full time job. I shared with them my experience that the longer the process of job getting dragged on, the more it crystallised for me how important it was to get this particular job.

Such tensions were clear evidence that I was still deeply occupying Bridges' (2004). neutral zone, that no-mans land between the ending of what is past and the emergence of new beginnings. One thing that had changed was that I was no longer pursuing siren calls from my old consulting world for the time being. I recognised how much energy had to go into that pursuit and I was also recognising that I had to an extent partially disqualified myself by embarking on this PhD. My focus therefore was now on my PhD, on teaching and on building my academic credentials, which included lining myself up for many conferences by way of building networks and increasing my visibility. However the

possibility of relapse into consultant mode was in my awareness and I was fully aware that I could return to that default position if the academic going become really turbulent. As I look back I realise how important it was for me to continue journaling during this unsettling phase, by way of providing a private reflective space for my transition. Leading master classes for students in consulting practice; and perpetually telling my story at conferences were highly instrumental in grooving my understanding of my journey to date and where it might be headed next. I learned a lot as I listened to myself, and as I attended to peoples' responses to my narrative.

In the midst of this escalating business, I was acutely, regretfully aware that I was moving away for the luxury of the deep reflective space that occupation of the full time PhD role had provided. My life was becoming increasingly invaded and fragmented. I realise now that had I been part-time rather than full-time PhD student from the outset, then the chances of my making this migratory conversion would have been significantly diminished. As it was, the head start of eighteen months full time immersion in my studies was sufficient to propel this PhD towards an ending of sorts, and at the same time increase my visibility and credibility in the eyes of the academy.

As the fateful day of the interview approached I was less and less insouciant about my chances or not of claiming this post. Putting together my academic CV had been quite an education and I realised that mine had glaring holes, not least where the long track record of research publications should be. In the course of testing my CV on the market, I researched and applied for some other roughly equivalent jobs, and in the process discovered that what was potentially on offer here at Bristol was uniquely tailored to my abilities and also my needs as far as I knew them at that stage in my life. What I was growing to realise was that I really, really wanted this job, perhaps more than I had ever admitted to myself, and that success in this interview would be a significant step onwards through this academic rite of passage.

The day of the interview was somewhat surreal, involving as it did presenting to and being interviewed by my close colleagues, resplendent in my suit to ensure that all of the necessary interview rituals were observed. In the end I was offered the job, which was a delight and relief, though the proviso was that it was on a one year fixed term basis rather than a permanent appointment at that stage. This condition was to protract the experience of the 'neutral zone' significantly, where the pressures to perform and to prove myself were to sustain for a further year.

Crafting the Bridge between Autoethnography and Collaborative Inquiry.

Moving away from the inward focus.

The passage between the completion of my autoethnography and the movement towards the next stage in the research process – which was to pull together the research conversations from an ICC cohort on the theme of life course transition into a coherent document - was by no means straightforward. Throughout the construction of my autoethnography 'An Outside View' I was drawn time and again to the actuality of crossing bridges – which occurred repeatedly on my journey to work - and the corresponding metaphorical resonance of crossing bridges in my reflective journal. The ultimate bridge in this metaphoric series was to cross the bridge of completion of the autoethnography. Once crossed – and allowing for the realisation that the autoethnography was not the totality of my research, and that more needed to be done – I noticed myself growing impatient to move on with my research, yet not knowing quite how to proceed.

I was in part still in thrall of the reflexive process that had pervaded my autoethnography, yet at another level I was growing suspicious that this process was becoming increasingly narcissistic, and inevitably hitting diminishing returns. At a simple level, I was becoming stale and burnt out with the process of researching me. I reached for some theory to help me understand this phenomenon better. In theoretical terms, I was growing to realise that I needed this study to reach beyond the subjective plural-relativism, the green meme; (Beck and Cowen, 1995) towards the intergralism of what Beck describes as the 'second tier', which allows an integral view. This theorising helped me to intellectually frame what was happening better, but it still didn't help me climb out of the now ingrained reflexive habit completely.

I was aware of a feeling of 'stuckness', of not knowing where to go from here. I was at the impasse. I was resistant to writing a method paper, in part because my intuitive feeling was that my method was still in flow. I did not know exactly where it might be proceeding, but I was fearful of arresting the full flowering of the method through premature dissection of the same, and thereby damaging the emergent process. This waiting in the impasse

was both excruciating and tantalising. On reflection, this unwanted hiatus felt in retrospect like a necessary fallow period, an incubation period before the next stage of creativity might flow. I had always planned to survey a group of my ICC contemporaries in my original research plan, which should mean the eventual embarking on this course should not have been difficult, but it was proving to be so. What I needed was a stimulus to propel me in that direction, beyond my generalising that conducting a survey would be a good thing to do next.

The impetus to move towards an ICC collaborative inquiry.

The eventual catalyst that led to this next stage in the research process – which was to interview a group of ICCs on the dynamics of their life transitions, though now real plan of tight focus was in any way clear in my mind - occurred in a Management Development for our mid-career professionals that I was co-facilitating. In the course of running that class passing references were made to three now eminent management thinkers, whom I had known, as a student and at times as a client of theirs, 'before they were famous.' The three luminaries in question were Mike Pedler, David Megginson and Tom Boydell. The mention of their names in class jolted me back from the present to my times with those men in Sheffield. I was transported back to a time of radical change of which they were in the van, the memory vividly rekindling the spirit of overthrowing an existing order that had so energised our thinking and our work back then. At some point in my research strategy – such as it was – I had considered reaching out to other independent consulting contemporaries of mine, to share some of my insights into my experiences of life transition, and to stimulate their memories of my experiences of the same, and also of their own. This reference to these three luminaries in class, and the thought processes it set in train, motivated me to go in search of these three erstwhile associates as a first stepping stone in this survey process, though with little real hope of contacting them, as each were much in demand and extremely busy, and by now located God only knows where. I could only imagine that they had moved on from Sheffield by this time. I rather wondered if desperation were driving me at that stage. Desperate Dan.

In the end, the pursuit of this 'slender thread' (Johnson, 1998) was to propel me towards an immediate trip to Sheffield – where remarkably all three still lived – as my tentative inquiries produced the remarkable result that all three were indeed available the week after my original inspiration to call them had occurred. This occurrence felt like synchronicity (Jung 1972, Jaworski 1996) writ large, to manifest this deeply unlikely coincidence of events in

such a short space of time. The three men in question were quite as struck by **the** implausibility of my finding all three of them together in Sheffield at such short notice **as I** was. Mike Pedler related that while I was forlornly attempting to contact him at home, **he** was at a conference, where he had met a common colleague of ours that he had not **met** in a while. Out of impulse he asked her how and where I was. She had no idea. **But he** said he felt a bell had been rung. He discovered on his return home that the bell was **his** own telephone where I had left three messages on his voice mail. And he was **available** the next day, when I suggested we meet, as a result of an unexpected cancellation.

I framed my meetings with them as a semi structured research conversation on **the** subject of life transition for ICC, where we could freely draw upon shared memories **of** each others transitions, and of key transitional moments to illumine our inquiry. **This** process of returning to Sheffield where I had once happily lived in my twenties and **of** revisiting old memory sites stirred vivid recall of my time there through active engagement with the sights, sounds, faces, voices, phrases and accents of the place. There was **no** doubt in my mind that the process of immersion in the creation of 'Outside View' had heightened and sensitised me to these memory triggers, allowing me to step **beyond** nostalgia to a different level of critical and aesthetic appreciation of what was all around me. It also greatly assisted the process of conducting these first research conversations **in** Sheffield, where I felt highly attuned to my memories of my time spent there, which I **felt** was also helpful in stirring my respondents memories also, though in truth there recall seemed vivid and pretty exact, including precise names dates and times.

A seductive invitation back into introspection is resisted, as new vistas emerge.

Once through with these dialogues I declared that a day off walking the Dales was in order, following two intensive days of conversation to allow all that I heard to shake down in some sort of order in my mind. As I reflected I noticed that the process of absorbing my trio's narratives had also re-stimulated aspects of my own story that had been neglected during the writing of my life account. Before I knew what was happening I found myself back in reflexive autoethnography land, wanting to write up and capture these thoughts. It felt as though I was teetering on the brink of a reflexive waterfall once more. Where I was situated in that moment felt quite calm, but I knew that to go over the edge would precipitate my immersion in an all-enveloping whirlpool. Once you have gone over that reflexive waterfall and survived, as I did during the creation of an 'Outside View', then it is difficult to resist the temptation to do it time and time again. And to be seduced into

believing that it is the best thing to, the only place to be, inside your own thoughts. But resist I did, buoyed in part by the richness of the contact with others and their narratives. It became clear to me though that the boundary between the auto and the ethno aspects of this work is a fine one.

And so it was that in the space of one week that I had shifted at speed from a state of feeling completely blocked, of not knowing what my next steps might be; to finding myself caught in a marvellous virtuous spiral of connections and referral, as my respondents had suggested other leads to follow up and had confirmed those people on my tentative list as indeed being the people to seek connection with. The pursuit of these connections and networks built a programme of research conversations that was to form the backbone of my emergent collaborative inquiry process that was to productively occupy me for much of the ensuing three months. It seemed that the 'ringing of that bell' that guided me to Sheffield provided the impetus that would transport me from introspection and stuckness towards engagement at a different level with my research questions. It felt at the time I needed to wait – although the action-orientated part of my being deeply resisted this waiting - and to be attentive to the moment when it was signalled I needed to move the next stage. I never expected the stimulus to occur in class, nor for the first port of call to be Sheffield. Now I knew from the nature of what had transpired in Sheffield that I was on the cusp of a collaborative inquiry (Reason and Bradbury, 2001), where I would work with my respondents to build together a picture of our experience of life transition.

Purposes of the collaborative Inquiry.

The purposes of this phase of the research were several-fold, as far as I clearly knew them at that time. I was quite open to the possibility that these purposes might change and evolve, after my experience of the autoethnographic process, and I was attentive to the possibility of evolution in the tentative styling of the original objectives. A principal purpose was to 'triangulate' my findings from 'Outside View'. I struggled with the two dimensional nature of the term 'triangulate', and in a search through the methods literature for a better alternative was rewarded with the discovery of the metaphor of refracting various data points through a crystalline structure, rather than a single plane triangulation. (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005).

Within this crystalline structure, I was conducting, in validation terms a 'peer review', although it quickly became apparent that this stage of inquiry was far more than a simple

validation of my ipsative research. At a simple level it did gather their memories of me and my transitions over time, and allowed comparison with my own. Beyond that purpose, it also provided the 'ethno' to contextualise my inner experiences, and to develop a rich picture of my historic context, which was already broadening the study significantly.

One additional purpose first vocalised by Mike Pedler was that the process orientation towards consulting that this generation of co-creatives had created was a significant departure from that that had gone before, and that there were no guarantees that this knowing would automatically pass to the next generation. Mike suggested that this study could be part of capturing of the essence of practice, and later others strongly concurred with that view. This was an early example of my collaborators shaping the research process, beyond my definition of purposes. This theme emerged as one of 'passing of the baton'.

I was acutely conscious during the formulation and design of this second research phase that there was a large element of the unknown at play here. I truly did not know what would emerge, anymore than I knew what the Sheffield trip might spawn. So there was a loose: tight tension at play, wherein I was seeking focus, while remaining open to what might push through. An associated tension was that between continuing with an unconventional approach – which I had originally pioneered through my experiment with autoethnography – while delivering a piece of work that demonstrated academic rigour. My fear was that, in the pursuit of rigour, I collapse back into a conventional research method that inhibits the full realisation of my alternative inquiry. This tension was to run throughout this phase of the inquiry, and was also forcibly vocalised by my collaborators on a number of occasions. They did not want me to give up on the experiment, or on their involvement with it. Part of this drive towards allowing whatever might come up the space it needed to form a pattern had become a matter of faith in this pursuit of the emergent. A reading of Alveson (2002) on emergent research approach was as I remember reassuring in that regard.

Defining my population of inquiry collaborators.

I was so buoyed by the success of the spontaneous 'slender threads' (Johnson, 1998) approach to divining the Sheffield research collaborators that I was highly encouraged to continue with the same serendipitous approach to discovering, or uncovering the fuller compliment of my collaborator population. However, I also knew that this could not be

entirely random, and that an element of rational science was required. As a point of departure, given the aims and methodology of the study, I decided that the population had to include people who were known to me, who at some level 'mattered' to me, and who had followed a broadly similar life trajectory, as this would allow points of comparison to be made and would also mean that the respondents would have knowledge of me. To begin, I developed a list of 'possibles' from memory, then made reference to my archives and journals, which were substantial, to confirm and reinforce this listing, including checking it against the Sheffield respondents recommendations of those we had once worked with.

This listing process developed into a fascinating process of trawling through the world wide web to discover who of my colleagues of twenty or thirty years or more were still around and in active service, as it were, and contactable electronically. What I uncovered was not only a listing of who was still accessible, but I also revealed the threads of who was still in touch with whom through web links to networks and to consultancies, and where the remains of their old networks lay in relatively shallow graves. I discovered what these networks had morphed into, drawing in new people and influences. At some level this was becoming a separate study of the development and demise of networks, a research temptation I was barely resisting, such was the pull of it. I was aware that without the web this process would have taken months, and would never have yielded this richness of result. I became more than ever allowing of some degree an element of chaotic randomness to guide me towards the people I need to meet.

However, as the process developed it became clear that from a wide range of choice of respondents, I would need to clarify selection criteria to inform my choices. These criteria included confining myself to UK born and practicing independent co-creatives, whose background would to some extent reflect my origins and the context and trajectory of my own practice. The next criterion was that people would have to have been UK 'independent' for twenty years, although I found myself qualifying my definition of independence somewhat. This distinction was one where the discussant gave clear indication of independence by orientation if not by being free of structural positioning within an organisation. A number of academics fell within this definition.

I was seeking to interview practitioners who had selected independence, and had intentionally moved towards it rather than having been pushed into independence through force of circumstance. I was also interested to talk to independents who had been

through several cycles of independent practice in their lives; an experience which I believed would greatly enrich their reflections, through the provision of comparison.

As one of my purposes was to collect feedback on my practice and my journey, it was important to select people who were close to my historic network. Such people, I reasoned, should be able to talk with intimate knowledge and experience of my practice. These discussants could also reflect upon our shared experiences and our parallel journeys conducted both together and apart. Having set these criteria, I needed then to decide whom to choose, from a rich list of possibilities.

Looking back to my journal entries of that time, I observe that I was voicing some 'worse fears' as to how people might respond to their invites. I think my fear was that of rejection: or a fear that those who were now of somewhat exalted status would treat my invite with downright contempt or with non-recognition, and social blanking. In the end these fears were to prove unfounded. There was only one rejection to my invitation, and that was from someone who did not have a pleasant recollection of our time together. I felt glad that I had invited him, as I had wrestled with whether I was only self selecting people who would be kind about my experience, and thereby avoiding the collection of 'disconfirming data.' (Guba and Lincoln, 1992). While I agonised over my choosing, I also had the counterbalancing perspective of my supervisor reminding me that 'It is your research; you are in control of this project. Just so long as you in awareness of what you are doing'. As for the rest of my invitees I found their response warm and enthusiastic. They said that it would be good to meet up again, and also opined that it sounds like a fascinating research topic, and one that they have often pondered on and would be happy to engage with. A number said that life course had been particularly on their mind of late, while in reflective mood, and that the call for involvement was both timely and welcome. Several mentioned that my call was synchronous.

I allowed the list to grow naturally, partly based on availability – there were some who could not realistically make it within the time frame – but also because some of those whom I invited also suggested others I might want to invite in too. These included those who I had simply forgotten about, or whom I had not thought to be available. I also had one or two examples of people who had heard about this research activity through invitees, and who volunteered themselves, saying 'Hey what about me, why aren't I on this list, I have a story to tell too. Did you forget me? How could you!' It was a delight to respond to such exhortations, and a pleasure to invite these individuals in, as they clearly

had something to say. In the case of two of the people who had come to me in oblique ways, I discovered that they had had a strong connection with each other once upon a time, but had not seen each other for a long time, and did not that each had approached me to be part of this study.

I also noticed that there were people who I had been prevaricating about asking, including an old mentor who had been very close to me, but whom I had held back from contacting. When I eventually decided to go find him, I discovered that he was dying, and that I could not possibly see him. This really shocked and saddened me, prompting me to dither no further with other choices I had to make. It sent me in search of another old and dear colleague, commonly known to the friend who was dying. This person I had previously been very close to, but who had chosen to be out of relationship with me for reasons I know not why for the last five years. My searches led to the discovery that he too had been seriously ill and was on the brink of death, but in his case fortunately was recovering, so there was no question of interviewing him. The message from my failure to contact these two people, both of whom incidentally were close to each other, was to say, very loudly 'no more prevarication in contacting people please. It is later than you think'. This experience did leave me with a sense of sadness and was a powerful reminder of the fragility of all of this business. Not just of this study, but of this life we live, and some of the vulnerabilities surrounding us, and the way we live our lives. I was also aware – following the 'passing on the baton' injunction - that I was researching a generation who are in all probability very distinct from the next wave of independents coming through, and whose collective wisdom on their own journeys might be lost unless someone were to commit to capturing the same.

Among those that I selected were identifiable groups of people who had clustered around each other for quite some period and who had grown in each other's developmental wakes. This selection process resulted in my selecting 23 for conversation, though I was not at all sure that this was the correct number. My supervisor suggested that I could not possibly know this until I got into it, and that I would know the end point as I reached towards it, rather as I did with the autoethnography.

These research conversations stimulated mention of others, both in my own and in my discussants minds, who were not within the conversation population. I was aware that these ghost voices were finding their way into the narrative, and that, after some initial unease, I was more and more allowing of that influence. In the end, I had selected the

people I had selected, while fully aware that there were others who might equally have walked through the 'sliding door', and who may well have taken the conversation in a different direction. In the final mix, I did allow remembered quotes from these voices into the data stream.

The research conversation process.

I was tentative at first about my introduction to these conversations – 'what do you say after you say hello?' as Eric Berne (1966) was to memorably inquire in the title of his seminal book on how social awkwardness inhibits us from asking the questions that are really on our minds - but I felt that I was soon into my stride with the introduction after the first hesitant forays. My introduction was not exactly the same in every instance of course, though I was conscious that there needed to be some consistency, to ensure a degree of rigour and of comparability within the process. After the initial pleasantries, I emphasised that this was to be a highly open process, and that they would have a strong influence in the conversations direction. I also asked if they would allow their name to be used openly, and possibly attributed, during the study. I also asked if they would allow the conversation to be recorded. No one demurred at either of these requests.

I moved on to talk about the purposes, broadly outlining these purposes as outlined above. By way of inviting them in, I talked of the creation of the autoethnography, and through reference to this work delineated some details of my journey since we had last met, majoring on recent developments. I did not hold back on disclosures or vulnerabilities during the sharing of my narrative. A number commented, as we reviewed the conversation, that this recounting of my story provided a narrative bridge that invited them into my world, and set the invitational tone and permission for them to share their narratives also.

I then revealed the four major themes of my inquiry, those of independence, life course, personal values transition, and the influence and development of 'big ideas'. As I spoke to each of these themes, I drew them imprecisely as interlocking circles within a Venn diagram on a sheet of paper. On completion of this exercise, I laid the diagram in front of them, saying that they could begin wherever they liked with these themes, and proceed in whatever direction, and in whatever idiom best suited them. I explained that I simply wished to hear their story, told in their way, on the assumption that I had never heard it before.

I did not declare that this was a collective ethnography, as that purpose was not fully known at that time. I did say that it was a collaborative inquiry, a co-creation, created by co-creatives, pursuing a co-creative process. All seemed familiar with collaborative inquiry, and were pleased to be following a grounded inquiry process. I did not persist with the conceit that they were the sole correspondents, or that the sequence of conversations were somehow independent of chronological time. Of course it was quite natural for discussants to ask who else was involved, and this helped serve as an icebreaker, also. I was quite open to allow further reference to other discussants, and to some extent to bring in their contributions where relevant, as long as these other voices did not become too dominant, or that confidentiality was betrayed.

Interestingly, a number of people began by saying 'Well I hope I can be of help, although I am not sure if I will have that much to add'. It was if, through this expression of doubt, that they carried in their minds a picture of someone 'other' whose experience might be more relevant or more heroic than their own. One thing that took me by surprise was that most people had done some preparation, and some thinking, in particular around the 'big ideas' and the influence of these ideas on their development, in line with the expectations I had stimulated through my telephone conversations and invitation letter. I certainly appreciated that thought and preparation had gone into their preparations for these encounters, which was evidence again of the seriousness they ascribed to this activity.

I had never anticipated that there would be any difficulty in getting co-creatives talking. At few points in these conversations did I have a sense of being talked at, or sermonised. Most of the time, I felt engagement in a powerful, reflective dialogue. On a few occasions there was a sense of people getting into somewhat defensive default mode, saying 'Here's what I'm about and here's what I do, so that is it, so don't try and get me going on that hook', but otherwise there was a genuine sense of 'Let me check that out, let me think about that'. Given that these conversations had become framed as a collaborative inquiry – I declared this early after the initial conversations, when it was clear this was what they were - there was no room for this to become a hostile interrogation, nor did it ever become so. There was little doubt that story telling is the co-creatives natural milieu, and that this process allowed the fullest expression of that inclination.

Let me say a little of how the conversations proceeded beyond these beginnings. There were some who told the whole life course story chronologically, linearly and meticulously.

They would say 'let me go back and make sure I don't miss anything. Pull me back if you think there's something I may have jumped past, or if you think there is something in my background that you think I may have missed'. Others, by way of contrast, rather than taking a systematic archaeological approach towards their life narrative, instead began with a reflection on present challenges and worked from there. This approach, they explained, was predicated on a view that we can only access the past through the present, and that today's dilemmas will represent a fractal of the past struggles also. There were also several who didn't care really about the past and that was in some ways proved a pleasant contrast too, a release from painstaking efforts to recall, and checking whether what was being said was accurate or not.

Even though quite a number of these people have been close to me and we know each other socially - which could have meant that this conversation might have descended into a glorified catch-up, a sepia-toned basking in all our yesterdays - it was instead approached with great seriousness. One among us, Tony Hodgson, opined that he was not surprised that the conversations had such a powerfully reflective feel. He said that 'serious inquiry evokes a serious response', suggesting that the work that had been done during the first phase of my research, the autoethnography, had set the tone and had provided insights that were to determine the tenor and temperament of the second phase. He suggested, and I agreed, that in the process we immersed ourselves in our stories, inquiring into their meanings, rather than becoming collusive.

A key learning for me in all of this is that ultimately, people will talk about what they want to talk about. And that the allowing of that expression is most likely to lead to the heart of the inquiry. It certainly felt that this validates the naturalness of narrative enquiry as a mode of inquiry for this population, among natural storytellers. There was a very rich use of metaphor among all respondents. This would suggest that they were able to draw upon the 'experiential' and 'presentational' elements of the Heron learning cycle (1996) as much as the 'propositional', drawing upon a very rich experiential base in the process of so doing. I had a sense of people needing to get the stories out as much as they needed to impress with finely architected propositions or neatly formed conclusions. There was an interesting difference in the range of expression though, from those whose expression was deeply embodied, at one end of the scale, to those at the other who felt the need to contextually frame their expression through reference to theory and literature at the other. Men were more likely to seek theoretically supported explanation than women. Others simply and honestly declared 'I don't know why the hell I was doing what I was doing at

that time but that's what I was doing. And this is how it felt'. Few seemed to indulge in excessive post hoc rationalisation.

I placed no time limit on these conversations. The longest was seven hours long – it segued into dinner, as the light faded – and the shortest one and half hours. Averagely the duration was around two and one half hours. I felt that we each knew when we were done, and allowed the ending to occur naturally. A number said they would come back to me if they recalled anything really significant that they might have omitted, though in the end this didn't happen. A few did come back to me to develop further themes that had emerged in conversation, which was most welcome. It was volunteered by two early discussants that it would be good idea to bring as many of the discussants as possible together to review my findings, to further progress this conversation. This idea was enthusiastically taken up by others, and came to pass in July 2006, in the convening of the Co-creatives Action Research Practicum (CARP).

Reflections on my thoughts and feelings at the end of the conversations.

I was pleased with the way these conversations had flowed, while I had been doubtful at the outset as to whether they might work, and still held reservations as to their efficacy once they were over. They had never felt forced or stultified. I was gratified that the narratives confirmed the key themes of my auto-ethnography. I checked innerly that I was not forcing this correspondence, wishing it so, but I did not feel that I was. It was there, in front of me, and had it not been, I think I would have been open to that dissonance. Beyond that reassuring validation, I felt increasingly as though I was carrying with me a precious thing that was called other people's lives. Many of the narratives were deeply confidential and often moving, I felt the stories had a sacred quality about them. It felt that there was a mystery in what I was holding here, a mystery that was to gain clearer expression during a later stage in the validation process, when I reconvened a slice of the population to review the findings. At the post conversation stage the mystery was more a sense than something I could clearly articulate.

I was very conscious, very aware that I was wishing to honour their stories, and to honour the emergent process, even though I didn't fully understand it at that stage. I wasn't wanting to mess around with that, wasn't wanting to take a short cut that would take me to a quick and dirty conclusion. Instead, I found myself saying that I need to be patient, and to allow it the time it takes to get where it wants to. I was aware of my styling myself

variously as an agent, a vessel, a channel, a cipher. As in my autoethnography, I was the research instrument. Beyond feeling guided in the process, there was a growing sense that this research was no longer mine alone, and that it had become a shared inquiry. In line with this, the purpose of dwelling on my journey was fading into the background, while the narratives were coming into the foreground. Indeed there was a sense in which all of our narratives were coalescing into one.

Assimilating and 'writing up' the conversational inputs.

Taking the commonly delivered ethnographers' wisdom to stay close to the scene of the crime after a research conversation, I stayed as close as I could to the location, and wrote in free writing style of the impressionistic thoughts and feelings gained from the encounter. I stayed with the voices and my inner sensations. Later, but not much later, I also reviewed my notes taken during the conversation, and listened to the tape, and its tone. My intention was to immerse myself as far as possible in each person's lived experience. Sometimes these 'write-ups' could last for several hours, segueing from recollections of the conversation itself into reflections on the meanings of the conversation, often in that reflection process linking the ideas that had emerged with ideas that had occurred during previous research conversations. These write-ups would steer me towards the zone, where all sense of time would be lost as I became totally immersed and absorbed in this detective work, seeking to detect patterns in all that I had heard. In this sense, while the write up was primarily focussed on that conversation most recently concluded, there was a decided layering of sense making, as expression built upon expression, seeking a pattern.

The ending of the research conversation process.

The ending of this research conversation process came when it came, just as my supervisor had predicted it would. This ending was not strongly announced. It was more the case that it crept up on me, signalling itself quietly at first but then with increasing insistence. Beyond my original listing of respondents, I had made note of others whom it might be a good idea to see, and I had already approached a number of these additional respondents to test their willingness and availability. However, once I began the more formal analysis process of the collective responses from the original cohort – beyond the spontaneous patterning that had been occurring - it became clear that I had already collected data rich enough for the most avaricious of palettes, and furthermore that a

pattern of themes and expressions was emerging that was strong enough to suggest that I was reaching 'saturation' point (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), where more research interviews were unlikely to add much more other than the texturing of these themes. This moment of realisation was concurrent with the Christmas break, which allowed a natural break point for me to begin to pull all of this information together. As it happened, quite a number of those who were on my additional list of respondents had already signalled that their diaries for the following year were already become log jammed, which was of considerable assistance in my drawing the line on the data collecting process.

Wrestling with the Beast.

My residing memory of Christmas 2005 is of my facing the daunting task of somehow making sense of this plethora of information, armed with crammed notebooks and piles of tapes that were already beginning to overflow beyond the kitchen table. My analytical first cut was to organise the findings under the categorical themes identified in my autoethnography and stored somewhere in my 'theme-attic', as there was a close correspondence between these themes and the pattern of themes emerging from the research conversations. As I proceeded further into this sorting process, I became suspicious that I might be indulging in what Jane Speedy describes as the 'theme park' approach (Speedy, 2000) to data analysis, where the researcher organises the data into attractive installations based around themes, rather than face the true indeterminacy of that which is staring back at them, accusatively, defying methodological neatness. I allowed this suspicion to remain that these themes were my construction and that while they may seem to give my work authority through their apparent coherence, that this data could just as easily be sliced in different ways and be represented in a quite alternative pattern.

I was also aware that the connections that were suggesting themselves between the themes were also my own construction. These were my 'makings', as Weick (1994) would prefer to term findings: they were not necessarily waiting there to be somehow discovered or 'found'. Despite these reservations, however I decided to proceed with my themes approach, as I believed it served an organising purpose more efficiently than any other I could visualise, without letting this doubt completely derail my analytical process. I realised that I needed to ensure that I checked myself at frequent intervals to see if I was imposing an order that was more to do with the allaying of my anxieties rather than truly reflecting the complexity of the data in front of me.

The process of data analysis and synthesis proved a tortuous one. After six months of wrestling with the data, I found myself facing an unwieldy document which had amassed 30,000 words and more, and while it made sense to me I was finding increasing difficulty in finding ways to make this 'Beast' useful and interesting to others. On the other hand, I was a little despairing of how to reduce it without doing violence to the nuances and textures of my respondent's original expressions. The breakthrough from this impasse came when I began to experiment with 'creative analytical processes' or CAPs, (Richardson, 2005) to represent these themes, and also to represent the relationship between them, in the spaces between.

Breakthrough occurs through CAPs.

The 30,000 word beast was a construction that resulted from linear analysis, where the approach was logical, and the emphasis was on logical connection and detached description. What was needed was a departure from the sterility of this approach, in much the same way as my synchronous invitation to writing as inquiry and autoethnography had released me from my early attempts at academic prose style. This breakthrough was achieved through experimentation with a number of creative approaches which I discovered were expressing far more powerfully the sense and spirit of my research conversations than the language of the Beast ever could. That is not to say that the Beast was wholly discarded. In fact the Beast remained an important source of information, ideas and connections. The process became one of allowing the creative expressions to emerge, while checking back with the Beast to check that the completeness of the information had been represented. And if it had, to check whether it mattered or not those certain aspects of the narrative had been excluded or elided.

These CAPs did not emerge simultaneously. Rather they emerged progressively, in a fashion where I was experimenting with one or two simultaneously. The CAP forms that I was experimenting with mainly included dialogue and narrative writing. I was also having patient readers test out some of these early works-in-progress, giving me interim feedback as to whether these were likely to work or not. I grew to realise through this 'member checking' process (Creswell and Miller, 1998) that a success criteria was that these CAPs inspired further ideas and conversation, as much as they provided a definitive explanation or description of 'fact'.

Co-creative's Action Research Practicum (CARP)

One outcome of this thematic musing was my decision to invite together in July 2006 the collaborators from my original research conversation group, together with my colleagues from my department to act as anthropologists to the process. It seemed to me that their engagement with the emergent themes in relatively raw form would be rich and would be entirely consistent with the collaborative inquiry approach. I realise now more clearly than I did at the time that this event was evidence of my engineering the bringing together of my two worlds, of the world of consultancy that I was moving away from, and of the world of academia that I was moving towards. This forum gave these two worlds an opportunity to observe and to reflect upon each other; and to share those reflections with me, which proved to be a highly enlightening and unexpected transitional process. This CARP event is extensively chronicled in the Portfolio. On reading this chronicle, the passage that really caught my attention was my closing reflections post the event, which capture in my view quite tellingly the sense of satisfaction yet overwhelm that was assailing me post this event.

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The drive back home from CARP.

As we walked into the car park I suddenly noticed that together with a sense of relief and completion there was also a feeling of absolute exhaustion. This exhaustion caused me to reflect upon all the different roles that I'd played during the day, and of how each in their own way had taken their toll. I identified among those roles those of organiser, instigator, caterer, facilitator, information presenter, decision maker, customer, and supplier. Ann, who drove back with me, commented on how hard we'd all concentrated during the day, not just shallow concentration but concentration at a deep level, on the interior, where we placed attention on what was shifting within us.

We talked of my PhD, of how excellent it was that I had support for finishing the beast, that folk actually wanted to read it, and how motivating that was with regard to my finishing it. In addition to having my old colleagues fully on board of my research, I reflected on how satisfying it was that my newly found academic colleagues are fully integrated into my research also. Feeling more than ever that they are with me on this but also my old colleague's also so great impetus to carry on and feel support around me. We talked of how the day, and the relationships it had forged, could build into a consulting development agenda that could be important for the department.

We talked about this being a highly reflective group and that while we had begun to catch their reflections, that there was a great deal of richness yet to be tapped. Talked about how generous people had been, how they'd fully engaged themselves with the enquiry, had been highly co-operative and increasingly through the day had been happy to share their stuff including their vulnerability and their poetry, we reminded ourselves we wanted a copy of Robert's poems. We discussed how we might harness that power, that narrative power that's out there just waiting to be tapped, either for this PhD or for the work that might flow from it.

As much as we allowed our minds to run ahead to what might be in the future, I also felt a need to be reminded of Ruth's wisdom that the day was 'in and of itself', it had a purpose, and a number of clear purposes which had been achieved, which was cause enough to be satisfied with the day, even if we never meet again, the day had done its job. I felt they had, and within that in and of it well maybe we'd never meet again and the day had done its job.

The day after event

I woke initially quite energised but then quickly recognised that the residue of last night's exhaustion was still all too apparent. The build-up to this event had been occurring since November 2005, when it was first mentioned, with the formal invitation going out in late March or April. Thereafter it had transposed itself through various different stages of metamorphosis and now it was over. Part of me was saying that I needn't worry about that any more, it was what it was, it was highly successful, time to move on, while another part was whoa, the ending's not what I thought it was, it's not as clean an ending as I imagined.

By way of grounding myself, I asked what it was that had been achieved by the day. I reflected that most notably my PhD direction and substance had been confirmed. A large part of the day had been both validation and reliability testing of the PhD, and of the theories attached to it, and it felt that the research has withstood these tests well both from an inside view from the informants; and also from an outside view from the academic reality check by my ethnographers. It was delightful to reflect that Schwartz works in the way that I suggested it might, and that it might become a theory, and to know that it works at least as a thinking tool.

All of these prospects as well as other possibilities swim in front of my eyes. I am excited, but I also notice that I am beginning to become overwhelmed. But I keep on writing, reminding myself that this is all a part of the research method, and that what I'm doing right now is part of what it takes to get to the next place, that it feels painful but that I need to go through this, it is a necessary part of the gestation. It is working through the impasse. It feels intensely exciting but I also know that it is like giving birth to an elephant, it's very difficult to know what is happening and how it is happening. I know that what I'm writing here is the raw material for the next piece of method but I'm not entirely sure of what it is, the theory is in chaos and I need to stay with that. And yet what I am trying to do is to tidy up this last piece of method, not to give birth to another one. All I know is that I'm in the process of materialising something, and that it is proving to be a difficult materialisation process. I reassure myself that it might in fact be the final part of the method paper – oh joy – but I don't know what that part is yet. Perhaps I didn't even realise there was a final part. There's a restlessness, a restlessness that won't let go.

Suddenly I allow the overwhelm to engulf me. I'm infused with a sense that yesterday was about being in the crucible of relationship. There were so many points of my origin, so many fragments of my story, combining with heard and unheard fragments of other consultants' stories too. I was overwhelmed by the improbability of all of this, of us being together, and of my having somehow brought us all together from a vague idea in a pub conceived many months previously.

I feel my PhD shape-shifting, I feel myself shape-shifting, I wonder if I'm once again confronting the archetype, I cannot sleep. I reflect upon how grabbing hold of a slender thread back in October has led to this, this development of this proud quilt but I also question whether this quilt, like Ann's, will remain forever unfinished. What has happened in Reading has unleashed a whole new wave of thinking; my PhD has taken on new life and animation. I'm reminded that there's nothing quite as simple as adding a small accretion to something is near to completion.

I feel that I inhabit a dream state and dreamscape. Suddenly as I write I am inhabited by a vision of the polychronic spiral, it's winding upwards. As I try to make sense of what has occurred, and what is occurring right now, the spiral invites irresistibly. I find somehow that just as I try to explain the spiral then I am subsumed within it. The Reading event has created a new front-log and yet there is the backlog of understanding and explaining, there is all of that writing to be edited, to be done, and yet the front-log demands, It is very persuasive. It says that it and it alone, this new thought will makes sense of the whole backlog, to explicate the relationship between front-log and backlog, if only I will trust this front log, to have its will.

If I had a fear concerning the CARP event, it was that what came out of the event would invalidate my findings. I realise now that I had not entertained the counter-fear, that this CARP event it would create an entirely new raft of work.

I also begin to realise that in the writing up of this narrative, that it gives me a way to link back to those that were not here, they can simply have a copy of the narrative, make of it what they will and make their own decisions about whether they enjoin to the next step. Maybe now it's time to stop.

Simmer Time.

This chapter head is inspired by the lyrics of BB King, as uttered on his 'Live from St Quentin' album, relating to one of those moments in jazz or in the blues when many ideas have been explored, and it is time just to let the melody truck along for a while, to 'let it bubble, let it simmer' before the next theme. Simmer time allows impetus to build and coherence to push slowly then ever more firmly out into the world. This metaphor was gifted to me by my supervisor at a time when I felt as though I needed to finish or to move on yet I could not find a way to do just that. This chapter is the story of the fallow time between finishing learning anew, and of accompanying push for a fresh synthesis, for second order learning. I believe it is worthwhile recounting this episode in the life of madam fud as it journeys through an important 'incubation period' in her life. It relates to the cracks, to the spaces where creativity and originality often lurks on the boundary and in the margins. It is the space where synchronicity looks for an opening, and where the 'slender threads' tantalisingly dangle, if only we would take the time to look out for them.

It also relates to the experience of existential agony that occurs as this project lurches between the twin forces of 'discipline and desire'. It is at that moment when I realise that sometimes it is best just to let the writing cook in its own time, rather than to force this work into a pressure vessel, desperately seeking closure of a kind even though I knew things were undercooked. I was also aware that just as there were forces working to incubate madam fud for a time; so too was there a parallel process going on with regard to my life decisions post my taking of the one year lecturing contract seeming to be stalled as well. These twin requirements for simmer time were experiencing an interplay that was really quite unsettling at times, as ever urge was to finish both.

The forces pushing for completion of this thesis included the fact that I had accumulated so much field work already and that I had written up a great deal of this during the summer which in my mind surely meant that I was strongly heading for completion. The other factor was that I would shortly be moving into my new lecturing job assuming my identity as full-time staff member, therefore clearing the decks to create the space to give this job my full attention was important. Also this job was on a fixed term contract, therefore I had to get my formal teaching credentials and pass through formal probation

that year, as well as complete this PhD, the awarding of which was an important part of gaining my credentials. The pressure was well and truly on.

After this intensive summers the writing up the Beast, and of capturing the CARP event – a hot summer when in many ways it was most tempting to be outside – I had little time to breathe before I was catapulted into two conferences where I was to present two papers extracted from this dissertation. One of these conferences involved my experiencing a mock viva for my PhD. It was useful to go through this and in the process the examiners involved made a number of suggestions which required that I exercise a significant reframe for the entire dissertation. In fact the examiners recommend that I take out a lot of the heavy-duty theoretical material that I spent much of that airless summer inserting. Ho-hum.

And it was at this time that I wrote to my supervisor, ostensibly asking for specific advice regarding a technical aspect of this thesis, but in reality I knew that it was a cry from the heart, in fact I believe I was asking 'how do I decently rush to finish this, before the new term is upon with me, and with it the attendant teaching responsibilities? Or if finishing it should prove impossible, then how do I have the courage to put it to one side?' His thoughtful answer was that of BB King's, just to let it simmer let it bubble let in breathe.

In addition to the mock viva these two conferences were also to expose my mind to many new ways of thinking and understanding about the subject matter that I have under interrogation. However there was hardly time to do anything with these new ideas in terms of reframing my research. I just about had time to jot it all down. The outcome of this high speed saturation in new ideas was that instead of internalising this process and neatly mapping out what it all might mean for my thesis, I found myself returning immediately to the university at what felt like precipitous haste to fulfil the expectations of my new job as lecturer in management.

I returned to the University of Bristol full of anticipation, feeling like the new boy going to school for the first time. Here was I entering my new job, the job of lecturer, and I realised that I have not had a proper job for a long time, maybe for twenty or thirty years. I knew that it was going to feel like quite a test. And so it did. There ensued with great rapidity an intensive period of teaching, supervising and marking. I was also at the same time pursuing a Masters in Education. This timing of pursuing this accreditation came about in part because I felt that I needed the ticket, the qualifications, and also because it felt the

right timing to do this while I was immersed deeply in teaching, during the autumn term, when my teaching loading was highest.

Amid all of this clamour and busy-ness Madam Fud was put on hold for the time being and she was growing possessive, increasing jealous and resentful. She was demanding some exclusive attention, and lots of it. Around that time, in late November 2006, when I felt as though I had just about found my teaching legs, I picked her up again, somewhat guiltily, reviewing the conventional framing that I had encased her in over the summer, and also remembering that the mock viva had called into question the wisdom of this conventional framing. I went to speak to my supervisor about the implications for all of this and also to share with him that I felt that I was losing some of the original impetus and inspiration behind my writing. My supervisor's wisdom was to say, 'what you must do is to write without fear, write from the heart and write what you know without fear'. I was appreciative of him counselling me not to be conflicted between the experimental and the conventional. He reminded me that the PhD I was embarked on had from the very beginning been an unconventional PhD, an emergent PhD. I felt a degree of relief and liberation on hearing this.

I also felt an accompanying trepidation, knowing that what might transpire is that I might invite in the melusine, of the mermaid on the rocks, all over again, to work her unsettling magic. This opening for the melusine was created by my mock examiners recommending that I ground this research in a recognisable literature, yet they were most supportive of this showing the potential for being a strong methods fud as it was pioneering into an unusual and interesting methods area, such as the use of writing as inquiry and CAP. They counselled me not at this stage to collapse back into conventional methods, saying that it looked very much like a fud, given that I stiffened the methods aspects, which they reminded me would require work.

I reflect as I write that I may be valorising the encouragement of the mock examiners, for while one of them was unequivocally encouraging, the other had reservations about the whole project, mumbling something along the lines that what he saw in front of him was an example of 'hippy research on hippies by a hippy.' I smarted at this, yet at the same time this slight firmed my resolve to somehow 'show' the academy. This defiant desire in turn threw me into fresh work to shore my defences to collect more evidence. And contrary to my supervisor's voice to let it simmer, I was hearing more strongly the voice of my colleague Ann Rippin with whom I was doing much teaching at the time to 'get out of

the field. Beware the melusine, get out of the field now, no more excuses just get out'. I whimpered to myself, miserably. 'How can I get out of the field, when the field is within me, and the melusine says madam fud is far from ready for the light of day?'

I discovered that one way through this vacillation between the twin pressures to complete and to let it simmer was to immerse myself in the process of qualifying as a teacher, which involved completing nine written assignments based on my teaching practice. As well as providing a legitimate distraction, this immersion was to prove apposite for the immersion process, as it allowed me to reflect on my teaching experiments at that time, which were focussing on writing as inquiry, reflective practice, coaching assessment and small group work. I enjoyed all of this, and the writing of formally assessed assignments was useful in the discipline of writing in a classical academic style, in addition to weaving in reflective pieces. My reflective pieces received acclaim from my assessors which was highly encouraging, and was also most supportive of the notion that there is great value in reflective practice for management education. I embraced the idea of peer assessment of my teaching, and encouraged my colleagues to join with me in this as an act of co-creation, to join our reflections together in a portfolio. Committing me to handing all of this in before my self imposed deadline of Christmas – in order to clear the space for the increasingly strident madam fud – was also excellent practice in finishing; a painful process that I knew nonetheless would eventually face me with this dissertation.

And as the smoke clears from the completion of the teaching assignments, I realised that the past four months had not been completely wasted; that they had in fact comprised an important gestation, or incubation period. When I was counselled to 'let it simmer' I really had no idea how long this incubation period might be. The creativity literature, all of which underlines the necessity for incubation, is silent on the subject of the duration of incubation, and I think I know why, which is to say that it is unavoidable but unpredictable in its duration. But now I know that it is over, and the clarity that follows the ending of simmer time indicates that now it is time to write up my method. I find this inner direction unsettling, as I thought it might be time to write up the collective ethnography, committing to paper the Beast that had been created from all of those hours of research conversations with my cohort.

But in fact my instinct is that it was my method that needed the treatment first, perhaps because I now realising that if an alternative method is pursued then there is an inevitability that the methodology will be foregrounded in defence of the thesis much of the

time, for that is where the contribution is likely to lie. I am also growing to understand that part of becoming an academic is that methods must be crafted and patiently developed rather than picked off a shelf. And as I address the process of describing method, I realise that I need to return to my first principles, which means turning to the 'Writing on the Wall', the flip charts that adorned the walls of my student cave. But I look around my lecturer's room and this writing is not there to inspire me. And I notice its loss.

The Writing is on the Wall.

Background to the creation of this artefact.

After an extended period of being my own cartographer, I was feeling badly in need of a map of the terrain, even if I were in the end to choose not to follow that established map. Ellis (2006) in her novel 'The Ethnographic-I' speaks to the discomfort her students feel when they realise that they need to navigate for quite a while without the assistance and security of a compass. Various trips to the library were to witness my return with a weight of literature, most notably the heavyweight 1,200 page Denzin and Lincoln (2005), and the slightly less weighty but hardly negligible Patton (2002) on Qualitative Inquiry. (Denzin and Lincoln in its promotional literature claim that 'this may be the one book on qualitative research that one would want to take to a desert island.' I struggle to visualise the circumstances under which one were left choosing which qualitative inquiry masterwork one would wish to take to ones desert island). In addition to these works, I availed myself of the complete works of Ellis and Bouchner (1996, 2000, 2002), to add ballast on the autoethnographic side. For guidance on action research and participatory research I turned to Heron (1996) and Reason and Bradbury (2001).

My immediate realisation was that neither qualitative inquiry nor autoethnography was light on literature. First glimpses into these texts revealed that this literature was dense with technical argument defending this variety of methods against logical positivist attack, either real or imagined. I was aware at an early stage that my chapter on method literature could be as voluminous as I might choose, and that I could devote many thousands of words defending already well rehearsed arguments concerning autoethnographic method, and its applications, benefits and limitations. I was excited by what I was reading, and was keener to experiment with the approaches I was reading about than to analyse them further.

As I read these books I scribbled notes frantically, and as I scribbled a summary of these notes was finding its way onto a flipchart pad on my desk that I was using as an improvised blotter come random note catcher. (Since early in my management consulting days, I have been an enthusiastic devotee of the flip chart, both for public and private consultation. I think part of the attraction is to witness the whole thought and argument,

writ large and bold, on the largest page. Whatever the initial attraction of the flip chart, it has now become for me a habit, a ritual practiced sometimes to the enlightenment - and more often to the amusement – of my academic colleagues, who prefer the tightly worked argument over the impressionistic big splash on a shaky chart stand).

This impromptu flip chart writing occurred in my large PhD room. At that time in nearly 2005, I had sole occupancy of that capacious workroom, and plenty of floor space and more crucially wall space to work with. As I proceeded further into the literature, the notes on my work surface were growing out of control, spilling onto the floor. I realised that what I needed was some form of summary of my findings on qualitative inquiry, to direct my ongoing experimental ethnographic work, lest I become lost forever in the literature and the choices and dilemmas it posed. To achieve this summary, I tidied my flip charts as best I could then began to hang them on the extensive wall space. Before long, the walls were replete with diagrams, quotes, constructs and drawings relating to interpretive method. I did not at that stage have a plan for what I might do with this intellectual wallpaper, besides letting it hang for a while, giving it some sort of perspective while I absorbed it. It was interesting to see how the various ideas juxtaposed one with another on the wall, sometimes in violent opposition.

I think I imagined their tenure on the wall as being strictly temporary, but in the event the charts were to remain on the walls largely undisturbed for two years. In the course of that time, they provided an open talking point for colleagues and visitors who were curious as to the unusual method I was following, and they also provided an academic reference point for my own experimentation. This qualitative intellectual counterpoint mattered greatly to me, as the discipline of management still has as its tradition a strong grounding in economics and positivism. This writing on the wall provided an anchor, and I would turn to it often, in moments of methodological or philosophical seizure, while seeking inspiration. They were my Bayeux Tapestry, a testament to my transformational moment when my inner positivist Harold received an arrow in his reductionist eye.

As time passed, other PhD students came to join me in that room, but they did not - as I imagined they would - request that the wall display be taken down. In fact, they said they liked the impressionistic posters there, and asked that they stay. Though these charts became old and dog-eared – they had fallen off a few times, to be duly reinstated in a lopsided student-ish way - they still retained their charm, at least to me. They were an

idiosyncratic talisman, an important and enduring artefact, my easy to read textbook on the wall to guide me through my taking of the narrative turn.

At last the time came to pass in late 2006 when my full time studenthood had run its course, and I was to move on to a full time lecturing job in the Department. Coincident with this shift in status was a department move, transporting us from the stately bell tower up the hill to a Victorian house, the like of which are multiple in the University precinct. As I contemplated taking down the posters, a catch in my throat caused me to pause before immediately consigning them to history. I realised that I was not quite ready to bury them in their designated orange crate. Perhaps I already knew that once down, these posters would not remerge in my posh newly decorated lecturer's room, where I would need to do posh newly decorated lecturer things, and possibly to present myself in rather less bohemian style than the anarchic posters suggested.

Realising also that these artefacts might come into play in the eventual write up of my PhD, I reached for my ethnographer's tape recorder and began read from the wall, in an attempt to capture the flip charts' essence before finally taking them down. I felt slightly self-conscious at first, pacing the room while dictating, knowing that I could be seen through the porthole in the office door. But soon enough I found the flow and was extemporising on my montage without inhibition. I concentrated hard on this task and time flew as I worked to capture these etchings in words. I was most surprised to discover that the exercise had absorbed in the end several hours of thoughtful dictation. What follows is a transcription of this monologue, subjected to some recent editing to smooth out some of the stuttering repetitions, but otherwise pretty much as it fell from my lips.

'The writing is on the Wall'. (My Transposition.)

The wall asks that we begin by asking the question 'what is social science?' if we are to understand interpretative inquiry; and we respond by saying that it's the analysis and understanding of the pattern and conduct of social process, of society. When we ask what qualitative research is, we recite that it is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, where the observer is engaged in social interpretation utilising material practices that make the world visible and further than that represent an emotional whole. There is no denying the importance of emotion here. In this approach we work through a constructivist paradigm of interpretation. When we ask 'what kind of being is the human being', we work through relativist ontology where multiple social realities are recognised.

When we ask of this paradigm what the underlying epistemology may be, we respond by saying that 'it the relationship between the enquirer and the known', a subjective epistemology where the knower and the respondent come together to co-create understanding. And when we ask 'how do we know of this world, or how do we gain knowledge of it', when we ask of our methodology, then the answer is that it needs to be 'partially situated' and that it needs to be naturalistic and relational. This begs many questions of our research design, among them whether the design needs to be a legitimation of the transgressive. It also asks of theory whether it is formalised and substantive, or heuristic.

The wall moves from this dry, definitional point of departure on the nature of social science and qualitative inquiry to talk vividly of 'creative analytic processes' and of the power of auto-ethnography in particular. It touches on the power of irony, which I have always loved as a usage, and it reminds of how healing fiction can be. It talks of the power of visual presentations, of polyvocal acts, of the use of drama, and of comedy as much as of tragedy. I see mention of responsive readings, the use of satire, of the images that poetry creates and of the driving narrative of the story. It encourages readers' theatre, the plundering of personal archives, and the world of naturalistic conversation. It transports me into the worlds of layered accounts and of socio-poetics. All of this I read of within the one handbook, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and I am astounded. Amidst all of this, we are reminded that there is no set method, no fixed technique. Mixed genre is okay, and we can mix and match at random from among all of these possibilities, as the evidence, the mood or our hearts and intuitions take us.

At this point the writing on the wall changes tone, to address distinctions between the world of quantitative inquiry, so well known to me through my early grounding as a positivist economist, and this brave new world of interpretative inquiry. Must research always be operationalised, or could we not instead simply have an emergent research strategy? The wall contrasts triangulation with the crystalline structures that reflect and refract upon themselves. It breaks my thinking away from the sequential, instead moving it towards the simultaneous, the concurrent. Emic stands alongside etic, and the comparison is a favourable one. We think of the confidence that 'thin' brings us but bravely reach for thicker gruel. The large representational canvas has its attractions, but the thick picture invites us over to examine the deeply layered, barely discernable miniaturised world. We revel in the rich lustre of it, while recognising that the generality is lost in that moment of immersion. There is detached observation, which has its place, but

there is also discourse as an alternative. We may tend towards the indirect and abstracted or we may rest with the everyday, where everyday life constrains us but also contextualises our inquiry. Then there is that which is outside, which is alien, which is foreign, which is 'other', and there is self, the self that is us, together and within. I learn that one person's deviant is another's sociological hero. Perhaps things do not need to be proven after all. It might be enough that they're simply trustworthy. And it may be possible to substitute internal validity with credibility; external validity with transferability; reliability with dependability and objectivity with confirmability.

The wall challenges the notion of control variables, suggesting instead the use that might be made of fate, and of vulnerability, in our inquiry. This is a world where evocation might substitute for representation, and mishap for mastery, feeling for fact. Where rigour is placed to one side, and peace of mind privileged instead. This is the peace of mind where we discover an inner knowing that was not there before, which speaks to us of how to be, ushering in that moment of grace wherein much is understood and where conflicts and tensions are resolved. And from that moment of grace emerges the possibility of substituting 'how to know' with 'how to live, with how to be'.

The wall encourages us to countenance a world where research subjects are transformed into participants, and where categorical knowledge is set aside in favour of narrative knowledge. This is the world where narrative knowledge is of necessity the knowledge of the first party not of the third party. And the learning gained from that narrative is not dry, antiseptic, distant, but evocative. It has an intimate quality. In that space, the pressure for validity is relaxed, to be replaced perhaps by verisimilitude. At that point learning may be grounded in experience, rather than being driven by the feeling that all learning needs to be a process of forcing abstraction, where we are obsessed with the propositional at the expense of the experiential.

This obsession with the propositional is of course powerfully driven by the fanciful belief that objectivity can be created, and that the ultimate sin is that of subjectivity. From this deifying of objectivity has grown the search for dependent and independent variables, most of all for control, whether it be control variables or just good old fashioned control, the absurd fantasy that we are somehow in charge. The wall offers the alternative to control, which is that of surrender, surrender to the ebb and flow of life. And within that ebb and flow, we can allow models to emerge naturalistically. These emergent models are grounded in the heuristic, in what is commonly if tacitly known, rather than the researcher

feeling that we need to be perpetually in the act of 'building' or 'constructing' theoretical models.

If we sacrifice objectivity, then we necessarily sacrifice reliability also. There is the audacious thought that reliability may be replaced by literary license, within our narrative scheme of things. It is at this point that notions of 'unified knowledge' break down, and we grow to learn that perhaps the best we might hope for in our research is to touch upon personal truth. Which means that we must reach inside, unapologetically embracing the insider. This in turn frees us of the need for anonymising, frees us from a research world where knowledge is closed, hermetically sealed within the shibboleth of conventional research norms. Instead, the individual's voice is liberated; it is allowed to stand out, to a point where we see the person behind the expression. The wall is allowing of the confessional, as much as it embraces feelings and sensations embodied in our viscera. We know that language is deeply limited in the terrain of the embodied, yet we seek even among the inadequacy of the written word for some expression of what shifts and moves beneath the skin. Some times we need the tunes and the pictures as well as the ubiquitous word to bring the full experience to pregnant life.

The wall suggests that at this point the passive voice is abandoned in favour of the intimate personal voice, and it draws interested others into the conversation. Of course, at that point we draw in the reader, not as the passive recipient of our anodyne third party voice, but as an accomplice, as an active co-creator of our learning and discovery. We have forsaken the taking of a neat snapshot, suspended in time. We have gone beyond the time-lapse sequence even, to acknowledge the curve of time, and to reach for methods of expression that recognises the episodic, cursive nature of time. We are no longer freezing the past. Our stories are about the past and each time they are told the past is recreated. The story as commonly told has the possibility of being replaced by the story as lived.

We have broken away for the mainstays of the unitary and from the altar of coherence, to a world of research where what is represented to the reader is what is actually out there, as best as we can represent it. As the remains of the canonical crumble around us, we see rising in its place the counter-narrative, the transgressive narrative at last daring to find the oxygen to speak her voice. And amid the rubble what we grow to represent is disorder, disconnection, chaos and the struggle, where incoherence rather than order reigns. We no longer privilege one view and one meaning, but embrace multiple views

and marginal standpoints, where we stand unsurely on the edge, seeking to learn what might be over the other side. We acknowledge that we are reporting life here, which must allow for multiple interpretations and explanations. And every time we make our verbal construction, then at some level we fictionalise life.

Part of the power of fiction is that we 'think with' stories, not about them. And in the thinking with them, what better than for a story to be used, to be told and to be retold? There is no need to analyse stories, to deconstruct them if they are told well. There is no need to make them solid. They simply need to be retold, reworked and recreated. And as we work with narrative so inevitably we work with metaphor, noticing how the metaphors become narrativised. There is no need for these metaphors to be turned into geometry; they can remain where they are, gathering moss and nutty accretions as they tenderly age.

The wall reminds us of how much conventional effort goes into making sure that the story accurately reflects the past, but suggests as an alternative that we might be better served by looking at some of the consequences of the story, at the unintended consequences, rather than waste ourselves reaching for the truth on the pinhead. And also for us to look at the prospect of new possibilities that the story opens up. Among these possibilities is the realisation that we are continually reinventing ourselves and our histories in this act of sense making. This realisation dispenses with the notion that there is some form of 'pre-narrative experience' out there that happened before words, that there is a pre-formed explanation that we are seeking to uncover. Rather, we grow to understand as we approach the past that we are redesigning it. Which means that we must address choice and dilemmas, even if it is transgressive so to do, rather than to succumb to the temptation to stand behind a transcendent establishment. The wall challenges the instinct to hide behind author-ity, as we all so often do.

The wall underlines that this fresh knowledge moves us towards a world where emotion is no longer trashed but dignified. We grow to understand that our 'lived experience' is important, as important as many things, and that the researching and understanding of our experience can be therapeutic, if somewhat traumatic as we experience it at the time of its expression. We allow for a moral centre, and do not discount the centrality of the human heart. In the recitation of our words we can allow romance to play its part. It is possible that we can manipulate sympathies, this we recognise, yet we can also be deeply empathic. We work unashamedly with a confessional culture and we permit a degree of

self-absorption and self-consciousness. We allow plural voices, those within ourselves as well as those outside. We can be expansive, relaxing as we breathe into our writing. We settle for unsettled meanings and we embrace marginalised standpoints. Interruptions are welcomed; interruptions are painful and unwanted often, but they are the stuff of what we deal with here, in this impressionistic world, a world that's multi-layered. It's dialogic and it's expressive and what we aim for is an unmasking. We're looking for a storied life, intuition plays its part, and we know deeply the connection between aesthetics and our researching. We live from moment to moment and we allow small lies. Most of all we allow the paradox to break through, and rejoice in its revelation.

What we need to do is to grow strong, to the point where we no longer feel ashamed when we see academic jargon that we do not yet understand, consequently retreating in the face of implied scholarship and its impenetrability. Instead we move beyond our shame, and commit ourselves to accessible prose, to a form of writing and of research that will pull others in, that will have benefits beyond those glories accruing to the researcher alone. For this form of inquiry is not about the glorification of the researcher, or a celebration of our comparative cleverness in a world of narcissists. We challenge the implicit assumption that the academy has full understanding, instead acknowledging that we are all partially situated and perhaps what we most need to know is where we are partially situated, and to understand the implications of our positioning. In that discovery we reach for our difference, our diversity, as well as acknowledging the similarities between us.

We know that we live between a rock and a soft place. Our wish is to extend our ethnography beyond academia. We want to counter the practice of authority, we allow for radical empiricism and seek to discover that face under the mask, the original face. What we're looking is for a narrative act of self-creation, for the taking of personal accountability, for reaching for verisimilitude and for a knowing that narrative is all a part of the existential struggle to move life forward. It is about the relationship between researcher, participant and reader, and the way that triangle plays one with another.

My Dirty Little Writing Secret.

Reading this Writing on the Wall (WoW) text in its completed form comes as a pleasant surprise. In fact so pleased was I that decided to honour it with the three lettered acronym WoW, in true hyperbolic consulting fashion. I had not expected when I first began to doodle on my flip chart that I was beginning the process of articulating my rendition of the bases of qualitative method, which is in essence a composite of others treatment of the same. Nor when I tentatively wielded my tape recorder did I have in mind that this would result in a coherent statement of method. My best hope at that time was that I would capture some kind of record before the original artefacts became buried. I had not visualised those flip chart artefacts becoming transformed into text. An important part of my research is of course research into method, as well as research into the substantive issue of ICC values transition, and so in that way this transcript plays to this method study. I muse as to whether this transcript is an aesthetic re-presentation of the original WoW, or whether it comprises original research data in itself. I mention this as I am aware that the distinction matters as to whether the aesthetic is used in management research purely for adornment, as a different accessible way of revealing the data once it is collected; or whether it represents a distinct way of accessing insight that would not be available through other means. My judgment is that this text falls somewhere between the two, if that is possible. It does stand as a re-presentation of the original scrawled graffiti.

On the other hand, the completed text is distinct and separate from that which was on the walls, and does render itself susceptible to a further order of understanding with regard to examining what the discourse behind this text might be. One thing that remains true is that while I do find this WoW document useful and enlightening – as other researchers with whom I have shared it have found it also – it does not inspire the same sense of intellectual excitement that the original flip-charts did, as they blew in the gentle breeze that fitfully refreshed my student cave. This could of course be because that initial experience related to my coming across these ideas and materials for the first time. The fact is that while I now have both artefacts to work with as ‘evidence’, my heart remains fondly attached to the original scruffy etchings.

At this point I notice that the way this chapter is emerging had parallels with what piece is becoming an example of what Pullen and Rhodes describe as ‘Dirty Writing’ (2007). They

remind us that that research is messy business; to the point where there is little point in devoting the energy we do into trying to clean it up, to sanitise it for the reader's consumption. Their paper begins with a description of a guy in New York who relishes his work, which is the cleaning up the pavements after the suicides, the 'jumpers' have splattered down on them from a great height, and proceeds to reflect on how academic messes are neatly cleaned away. And how it may better serve us to have the full mess on display.

Allow me if you will to extemporise in the spirit of dirty writing - or my interpretation of the same, which Carl Rhodes recently reminded me in conversation, might not be exactly what they meant by dirty writing, but there again it may be - to see where it takes me. It is tempting to say that the above transcript *is* the WoW, but it is not the original. It is a textual simulacrum, evocative of the sense of semblance that Magritte reached for when he painted, 'C'est ne pas un pomme' (1964). It was the original flip charts that acted as the temporary chaotic mechanism that transported my thinking for two years or more, accreting new ideas and shedding old ones as they fell to the floor on the way. Yet now, if I were to be asked what the intellectual inspiration behind my pursuit of interpretative method was, I would in all probability direct someone towards this written transcript. As I offer it now to you the reader. I would be content that the reader would receive this as a coherent account of the underpinnings of my practice. What I may omit to say in offering it was that this coherence did not come out in one piece, at one moment in time, thereafter to guide me through my research. I may also fail to mention the randomness, the dead ends, the chance breakthroughs and the serendipitous encounters which were to provide the apposite insight at precisely the right time, from a whole variety of sources, and that were indelibly to guide the emergence of my research philosophy.

And as I offer this transcript I also speculate as to what value this WoW may be to the reader. It may well be that I impress the reader with the comprehensiveness of my approach, which might inflate my ego temporarily but would not add value for the reader. Or it may encourage the reader to follow my lead, which might add value. It may also be that I distance and discourage my reader through the presentation of an exhaustive rendition of method that seems at first sight too overwhelming to emulate in its totality. They could also assume that I was simply showing off. In fact you might well be thinking that now.

Putting this another way, had someone put this transcript in my hands three years ago, I find it hard to say how I might have responded to it at that time. It may have inspired, it may have distanced. I may have admired the prose, and then put it to one side. One thing for sure is that I would not have adopted it wholesale, turning to it at each and every point as I devised and mobilised my research strategy. I did not do that at that starting out time with the academic texts available, such as the redoubtable – and exhaustive - Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and neither would I have done so with this manuscript. Nor would I advise anyone else to do the same at their point of embarkation.

It will serve me into the future, I feel sure, and if I have the dedication then WoW may well be modified and refined as different and complimentary ideas and practices are experimented with, with these fresh ideas and insights becoming progressively layered into this world view. In this way WoW could become a working, living methods document. This act of transforming charts into text has undoubtedly proved useful in deepening my understanding of the underlying intellectual project, in that sense that the exercise was forcing me to think through how these methods all hang together, if indeed they do. For coherence is not the ultimate goal. Indeed, as Pullen and Rhodes (2007) remind us, the pursuit of coherence may be driven by a need to impose authority – based on an assumption that there is an underlying coherence out there – rather than a genuine exploration of what exists with the phenomenon that we examine. Perhaps after all there is no ultimate research goal. Indeed, even as I write, this act of committing reflections on the construction of WoW to prose continues to challenge my understanding of emergent method, and my articulation of the same.

Feedback to date gathered from the students I have shared this with - as well as the non-academics who have inquired as to how I approach this work, and whom in return I have burdened with this – suggests that WoW is comprehensible, and that they find it convincing and for some inspiring in its encouragement to research in a likewise manner. This feedback is reassuring and confirmative, as part of the purpose of this fud was to inspire to action, to encourage the embracing and practice of alternative ways of knowing, and through that practice to open up dialogue that has previously been suppressed or simply ignored. WoW may also offer to my examiners satisfactory evidence that I have thought through my research strategy, and that there lies behind it a rigorous academic base. Beyond my examiners, it may well be that this proves robust enough, with some refinement to be released to the general world through publication of some kind, for the

benefit of widening the conversation on the process of assimilating and internalising qualitative method.

The impossibility of simplifying and describing the internalisation of learning process.

Reflecting on this natural process whereby I came to describe the intellectual bases of my research method – the ontology and epistemology - is a vivid and somewhat chastening reminder that the process of internalisation of learning is highly complex. And that the process of description of the same probably impossible. Part of the difficulty is the fluidity of the whole process. At some points it feels that the gestalt is clear, with all of the pieces fitting perfectly together. At other times, the pieces are all over the floor again, defying reconstruction in the same way ever again. I am fully aware that WoW was not a piece of sense-making that I developed overnight, on the reading of one or two texts. An accurate narrative description the fullness of my 'retrospective sense making process' (Weick, 2002) would require a treatment that I would imagine would justify a thesis in itself, if indeed such a process could ever be captured in words.

If I were to attempt to describe the skein of influences that have been part of this web of sense making, then I would need to mention the interaction between experiment, reflection on action; leading to some theory building, development of heuristics, then action and reflection once more, rather in the manner of a dynamic and somewhat dizzying Kolb (2003) learning cycle. Overlaid on this experimentation would be reading and learning related to method; and overlaid on the reflection and theory development side would be literature and learning related to theory, and to empirical research. I recognise that in my case my progression through the learning cycle has included many elements other than reading to direct me towards relevant method and to highlight salient theory.

These elements beyond the literary would include the seeking out of sages, seers and informal mentors within and outside of the academic community. It is noticeable that I have not confined myself to management influences, reaching also to English, to education, social psychology and sociology. These influencers I have sought through contacts at my own institution but also through enthusiastic participation in a wide variety of conferences ranging from 'straight' management events such as the British Academy of Management conferences through to more off the wall events such as 'The Art of

Management and Organisation' conference last year in Krakow. These very different environments have offered me rich and contrasting perspectives on the many domains and modes of management inquiry

At these events I have been an active presenter as well as an avid absorber and challenger of others ideas. I have presented alternative and transgressive methods and ideas which have certainly attracted stimulating debate that has proved invaluable in the process of my testing, refining and promulgating my ideas. In addition to testing these alternative approaches at conferences, I have also taken the opportunity to work with students of ours at the department to test different methods and ideas, such as working with a volunteer 'writing as inquiry' group, and also working with students to create a critical view of executive coaching. Interestingly, much of what was learned from all of these sources was to find its way into my research and personal journals, and also from time to time onto my walls, as part of WoW, which would be to say that this artefact has been an important element in this internalisation process.

Nor would I discount the impact of my discussants in my field work, my co-creatives. As much as they are co-creatives by orientation, so too have they proved to be a vital contributory element to this study. This informal mentoring provides a further layer of the internalisation process, and an important one. My co-creatives importance has lain not just in their active contribution to my substantive – including their many references to literature, and patient explanations of the same - but also in their continuous support in this prolonged learning process. Of course, it could be argued that their involvement at all may problematise the formalised view of knowledge creation process where perhaps the university prefers the heroic suggestion that knowledge creation is done by the student alone, rather than in collaboration with others.

Could WoW stand up as a proxy for a 'Methods Chapter'?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter I am surprised by what has emerged through the prose of committing WoW to paper. It seems to have coherence, a wholeness about it, which was not evident prior to this execution to print, when it felt fragmented. The fact is that in practice, the fragmentation remains, but at least I know that somewhere in my brain it all hangs together, and that I have a written reference point of the stultified brain needs jogging, or if I need to explain what is behind all of this, which as a teacher and research

supervisor I am frequently called so to do. Now it feels like a whole. I am also pleased that feedback suggests that WoW is expressed as far as possible in non jargonistic terms, rendering it intelligible to the alert and interested reader

When I ask the question as to whether WoW describes my method, then the response that returns is that WoW might well serve as an account of my ontology and epistemology. True it does not explicate the emergent method, but then I feel I can breathe easy with that, as that method is covered extensively elsewhere. But it does cover the philosophical beliefs that underpin that emergent approach, an approach that was to test and to deepen my understanding of that philosophy as I proceeded deeper into the inquiry. The theme of authenticity has been at the heart of this inquiry into values transition. So WoW in its honesty regarding its provenance has authenticity on its side and in addition congruency with the context of the study also.

But viewed through a conventional PhD lens there are glaring weaknesses in WoW as a methods chapter, where convention decrees that method is explicated and defended, and the sources made explicit. While I am not feeling the need to conform to such convention – as I have set out my criteria for success in quite a different way from convention – I remain anxious that this may well not fit the bill at all. For example, while WoW clearly contains phrases and fragments from scholars' works, these are not attributed. My first thought is that if this were to be a methods chapter, then it would need insertion of authors' names and dates. My first reaction to taking this direction on is instinctively rejected on aesthetic grounds alone. It would look appalling with all of those brackets interrupting everything. The aesthetic will be smashed by this atomisation, my hard won seamlessness utterly gone. But if I were obliged to insert references? On reading WoW through once more I discover that this would be no easy matter. I feel sure they can be attributed. I know these words came from somewhere; they were not mine to begin with. But where they came from I really don't know. I really don't remember where it all came from, which parts of which books, after the synthetic mixer that I have put these ideas through over a two year period. Even if I wanted to take apart my Meccano set I am not sure where I might discover the sourcing of the different parts.

Anyway, isn't a lot of this in my words? Or is it ..well it is now. It is my words. Or it is my conjunctions that pull these different ideas together? They have never been assembled or constructed in this way before. The longer I look, the greater the difficulty I have in

distinguishing between what is mine what is foreign, between what is an accurate rendition of theory and what is my own mangled interpretation.

So I give up on the idea of developing a conventional methods chapter from WoW largely out of the impossibility of this task. Even if I stuck in the sources, stylistically WoW is still way off the genre for academic methods. In its spirit it is thinking with. It is speaking to, not speaking down to. It is to an extent showing not telling. No amount of reading a smart list of quotes will make the reader know those quotes inside out. On the other hand I know that following the methods chapter formula would have saved me a lot of heartache. And I know that even without a conventional methods chapter I cannot escape the need for a bibliography. And the thought of assembling a 500 item bibliography which will need defending strikes a degree of terror also. In an attempt to quieten these palpitations I read through this text and experience some relief that I have at least a good number of citations there to bulk up my bibliography. This short lived relief is then overshadowed by the thought that I might be challenged on the contents of these citations. And I may fall short on my explanations. I question whether I should remove a number of them immediately, to avoid the risk of offering hostages to fortune. I suspend the question of how I represent my method and the literature associated with this method to allow the free-flowing dirty writing to continue to explore some inner disquietudes.

My Dirty Little Secret.

The more I examine it, the more I recognise how far I have deviated from the professional sounding 'systematic literature review', as advocated by the management doyen of the same procedure, Tranfield (2006, lecture to British Academy of Management doctoral conference), and as increasingly followed by many management PhDs. By contrast my non- systematic, highly haphazard literature review process has been variously inspired by recommendation from those whom I have met or chosen to seek in conversation; through following up interesting looking references from the bibliographies of stimulating books; or more often than not through pure synchronicity, where the right book or article 'flies off the shelf' at the right time, straight into my hands. Random excursions through Google scholar have proved at least diversionary and at other times inspirational also.

My dirty little secret though is that in truth I prefer writing to reading. It is not that I dislike reading of course. In fact, I love reading, it remains one of my earliest and fullest pleasures, and in many ways I am never happier than when I have the opportunity for

uninterrupted immersion in a book. Bliss. But it has to be a well written book, one that draws me in and keeps me there. But on the whole, especially when there this learning and knowledge creation business is concerned, I prefer writing to reading. This truth has remained a secret for some time, and is associated with some degree of shame, as to state it publicly seems both arrogant and indolent. Such a declaration would certainly fly in the face of received wisdom around academic practice, where the myth at least is that you read first, extensively, and plan your writing, before you put pen to paper. One finding that has helped me to 'come out' on this shameful 'writing over reading' preference was to read Megginson's PhD (2000) on the creation of management intellectual property matter. Within this thesis I was to learn that when Belbin – he of the management 'team roles' fame (1986) – was asked of the sources of his creativity; and in response Belbin confessed that his preference was for writing over reading as a way of sorting his ideas. This is not to confer authority upon Belbin on this matter, but this revelation has assisted me in flushing out the notion that such a preference could be legitimate. I now await my 'Write and Proud' tee-shirt.

Since that discovery, I have inquired of many others, including students facing writing assignments, of their preferences between reading and writing. What I have found is that there is a whole range of preference here. Some cannot begin to think with lifting pen to paper and capturing their own thoughts first. Others are unable to think until they have a fully authenticated reading list presented to them by reliable authority. Most fall somewhere at a point in the range between these two extremes. I have also discovered strong evidence of a distinction between what the students 'desire' in relation to this choice and what they believe is desirable, this distinction echoing that made by Hofstede (1984) in the domain of values and culture determination. And most people, when asked of their preference, comment that while they have never applied too much conscious thought to this preference. These responses have surfaced learning issues and dilemmas that are often in the background, unconsciously driving choices and often raising guilt and frustrations, stresses and strains that result in non-optimum writing. Or indeed in some cases, no writing at all, where the pen hangs paralysed above the paper, suspended in a rictus of fear and guilt.

A further complicating factor – if one were needed – is that I find that I am attracted towards literature that steers and encourages the reader towards experiment rather than towards the cautious absorption of all background theory before experimentation. I note also that it is my natural inclination to try out attractive ideas I have come across to see if

there work or not for me, before reading on too much further to learn of the full details of technique. After the experimentation phase, my instinct then is to reflect on my learning either in dialogue with others, or in solo writing on the results of that experimentation.

Writing as Inquiry as an 'Excessive Practice'.

I am aware that much of my discovery writing has proved wasteful. I acknowledge freely that Discovery writing is an 'excessive practice'. Given recent management research interest in the theme of 'excess' (which found expression in a special edition of the Journal of Culture and Organisation in 2007) it may even be that the excess of writing as discovery -or as some like to describe it 'listening-writing' (Cameron 1996, Markova 1992) - might be looked to as a potentially rich research phenomenon. And if such a project were undertaken – an exploration of the phenomenon of excess in autoethnography - then this document would be a prime candidate for investigation, for all that is happening here, even as you read, is the generation of research excess. And you the reader are burdened with it.

Discovery writing also brings its own writing management challenges. Today for example I started out with this document in a 'messy writing' state, but felt that despite this messiness that it is was really quite well developed with regard to argument and narrative flow nonetheless. The document was 5000 words, and I imagined that all I needed to do was edit and tidy up this piece, which would absorb half a day maximum, and hopefully much less. Yet now here I sit, back aching, twelve hours later, having concentrated solidly most of the day. I look at the word count. 10,000. It can't be. My plan was if anything to lose some words. Yet those that insinuated their way in here feel the right ones. And I know that this will need editing again, not just to lose words but also to shape the narrative, to work to surface the meaning.

Dirty reading.

My primary, secondary and tertiary reading waves, post my field work.

Lest I convey the impression that WoW was constructed in a distinctly 'literature - lite' fashion, then I feel need to disabuse that impression, not least because this script will be read by my supervisor and by my examiners. The reflexive need to dismiss this accusation of lack of academic gravitas is borne in part of a defensiveness that fears that this entire intellectual project be perceived as lightweight, never a great epithet to hang on a PhD. But the need to narrate the story of the 'reading waves' is in large part to acknowledge the many writers to whom I am in debt. This process of acknowledgement will also reinforce my learning with regard to literature sources, and their respective influences, while also directing the reader towards these sources should he or she prove interested in so doing. As I look back, I recognise that this reading occurred in three distinct waves. Allow me to briefly describe and comment on each these waves.

I mentioned earlier that the first phase of this reading that was to inspire WoW was my wholesale immersion in the encyclopaedic qualitative methods handbooks of Patton (2003) and of Denzin and Lincoln (2005). It was a wonder indeed to find a density of diverse literature compressed within the same two volumes. For more general early guidance on social inquiry I am indebted to the concision of Blakie (1993); and for more general advice on strategies of inquiry and research methods to Silverman (2005), Bryman and Bell (2003), and Phillips and Pugh (1995).

As my interest in autoethnography grew apace I concentrated initially on the autoethnography and writing as inquiry sections of Denzin and Lincoln, in particular on Richardson (2005) and Ellis and Bochner (1996, 2000, 2002). I was then to discover through our Graduate School of Education a British and European tradition of writing as inquiry and reflective practice, including the work of Sparkes (2002), Speedy (2000, 2005) and Etherington (2002, 2004). This British tradition offered a different yet associated prospectus on autoethnographic method from that of the North American School. The distinction lay in the impression that there was less attention being placed on protesting the polarity between their method of inquiry and the positivist preoccupation of the US academy, and more allowance of free and impressionistic individual expression. This

literature was supported by reading into the European Critical and 'labour process theory' traditions, (Willmott, 1994) noticing how they wove theory and advocacy with research methods which claimed high traditional rigour. All of this was rich fare indeed and took me deep and wide. Much of this literature was encouraging of experiment without the researcher worrying overly as to whether they were 'getting it right'. Given that I am disposed anyway to such encouragement, it was not long before I was putting the books to one side for a while and picking up my pen and then keyboard, to deep dive into the world of writing as inquiry. I needed to break from it and experiment.

Bell (2003), co-author of a recent and influential management research methods book, notes that it is quite natural for research reading to occur in phases, and that it is in many ways desirable for the research in their early interpretivist forays not too be overly constrained by conventions and rules that curtail intuitive creativity. This second wave of mine was to occur after I had completed my autoethnography an 'Outside View'. It occurred as I was preparing for my collective ethnography field work, and was reinforced by my early field work, which ran me into discussants that were buzzing with fascinating references, and eager to direct me towards salient intellectual sign posts.

This second wave was to steer me deeply towards early ethnographic studies, through the work of Bruner (1986, 1987, 1990, 2002), Victor Turner (1986) and of Van Maanen (1988, 1990, 1994) I was highly attracted towards the turn taken by anthropology at that time, moving away as it did from the exploration of the exotic to the study of the mundane everyday ordinariness that is already around us, and in its way quite as exotic as the foreign if viewed through fresh eyes. I learned of the process of 'making the strange familiar, and the familiar strange', a somewhat clichéd phrase attributed to many but which all the same contained a particular resonance as I continued to alert myself to the newness in ordinary things.

What I learn of ethnography is that if access is to be gained, then the researcher needs a 'warm invitation.' This insight was reassuring as I believed that I received a warm invitation from my co-creators. I learn of the 'epistemic' process, where research subjects are co-creators of the knowledge. What is needed for ethnography to work is an explorer mentality, a pioneering spirit, which I felt suited me and my natural preferences well. I smiled in recognition to learn that the ethnographer is a theoretical magpie, looking for – and often diverted by – bright and shiny things (Massey 1998:1). This chapter I write now overflows with evidence of my magpie nature, as does my thirty plus years in consulting.

Another ethnographic metaphor that caught my attention was that of the 'methodological omnivore', which again I believe this study is testament to; and not necessarily to its credit. Of great concern to the ethnographer – though the place can be found by accident – is the finding of a role, or of a place for yourself. I truly feel that this was happening to me pretty well for me within the research process. And it continued to happen at different times in different places, most tellingly at the co-creatives session held at Reading in July 2006. I was intrigued by the notion that there may be ethnographic personalities, and that I might well be one of these. This resonated with my thoughts on the journalistic stuff in outside view. Maybe an extended view of the same, which is to suggest that ethnography may well be a process of long cycle journalism. A great deal of the appeal of the ethnographic method literature to me was the emphasis on emergent method, as described by the critical writers in organisations Alveson and Willmott (2002).

I was taken by the notion that ethnographic tradition is based on the notion of a 'one year' cycle, based around the four seasons. My learning is that ethnography does take time, not just in the field but also for reflection upon that time spent in the field. And as you commit to that time in the field, so there are those moments when roles are reversed, and you become aware of them watching you, as much as about you watching them, which can open up a whole other conversation. I was certainly aware of that two way process during my field work, not just in the research conversations but even as I re-read notes and listened to taped conversations yet again. The 'at least a year' in the field nostrum underlines the truth that ethnography is craft skill that is learned over time, much as process consultancy is, and that it has a strong co-creative element to it.

Ethnography is method, process and product. All three become so intertwined one with another that it becomes practically impossible to separate them without doing damage to the fabric of the product. I would like to believe that this wish to preserve the integrity of the whole is a large part of my resistance to breaking this thesis out into neat literature and methods chapters. Or even to talk of method at all, as a somehow separate entity, as I find it so difficult to disentangle without doing violence to my experience of the creation of the same.

Somewhat akin to my learning of ethnography was my being attracted towards 'social constructionism.' I had at much earlier stages in my life been fascinated by the writing of Berger and Luckman (1966), of Goffman and Geertz (1973, 1983). I was also to find my discussants enthusiastic advocates of this philosophy and approach. In three of my

conversations did I heard variations on Geertz' quote "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun," where he takes "culture to be those webs" (1973, 5). This emphasis on relativism and on the power of 'thick description' has great resonance for me. Beyond these early authors, I was to discover Weick (1989, 1996, and 2000) and Campbell (2000) and Crossley (2000) who take a constructionist view of the world, placing great emphasis on the power of narrative. I was also to learn of Bandera's (1993) notion of 'social learning', which assisted my operationalising the idea of co-creation of a collective ethnography with my study group of co-creatives.

My Third Wave of Reading

Post the completion of my collective ethnography and its write up; I experienced the sensation of needing to collect my breath before charging into another cycle of cursive sense making. This need for a lacuna was synchronous with my engaging in a third wave of reading that was largely inspired by wandering the shelves of the Graduate School of Education library looking at what was out there, and also looking at the bibliographies of completed PhD's in related fields which were gathered in that same library. (This process of looking at others PhD's was to prove both inspiring and intimidating, not least when inspecting the comprehensive – and extremely academic looking – bibliographies.)

This literature that I prised from the Education library largely related to narrative inquiry, including the work of Van Maanan (1994), Gergen, Atkinson (1997, 2000) and most notably Czarniawska, and Czarniawska- Joerges (1992, 1997). Czarniawska I was to discover was an author that was influential in management circles. Through this trail was also discovering more of management ethnographers, notably more of Watson (1986, 1996), and also of Bell (2003, 2004). In the field of narrative and story telling in management I found Sims (2001, 2005), Gabriel (2003, 2005), and Hawkins (1994, 1997, 2002, 2006). In part through the teaching of writing and reflective practice to students, I had cause to look in depth at Schon (1983, 1987); at Heron (1989, 1990, 1996, 1999) and in management Marshall (1999, 2001), and to return to Etherington (2002, 2004) once more from the Bristol GSoE, who has published extensively on reflective practice. I reflect as I write upon my affinity with writers who are close to home, so to speak, or who I have met my chance of have sought out, and wonder if I need my theory embodied perhaps, or If I at least to be close to the oracle, and also to know that the oracle is like the rest of us flesh and blood. It could also simply be that I love to name drop.

As I review this third wave of learning, I recognise that even as I was absorbing it, that with respect to influencing the shape and direction of this research, and in particular of the method, then much of it was confirmative of what I already felt I knew, it deepened and reinforced that knowing. I also recognised that when I discovered a fresh thought or an alternative approach, that the ideas were coming in too late in the process to be overly influential. They were also to point up missed opportunities, which were accompanied by some regrets, part of the price that is paid for following emergent non systematic approach. Not only a reminder of what I had missed, but also a nagging reminder of what I may be asked about in a viva. Didn't you consider etc? In anticipation I beat myself up for ever committing to this reckless emergent stuff.

A further characteristic of this third literature wave was that I would take out of the library, or order from Amazon, volumes of books that would then sit on the shelf staring back at me. They were at once reassurance and admonition. Reassurance that such literature existed and that it had passed through my fingers, been thumbed at least once or twice. I believe that I hoped or wished that at that at some level there was an osmotic process in play that would allow the penetration of this wisdom simply through being in its proximity. On the other hand, admonition in that the presence of this neglected literature and its palpable virgin unreadness was reason enough to feel as guilty as ever I would need to feel. A contributory factor in this neglect was that while I was aware of this additional literature hovering above the shelf, I was also amid this write up. Which meant that I was experiencing perpetual tension between the choice of whether to read or to write. This choice was heavily influenced by my propensity to favour writing over reading anyway. Though each time I did dip into a book, I was to feel real pleasure and also frustration at what I was discovering. Others so badly written you cough over them. Others were silky smooth.

Conference participation puts this third wave of reading into living perspective.

This third wave was also to steer me through 'arts based management education', through the work of Howard Gardner (1973) through to the leadership given to the merging of arts into organisation studies led among others by Antonio Strati (2000) whose work on the aesthetic of organisations I first came across at the third conference of the 'Standing Conference on Organisation Symbolism' in 1984, (SCOS), along with those of Linstead who were pioneering the aesthetic and symbolic into organisation and management studies. I was to discover how far this aesthetic turn had progressed through my

participation in the 2006 'Art of Management and Organisation' (AMO) conference in Krakow. On the other hand, my experience of returning to SCOS in July 2007 was to reveal that while SCOS remained somewhat true to its rather whacky aesthetic and symbolic roots, that it had departed some from its dedication to playfulness to indulge in serious commitment to consideration of the philosophical and the literary to the management canon. I found this shift unsettling, and while I was impressed by the scholarship of much of this work, I was left wondering what had happened to the spirit of the aesthetic, and of embodiment of management research.

Which brings me to end in a high note regarding conference experiences, in July 2007, immediately after the SOCS experience where I felt a deadness and a sense of exhaustion and deflation after, I was to participate in the second 'Arts Based Educational Research' (ABER) which offered a living synthesis of the latest thinking with regard to arts based research practice. It was truly inspiring to be among so many fine examples of arts based research and practitioners who performed these pieces. This also provided me with the opportunity to give WoW an outing as a performative piece, and to receive feedback on it, and how it could be developed. Part of this feedback was to strongly recommend that I submit WoW as a stand alone proxy for the methods chapter, and also to include this 'dirty writing' to problematise the reading/ writing process.

In addition, it was excellent to spend time with Sparkes, Clough, Sibbert, Leitch, Speedy and the rest to talk at length as to how the aesthetic can be incorporated into management, without management appropriating the arts for its own nefarious purposes. It was also great to discover that these formidable names connected to forbidding learned articles are in fact flesh and blood made manifest, and it was reassuring and inspiring to know that in terms of method that I am broadly at the same party as they are; which just so happens to be a party I want to go to.

Faking It as a Researcher.

The pattern of my reading practice changes as this PhD progresses.

This superficiality of my reading practice at this later third stage was in vivid contrast to my earlier experience, during the first reading wave when first I embarked on this inquiry. Then the reading seemed to occur in expanded time, in a cocoon of total absorption, when I seemed to have days to immerse myself in a literature, and could dwell for a day over a whole chapter. Here at this later stage I was reaching for sound-bites, for crisp encapsulations, while knowing the damage to the texture of truth that such nuggets might do, if ever I were to find them. I wish to swallow wisdom whole, while knowing that swallowing whole, or 'introjection' as Fritz Perls (1973) the gestalt theorist would have it, does not work. Whatever needs to be internalised needs chewing over. Yet despite this awareness that quick reading fixes were impossible, it seemed that each dip into the pile of literature that was growing apace on my shelves provided a persistent reminder of the vastness of my ignorance, chastising me with me a ringing reminder of how much that I didn't know. And each book or paper that my hand dipped into contained a bibliography that would further detail the limitless boundaries of my ignorance.

At times this overwhelming sense of ignorance, of being painfully knowing what you don't know, could be overwhelming. Early on in this research project I was told that at the end of this doctorate I would be a unique custodian of knowledge in my area. I would know more than anyone. Yet there have been times in this endeavour when I felt that I probably knew a whole lot less than many other people. There were times when I would trudge back to the library, resigned defeat hanging over my head as I returned the unread books and paid the fine. My mumbled apology was as much to myself for my weakness in not reading this stuff as to the librarian for lateness.

I was also aware that, as subject matter expert, it was incumbent on me not only to know what was contained in 'my' literature, but also to be alive to the critique of the same, from a whole variety of schools of critical dissection. And in addition to knowing the critique, that I may be required to know the rebuttals to these critiques. A countervailing voice was saying that these texts have already been critiqued to death, and that the arguments are so well rehearsed that there seems little point in me regurgitating these again simply to

display that I have encountered them. The truth is that for much of this time when interrogating this literature, I felt more apprentice than a critical master craftsman, more an acolyte than a high priest. And from the position of interpretative qualitative apprentice I was not wanting to hear too many critiques of the interpretative literature at a time when I was enthused by it and wanting to go and experiment with this alternative practice. My blood was hot, and in fact I was hearing quite enough discouraging noises and reservations within me and without having to go seek more in literature. These contrarian inner voices were represented already, stoking that growing feeling of vulnerability. No matter how often I stiffened my resolve by saying that I was pursuing a grounded method, therefore traditional methodological criticisms did not apply. I none the less felt the disquieting impacts of the chatter of my inner critic deeply. This chatter rebuked me by saying that the development of my critical faculty is an important part of learning this craft, not least because the development of the necessary detachment to appraise coolly a theory or method is essential otherwise I could be totally enchanted or seduced by the power of my fad or fancy, only to be deeply exposed and embarrassed at a later date. And so the chatter between the top dog and the under dog rambles on, interminably. Allow me to tune you in to some of this endless background noise.

A visit to hear Carolyn Ellis.

One synchronous event that occurred during this third wave of reading was a visit to the Bristol GSoE by Carolyn Ellis, a seminal influence during my first wave of reading. Her appearing in Bristol felt like nothing less than an act of materialization; of the right person at the right time, to take me back to the basics, just at a time when I was getting lost in foreign literatures, and becoming bitten by nagging doubts about the approach and about my suitability to deliver to the same. This appearance of Carolyn Ellis was an example of both manifestation and embodiment, as described by Markova (1994) and by Spencer (2004).

I travelled to the GSoE with John, one of my supervised students who was following autoethnography as his dissertation method and my colleague Ann Rippin. I didn't know quite what to expect, and in fact I had some inner reservations about coming at all. Ann and I discussed this, and agreed that the underlying apprehension we both experienced was akin to those feelings of dread you have before going to a concert where a favourite

band were to play a treasured album that you have been playing at home time after time. There was the fear that the music would somehow be changed, that the magic would be lost. Or that the band would play something quite different, something we wouldn't want to hear.

All was said by Carolyn as it is written. I was on the right track with my PhD. Our lips moved in sync as we joined her in the response to the questions. Well not quite, but it almost seemed like that. I was in fact taken by her matter of factness, and also by her humour, which was unexpected. This encounter caused me to open afresh her recently published 'Ethnographic I'. (2006) This book is a revelation, an ethnographic novel on ethnographic method. I skim through this book – as I seemed to be skimming through many things at that time, pausing here and there to read pieces that resonate with her seminar.

This treasure includes an appendix which I had not examined closely at the time of first reading. This appendix is entitled a 'Chart of Impressionist and Realist Ethnography'. This is a beautifully constructed chart which rings marvellous bells as I sink in a hammock between the poles that hold up the continuums, swinging comfortably because I feel I now know quite deeply what these poles mean. And I didn't two years ago. But despite this smugness I discover that this reading also raises a difficult to locate anxiety. A closer look and I realise why I am unsettled, as this chart bears remarkable similarities to the polarities referred to in WoW. This discovery raises deep fears of accusations of faking it, worse of plagiarism that I should be disguising easily accessed truisms as hard won personal learnings. Indeed so strong is this feeling that I ask if I did in fact copy this chart. The answer comes back that that would have been impossible, as it was written after WoW. But it may have been that I copied something like it?

In something of a panic, I reach for Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and the rest of the literature that is cluttering the house in an attempt to match this WoW sequence of thoughts and their phrasing to the sources, but I cannot find these WoW words in this sequence anywhere. That is not to say that there is not there somewhere. I feel a deep insecurity about this. The examiners will know. They are omniscient. And they will ask. I know they will ask. Then I look at the monumental volume of Denzin and Lincoln again and cry. In the entirety of my time on that desert island I could not absorb all of this, let alone apply it. There is so much of all of this that I speculate whether anyone could summarise it, show mastery of it. Yet I dare I say that I am familiar with the literature. What a fake I am.

Identifying the audience I might be attempting to fool.

The theme of faking it brings to mind the question of who might I be faking it for? Beyond the known audience of examiners and co-creatives, there is the implicit wider academic audience, which I have heard described as academic to academic, which I have abbreviated in true consultant fashion to A2A. The phrasing of 'academic to academic' – has it ever before been represented as A2A? – had so much embedded behind it. I remember once sitting in the restaurant of the Randolph Hotel in Oxford with a trade unionist I was working with from British Leyland having breakfast, looking out at the massive solidity of the medieval wall of the college opposite. I commented to him, marvelling at the thickness of the walls. 'Yes' he ruminated, 'I notice their thickness too. I notice how that thickness keeps all of that exclusive knowledge in. And people like me out'. Do I want to write A2A, I ask. Well perhaps I dream of being a key dancer in that exquisite gavotte. At other times I wish for a different step altogether. One of the greatest condemnations of A2A community is to say of a text that is not scholarship but a 'stream of consciousness', a judgment which obliterates much of my attempt to build research through narrative, dependent as that narrative is on capturing a stream of consciousness feel, if not written entirely as a free flowing stream.

Despite this A2A censure I continue to believe that such narrative is important, not least because I am seeking an audience beyond A2A. There is self as audience, as in the self as you would write to in your private journal, expressing doubts and perhaps forbidden feelings. There is reflexive writing such as this. Much of this writing is for the benefit of the writer, for self understanding for understanding of context, for therapy and for healing.

There is writing as co-creation, where co-creators are recipients of this writing, are customers of the same, and at some level co-authors also, for this narrative writing seeks an audience beyond confines of academia. This wider audience predicates the language it is written in, and style or genre that the narrative might follow. I recently tested out WoW on an intelligent but naïve audience, to see if it worked. It was a thrill to hear that it was accessible and relatively jargon free. I then shared it with a friendly academic, who pronounced that this was a 'wonderful weaving of what could be construed as cliché but in fact comes together fresh and alive'. But he is friendly, and I know that the writer needs to navigate with some care among all of this. I have been told so often by so many

academics that I should save the 'fancy stuff' till after fud, but to stick with doing the conventional thing for fud.

Faking it.

I also know that I feel that I stand naked without this conventional apparatus. Worse still, not just naked. I could also stand accused of plagiarism. As the chatter builds, then the theme of faking it leaps to the psychodynamic surface. It strikes me that this embodiment of feelings of faking it could be a 'parallel process' (Hawkins, 2002) where my experience of method tracks one of the major themes of my substantive ICC study. The parallel process occurs when the theme resonates within the text that it seeks to illuminate. It would seem that the 'faking' theme which has haunted me as a consultant is re-visiting me here in my academic incarnation. Here I face a double or even triple risk of faking it. There is the faking it involved in busking along with this recondite method, where I am faking it though my unfamiliarity with this method. There is the faking it attached to this method being seen as a fake methodology which looks into the lives of a bunch of fakes. Then there would be the reverse faking it that would be involved in my feigning pursuing conventional method literature review which had never occurred in practice, where I am seen to play it safe, to go through the motions, to satisfy the system tick the boxes. Where I could sound clever and hide behind authority, even making it look as though my reading was planful, strategic.

How would it be to go down the conventional route, to fake it the other way around, to avoid accusations of faking it that might accompany authenticity? My supervisor read a paper I wrote last year and was very thoughtful about it. He said he really liked the 'thinking with' bits, but was far less sure when I lurched into 'clever stuff' which abounded in references and citations attached to carefully worked abstruse arguments. He reminded me that I was writing a different type of PhD, and that it was important that I did not attempt to write a pale apology for acceptable conventions. It seemed that there was no room for Trojan horses here.

Yet I do not feel that I am faking it in writing this up. I know I am tempted to fake it, and that is worrying. But then to be aware of the temptation is healthy in that such awareness should assist me in defending against it, at least through guilt or conscience. I feel that this WoW is a demonstration of emergent interpretative practice, which may be more

powerful for the reader than a conventional method literature review seeking to justify the approach without in any way demonstrating it. I believe that the representation of what is scrawled on the wall should be not only a demonstration of method, but of something beyond method, which can sound mechanistic and formulaic. Instead I would this demonstration to evince a deep faith in this reflective approach, and its resulting products. In fact, I am beginning to think that this is an ontological matter, which questions whether method and substance can be separated. The corollary of this belief would be to I question whether the methods chapter and the literature review can be as distinct as the conventions assume.

Impostor syndrome.

I have grown to learn from my colleague Ann that a close relation to these feelings of faking it, of being found out, is the 'impostor syndrome' (Clance & Immes 1978) a body of theory borne of the Seventies feminist wave. The authors of this work suggest that the impostor syndrome applies mainly to women, but my own experience and that of men we have shared this would contend this woman only assumption. This syndrome is defined as

'The impostor phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phoniness which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women'. (Clance & Imes, 1978: 241.) These authors suggest that successes in life are likely to be attributed to mistakes in selection procedure; to overestimation of ability; to others feeling sorry for them; to having charmed others or just dumb luck; in short to any external factor, rather than to take credit themselves for their successes as a result of their abilities, talents and efforts. They also suggest that you higher you go in an organisation, the more` likely it is that you will be affected by this syndrome

The sharing of this thinking with our students provoked such deep resonance that we offered a workshop on the theme of Impostor syndrome which was readily taken up by our students. I attach below my writing which I completed on that workshop, in response to the prompt question 'I feel like a fraud when ...'

I felt like a fraud when

I was facilitating a management seminar with a group of hard nosed truck manufacturers. It was hard work uphill, a colourless and terribly factual experience. And then it happened. Suddenly and for no reason I could discern – maybe it was the suit I was wearing – but I suddenly felt the embodiment of my father the manager. I felt I had donned his mantle. I was inside of him, or rather he was inside of me. I was at some level entranced by this. In fact so much so that I was reckless enough to take the risk of sharing this visitation with my group. I am not sure what I expected back from them following my revelation, though I noticed that I trembled as I shared my out-of-body experience. The hombre who had assumed the role of leader of the posse was cruelly dismissive. He said that I had made it all up. And that even if it had happened it was nothing. Quite nothing, and that I was wasting my time with this fantasy. I felt completely naked as in one of those dreams when you are suddenly naked in front of a crowd. I was hurt, badly hurt and was to learn not to share some much on impulse again. As I was to learn later from Carolyn Ellis ‘don’t bleed when there are sharks about’.

This free writing story was oblique, but it went to the heart of a number of my current dilemmas. In conversation post this writing, I mused on my current role as a teacher in a research intensive University, with all of the baggage that brings with regard to feeling like a fake. And having lots of others around to remind you of the same. The question was to ask really why I had set myself up in this way. Was it an opportunity to work through this fear, confront the fear of internal fakery? Was I confronting those feelings of faking it through going to conferences and realising that just about everyone has read more than me?

This is my first experience of working in an academic environment and I am fortunate indeed to have colleagues who work to help me with this feeling of fakery, rather to press my buttons... though there are those that do that too, By way of illustration of the working of the impostor syndrome in an academic environment, Ann Rippin my co facilitator of this workshop has given my permission to share a sample of her response to this same prompt question.

There are no end of occasions when I feel like a fraud in my professional life. Being a career academic is like being a peacock. We are paid to strut and to outshine the other peacocks on the manicured lawn. ‘Look at me’. The glistening tail feathers fanning majestically behind me as I walk: the long trail of references framing my elegant haughty head. Smile while the effort of keeping up those credentialising tail feathers is as grinding and painful as walking any distance in Jimmy Choos.

So. A fraud. I could have chosen nice, simple dull empirical research, but I chose ... to mix it with the theory boys, who trace everything back to Heidegger or Zizeck or Merleau-Ponty. I've read nothing yet time and again I put myself through the mill ... why do I do something so hard? And why with young men with goatees and polo necks and apple macs and social science degrees. And how come I don't get found out? How come they write back and say that my work is untheoretical they still publish it. You write beautifully they coo. Well yes I have to ..write beautifully, style over substance.

Reading this is comforting to know Ann feels this too. But then compared to me, she knows everything and everybody. So what chance do I stand of not being perpetually exposed as a fraud? I guess the truth is that the inner critic is relentless and indiscriminate in choosing its victims. Intellectual brightness is not an exclusion clause. We are all fair game. Unless of course we decide to stop playing the game. But I have a feeling that we would need to agree to stop together, to break the reinforcement.

Which brings me to the final prompt question, which was daring to challenge us to consider a world without the internalised impostor.

Imagine what it might be like not to feel like a fraud. What would you do? How would life be different?

I would tell it like it is. I would feel liberated, and certainly less bowvered. I would stop British type hedging. I would cease subterfuge; stopping worrying that everyone here except me seems to know their lines the lines. I would be happy to be unmasked, delight in stripping away the layers, layer after layer. Life would be a whole lot clearer. More whole. I would love more deeply. Live more lightly, ride high while I really go for my passions. I would feel joy pulsate through my veins more often. I would not feel like I need to keep pushing against the tide. I would simply be who I am, be the best that I am, being myself at my best to the table.

I would be more confronting, yet also be more content with my lot, happier to stay with my lot, to rock and roll with it all. I would dive deep and dig deep. I would cease to chastise myself, in stead writing without fear, allowing myself to follow my curiosity, wherever it might be headed. I would live much more often in the zone, in a flow state. I would feel less anxious about the necessary minimising I do in the face of multiple demands. I would

finish my PhD with far less citations in fact I would simply surrender a lot of unnecessary anxieties. In fact I feel that this impostor day has been a refreshingly authentic event. I am reminded of how rarely we get to this level of authenticity. And am presented with a vision of how it might be that if we live without the impostor syndrome in our lives.

Ann's response – better than mine of course, mutters my inner critic – says

I would walk to the podium full of confidence. I would look out clear eyed on the assembled group. I would speak from a place of deep certainty and calm. My voice would be steady and even. It would reach to the back of the room and curl around the listeners hearts like smoke ... I would let go of jealousy. I would look at others achievements with equanimity joy even, rejoicing in their success as a part of the collective success, seeing their achievement as cumulative building on mine, adding to mine, rather than detracting from it. There would be enough for all of us. I would not see success as finite... The impostor syndrome is tenacious. It will not be satisfied by easy answers. It had a tyrannous perfection. Shards of ice in Kay's heart. I want to end confidently and strongly. But the perfectionist in me is too deep.

Conclusions drawn from all of this reflecting on dirty writing and dirty reading.

These chapters remind me that the theme of crisis of representation, which I had at the outset largely repudiated for my ICC population, may well have relevance for alternative researchers, and I reflect it could be that this PhD may be speaking to that theme for that population. This sense of researcher crisis was most dramatically revealed to me through meeting Brearly (2006) and discovering details of her work with Australian aboriginals who wished to express their lives through their art, and to gain academic recognition for it. Her research is extraordinary, and it helped immeasurably in my understanding of this crisis. She it was who sang her PhD, causing her external examiners their own problems on the way. She it was who reminded me of my wish to be part of alternative expression, and that this was not just borne of indulgence but was an important carrying of a banner for others less empowered than me. She also challenged me to not funk out of doing this. And it is marvellous to know her name at last. So what do I have to worry about? Get on and do it. Not just in words but in other ways. So what am I worried about? Look at what that lady is risking here it is magnificent really quite magnificent. So I need courage do I not? Go for it. Part of the just do it message is to stick to my guns and to include WoW in

its current form within this PhD write up, as I believe it is an authentic rendition of my method, and also that it may be a contribution in its own right.

I have learned that when I say 'crisis of representation', that this crisis occurs at two levels. There is the crisis of representing a disadvantaged group. Then there is the crisis of re-presentation of the research, of using alternative approaches to discover knowing or meaning. Just as the social grouping might be unacknowledged or disparaged, so too could be the means through which the research is presented, if that way reflects the ways of knowing that work for that group. This has also caused me to ponder on the distinction between arts based methods being seen as means of representing research outcomes in themselves, rather than as means to sources of data.'

A principal method discovery gained from pursuing this line of inquiry in these chapters is that learning is temporary, and that a field could be a temporary learning institution, as Bridger (1972) would style it, though this PhD hardly feels temporary at the point of creating it. Klein (2005) goes further to describe research a 'transitional process'. What is discarded today could beg for inclusion tomorrow. Just as a natural conversation evokes stories that would not surface in another context, so too does the research move on impulse moving recursively through the themes. Part of the discovery is that nothing is ever finished and that we do a disservice when we attempt to force a finish, an ending. To clean things up, to clean the mess from the pavement. I am learning that it is okay for research to be internally messy, to be inconsistent, and to reflect inconsistencies in the world. Research is not a mirroring of perfection, or reflective of a desire for perfection, which can only distort. This is not to say that my method is a deliberate reaching for chaos, or a rejection of coherence. I recognise that we as humans do reach for coherence we need the gestalt complete, we can seldom settle until it is. On the other hand, research need not be driven by this seeking of coherence, and it does need to address indeterminacy. The work of De Certeau (2000) reminds us that research is full of holes, and that what you exclude is as important as what you include. These two chapters which follow WoW are by way of inviting the reader into those otherwise excluded inner conversations and choice points that determine the final public outcome of any text. As much as this chapter opens up on what lies behind the scenes in this research, so it also exposes the truth that this writing will be interpreted by the reader in ways that may or may not reflect my attempt at representation.

This act of editing reminds me once more of the walls subliminal influence, in the way that the principles on the wall have guided the editing process, and of how these ideas being up there on the wall, and now here in the text, and in here in me, mattered. If these principles meant something then, at the point of committing them to the wall, then they mean even more now. A whole lot more. This chapter has also reminded me of the inescapability of the parallel process. This chapter is written by an ICC studying ICCs, and to that extent is perforce bound to be a reflection on the writer and his inner state. To that extent the writer and the reader grow to know more of this species ICC.

Getting Out of the Field the Slow Way.

I sit on a South African sundeck in Cape Town in the improbable heat and push my laptop to one side, gazing out on the azure emptiness. I have been working hard this afternoon on Madam Fud, feeling like I have made some progress and now I need a rest. I struggle to make sense of the contradiction and confusion that Madam Fud brings today, sitting here as I am with neither reference books nor internet access to guide me. I am quite alone and without visible means of support here in my African eerie, except for my journals, research notes and my laptop. There is no opportunity for escape into emails or inviting websites. Well I am not entirely alone, as I have Table Mountain close behind me for companionship and the cold company of the Atlantic seaboard ahead of me reaching fingers out towards Robbin Island and beyond.

I am at last working the 'Life Course' piece, pulling together all of my ICC research conversation data in a heroic attempt to beat coherence and form into it. As I stare at the mountain of material in front of me I wonder how I might ever make sense of this Beast of a writing task that seems to have grown in size since I last put it to one side several months ago. As far as I recall I was all set to write up when the full force of the methods material of the writing on the wall blew through like an irrepressible tornado, sweeping all other priorities to one side until it had exhausted itself. Now that WoW is settled for the time being in chapter form, I am dismayed to discover that the order that I convinced myself prevailed in my treatment of the Beast was a chimera. It was no more intelligible than it seemed in its raw form many months previously. Far from this being an exercise in getting out of the field I was becoming painfully aware that this trip to Cape Town could re-immense me in the original field material to the point of drowning.

The choice of South Africa as a place to progress this PhD after its neglect over the autumn term was made in full consultation with Madam Fud who declared that she needed a touch of the Riviera to revive her; she needed some sun on her book covers. (Incidentally I notice as I return to writing her that Madam Fud has developed a full-blown personality and that she is most definitely feminine). Between us we chose to come to South Africa, a place where I have not returned for seven years despite having lived there for five years during the heady days of Mandela's accession, and I had made a promise to Madam Fud months before that she would have me to myself in a delectable environment.

Well, not quite to herself. There was a call to me to deliver a seminar and a workshop in Johannesburg but then both the seminar and the workshop involved me talking to an audience about her, about Madam Fud, and she approved of that, even if she would not be revealed in her fully finished finery.

A pilgrimage and a retreat.

The choice of South Africa was not a random one; it was not simply selecting a place where the sun might shine during our unreliable winter or a nostalgia fest where I indulged in past glories. It was rather more a pilgrimage, just as my trip in the previous year during the writing of 'Outside View' to Edinburgh had been a pilgrimage. (Interestingly of the places where I have lived, Cape Town and Edinburgh are favourite towns of mine, both of which share as a centrepiece an area of mountainous wilderness slap-bang in the middle of them, where in each instance I was compellingly drawn to expend some energy and gift myself some reflective time. In Edinburgh this area is the volcanic outcrop of Arthur's Seat, in Cape Town it is the rather grander Table Mountain). And as I planned my time in Cape Town, I determined to visit specific places of pilgrimage during the necessary breaks from my writing. I made notes of places that I wished to revisit, noticing with interest that there was in my planning a proper tone of ritualistic solemnity about these proceedings. This morning, after writing from dawn to breakfast I climbed to a pilgrimage site known as Devil's Peak, the highest point on Table Mountain and a lonely promontory rarely walked by tourists or even locals as it is very steep and demanding, without sources of water. I remembered as I hiked up there this morning that because of its unwelcoming nature I had in the past only ever climbed it alone or with my dog, hence my memories of this peak were exclusively solitary ones. It was a tough climb and as I walked I recalled that just before I returned to England for good that I had been up there on a baking hot day, (though I did not know at the time that this was my final trip up there nor that I would be soon to be leaving) when my dog died slowly and tortuously right in front of me.

And as I walked today I asked now as I asked then, what was it that killed her on that hot day? It could have been a scorpion or a snake, both of which are common in the area. It could have been the fact that I did not carry enough water, and was unable to revive her. I remember dragging her down the mountainside over rocks, through harsh thorn bushes at a helter-skelter pace, attempting to get her down to a nearby stream that nestled in the saddle of the mountain, while she gazed at me with pleading Labrador eyes. We never made it; she died about 200 yards above that stream. I remember that I cried. It was rare

to be so close to the death of a loved companion, a fellow adventurer, though not the first time I had someone die in my arms. As I cried I noticed I felt sad and guilty and responsible and alone. The feelings simply poured through me, though while I told myself 'she was only a dog' that didn't of course work. My head was clamouring with questions, and when I returned home many more questions were asked, as I knew they would be. 'Why didn't you bring her down?' 'Why not go back up and bury her?' 'Why not go up right now before the ravens and the eagles have her and bring the body back?. Do you have any idea how upset the children are? Look at them'. Oh really. Whether her death played a small part in the larger picture of my going I will never know, but I would not be surprised were that true. At the time I did not know it was my last time up that hill, the last time I would walk with her, nor did I know that I had decided to leave this country that I had arrived in with such high ambitions and expectations. It is little wonder we human beings do endings with badly, as we so rarely have prescience of their coming.

An encounter with my power animal

While up the mountain this morning I was aware as I conducted my pilgrimage that I was trying to force some kind of transformational moment. I walked past several memorable landmarks where I remembered that insights had occurred for me in the past, all in a flash, coming as they do from nowhere but this time around nothing was happening in the revelation department. I reminded myself it is impossible to force such epiphanies, so I reconciled myself to putting to one side the expectation of instantaneous enlightenment, settling instead for reflective mundanity, for existential ordinariness. And yet when I moved towards the summit, dark shadows in the perfectly blue sky signalled that I that I would be in danger if I tried to gain the triangulation point at the highest point as there were three sentinels around the summit of Devil's Peak. These sentinels presented themselves in the form of three ringed ravens, large black creatures displaying shimmering white dog collars, ravens larger than eagles.

I surmised that they must have been protecting a chick near the summit. I gazed in awe at these creatures, transfixed by their hypnotic magnificence. But I was also frightened, as they were insistent that I should come no further. They moved in very close, close enough for me to see their claws, to see the details of their beaks and eyes, I could smell the menace. I realised that I was in the face of power animals; perhaps my power animal had arrived. (Back in Sheffield at the beginning of this research journey I talked to David Megginson about the invoking of power animals. I was somewhat scoffing of this

metaphysical idea yet now perhaps my power animal had arrived for me at last, in my moment of pilgrimage). I recalled Castaneda had written of power animals in 'The Eagle's Gift' (1981), that book so treasured by a number of my ICC respondents, and perhaps this had been my moment to receive that gift. Perhaps these creatures will protect me in my new metamorphosis, in my most recent phase of becoming. They bring to me the gift of guardianship.

Resigned from the prospect of gaining the satisfaction of making the top, but exhilarated and immeasurably compensated for by my encounter with raw power, I faced the long and dusty track down Devil's Peak. As I gazed down its vertiginous sides I realised that it's a long way down. But then it is always a long way down, after a significant high. And as I descend I am aware of Madam Fud chattering away in the background as always, like some hidden hard disc that never stops whirring, like some systems program that is contactable if you need to hear what it's saying, and sometimes chattering away when it is the last thing you need to hear, like an unwanted tune that you just cant get out of your head. She mutters good naturedly about the peace she felt while writing the 'Writing on the Wall'. I notice how she loves that writing on the wall, perhaps because over these last three years, since her conception, that wall has provided her protection from the moment it first went up on the wall, just as perhaps the power animals might provide me protection now. The wall is her epistemological battlement, her rampart. Then at last her chatter is interrupted by the irresistible beauty of the here and now of the track ahead. This moment of presence is in turn interrupted by the intrusion of the past as old Cape Town memories clamour for attention, inspired as they are by gazing out over the endless hazy panorama that is Table Bay. It is impossible to keep your eyes off it for too long.

As I gaze down on the Law Courts far below, appearing the size of matchboxes - sat squat, stubborn and classical amid an outbreak of trashy Seventies buildings - I am reminded for no discernable reason of my association with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), an institution which at the time in 1996 was shrouded in deep suspicion. It was seen as indulgent, as an unnecessary opening of wounds that could cause humiliation to be brought upon innocent people, for no tangible benefit. We know now that the TRC did not end up fulfilling that gloomy prediction at all. Quite the opposite, and in fact it has become a model for the world, but we didn't know that then. If any country or region needs to move on to another place after a period of open conflict, then it is to the model of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that they turn for inspiration. Its purpose was to bring closure, to bring peace of mind and amid all of the anxiety and

anguish of transition and it largely achieved that aim. This historical prompt evokes in my mind a thought concerning the parallel debate around the methodological criticisms of ethnography and especially of autoethnography as indulgence (Sparkes, 2002) that raged as I put together WoW. I am not aware of anyone accusing the TRC of having been an exercise in indulgence anymore, but rather of a necessary piece of truth telling and of narrative sharing before reconciliation could ever be achieved.

And now, after the dust of that descent, and after a shower I am returned here to the deck above the ocean where the waves splash far below. I look down upon the ocean and at the beach where I walked this morning before I went up the hill. It was high tide and there were the tallest and the highest of waves crashing down onto the beach, transfiguring the flat friendly sand into a mountainous and treacherous landscape of shifting dunes. I was in awe of all of that motion and all of that power, transfixed by that just as surely as I was awestruck by the power animals that were to stalk me later. I look over the balcony now to see the red rooftop of the villa that I first purchased amid wild excitement and expectation thirteen long years ago, when I first decided to move here, thinking perhaps that the move would be forever. And for a moment - as I remember my impatience to take the keys off the agent and move in - time stands still or goes backwards, it is hard to know which, in this moment of suspension. Thirteen years dissolve as if they had never been. That moment of becoming a South African is pregnant in my awareness. The years dissolve as though I had never considered becoming an academic, nor considered what might be involved in the process of going back, which I have learned is never as simple as going out. I realise that I have never truly reflected on that process of becoming a South African, an emergent person in an emergent land, and what learning might be taken from that to inform my understanding of my current transit. And just when it seemed that those skills in being South African were redundant on my return to my old context, now it was clear that they were proving most useful on my return here.

A moment of grace, as I grow to settle on my perch.

As I sit here at the table with my computer in front of me, in the face of this experience of floating timelessness, I feel contented; there is a feeling of being whole, of being at one with an indefinable something, perhaps with the ineffable. Somehow I am experiencing a moment of grace, a gift from nowhere at all, and I luxuriate in this peace of mind. This recognition that I am occupying several existences at the same time, far from unbalancing me brings with it liberation, a new freedom. I recognise that I am returned to a memory

site where previously there has been joy and exhilaration but also a place where there has been at times trauma, loss and some deep and gruelling sadness. So what is it that has brought all this peace of mind to me at this moment? Has it been anything to do with the writing I've been doing, with the impending completion of this dissertation? And as I ask myself that question, the response chimes that this writing has furnished me with many tools to bring some peace of mind now and some peace of mind into the future.

It may well be that in all of this reflection and introspection, I have somehow learned better how to go inside, to know where to look for a place of repose. I would say that this process of writing has assisted me greatly in finding my inner gyroscope. It has helped me to know how to rock and roll better with whatever comes at me, to become more centred, to know where to find my inner strength. About ten years ago a colleague Sue who worked with me shortly after my return to England said simply, out of nowhere at all 'I really do hope that you find your perch'. I was scornful at that, scoffed at her, refusing perhaps to believe that such a perch could ever be found or that even if it could that I would have little use for it, given my nomadic nature. It may well be that what I was doing then was denying that I was in a process of becoming. It is certainly true that there was no notion in my mind of becoming an academic then. But it is interesting that I return to this place to precipitate some finishing while I am deeply in the centre of the becoming process. Now perhaps it may well be that I'm nearer to finding my perch; I'm much surer of my footing now than was back then, or even three years ago. I feel far less likely to lose my footing or to be snagged by the impatient thorns, but then you never know.

I notice now that I am much more in tune I with transition, more settled and more at peace with my life, more settled perhaps than for a long time. An example of this would be that I have said goodbye to some old addictions. On completion of 'An Outside View', in a moment of contentment, clarity and resolve, I quit alcohol, which had been quite a part of my life and of my identity previously and I have not felt the need to go back to the bottle since. I notice that in my life there is less restlessness. If I am in pursuit now, then it is of natural highs in the belief that life can be complete without toxic stimulation. This is not to say that I have rid myself of the invisible addictions, those patterns of thought and feeling that run our programmes without us necessarily being aware of them, but at least dealing with the physical dependencies is a step nearer knowing something about the underlying struggle that drives us to the addictions in the first place. Part of that change I confidently attribute to developing the habit of the written life, a habit that has been deepened by the discipline of constructing this PhD. It has also been stiffened by the sharing of this inner

life with others through the disclosing of extracts of this writing, an action which far from unsettling me has brought with it a strange sense of authenticity, of standing firmly in my own space and clearly marking who I truly am. This is exemplified by my increasing comfort with publicly crossing the private: personal boundary in my everyday disclosures, the effect of which seems to draw others in, encouraging them to open up more also.

I was also reinforced in a growing understanding that it is impossible to force deeper transition and its underlying psychological adjustments, anymore than I can force moments of grace or the realisation of insights, just as I discovered yet again up Devil's Peak today. What I sense that I must do instead is to 'stalk' just as Castaneda recommended we should in 'The Eagle's Gift' (1981) Despite the revision of much of his work – and the exposure of him as a fake, which I can hardly complain of - I remain drawn to this notion of stalking. In fact I am entertaining the idea that the performance of active conscious stalking of ones desires, of ones prey might be an important part of this becoming process.

I have drawn from this act of writing a sense of redemption, recognising its confessional power. And within that process of redemption there lies a recursive element that has an almost hypnotic quality about it, as I stalk the inner meaning, where there has been the continuous cycle of search and re-search again. Around and around swirls the process of becoming, tuning into the ebb and flow, just as the tide pounded in and out this morning, sometimes gentle and other times infinitely powerful in its mood, unforgiving in its relentlessness.

The process of becoming is deeper than the re-design of superficial life structures.

My life has greatly changed over the last three years, perhaps inalterably so, and most certainly at a structural level, at the level of career artefacts, of roles and jobs and such like observable externalities. And while a perch has been created at the university and my personal economy has changed drastically (and not necessarily for the better), I also notice that there has been a shift at a deeper level, a shifting of deeper structures where the tectonic plates lie. I suggested earlier that I am now more attuned, more open to transition than ever before in my life. By the same token - though I remain alive to the possibilities and attractions of change- I am not compulsively or addictively seeking change or novelty, which is a welcome change from some of my patterns in the past. And while I acknowledge that this slowing propensity for change and its attendant upheavals is

in part to do the inevitability of slowing down through aging, I do not believe that 'you're just getting older' is the whole story. For example, as I have recently mooched around Cape Town and its environs, I have heard at several points a distinct siren call, compelling me back to South Africa. And I have willingly tried this on, this prodigal's return. I have tried on not only the mental model but also the embodiment of being South African again, and I felt the seduction of it all over again.

There have been strange moments on the turning of a corner in the city or on a bend on a mountain pass where elapsed time has been suspended, where as if none of the last ten years has occurred, when I am back here again, as though I have never been away. I notice that when Capetonians had been in conversation with me after I had been back here a few days that they showed a momentary confusion, as if they were not sure if I was one of them or not, but I notice after two weeks that I am increasingly embraced, accepted. I speak like them, I sound like them, and I pick up the tones and the clues all over again, but with prior inside knowledge, as I engage with re-becoming. I realise that I could simply merge into the Capetonian soup once more and be utterly absorbed, I could simply abandon myself to all of this, and I know that in a short time my latest forays into UK academia could be quite forgotten. I experience both resistance and surrender to the re-becoming and the un-becoming processes.

I also know that having a choice – knowing that I have alternative becoming or re-becoming pathways – in fact strengthens the commitment to becoming what I am in the process of becoming now. I reason that it is better to be choosing between attractive and available options than to be moving in a direction because it is the only option. It occurs to me as I reflect on my new world that for many people university is the only environment that they have ever known, and that the process of becoming whatever their own variation on the theme of being an academic is occurred far enough back in time for its assumption bases rarely if ever to be subjected to current challenge. I am reminded of the power of having multiple points of reference in one's life, if one is ever to make any kind of detached assessment of one's current circumstances. I would most certainly advocate a period of living outside of one's habitual culture to anyone, if they are to really appreciate and understand what their heritage might be, and to know also how that culture is received by others.

As much as there is becoming so might there be unbecoming also.

So I hear an inner bell summoning me back to my old southern African life at the same time as I am in receipt of encouraging invitations from South African friends and acquaintances made at a practical, material level to come back too. It is flattering to be asked after all that has gone before and then there is the sunshine, and the economy is booming, how seductive it all is, I sigh to myself. And if I came back I reason that I would return with a different perspective, I would be a different person, understanding and appreciating it all better a second time around. As I dwell for a moment on what I would be leaving behind, I know in fact how quickly that feeling of loss would go and how I would immediately immerse myself in this newness, I realise how quickly the transition would happen. But I intuitively resist the siren call, while at the same time flirting with it; I know that I am not ready again for the full pendulum swing although I know I could do it.

But as I test out my readiness to go back, and resolve that now is not the time, I cannot but fail to notice how I am relishing this exercise in infiltration of a familiar but changed environment. I am thoroughly enjoying penetrating this SA society once more and enjoying the fact that I know how to do that. The ethnographer in me is enjoying my anonymity, my engaged detachment as I stalk my understanding of the new scene. I am enjoying knowing the subtle clues of culture and of expression, knowing how to morph; I am instinctively deploying all of those skills of malleability and mutability which have been so central to this research. My sense is that I am deploying these capabilities not only to provide me with entertainment or distraction; but that they are here deep within me, they seem to be part of my default position. But I know also that the under-cover agent can be flipped, that the anthropologist can go native. I am alive to the possibility of relapse, to the possibility that I could abort the process of becoming an academic and revert to being a consultant once more, here in South Africa or elsewhere. I could relapse just as my abstinence from alcohol could relapse. All of the best relapse advice would say not to flirt with the possibility of falling away from grace, but is hard to resist. And despite the wisdom of Alcoholic Anonymous counselling against the folly of 'doing a geographical', where you move to a new town, new friends new job but soon enough find yourself sliding back into old habits, the seduction of movement as a proxy for inner change exerts a powerful pull; it is important for me to recognise how susceptible I am to the seduction of the return as much as to the seduction of the new. I thought maybe that I had unbecome a South African but now on return I recognise that the programming never completely goes it

away. It can very easily be reinstalled, while wiping out that which has been put in place since.

I reflect that if there is a process of becoming then there may well be a process of unbecoming also, just as there are those who believe that a degree of unlearning is necessary before learning can begin afresh. I have also been intrigued by my recent discovery of the concept of coachability, which suggests that an individual being highly susceptible to being coached is not all unalloyed joy. The caution lies in the fact that just as the individual can be coached into new ways of thinking and acting one day, so too can she or he be reprogrammed the next day to act in quite a different way. A student of ours recently wrote a dissertation on the subject of 'disidentification' as his description of what mid career managers need to go through before they can truly leave the institution they have spent most of their working lives in, which was strongly argued and exemplified, emphasising that there is a process in the middle of transition before a new identity can easily be adopted.

Part of the seduction of return is that in wearing this South African cloak and this mask I've been able to get inside of quite a few things while I've been here. I've had deep and really difficult conversations with both black and white people for example on how racism has changed but how it is still deeply ingrained, and of how it plays out in all of its complexity. I know that these are not frequent or familiar or easy conversations for the people I have had them with and it feels a privilege to have gained access to them. In general it felt great that I know my way around and to be among people who can talk openly with me.

Gaining a point of observation on my becoming.

By and large I decide that this intuitive decision to come to South Africa has been the right one. Part of the wish to come here was to return to the zone, to gain a point of observation and to return to that sense of expanded time that had characterised the earlier stages of the writing of 'Outside View', to step once more into that luxurious space where the slender threads invite and where synchronicity prowls. There was a wish to get away from a teaching life that had become fragmented and extremely full of people. Part of the busyness and the fragmentation had been of finding out of the new rules, the new ways of playing the game in my new job. There was all of that passing (and failing) of the tests, many of them invisible. There was proving myself, of knowing how to prove myself

in small ways and big ways, sometimes in light ways, other times more serious. There was the infiltration of my new world, and the presenting of myself in my new guise. I found myself rising to the challenge but also noticed the pressure of all of this presenting of myself too. The apprentice inside of me was keen to know how he was doing, keen to prove that he was capable but also at some level wondering if he would ever be the master again. And although at times I have been mentoring my students and some junior teachers, a large part of me has been experiencing those unwelcome sensations of being the sorcerer's apprentice all over again, which does not get easier with age, in fact it gets more difficult. It has been taxing and splitting to be dealing with this confusion of identities.

But while I am away here alone I can shed both of these identities, I need be neither master nor apprentice. I can take the advice of Wheatley (1994) and seek my 'point of observation', where I can see my situation with fresh eyes and work to make sense of what is occurring and what might need to emerge next.

Donning the cloak of the visiting academic.

This time in Cape Town was briefly interrupted by a trip up to Johannesburg where I had been asked by two university groupings to come and talk about autoethnographic research method, and about the role of ICCs. I had not realised until I arrived that I would be given some kind of red carpet treatment, being addressed as doctor and having earnest inquiries into my views on almost anything that might come up. It was startling to discover how few views I had truly developed and I had to make a few up just to keep the conversation rolling. My work is powerfully received and invitations to return were soon warmly extended. It was very good to talk to some students who were just starting out on the autoethnographic adventure. This was a powerful reminder for me of how it all was for me, just two years ago when first starting out with this writing as inquiry adventure, and how this teaching of the same method far away from home had brought the whole thing full circle. There was among a writing group a cynical academic who was very challenging but also in the end proved helpful to me in causing me to slow down and to think hard for a justification of all of this writing and reflecting. As argued with him I was acutely aware of revealing my vulnerability, and was reminded of powerful words of wisdom from Carolyn Ellis 'not to bleed when there are sharks about'. But what the hell, I bled anyway.

The doctoral participants in the autoethnography laboratory talked movingly of their work, to the point of spilling tears, and it was a good reminder that this work does matter, it matters intensely to the people who are involved in this opening up of their lives and of their context. It is far from a trivial or 'academic' matter, in fact it is humbling to be facing it directly as it struggles to gain life and expression. Perhaps it is important to know that research is not entirely intellectual at all, and yet even in this work of mine in writing as inquiry as in the work so many others there is of necessity a strong privileging of words, as academia is most of all still a wordy place. The linguistic turn cannot be ignored. We inquired between us how we could move away from words towards something more embodied. Both white and black writers felt relatively voiceless, so I relayed to them the story of Laura from Australia, the PhD researcher who is telling the Aboriginal story by singing and painting it, and encouraging the aboriginals to tell their stories also, through non written Masters and PhD programmes that seek emancipation through alternative expression.

My audience was profoundly moved by this tale, a response which provoked feelings of shame in me, as I remembered how easy it was for we European academics to be knowing and slightly mocking of this not written but sung PhD. But then I know that there was something in that primitivism, in that naïveté that was more deeply moving in a way that is rarely reached through much of the intellectual sophistry that we western academics gather round us in some form of supposed defence of our expression.

For those in that group that were intellectually opposed or resistant to the primitive I also shared some details of the Ruth Leitch 'Spoon Drawer' autoethnography (2005) and this seemed to assist in their understanding that academics can also experience humiliating, chaotic, embodied experiences which defy conventional expression. Reading Ruth Leitch with the group was a reminder that there are many academics who struggle with letting go of the Meccano set approach, who struggle with loosening up and allow the stream of consciousness to come through, as it fights against so much of their conditioning. I am aware yet again as I spoke, and I write this that perhaps I have the opposite problem, that perhaps my internal structures are way too loose. But it is important to know though we all come at this dilemma from different directions, that the tension between lyricism and restraint still remains a demanding challenge for each of us to face in either instance.

I also share with this audience my experience of moving from that conference where the aboriginal song cycle was sung to jump on a plane and head for the intellectual left-

brainness of the British Academy of Management conference, reflecting on how I manage to make my moves between those two very different and probably incompatible worlds without my identity completely imploding. I thought as I spoke about Ann's fascination with my ability to live in two worlds whereas she cannot, and how that reflects upon my malleability. I noticed as I shared this that I no longer feel defensive about this capacity to switch between worlds, that I accept it as true. I also structured my time in such a way that I moved from that deeply unconventional - in South African terms - academic group towards a much more conventional presentation at another university down the road. This juxtaposition which may well exemplify not only this capacity of mine to move between worlds but also my habit of structuring my life in such a way that I am required to demonstrate such agility often without a moment to take breath and to inquire why I do this in this way, or to reflect on the cost of this to me.

This journey to the second Johannesburg university also brought me close to another colleague who was busy finishing her PhD. This relationship was nicely competitive around PhD finishing and she was reminding me of how you have to know what game you're playing at any point in your life, if you are to play that game right. And she was reminding me that the game that we were in now was the game of finishing the PhD and all other things needed to be subordinate to that. She then spelt out all of the rules of finishing that she adhered to. I was spell bound by this, and began to realise that my finishing was unlikely to happen unless I adopted similar rules. I'm reminded that early on when I began this PhD I was saying that the formal qualification didn't matter but that telling my story did, in a way I wanted to tell it, regardless of the demands of formalism. I look back now and wonder whether that was a defence, as I now realise that both things matter. Telling the stories matters and getting the formal qualifications matters too. Try telling Brearley and her aboriginal students that representation, that legitimation don't matter. Of course they do. In a lesser way my gaining my PhD certainly matters for my sense of status and equivalence with my colleagues, and it remains central to my formal becoming. The process of becoming has both an internal and an external component.

So what sort of academic do I feel I am becoming?

After leaving the clamour of Johannesburg and rushing to the airport amidst all types of upset hotel check-out arrangements and nearly missed flights, I returned here to my haven to finish writing, expecting to immediately pick up from where I had left off. But on my return I found to my distress that it was difficult to pick up on the writing again, it all

seemed in pieces once more, and it was hard to know where to start to pick up the pieces once more. And yet as I got into the work, I found that quite soon I had slipped back into the zone almost without realising it. I was alone but not lonely. I was enjoying the triumph of being among the lively silence once more. After a morning of satisfying writing which I had taken to the point of not being able to do much more without forcing it, I went downtown to the Home Affairs to renew my ancient work permit, for you never knew when you might want to come back. I discovered after two hours waiting that I was not to be bureaucratically processed after all, as the office was shutting for the day. Me and about fifty Zimbabwean refugees were turned out on the streets to fend for ourselves for the evening.

I was interested to notice my reaction this knock back. I did not get back into the frustration I might have felt when I lived here ten years ago; instead I shrugged and laughed it off, a luxury which I realised was not open to the Zimbabweans who would retreat to god only knows where to pass their evening. I went for a walk in the streets and suddenly I was struck by a great sense of aliveness, of a-where-ness. As I walked through the Company Gardens, a foundation place in Cape Town, I was aware of people sleeping in the shade under the original British ordered bushes, there were lovers lying beneath trees and elsewhere there were solitary reflective coffees being had as the pages of the newspaper turned under the welcome shade of umbrella palms. This did not seem to me like a country in turmoil. I did not feel like a person in turmoil. Coming here had transported me back to being the best I can remember. I was buoyed by a sense of returning home.

That evening I went up Lions Head, another much loved mountain serving as a pilgrimage site. It was a fine evening and many young people were going up to spend the evening watching the sun go down, before descending by the light of the imminent full moon. I spoke to a very fit young Dutchman who declared that he runs a very busy operation down town but that he needs to come here three or four times a week to clean his head out, to gain his point of observation. He called it his mountain top laundermat. I returned in the moonlight just before the main group began their descent. As I picked my way down the track I could hear the waves on the beach, see the reflection of the stars on the sea. The whole scene was impossibly beautiful and romantic; I feel whole and complete, the afternoon's mood of peacefulness segueing delightfully into evening.

As I wended my way down before the last of the light went I reflected on my last hasty departure from this country, recognising somewhat painfully that while endings mean a degree of waste they can also clean and purify. As I allow this reflection to be applied to my PhD I recognise that there has been quite a bit of waste in the method followed also. There has much been discarded but I am aware that what has been discarded could find a new life somewhere else. It is rather like that Bowen poem where the pieces of the quilt which are left over are used to make another quilt elsewhere. There have of course been painful losses but the phoenix has been able to rise from the ashes. Nothing is ever truly lost.

As I think about other alternative worlds, from this point of observation in Africa, I am compelled seriously to pull away from the minutiae of finishing to examine the purpose of this research project I am currently engaged with. I determine that I need to ask whether this examination of those in mid business careers seeking to become academics in a western context is really a crisis of representation that I am addressing, when I look out here at the fundamental crises all around me, beyond our affluence, beyond our academic comfort zone. The crises that I address seem pitifully shallow rich men's crises; they comprise luxurious crises well beyond the means or even the comprehension of most Africans. They would kill to have crises such as these, I surmise.

So I ask am I becoming a Laura or a BAM stereotypic clone? I speculate that the embodied approach is far more likely to yield true engagement with enduring change than the intellectualised and largely elitist Academy of Management ethos. I further argue that in my becoming I should be choosing radical embodiment over respectability and status, as it seems that life rarely allows you to occupy both spaces at once, though the radical in all of us also craves some respectability and approval also. A contradictory voice indicates that that is not a matter of once and for all choosing, that I occupy an important liminal space between these two academic universes and that there is worthwhile bridging that I could do between these two worlds, as few others occupy that liminal space. And I am reminded again this process of choosing what it is that you wish to become is never finished. I recognise that there is a parallel process between the dilemmas of finishing this fud and finishing this process of becoming as we move towards being in our new identity. I need to be open to the awareness that none of this is ever finished. There will always be holes as well as wholes and all of that wanting to tie life up with a bow should maybe be dismissed as a dangerous fantasy that gets us all in more trouble than we could ever know.

Is it possible to finish? Anything?

I asked as I mused on my solitary afternoon and evening post my writing if it possible to truly leave somewhere? I asked if it possible to ever really unbecome someone; or does a fractal of that lived experience always remain? Answers come there few, as I force myself from this extended and I suspect diversionary reverie to gaze once more at my screen to attend to the finishing of 'Life Course'. I notice how little I'm enjoying this business of finishing. I notice I have pushed all of my paperwork quite to one side as I have sat daydreaming upon the deck. I'm caught in a battle between the devil and the detail, the battle between capturing the mood, entering the zone which will once more enable the writing to flow, and these million microscopic decisions that need to be made when editing needs to be done which threaten to destroy the lyricism. This is the point at which discipline gets its revenge on the excesses of desire. At some level the whole editing process feels like a giant Sudoku puzzle. If I put that number in there then what does it do to that number over there in the other square? It seems that there are a million tiny precise moves to be made amid a collection of the big ideas; there is a constant sense of balancing. I find myself checking, testing, looking everywhere for balance and yet I need to remind myself that this is a messy business. No matter how much I might wish to strive for perfection, I'm never going to find that neatness. The geometry will always be elusive, which perhaps means that I need to be content with the metaphor instead. But then after all it was the magic of the metaphor that I wished to embrace, not the geometry which perhaps I should leave to others as they attempt to force fit it around that metaphor. I think I always realised that the seduction of geometry and of its attendant of perfection, would prove to be elusive, so perhaps I need to settle for the metaphoric level in my editing too, and learn to live with the imprecisions and the pieces that plumb don't fit.

To move to another metaphor this finishing feels like mosaic making. I remember many years ago writing a piece on the making of a mosaic, it was an extended metaphor about the consulting process and was written for a consultancy whose name was Mosaic. I am back in touch now after twenty years with the co-owner and founder of that consultancy. It is only with the writing of this PhD that I have reached out for her again after all these years, though I have thought of her often, and I discover that after a time in Corsica where she journeyed after she left Bristol she is now over in California, after a spell in South Africa. (One thing is for sure, she is not short of multiple points of reference). In her current reincarnation in California she is promoting and the creating a company that

supplies free wind-up radios to Africa and so we complete a geographical full circle. Here I am in Africa and there is my friend, a long way away with another ocean crashing on her doorstep, creating these wind-up radios that bring the news of the world – and perhaps of their world - to the African people on my current doorstep. She is a classical, in fact a quintessential independent co-creator, and though she is not yet a direct respondent to this piece her finger prints are all over this research. Ah, the temptation of the melusine yet again to pull in just one more person.

For it is insufficient to carry my friend inside she must be summoned, she must be manifested says the temptress melusina. And yet I know that the finishing will never occur this way. But then what discontinuous moment will usher in the finishing, what will cause this indeterminacy to resolve? I am reminded this finishing is in part about allowing the process of 'Hare Brain: Tortoise Mind' to work through, as Claxton (1997) once advised that we must. I also notice how hard it is for me to allow the tortoise to go at the pace that she needs to go at to make sense of things. The tortoise needs the time it needs to reveal what it needs to reveal; but the hare is overjoyed to be irrepressibly jumping around the field, finding it difficult to stay still even for a moment to allow the chatter to subside.

What is becoming more and more apparent is this will never be complete; it will always be a work in progress. As De Certeau (2000) has implied, this work will always be full of holes. I am reminded that the whole business is messy to the point where there's little point in trying to clean it up. In fact I'm reminded that perhaps I do this work a disservice when I try to clean it up, or when I try to put some sanitary frames around it. Research is a transitional process, it is nothing more. Amid all of this pressure of needing to finish – and the accompanying surrender to the fact that it never will be finished, I remind my self that I wanted to enjoy every phase of this project, to enjoy finishing it as much as I enjoyed starting out and have enjoyed the middle bit too, despite all of the frustrations. And yet I know I move towards the end that there is a need for planfulness, there is a need for laying out of chapters, for the counting of words and for the knowing of how one piece fits with another jigsaw-like. This flies in the face of the writing as discovery principle which my head says I now need to abandon, but even now as I move towards the end, discovery writing prevails. It is proving a very difficult habit to break and perhaps one that I do not want to break. Because I think I persist in the belief that the strange attractor that will pull all of this together lies in the realm of the emergent. It cannot be planned or bullied or controlled into existence. And I intuitively know that the strange attractor has not revealed itself yet, despite the staling and the pushing and the forcing

and the patient waiting. Perhaps after all this is a matter of belief of a faith, this emergence and complexity caper. Perhaps it is an ontological matter.

A strange attractor leads me out of the field towards finishing school.

My need to see the whole, to embrace the whole is I realise greater than I had supposed. Perhaps that is why this seeking of the strange attractor is so important to me, to pull the whole thing together. I was aware that when I left my PhD to go teaching back in September, despite all of the work during the summer to bring it together, that I had left my research completely in pieces for the second time, or so it seemed. What I had brought with me to South Africa, I was alarmed and dismayed to discover, was more fragmented than I had supposed, with multiple pieces of metaphoric mosaic scattered all over the hard drive while I was anxious to get my arms around the whole, to coax Madam Fud back into wholeness. And as I sit here today at last giving my undiluted attention to the laptop and look at these many fragments, what occurs is that my research diary, the research diary so cherished during the early days of this research, has come powering back to the fore once more, filled as it is filling now in front of your and mine eyes, crowded with a miscellany of ideas, thoughts, diagrams and fleeting impressions, which I realise are all ways of representing of experience, each in their own attempting to capture the elusive whole.

In addition to the spontaneous outpouring of simultaneous new ideas and connections, there are yellow stickies, there are scribbled things in the margins of drafts which I can barely detect but which once they become clear remind me of the power they held at the time when they were written down, though that power is inevitably diluted. Behind all of this kaleidoscopic material lies the haunting fear that I might have thrown something vital out. Just at the point of discovery of something really important that I thought I was lost I feel the joy of reunion, only for that to be quickly replaced by a panic that if I could have lost that thought – and it was a big one – then there might have been even bigger ones that I have let slip away, which may be lost forever.

And yet amidst this I'm reassured that if things are lost then lots of other things have made it through that I thought that I had completely forgotten about. And I learn all over again that nothing is ever completely lost. If it matters then the thought or the person or the feeling will find its way back, it always seems to, it is never gone for ever. As the pieces begin to fall back into shape, there is growing within me an increasing sense that I'm

approaching the home straight and that what I have here in front of me is in good enough shape to bring it home. Rather like finding the road down from the mountain I'm beginning to sense the end and relief that comes with that. I sense the possibility of rejuvenation at the end. But I know that I must discover the organising principle that will pull madam fud together again, humpty dumpty like, but it has not revealed itself yet.

Returning to Cape Town has brought a sense of closure for me. I realise now there was much unfinished business left in this place, some of it painful, and that somehow being here has dealt with some of that, without having to take direct contact with those that were a part of that pain, and whom I have not visited this time around, preferring anonymity instead. I'm at peace with the place and just as that has brought a degree of closure to me in being here, so too has it ushered in the possibility of closure for the PhD. Perhaps Madam Fud is at last preparing to make her final move.

.As I think back to my original struggle between discipline and desire, I'm reminded that the birthing of this thesis was painful. I do not want it to be a painful ending but I know that there will be losses. As I sit here on the deck I'm reminded of the early reading of the Rut and River stories (Markova, 1994) that captivated me early on. I wish this to be a river story. Suddenly out of nowhere I am assailed by a vivid flashback of me reading Okri's 'The Famished Road' (1991) on my deck of my first house here which lies directly below where I sit right now. If ever there was a river story then it was Okri's story. He would have never conceded to the academic Meccano set approach and his lyricism was sublime. I'm reminded and inspired by that lyricism now. I resolve as I start out on my new career to keep both selves alive if I am to truly engage with learning. And not to allow the formalism, the bureaucracy and the accompanying world weary cynicism to kill the lyricism within. The spirit of Okri reminds me that this venture is about embracing a world of entrancement, a thought which paradoxically galvanises me into action.

With a new sense of urgency, I reach to grab a version of 'The Prologue' which I wrote many months before then put aside, a short sardonic piece that presented an insiders view of co-creatives life course to a somewhat jaundiced but interested audience. I enjoyed writing this, without really knowing where it was heading, not least as it offered light relief from the seriousness of the truckload of data facing me. I shared an early version of this with my wife, who declared that it was fun and insightful, but it was nowhere near ready yet. I trusted her judgment, though part of me wanted to go public with this. I labelled it 'The Prologue', imagining it as the frontispiece of my PhD, and returned to it,

doodling with it quite frequently over the intervening six months, without taking it too seriously. I even thought of throwing it out, afraid that it might seem heretical.

Eventually – after months of mud wrestling with methods related writing such as WoW – when the substantive material was quite put down, and at a time when I was in increasing despair with the still corpulent document that had earned the nick name 'The Beast', I returned to 'The Prologue.' And then it happened, almost automatically. The indigestible information in The Beast began to transpose itself into the idiom of the Prologue. In the end, I surrendered to this process, to the point where 20,000 words were reduced to 5000 or so, in sardonic Prologue style. I was deeply concerned that this did no justice at all to the inquiry that had preceded it, until I shared it with a number of collaborators, who declared it good. As did my wife, who pronounced it nearly ready, that it was a 'good start', and that it seemed to be heading towards a conclusion. All of which was profoundly to my relief. But I was still not convinced that this was it, so I put it aside once more.

And yet I had been avoiding the final finishing of this for quite some time, despite these reassuring noises. Yet I know now that this is that finishing moment, as all else is put aside and the musing declared over, while I attend to this finishing. The bird song fades into the distance as I tap on the keys, bursting towards an eventual ending. And what appears on my screen at the end of all of this is the final version of 'The Life Course of Independent Co-Creatives'.

The Life Course of Independent Co-Creatives.

Welcome to our world, the mysterious world of independent co-creatives. Some would say a world of alchemists, sages, shamans and necromancers. And others would say of charlatans and of opportunistic chancers. Perhaps you have seen us, prowling the corridors of your Corporations, dispensing our wisdom, offering our potions. Or if not in the corridors, then likely in your training rooms, or in a nearby hotel, where, it is rumoured, we hold your managers captive while we spin our spells. You may have met us as a life coach; of glimpsed us through the blinds of group self development rooms. You may even have been in that training room yourself, sat there in an uneasy circle, no table for protection or defence, while the flip charts fills with the facilitator's squiggles and unlikely looking diagrams. Come on, you know the sort of squiggles, the ones that make you feel that if you look at in a certain way, from a certain angle, then you will begin to see the same shapes and profound meanings that the facilitator divines within them. Or you might see the old hag and the young woman, but never at the same time. But then it would not surprise you if you saw nothing at all, though you dare not pronounce to the class that your mind was empty. Perhaps your natural inclination is to join in enthusiastically, see where it all leads. Or you may be more in the mood to join the huddled smokers at the break, to mutter darkly about what may really lie behind this latest attempt at corporate manipulation.

From the questions that you ask of us during your well earned breaks from this mix of intense self reflection and blue sky strategising, it is clear that you are curious to know what sort of human beings co-creatives really are, to know how we are when we are not showing up on your premises as softly-spoken yet insistent masters of the universe. You may want to know something of our lives, where we come from and how we got into this curious business in the first place. It may even be that you want to become an independent co-creative or consultant yourself, and wish to know about all of the things that happen behind the scenes that cause us to be in existence in the first place. And you may wish to know what it is that enables us to sustain such an apparently ephemeral career, carving a living out of seeming fresh air. If such questions exercise you, then allow

me if you will to escort you on a brief guided tour of our mysterious realm, and of our passage through it, from beginning to until end. You might call it our life's course.

To assist in this enlightenment, I have drawn not only on my own reflections, but also upon those of my co-creative companions of long ago, and of more recent times, engaging them in deep and private conversation to gain an insider view of their inside secrets. These discoveries guide and shape this narrative that you read now.

The journey towards independent practice is a fragile one. This may not always seem to be the case in retrospect. Looking back it may seem as if our journey was in fact preordained, but the reality is that that is not quite the case. What looks from the outside like a strong robust independent practice with some long-standing clients, bearing a confident, even self-satisfied presentation to the world, most probably had a decidedly fragile existence in its immature years.

We have moved towards this state of independence from a wide variety of backgrounds, to the extent that it is difficult to generalise as to the exact nature of the primordial soup that has delivered each of us into this unusual way of life. Each of us has differing points of departure, including managerial positions, and management consulting; academia; personal growth type roles which often began as a hobby then grew more serious; and entrepreneurial businesses. What is fascinating – to us at least – is that, despite these differing start points, we have each ended up in a very similar place, in relation to how we are positioned in the world, and in the freedoms that we have created for ourselves around the choices we make. This evident similarity is most apparent in the values that we hold. These values include openness to change; self-direction; a pursuit of excitement; a strong appetite for personal freedom, and a variety of beliefs that could be broadly gathered under the banner of spirituality, though many of us take exception to that word. As this narrative unfolds, I trust that you will grow to understand how we come to occupy similar life and values positioning at this stage of our lives, starting as we did from such different points.

Although our life positioning is similar, the roles in which this 'independent co-creation' is manifested vary widely. We share easily identifiable common ground in management and organisation consulting, a role that most of us have occupied at some point in our careers, but we have also branched out into many other arenas of activity through time. These alternative roles would include entrepreneurial roles such as marketers or 'ecopreneurs'

for innovative 'green' products; film making, setting up a western riding school in the USA; coaching of all types including sports and musical coaching; the creating and running of conference centres and retreats; involvement in the creative arts at many levels, including working with a string quartet, and managing an Irish band; and for many of us a passionate involvement in environmental projects, well before this became in vogue. We each of us have also engaged with education and learning at a variety of different levels, both formal and informal, for adults as well as for young people. We have also - with varying degrees of success - been the creators and developers of significant intellectual property matter, this IP often relating to these educational endeavours. Our interests and passions have led naturalistically and somewhat inevitably towards involvement on a number of political fronts too, often in the van in the liberation of minorities, or on environmental issues, but this political interest has rarely been executed in a formal political role. A review of our various histories also reveals excursions into a variety of therapeutic and advisory roles, including sex education.

We move in and out of these roles with apparent ease. A common denominator is that in the case of each of these projects or passions, the orientation towards them has been one of 'co-creation'. This activity is characterised by us working *with* our customers, staff, stakeholders, rather than 'doing unto them', and not imposing upon them ideas and beliefs from the positioning of expert or guru. This co-creative preference is nowhere better illustrated than in the names of our businesses, where the co-creative propensity manifests itself as a putative brand. These names would include Co-Development International, Meta-bridge, The Space Between, and many others. These names also speak strongly to the notion of liminality, of betwixt and between, a shadowy area that is the place where much of our co-creation work is realised.

A further defining characteristic is our passion for the development process, for starting something up and taking it somewhere else while we journey together with those whom are intimately involved with the project. Or through bringing into the centre those who have previously been on the fringes. A belief that guides this co-creative practice is that 'change occurs in the crucible of relationship'. A corollary of this appetite for creation is that we may well be poor completers or finishers, though some would suggest that we get better at seeing things through as we grow older. We love nothing better than being in at the start up and early development of an idea of project, along with others. It enlivens and rejuvenates us.

Many of us feel that we have occupied this space called independence for most all of our lives. As we have grown up and moved through life's phases, we have naturally felt ourselves to be at some level outside of things. That is not to say that we have always been alone, far from it, but it suggests that, wherever we have landed in life, we have not felt as though we fully belonged.

This sensation of being an outsider has been there from the very beginning of our conscious lives, sometimes as a result of our positioning and roles in the family, or from profound dislocation as a result of many early geographical and education moves. We had to learn to adapt, to survive from pretty early on. These early experiences proved crucial in forming the independent that eventually burst out of the chrysalis and appeared confidently on the world stage at a much later date. For many of us, our position in family and our family circumstances meant that we felt that we were growing up as a virtual small group facilitator from quite early on in our lives. A small small group facilitator.

A number of us feel that we have entertained a sense of higher purpose from an early stage in their lives. We have felt that there was a calling, a vocation towards formal priesthood, or a calling to medicine, to healing or to teaching, though that calling didn't seem to quite fit somehow. And yet the discovery of independent co-creation did satisfy that latent calling towards serving a wider purpose, and allowed that calling to reach towards its fullest and most powerful expression.

Given such a history of outsider-ness, it has for many of us been little short of miraculous to discover this singular life space, where being an outsider is regarded a distinctive competence, for which we are well recognised and rewarded. Such acknowledgement comes as a profound relief, after years of being in roles where the shoes have not fitted, or at least have not felt at all comfortable.

As I listened to the stories of what has caused ICC's to choose the independent life, it became clear that each of us could identify a 'forcefield of factors' that were driving us away from our existing situation, contrasting with those factors that were attracting us towards a new one. For example, for those with a corporate background, the forces that caused them to move away included the stifling vagaries of corporate life and all of the pressures to conformity that lay therein. Their wish was to escape the tightening straitjacket of performance management, and to face the exhaustion that comes from being stereotyped as the outsider, the maverick, the misfit. At some point we reach the

stage where we become tired of being demonised, of being cast aside, of being censored, of being rendered voiceless, of being alienated. At that point we say to ourselves 'I've had enough of that, there is too much pain each time I visit that institution to be reminded of this, I need to get away from it, I can take this re-stimulation for only so much longer'.

On the other hand there is part of the forcefield that is moving towards a scenario where we experience a sense of freedom and autonomy, where we have control over our own lives. We realise that in that place we will have the ability to change significant aspects of our lives, our beings, without being censored for doing that, or where the censorship has little influence upon us. We also move towards to a positioning where we have room to discover our own voice, rather than feeling that we are playing the role of institutional glove puppet. We are aware in this process that we are seeking a place in life where we feel that our natural values are allowed a space to breathe and to grow strong, rather than those values being compromised distorted and generally mangled. This movement 'towards' involves a subtle and sometimes stumbling progress towards alignment of these natural values with a growing sense of our life's purpose.

This force field is finely balanced, and it is interesting to dwell upon the tipping points that eventually propel us towards independence. For some this tipping point occurred in the past around an 'interruption' to the normal course of their lives, including dramatic events such as illness (sometimes life threatening), redundancy, the break-up of a relationship, or a divorce. For some it was a conjunction of a number of these interruptions occurring simultaneously that was the catalyst for this major life transition.

As we discussed these tipping points there were also frequent mentions of 'transformational moments', where suddenly the new direction became clear through a damascene moment, when through the media of a phrase or a crystallised vision the way forward became compellingly clear. These moments occurred during personal growth events or at seminars, or through encounters with individuals or in nature. Each of us could identify moments where synchronicity – captured in Jung's paper 'Synchronicity: an acausal connecting principle' (1972) – oiled the wheels of our unfolding narratives, where it shaped and defined our journey. Synchronicity occurs more often when we are in a liminal space, on the threshold between states, or when we are in free flow, or in the zone, when life seems to be occurring naturally around us in the way it should, without conscious effort or agency on our part. Jowarski, (1996) a scenario planner whom we

would claim as one of our own, writes of the ushering in of 'predictable miracles' which he believes can happen on a communal as well as on an individual basis.

The decision to pursue the independent life is often influenced by wishing to follow the example of a role model, who more often than not is a mentor. In our conversations, there were interesting variations in the extent to which we seek out mentors, guides and seers. Some really wished this guidance, while others seemed positively resistant, wishing to do it their own way, particularly where mentors had been imposed. One among us cottoned onto the fact that there are mentors out there looking for apprentices to develop, and that if you're smart and you want to get onto a fast track development process you could do far worse than to seek out such a mentor, and to enjoy their guidance and protection. An almost inevitable downside of this is that for a certain period you become the sorcerer's apprentice, an identity it is often difficult to extract yourself from. We agreed that in such a fluid role as ICC, mentors are helpful, and that experience of a great mentor at an early stage is likely to make us disposed and more able to become good mentors ourselves later in our lives.

There is no typical learning path for ICC's. For some the preference is for book learning. This preference began at an early age in an absolute love and reverence for books, and many of us retain that passion for reading, and for discussing the books that we absorb. For others the preference is for writing over reading, as a way of making sense of our worlds. Some would rather have root canal treatment than write. For all of us there remains a desire for reflective conversations, wherein co-creation occurs.

When I learned about our reading preferences, I discovered that our major influences are emphatically not management gurus or even management writers. Indeed there was a fair amount of disdain and scorn expressed for populist management writers, this scorn accompanied by a sense of disbelief – and no little envy - that these books from the University of Heathrow could be as popular as they are. Our preference instead was for a whole variety of literatures, much of this philosophical and psychological. Post modernism and social constructionism has clearly exercised much influence, while guilty secrets included spiritual and 'new age' texts, with Castaneda earning many favourable if apologetic citations.

While many professions are emphasising the need for formalised 'continuous personal development' (CPD), it is clear that are no such guidelines exist for ICC's, nor is there any

evidence that we would wish such a formalised process should such a thing exist. What we seem to prefer instead is to 'get off the map' and to design our own way forward. Our navigation tends to be towards a broad vision of a desired future, with plenty of scope for grasping slender threads that may turn into strong ropes along the way, and for allowing synchronicities wheels to guide us. Just as there is no CPD for us, nor is there clear professional standards either. In this absence, we are required to set our own standards and guidelines, often agreed explicitly with the client, though at other times these are left as implicit.

One reason for going independent is to achieve the illusory nirvana of sustainable work: life balance, where we have high control of our time. We very soon discover that, if it is balance we are after, then predictable employment would be the better option. The price of the pursuit of freedom is a high one, and there are many paradoxes surrounding independence, not least the paradox that independence means high dependency on just one or few customers. As the novice ICC ventures further into the journey the not so obvious paradoxes and dilemmas of the independent life compound. It becomes increasingly clear to us that this way of life is a fragile process, and we grow to understand why there is such a high drop out rate at a fairly early stage in the trying on of the independent mantle.

As we inquire as to what is it that keeps us hanging in to our practice whilst many others drop away, one answer was that we increasingly learn to develop and to be guided by an internal gyroscope, rather than to rely upon external signposts and structures. This inner gyroscope helps maintain equilibrium, and also allows for the adjustments we need to make to uncertain environments that call for us to an agile response. A prerequisite for our survival is to develop a degree of malleability and adaptability, which the gyroscope allows; without permitting us the indulgence of believing that there is an undisputed core identity to which we can cling at times of uncertainty. Central to the working of this gyroscope is an awareness of personal values, and an ability to tune into these when the choice is for shape shifting, or the presentation of identity in another guise. Values illumine these choices of self-presentation, and assist in the decision making process. These values are apparent not only in what we move towards and embrace, but also in what we reject.

Survival over twenty years of more of independent practice means that we have inevitably faced times when the going has become tough. Our narratives speak to tough times, lean

times, of illnesses, divorce, separations of many kinds; of various interruptions to work which threatened our practice, and that also raised threats to the harmony and quality of home and family life. Each of us has a story of when we were down and things looked bleak. And for most these narratives are accompanied by a reciprocal story of a phoenix moment when we have somehow extricated ourselves from difficult and very challenging hostile environments, often with the conjunction of assisting serendipitous forces. It is at times like this that we look inside and seek strength and succour. We have also learned that to extract ourselves from the pit, we need to learn to ask, to reach for support, when asking for help is often the last thing a self reliant independent person would want to do. We learn to reach outside, as well as seek support from within. A great deal of learning is to be had at the bottom, and those dark nights of the soul are part of the 'tests' of our independence. It dawns upon us that the deeper the retreat, the more powerful the return.

The independent journey is transitory and can terminate at any time. There is no automatic inertia wheel to keep it going, while we busy ourselves with something else. In fact it can easily grind to halt at any time. The ephemeral nature of this life is well recognised by experienced practitioners, and we have developed a deeply internalised understanding that adaptation is necessary for survival and growth. As we grow older we become more adept at this transitioning business, even to the extent that discontinuity, while threatening and uncomfortable, is also welcomed as an opportunity for renewal and for dejunking at many levels. At a superficial level there is the opportunity to discard artefacts or archives that have trapped us in the past. As a deeper level there is the opportunity to challenge and perhaps leave behind habits, and mental models, ways of construing and emotionally experiencing the world that no longer serve us. These transition points deliver the opportunity to review relationships, as we decide upon those that intimates and associates that we require for the onward journey, and those that are not. This neutral zone is a time for shedding skins. We have also learned, among all of this discarding and letting go, how to acquire the wisdom to know what it is that we need to hold onto, and also to know how to manifest that which we desire to move towards.

There are those among us that are well attenuated to noticing when a sense of staleness or of impending burnout is approaching. And we have some very good ways of knowing how to change the patterns of our lives in small or in large ways that cause our world to be experienced afresh, and seen anew. As time goes by we get better at noticing when we are likely to go under, either through volume of work, or in a relationship, or beneath a physical habit or addiction, and to do something to forestall that descent. By contrast there

are others among us who time and again fall into the addiction or the overwhelm trap to the point where this becomes dangerously threatening. These experiences inevitably leave us chastened, clear that things need to be done to take preventative action against this occurring in the future, but not always succeeding in following these good intentions through.

Some of us like it when all of the dice are thrown up at the same time. There is the sense that we are meeting many challenges simultaneously. These multiple upheavals can be any combination of the personal, professional, relational, learning or locational dimensions of our lives. We say 'What the hell, my very being is an open system, all these aspects of my life are interdependent anyway, so I may as well deal with all the changes and the chaos together'. Some throw all the dice in the air even when our lives are looking enviably stable, and we have reached many of our goals, and have succeeded in re-freezing our lives. Others are far more circumstance about transition, and prefer a cautious planful approach. We tend not to wait for mid life crises. We have come to anticipate that transitional challenges will face us many times during our lives, and that the more adapt we become at facing these challenges, the more deeply satisfying our continuing lives will be. We are aware that there is a transitional deficit which, if it is not sorted first time around, will come around again demanding that the debt be cleared, and the unfinished business resolved. If these deficits are not resolved, then they cling like barnacles to our sides, layer upon layer on top of each other hindering the freedom of our forward progress.

Just as our engagement with co-creation work, in whatever arena, can be triggered by a sense of calling, there is also the likelihood that we experience a 'crisis of faith' at a later stage in the pursuit of that passion. These crises are experienced as sometimes momentary, sometimes irreversible. These are times when the meaning of our work is deeply challenged, and they inevitably precipitate major transition issues. These crises of faith often have at their heart the issue of whether or not we are making a difference, or whether indeed we have ever made difference. There is little doubt that we have a propensity for soul-searching, and for intense agonisation, when others from a different sphere of occupation may just shrug their shoulders, pick up the cheque and get on with the next thing. Part of the agonisation process is a belief that holding a continuing sense of doubt about our practice is ethically healthy, and that without doubt there is a real danger of us disappearing into hubris, or of our already more than healthy egos inflating towards full on narcissism. This inner turmoil can also lead us to a paralysis of

inaction that those around us can find most frustrating. There inclination is to tell us to snap out of it, to 'get out more', to realise how fortunate we are. That doesn't always help.

What we have learned from our experience of many transitions is that time is not what we think it is. We have grown to experience time as circular rather than linear. We have slowly learned that while everything changes in our lives and all around us, much remains the same. And we have grown to know that, if we miss a challenge this time around, then it is likely to represent it self in a different form at a later stage, when we will have another chance to bite at the developmental cherry.

Many of us, in our pursuit of our goals, have experienced degrees of burnout, some more intensely than others. One of the most common causes of our burnout is of course client dependency. It's that siren voice calling from the rocks, pleading ' You're the only one, you're the only one, we can't do it without you, we need you, you can't leave at this point, this would be abandonment, don't leave us, this will destroy us, come back, come back'. For a number of us burnout has caused our premature withdrawal from work. This can occur through physical ill health or through psychological scarring that sensitise us to ever becoming that exposed and vulnerable again.

Burn out would be an example of unplanned exits from this independent life. There are also examples of planned exits. As we reflected on when we planned to exit from this business, many remembered that their earlier plan was to retire at 50 years of age. We had grand plans for this, but then the fifty landmark passed without significant change. It may have presaged some changes in financial arrangements, but not profound withdrawal from co-creative work, at least not on a permanent basis. As we pass milestones such as our fiftieth birthday, we may continue to devise withdrawal plans, but these now seem more conditional and open to unpredictable influences than those made with such confidence earlier in our lives.

Part of the reason for this conditionality is that in some ways this independent co-creation business gets easier as you get older, and that in other ways it doesn't. It would seem that just at a time when we feel that we are most capable and most sure emotionally, intellectually and expressively, then the body is less able to keep up with the frenetic schedules that are often demanded by this sense of renewed confidence. Just as we feel more fluent and wiser than we have ever felt, so we also feel hobbled by age and the process of inevitable slowing. We become aware that we need to find ways to deal better

with personal replenishment, if we are to stay the course, in one piece. But we are not always so skilled at devoting the time necessary to allow that refreshment to occur, often because something compellingly interesting comes up just as we are settling to meditate.

It is not uncommon, beyond the midpoint of our careers, and despite feeling fully up for it, that the work inexorably moves away from us, for reasons that we cannot quite put our fingers on. This experience of work moving away is discouraging, and unsurprisingly causes us to think with increasing frequency about getting out of this business altogether. On the reverse side of the coin, it can happen that, after long periods of feeling a lone voice in the wilderness, there occurs the pleasant sensation of the world suddenly waking up to our competence, and demanding it now. This often occurs at the turning point when we had given up on the world ever paying attention to us again. I listened to examples of this from our environmental work, and also for activities such as scenario planning, two areas of expertise much in demand now at this time of high unpredictability and discontinuity at many levels.

With regard to our physical well being, a number of us have had near death experiences, accompanied by strong warnings from within and without to take better care of ourselves or else death will result. I have listened to a number of moving stories of experiences of rehabilitation, re-entry and of dealing with the fears that attach to such traumatic physical experiences. Part of the dilemma of the recovery process is of the risks attached to re-entry, where 'just one intervention' might prove to be too much, tipping us once more into destructive and self-defeating patterns.

There is also the experience of actual death, of death being near, coming knocking. Increasingly, we seem to meet most frequently at the funerals of fellow travellers who have departed this life. Clearly there comes a time in life when we begin to bury your own, and in the process of burying them we are bound to ask, 'What was the point of this life, what was the point of their life, what happened to those dreams that they dreamed, the dreams that we all remembered? Why was she taken prematurely? How important is any of this work that seems so pressing?' We are forcibly reminded of the ephemeral nature of all of this, and of the fact that maybe it is later than we think it. This awareness of the ephemeral also brings into relief and perspective how seriously we take ourselves, how pompous we can be. And that perhaps we need to listen to the cosmic belly laughs that resound as we persist with the illusion that we are somehow in control of our lives, and of the destiny of the planet.

Acceptance of self is crucial in this maturity cycle. We need to have worked through a fair degree of our social conditioning to be fully there in the moment in our interventions. This is where our values have devolved to a highly developed stage in relation to our openness to change, and where our capacity to transcend self and our limiting fears comes into play. There is little doubt that if we back off from our developmental edge, then we are likely to arrest our clients' development at that same point also. Self-awareness brings a capacity for self renewal, which in turn freshens and enlivens our work. It may not be eternal life that we seek, but it may be a version of aliveness to the now that allows fullest engagement at whatever age, accompanied by a wisdom that will inform us when it is time for us to move along.

Even in our late fifties and sixties, we continue to adapt and refine our choices, often making radical step-outs. For us independent co-creatives it is rarely simply a question of scaling down, or of retirement. Instead it is the case - after years of practice of significant life transition, with relative degrees of success and failure - that we have grown in our confidence and competence to navigate towards the unknown. The deeper we move into this journey, the more uncharted the waters. In this absence of external guides and signposts, we rely increasingly upon our internal gyroscope to inform our onward journey. Central to our successful navigation is our in-touchness with our values, which in turn requires vigorous reflection and self-questioning. As get older, these values begin to stabilise around valuing openness and adaptation, and a degree of universalism, where we value that which is above our immediate self-interest.

However, it is clear from the nature of the values themselves that there is little likelihood of stabilisation. This values journey is not a defined progression with a fixed end point, but a continuous process of seeking a positioning where professional practice and our personal lives are consonant with our values. These values are a work in progress, subject as they are to refining and development. This process could be compared to painting with a moving brush. There is constant oscillation. The compass point swings perpetually, though in a narrower arc as time progresses. We can be seduced far away from these values priorities by exciting looking projects that call us strongly, but experience says that these ventures rarely persist. In the end we are pulled back again towards our preferred priorities, often chastened, hurt and confused by the experience of inhabiting different social worlds that manifest radically different values systems. Our development of social identity is a continuous process of becoming, and while our

sometimes chameleon nature can be confusing and frustrating for others, it has proved invaluable to us in this life of perpetual adaptation.

Separate the Signal from the Noise.

Locating my approach within the method literature.

Once written, I asked myself then what this piece actually was, and whether it was locatable in any recognisable genre. When I refer to my method of data collection, I refer to the totality of my collective inquiry, including my autoethnography; my initial research conversations, and also the collective session that was convened with a cross-section of my co-inquirers, which I entitled Co-creative's Action Research practicum. Life course as it finally emerged was a synthesis of all of this.

A search of the literature points to the work of Davies & Gannon (2006) 'Collective Biography' who describe processes that allow a group to coalesce their storied and re-storied text, where memory is gifted one to another. This they describe as the 'methodic (and sometimes chaotic) practices of collective biography' (2006:8). They continue 'in collective biography we catch ourselves in remembered acts of turning on ourselves, seeing how we take up forms of power and strategies of surveillance. We attend to the ambivalent processes of subjection. We develop and refine our capacity to reflexively turn our gaze on our selves in remembering moments of turning, of constituting ourselves and being constituted' (2007:11). From a different perspective, Speedy (2007:122) suggests that 'like definitional ceremony, this process of talking, writing, reading aloud, reflecting and re-writing stories expands the spaces between culturally familiar or appropriate explanations and assumptions and the particularities of the stories people seek to tell and the language they might uncover in so doing'.

As I read into this method, I recognise that what I have created in the 'Life Course' document is not a collective ethnography, in that I have assumed powerful agency for the group, rather than gone through the struggle that is so powerfully spoken through the practitioner accounts in Davies and Gannon (2006:116). One comments on 'the difficulty of letting go of individual egos as we launch into the collectivity of writing. We were dismayed when words we might have struggled over disappeared in someone else's drafting. We felt obliterated'. I have by-passed the workshop phase in the process, the crucible within which the biography is created. Nor was my piece actively co-written with my collaborators. In retrospect I really wish that I had convened an ICC writers group to

capture our story. I realise that opportunity is open into the future and I would really be interested to know what might be created in that space. I would agree with Davies & Gannon (2006) from my experience of the richness of CARP, that such a collaborative writing workshop would need at least three or four days to really begin to yield the granularity of text that would begin to embody and particularise our shared experiences. A criticism I would make of 'Life Course' is that it operates at the level of generality and would need more plausible and living detail to bring it alive.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that this piece did evoke a resonant response from the original respondents and from those with which they chose to share it. The passages that follow relate to their responses, and also to the quite distinct response that was evoked from different parts of the academic community. .

Collecting feedback on 'Life Course' from the ICC community.

Once 'Life Course' was complete, I was left feeling both triumphant and nervous, needing an impetus to launch it upon the world. What liberated it in the end was the chance – although by his point I was beyond believing that anything to do with this PhD was subject to the agency of pure chance – to share a draft with two ICCs who were not part of the original respondents, but who run a regional independents consulting network. Their response to this draft was so enthusiastic that I was greatly heartened to put it out to the world in its current form without further editorialising. One of these readers has wide contact with associates who predictably consider going independent as a life choice at some point in their lives, and who turn to her for advice on the subject, She indicated that the sharing of this paper with these interested parties would go a long way towards addressing these people's questions, and asked my permission to share this narrative with these clients. This unexpected and unpredictable development is an example of how this 'creative analytical process' approach works in practice. Once the piece is out there, it may be used for a variety of purposes (hopefully useful and benign) that were not in the authors mind when the piece was conceived. They are separate from authorial intent,

After this initial skirmish with successful exposure to the world, I distributed this to the original ICC collaborators in the research, and I was delighted and relieved to discover that their responses were largely most confirming and encouraging. This affirmation stimulated me to distribute it more widely, and to my delight I found that those to whom I sent it also had their own distribution in lists, as they sent it out to others, who in turn sent

their feedback to me. This would be an example of the 'passing on' phenomenon which Andrew Sparkes has alerted me to at a recent lecture, and which I was considering incorporating as one of the validation criteria by which to measure the impact of my narrative work.

The more the feedback flowed from my correspondents, the more I became convinced that 'Life Course' was the 'strange attractor' (Wheatley, 1994:133), the organising principle around which the substantive element of this ICC thesis could hang. And the more convinced I became that this text had relevance, the bolder I became in the distribution of it. It rather reminded me of my writing of a fictional short story for a competition that was accepted for 'Bristol Tales' (Doherty, 2005). One requirement of this competition was that I collect feedback from a number of local sources. As the feedback flowed in, I became more and more curious as to audience response and as the feedback came in so too did I become more confident of asking strangers for their views. When this piece was eventually published, those same readers from local shops, cafes, museums, lingerie boutiques and art galleries felt that they had a part in its success, and became great promoters of the anthology, much to the delight of the local bookstore chain that was stocking the book. There were strong parallels between this exercise and the feedback soliciting activity that I was engaged with now. Whereas part of my mental model suggested that I was taking up peoples' precious time by asking them to read my story, the opposite seemed to be true, with people proving to be most generous with their time and feedback.

You will find in the Portfolio under the heading 'Reflections and feedback on the Life Course Narrative' a summary of my general impressions of reader's feedback, together with selected quotes from readers to illustrate the range of reader responses. For convenience I use the Speedy criteria as container to display these comments, though as previously indicated not all readers used this format.

This was an important learning for me with regard to soliciting reader feedback on my writing, and one which seems to fly in the face of much that I perceive as the academic attitude to soliciting readership. In the academy the assumption seems to be that people really are too busy to read and that really it is unfair to burden others with your outputs unless the work has already achieved quite a degree of polish. This logic also supports the resignation I see in asking for counsel about distributing writing which underlines the assumption that in fact very few will read much of this stuff anyway. Which rather feeds a

belief that whatever is read will be read by a highly restricted audience who communicate largely in an impenetrable jargon, which all rather feeds the circular process that descends towards near illegibility, driving academic prose further and further out of the reach of wider readership.

Collecting feedback from the academic community ; Exposure to a different world.

Encouraged by this ICCs feedback, I decided to offer 'Life Course' as a full BAM conference paper, topping and tailing the text with information on method and on the ICC population itself. This paper was accepted, somewhat to my surprise, given the unconventional nature of it, and was well received by the conference group that I presented it to, whose feedback suggested that it represented an interesting narrative concerning an important and often neglected population among consultants, that of the independents. I was pleased with this reception, but I knew enough of academia by now to know that acceptance of a piece for a conference, and sympathetic and supportive treatment of it by that audience did not necessarily mean that journal editors would be throwing their arms open wide to publish my piece. Nor did it mean that it would pass the scrutiny of academics assessing its rigour as a contribution to knowledge when contained with a PhD submission.

In fact the sober academic assessment of this piece was distinctly cool. The principal reservations included the suggestion that this ICC population did not exist as a distinct population; that much of what I seemed to be claiming as unique to that population could be attributed to almost any group concerned with co-creativity; that the method was poor science; that as a piece of interpretative representation, it was overly generalised. Most of all, beyond all of this highly legitimate criticism, there was an underlying tone that this population of independent consultants were a bunch of self indulgent, self appointed gurus who hardly merited consideration as a serious management research population. I had one academic say to me 'who exactly do these people think they are? They are no more than a bunch of mechanics. They are not some sort of seers'.

There was also an almost universal academic dismissal of the relevance of positive feedback from ICCs within the cohort as evidence that the action research process was working successfully, or that my findings were validated. This claim was discounted on the basis that 'of course ICCs are going to like it! Of course they are going to be uncritical of it. It casts them in a favourable light. It valorises them and indicates nothing of their dark

side. It does nothing to cause them to reflect. It is appreciative inquiry that does little to enlighten or expose this social phenomenon'. The counter-arguments that it caused ICC to reflect, that it gave them a fresh point of observation on their positioning in life, that it had caused a shift in the way they conducted themselves were dismissed as still not providing evidence that this was defensible research. My use of collaborator review of my writing as I proceeded as a means of validation was rejected quite fiercely by saying that such affirmation was really indicative of nothing beyond the fact that people were agreeing that they had said what I had reported them as saying, and was not a reliable basis on which to conclude anything of substance.

I remember forlornly protesting that this piece was not meant to be the whole story of my research; that of course there were other voices that needed to be brought in to the picture but I found myself weakened in my response to the point of choking on my own words. Part of the implicit learning I was picking up here was that action research, emancipation and readability were all very well as research motivations and goals but at some level they were deeply suspect, when they were offered as proper rigorous research.

It was also suggested that I needed to develop a thick skin; that I needed to get used to these knock backs. I had to understand that it was all a part and parcel of the academic turf, that it was something that we all had to go through as a rite of passage before we properly aculturalised; everyone in this field needed to get used to experiences of humiliation and invalidation before their work becomes accepted. I protested that I sort of knew that anyway and that in my previous existence I was no stranger to knock backs and experiences of damaging criticism and rejection. Yet I muttered to myself that the type of rejection they were talking of seemed of a different order of punishment and invalidation than those that I was habituated to. And I considered privately that I was not at all sure if this was the world I was wanting to move towards, if it contained such institutionalised batterings within it.

At the same time as these contradictory feedbacks on 'Life Course' from participants on the one hand and detached academics on the other were clamouring for house room in my by now thoroughly confused judgmental processes, I was being encouraged by my supervisor to consider moving away from ICC studies as the main focus of my research and to look at instead at my emergent method themes and my personal emergence as an academic as alternatives. He had closely read my fud draft and I could see as he shared

his impressions that there was more than one fud lurking within my voluminous draft, and I was finding it interesting to have fresh eyes espy these other possibilities. On the face of it this suggestion of re-focussing the ICC work as the primary theme made some kind of sense. I was growing to realise that research can go in a number of directions, and I was not closed to a re-frame.

On the other hand this did mean a lot of discarding of my materials relating to this ICC theme, including the implicit suggestion that the 'Life Course' could go. I noticed the strength of my reaction to this. While reluctantly prepared to have my fingers prised from huge chunks of material that I had painstakingly crafted and re-crafted, this process of letting go was painful and miserable and it felt that it could only happen by degrees. In the event the process that I intuitively adopted was an incremental one, where bit by bit pieces of the old were being whittled away while new pieces were being crafted and inserted for later inclusion as substitutes or alternatives.

Impact of these two different universes of feedback on my becoming motivation.

The impact of being in receipt of these two vastly different schools of feedback and response to 'Life Course' had an inevitable impact on my trajectory towards the academic life. It seemed more than ironic that while the world that I was leaving, that of the ICCs was warm in its reception of this piece, and encouraging of its wider distribution, my new world was deeply sceptical and even mocking of it. This was to leave me with a variety of conflicted feelings where I was painfully conscious of occupying a deeply confusing middle space between these two worlds. I was vividly living the delicacy and the liminality of being between two worlds when you are then knocked back by the one that you are wishing to move towards. I was also conscious that as much as these two worlds are out there in my external environment, so too are they in here, deep inside of me and they wrestle still. It is quite a fight and I am interested too in how this tug of war of inner loyalties and inclinations affects the mechanics of relapse. On the one hand I knew I was being tested by the academy. On the other part of me was resisting that game. Interestingly I was not making plans to relapse or to return to my old world but a part of my openness and trust in the academy had been damaged. At some level this felt like a banishment from the garden, that my innocence had been lost and I had been cast out, with no clear way back in.

What I was not hitting out against as unfair but was feeling all the same was this experience of researching in the wrong trench after all, of discovering that after years of endeavour that the research treasure lay buried in a different place. This it seems an inevitable part of the scholarly experience and one that needs to be learned about. Of course it is undermining of confidence to have to discard hard fought research work but then the whole process of learning is undermining of confidence while one is between states; so it is hardly surprising that academics, who are immersed in the process of learning and of creating learning are so prone to self doubt.

One trench that I was most reluctant to climb out of though was that relating to the relevance of 'Life Course' to this PhD. I was challenged that while I could of course choose to leave it in the main body of the piece, that I needed to be sure that that was for reasons other than the indulgence that I enjoyed it as a piece of writing, or because my ICC chums liked it. I accepted that this challenge was a valid one, though I continued arguing for its continued inclusion on the grounds that this piece was a good example of my interpretative work; and that this piece in particular did seem to be the strange attractor to the whole ICC story though I could not entirely rationalise why that might be the case.

At a deeper level I feel that while it tells the ICC transition story; that it also tells my transitional story and that there is much in this that enlightens the dynamics of my passage as I become an academic. It speaks also to the way I have taken inspiration from and learned from others who have occupy this space before me, and to how I might advise those who follow me. It also has much to say on the power of creating change from the margins, where I have been positioned for much of my life. And this reflects directly on my marginal passage towards academia and the liminal space that I am creating within that, to allow me to influence from the edges rather than from the centre ground.

The truth about cats and dogs.

I was most struck by the 'irrational' responses of quite a number of academics to my studying consultancy – or to my having been a consultant, and struck by the vehemence of emotion that accompanied this expression. I found myself asking if the academic reception would have been different had it been a different population; If I been looking at

social workers or chimney sweeps or folk singers or call centre operators rather than consultants? My answer to my question is affirmative; that I think the academics would have been far more measured and detached in their consideration of the appropriateness of this population for study with a different population. If I am right in this then the reason for the strength of emotion might lie in the fact that there is more that is similar than is different between consultants and academics than academics are comfortable in admitting. In both worlds there is a degree of narcissism, of self promotion and of self absorption; of the making of claims and of the staking of turfs, or performance on stage and of dramas behind the scenes. And evidence of much deeply engrained competitiveness. I would argue that in the projection of these frailties onto the consultants, so the academics might be projecting their own worst fears about themselves which they of course are unable to face.

This is by no means two way traffic of course. Just as the academics might project onto the consultants so too does the traffic run very firmly the other way. It has often occurred to me that the consultant accusing the academic of not living in the fabled real world may be at the same time questioning the solidity of the ground under his or her own feet.

I wish now to share a poem that has been with me as guide now for twenty years or more and which has acted as a powerful commentary on my passage through life.

Men too gentle to live among wolves

James Kavanuagh (1991)

Some people do not have to search -
They find their niche early in life and rest there,
seemingly contented and resigned.
they do not seem to ask much of life,
sometimes they do not seem to take it seriously.
At times I envy them, but usually I do not understand them.
Seldom do they understand me.

I am one of the searchers.
there are, I believe, millions of us.
We are not unhappy, but neither are we really content.
We continue to explore life,
hoping to uncover its ultimate secret.
We continue to explore ourselves, hoping to understand.

We like to walk along the beach -
We are drawn by the ocean, taken by its power,
its unceasing motion,

its mystery and unspeakable beauty.
We like forests and mountains,
deserts and hidden rivers,
and the lonely cities as well.
Our sadness is as much a part of our lives
as is our laughter.
to share our sadness with one we love is perhaps
as great a joy as we can know ---
unless it be to share our laughter.

We searchers are ambitious only for life itself,
for everything beautiful it can provide.
Most of all we want to love and be loved.
We want to live in a relationship that
will not impede our wandering,
nor prevent our search,
nor lock us in prison walls;
that will take us for what little we have to give.
We do not want to prove ourselves to another
or to compete for love.

We are wanderers, dreamers and lovers --
lonely men and women who dare to ask of life
everything good and beautiful.
Those who are too gentle to live among wolves.

As I read this through I begin to understand why I might have included it. I realise that I am not one who found their niche early, though I have found a number of niches and the one that I am shaping and becoming into might well work for me now. Kavanuagh suggests that with regard to us wanderers and searchers, that 'there are millions of us'. This may well be true and may well be why life course cannot be confined to my variety of ICC alone. I think it matters because I believe that there is room within the academy for wanderers; it need not be populated by those that already know the answers alone. And it challenges that the searcher might be embodied in his or her love for the mountains and the forests and much as he or she are in their heads. It also asks whether wanderers are too gentle to live among wolves. It is my experience that the wolves are everywhere. And it is my recent experience that the academic wolves do not go in for much gentleness.

Bringing it All Back Home.

Following the release of 'Life Course', and the acceptance that madam fud needed a significant change of tack away from ICC and towards this emergent theme of 'on becoming an academic', then this time that was to follow was of necessity a time of letting things settle down into a new shape, of my adjusting this new reality. This coincided with being in a new job, and of becoming an academic for real, where madam fud was no longer an optional extra but was in fact it was an important part of my gaining my academic spurs. Furthermore, the conference season was looming.

But despite this external and internal pressure, I noticed that the finishing of fud would not be forced, and I remained aware that at some important level that I was not wholly in charge. There remained that sensation that my life and even perhaps my being was being written by some agency, as if I were the cipher of this PhD rather than its unique author. An example of this agency was evidenced in the unlocatable yet unignorable insistence that this PhD be a narrative, and that beyond the narrative of the ICCs that it become a narrative of writing an interpretive PhD, or 'writing about the writing' as Laurel Richardson (2005) would have it.

So there was a push for the end. A mitigating factor in this difficulty in finishing was the reassurance that this PhD was not the end, merely a step on the way, a transition to a deeper point in this research. On the other hand there was the glacial slowness of pulling all of this together, of the weaving process. There were the returns to the intended goals, and to matching these to the direction that emergence have carved for itself, together with the necessity for moments of reflection to inquire what the totality of this might possibly mean. This halting progress and the ever present danger of falling into the abyss of fresh creation was to cause Louise to spell out a series of injunctions to guide the closure of this phase of this work.

Louise finishing fud injunctions

You have done the work, be satisfied with that

This will surprise, intrigue and delight those who read this

This writing is of a high standard, though perhaps you cannot see that as you are so close to it and its imperfections

In fact, the chunks of this that you have released have already been applauded as influential and significant.

Your readers have said that there is a least one book in this, so most of these materials can be used somewhere, or brought together in new ways.

No more inclusion of new material. I know that you are writing from emergent method, but I also know you ... so stop and finish

As new ideas come in, then catch them for later, don't work in them now

Nothing is ever truly lost; it is all there somewhere and will come back again, at the moment when you need it.

If in doubt about a piece put it in the portfolio at the end, or lose it altogether.

The plan was to enjoy this whole PhD experience, even right through to the end .. so see what you can do to enjoy this end bit too.

You will know when it is time to finally finish this .. or finish it for now, as all of this is temporary and transitional anyway.

In all of this process of agonised decision making – and the occasional moment of exhilaration - there was a growing sense of my truly getting under the skin of this work; of really growing within it, of feeling that it is mine. The notion - in fact the certain knowledge – was growing upon me that now I am its familiar.

A younger perspective on becoming an academic

During my visit to the 'Organisation Symbolism', in Ljubljana in 2007 I discovered that the convening body (SCOS) was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, and that I was among the oldest of the original founders there, though I had not returned since 1984. Beyond this causing me to feel ancient, I noticed that I was as much interested in the what the youngest among the participants had to say about what was on their minds, that is to say the PhD contingent that was there, as I was to trawl over the history. The concern among this group was about the nature of the PhD in management and organisation. This was driven as much by the fact that they considered the management PhD to be in crisis as much as by the fully understandable concomitant concerns regarding their careers resulting from this crisis. The crisis they identified relates to the twin problems of inheritance and innovation in studying management, where PhD students are expected to engage sensitively with the established canon of management literature, both mainstream and critical literatures, while at the same making of an original contribution to knowledge, expectations which they consider to be oppositional.

I discover that despite the age difference between me and them – where the needs of the younger scholars of their qualifications are different in kind from those of post experience students such as me - I shared their concern regarding this tension between the accepted canon and the push for originality. It struck me that the last three years for me had been a struggle between finding and following a canon that would offer some shelter from the storm, and at the same time wishing to be out there amid the big waves, experiencing all of the turmoil and exhilaration of discovering new ideas and thoughts. The PhDs say that they are seeking a new way, a third way through this dilemma, suggesting that the PhDs themselves will change the nature of management studies through these challenges to the establishment. It would good to believe that there is such a third way, though a part of me believes that the kind of struggle that I have experienced is unavoidable, in the process of creating and delivering a PhD product. What this conference has done for me, however is to expose the 'crisis of representation' among PhD students of management, and to point to the fact that this narrative of the construction of such an emergent PhD

may well be of service to that crisis of representation. I thought as I constructed it that this contribution would be made largely to the older post experience PhD population, but now I realise that this has relevance to the twenty-something PhD scholars also.

It was at this point that I realise that what I write on becoming is of use not just to old lags but also to those coming at this from a very different life positioning.

A change in formal role that promises liberation of written expression.

As I listen to the struggles of the younger career path academics I am reminded of my own struggle earlier this year with regard to my career. In short, I was pushing hard to have my fixed term lectureship extended to permanency, and to that end I was endeavouring to establish all three legs of the lectureship stool firmly on the ground. To explain further, academic competence is a three legged stool, and while I was confident that I was doing well with the two legs named teaching and education management, I knew that the research track record leg was far more precarious. To that end I was highly conscious that this PhD needed to be finished to a high standard, and further more that it needed to seed publishable material, as my academic license to operate would depend not only on completion of PhD but would need to plunder this PhD for publications to satisfy the needs of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a lens through which academic progression is judged. I knew also that the experimental nature of this PhD would make the already difficult feat of publication in 'starred' journals more difficult again.

As I push on in pursuit of convincing the world that I have a right to be lecturing here, it becomes clear that my School is having difficulty continuing the lectureship that I hold, and that career alternatives to this continuation option need to be pursued. As speculation mounted I went to see my line manager to clarify my position. Here follows an excerpt from my diary of that time, late March 2007.

With the uncertainty of this Bristol job swirling around, I realise that I need to add the pressure of job hunting, to the pressures of teaching delivery and PhD completion. Something has got to give, I say to myself, and I resolve to see my line manager, the head of school, to ask definitively what the story is now, going forward.

He is refreshingly honest about the whole thing. He paints the indelible picture that my best route through all of this is to become a teaching fellow, a super teaching fellow, a

senior teaching fellow, to reflect my passion and capability for teaching, and further that at my age and stage – though the indelicacies of age and stage are not mentioned directly – it would be best for me to follow this alternative career path. Where, after all, teaching performance is recognised, rather than seen as a weakness demonstrated by those who are not ruthless, single minded young career researchers. Nothing else in what I do now would change, except my job title. So we agreed that there were status issues involved, and that this move might mean taking a status hit. This I know, and it would be difficult to have equal research status, leastways around here it would. But we agreed that there were many things we could do to ameliorate the status hit, and the limits it might put upon my contribution.

I dwell on this for a while, and some things rankle. I think of colleagues, not notably more competent in research – but who are younger – and who seem to have little regard for teaching, who is unchallenged as lecturers. I think of that. And I think of all of the recent effort that I have put into fud, to have it ready well ahead of time; and of the papers I have been dressing up; and I wonder rather why I have bothered with all of that. I check my trust levels. I think of the precariousness of this route, this career path never trodden in this university before, at this university where precedent is venerated and where the new rarely comes easy. I think of my seeming destiny to be forever the trail blazer, the adventurer. And how that at some level I am fine with that. Then I let it all settle.

And as this dawning of my new status settles I notice a new feeling. A feeling of liberation, of profound liberation. I will be rewarded for what I do. I will not be judged for what I don't do, or do less well or not in accordance with the research rules. And then I think of not being judged by the conventional academic quality of my papers. I think that in this new role, who will care if my PhD is weird or not? I think of getting rid of the need to prove it, of the competition with academic others. I think of how I have at some level been lured into that, when I committed to the PhD, when my original reasons for beginning the same were quite different from reasons of academic advancement and jostling in a new found rat race when all of my instincts had been to escape such rat runs.

As I contemplate this enforced dropping out from the scholarly rat race, I experience many tensions flowing away also. And I feel now that I can write as I wish to, for the audience I wish to. I can write a book. I can write a shopping list. I can write great and transgressive educational papers and polemics. No one will care. It is up to me. Security, identity,

reward, status do not depend on this any more. The relief that sweeps through me is profound.

I realise that at some level that the striving has been placed upon me by others. Yet I don't want their striving, or their comparisons, or their pity or their condolences or their competition. So with the striving gone – when I finally feel safe enough to surrender it, as it has become ingrained – then I will feel absolutely free to write again. As a naïve primitive teacher might, rather than a faux impostor academic. And only our rivers run free.

'Sing like you don't need the money; dance like there is nobody watching'. This new way of academic being feels in that mode. I began here as the lowest form of life, the fud student and enjoyed being the Steppenwolf. Now I return to a different status, not quite to being a student but to something similar. And it all points in the direction of teaching and learning, not to research alone. My fud is profoundly about learning, and about learning and values, and about learning and its role in change. Ann and I run workshops, great workshops in reflective practice, and in writing your way into reflective practice. We field an innovative conference on coaching research. All of this feels related; and research output feels a bonus, but not the goal in itself. That feels far more sane somehow, than what I was growing to feel previously. The writing up of research because it is interesting and relevant, rather than because it is chasing status markers. It will be pleasurable to witness how this new identity and sense of purpose shake into life.

This transit to a formal teaching role of course is not without its problems. No one has the formula, and old rules fail to apply. In the face of this, I plough on regardless, to the point where I realise that I am creating a role that the department seems to need but which doesn't fit on any known organisation chart. This role has since been enshrined as 'Director of Post Experience Education', which describes quite well what I do with our adult learners. Feedback from quite a number of sources around the School has commented on this creation of a viable role out of virtually nothing, an unusual occurrence in this venerable institution. I realise that in the face of high precariousness over the last two years or so, that sometimes the best thing to do is the best you know how, to follow your own instincts in pursuit of your vein of gold. The longer this goes on, the nearer I feel I am to fuller discovery of this vein. This drive would seem to be somewhat independent of the degree of security or tenure offered by the institution.

Coming full circle.

I recently made a tough choice to miss a weekend seminar on identity formation in order to concentrate exclusively on finishing this PhD. I know that while I would find the seminar highly stimulating, that not only would it absorb precious time, but that it would feed me yet more ideas and tantalising references that would both tempt me towards new late inclusions in this thesis; and would also remind me of more material that I had omitted that was worthy of inclusion, to add to my shame and inadequacy list. However, my supervisor did attend this identity seminar and he had some really interesting observations to make. One was of the quality of our writing as inquiry and autoethnography students, who attended this identity seminar en bloc. He was really impressed by their maturity, by their intimacy with theory and practice of autoethnography, and their clear passion for this practice. This came as no surprise, as Ann and I have become used to complimentary things being said of our students by other academics, but it was nonetheless great to hear this from my supervisor.

The second observation was that a day in this company, as a student, helped him think through his relationship with his writing, and of the benefits that flow from 'writing into' one's research rather than painfully constructing it from the outside and feeling that you need to use a language other than your own so to do. This led to him to his third reflection, which was to cause him to inquire what it was that had caused this wave of interest in autoethnography to sweep through our department over the last three years. He said that quite a number of these students had mentioned the importance of my influence, and of the influence of my work in encouraging them to pursue this path. This acknowledgment then caused him to ask where my inspiration came from. Then he was reminded of the moment at the very beginning of this project, when I considered grasping the slender thread of writing myself into my project, with all of the reservations and terrors that came with that. And that he firmly encouraged me to pursue that tiny path that was now growing into a broad avenue.

When he had located his influence in the grasping of that thread, he then noticed how this had come full circle, in the sense that his participating in a class - that may well not have happened in the way that it did had it not been for his original influence in encouraging me to follow a writing as inquiry direction - was now reminding him of the need to write in more natural freewheeling way. Could it be, we speculated, that his early encouragement to me to experiment with alternate modes of expression was also a nudge to himself so to

do? A nudge furthermore which was to push through many months after he encouraged the grasping of the slender thread. This caused us both to reflect that these synchronicity wheels do work in mysterious ways, and that the timing of their influence is rarely predictable. Meanwhile there was truly a sense that madam fud was bringing it all back home. Which just happened to be the title of one or jointly shared favourite Bob Dylan albums of the sixties.

Description of this Dissertation.

I am aware that this emergent approach has meant the final product has deviated significantly from the original point of departure. As I anticipate drawing together my conclusions, it occurs to me that I should attempt to describe and summarise what this creation has become, before I draw my conclusions.. The more I work on it, the more abstracted and convoluted it becomes. I realise that the task of reflecting on and describing what this creation has become, and is still becoming, is proving difficult – if not perhaps impossible - for me alone to conceive. It may well be that I am far too close to it, and that despite authorial intent I remain quite unaware of how the different narratives and sub- narratives, themes and theories are interwoven.

After many attempts at struggling to write this description to my satisfaction, and in a state of some confusion and frustration, I went on a long bike ride, far further than I intended, to the faraway seaport town of Portishead. And as I rode Madam Fud chattered away, sorting out in her head just what it was that she was becoming. For in her world she would never settle for a description of her simply 'being', and resting with that. I listened to her intently and now I write down what I heard as I cycled along the river bank.

Madam Fud's self description, as dictated to Dan on his bicycle by the riverbank.

This is the story of a research project, of a research project that leads its author to a different way of life. The ostensible subject under investigation is a saga, a narrative of a tribe of itinerants labelled independent co-creatives that mysteriously morphs

into a narrative of the author leaving these same co-creatives to join an academic tribe.

The man who is telling this story relates to and constructs his world largely through stories, and his relating of this story is profoundly influenced by his positioning as an insider who has a curiosity about his history and the history of those who have followed similar or different paths.

And he notices that every time he tells his story it comes out differently, just as this story that I am now telling for the first time will come out differently next time around, dependent on the place and the audience. The sedimentary layers of this story crust and fold.

So there is the story itself, and then there is the story of telling the story. This distinction matters because there are others out there who are interested in different ways of telling such stories, especially through ways that do not claim to be scientific in the classical sense of telling the definitive 'truth', and these people would be interested in how this story has been put together.

Following a cursive process has meant that, through the telling and relating of the story to fellow itinerants and academics, and through listening to their stories, that there has followed the process of 're-storying' this narrative. This builds into a different order of narrative, one where deep underlying patterns of sense making begin to push through. Or not.

And just as the itinerants' story is retold and chewed over, so too is the story of telling the story worked through with others who are interested in this storying tale, and who have taken the time to converse or to read about it. In this way so this narrative about the narrative has become re-storied too. And restored.

An important part of the story of telling the story concerns how the story is written down, how it is committed to words and kept for the record beyond what is said and remembered in the moment. And the author and his accomplices have discovered that in the process of committing all of this to paper that the act of writing is not simply the process of catching and recording of what is said. We find that the act of

writing is a creative discovery process, that it is in itself a means of learning and knowing. And then there is the story of how much the researcher learns through working with other students and researchers on developing their skills in discovery writing.

This 'writing story' gains significance through the requirement to place both of these stories, the story itself and the story of telling the story, within the academic framework of a PhD, which is of course traditionally delivered in a written format. The placement of these narratives within the conventions of a PhD is not easy, not least because many others were involved in the creation of both stories, and the narrative is developing a shape that does not easily fit the conventional framework of one author working alone to produce a perfected work.

In this way the PhD finds a unique shape, and then we find that there are others out there interested in how to place such stories within such an academic frame. This requires that the story of fitting both stories within a PhD frame is told also, as a navigation aid and possibly a cautionary tale to others. Which gives us a third story; the story of telling two stories within one, within a PhD frame.

It would not though be possible to complete the detailing of this nest of stories without relating how the story of creating these stories has profoundly affected the course of Daniel's life. In fact it could be claimed that the stories are now writing his story, just as he writes their story. There is no doubt that the writing of these narratives has had a pivotal impact on his career through life. And within this creation, this episode in time, is embedded a capsule of the entire story of his life as it circles and cycles around. It describes his flight pattern.

At the point of surrender, when Daniel gets out of the way, then the narrative drive writes his life, and it is a drive that can prove impossible to resist. The results of this storying continue to deeply imprint his outer and inner being. So the muse becomes manifest, she is me, the melusine, madam Fud, the siren on the rocks, the belle dame that hast he in thrall.

This little summary tale is all of these stories and it is none of them. They are all my stories as told by me. And as this is the first time that I have written this account, then

you will know doubt find that by the next time you come to read it that it will have changed and evolved, as the act of description to a fresh audience inevitably nuances the delivery.

A retreat into literature returns me to my themes.

Having handed over responsibility to madam fud for her self description, I felt sufficiently liberated to take relief in some escape into fictional writing, not only as escape from myself but also as an antidote to academic reading. I selected a number of novels that had been gathering dust by my bedside for months, quite abandoned as I disciplined myself to push this writing exercise to its conclusion. It seemed a small indulgence to allow myself a break before the final push and, after all I reasoned with myself that exposure to some high quality writing could only but enhance my final product. And I profoundly needed a break.

Yet what I found was not release by further immersion in the themes that I have been exploring here. I was captivated by Sebastian Faulkes 'Engleby' (2007), which is among many other things a journey into memory of university life in the early 1970's, a topic that had strongly exercised me during the writing of 'Outside View'. He talks of the memories that crowd on return to his old college, of experiences of faking it and powerful accounts of the impostor syndrome at Cambridge. This novel is one glorious extended diary with pieces of an imagined lover's diary worked in between the grooves.

Central to this tale is the exploration of gaps in memory, and of writing into those gaps as a way of releasing memory. Faulkes describes the process thus;

'It was important not to become too drunk. In order to open up the door of the past, go back and relive and do better, one needed to be relatively sober. ... I pressed with all of my minds imagining force against the transparent portal of time. As I stood with my eyes closed in the afternoon, the door gave way and I was through' the recollection – no I can't call it that – the narrative, the sequence of events that had come into my mind up until that point. I opened my eyes. The present was back with me in all its inescapable banality. 'The present'. God, I hate it. It has no depth of field; no context'. (Faulkes, 2007: 228)

He then moves to talk of the type of panic attack that grips when memory presses through.

'In panic time stops; past present and future exist as a single overwhelming force. You then, perversely want time to appear to run forwards because the future is the only place where you can see an escape from this intolerable overload of feeling. But at such moments time doesn't move. And if time isn't running, then all events that we think of as past and future are actually happening simultaneously. That is the really terrifying thing. And you are subsumed. You're buried, as beneath an avalanche, by the weight of simultaneous events'. (Faulkes 2007:242)

I found this haunting, this account of that which is blanked out, and the processes involved in its reclamation. Putting Engleby down with a mixture of admiration and pure jealousy, I sigh, reaching for Tremain's safe pair of hands, seeking relief in the doings of sixteenth century Denmark. Not much room for existential musing there I told myself, with such a consoling title as 'Music and Silence' (Tremain 1999). But I was to be proved wrong as it transpires that the reigning king Christian was a strong advocate of stream of consciousness in his private journaling. This is experience of journaling is beautifully captured by Tremain thus

'King Christian has a private notebook in which he occasionally writes down the thoughts and meditations which seem to come into his mind *uninvited*.

'These *Phantom Observations*, as he called them, fascinate him far more than what he terms his 'habitual mundane philosophising'. Part of this fascination lies in the fact that he does not know where these things have originated or how they have come into his head. Is the human brain like a plot of earth where crops, flowers, weeds and even the embryos

of mighty trees could seed themselves according to the direction of the wind or the flight pattern of birds? Should a man strive therefore only to let in those thoughts which proceed logically from other thoughts and so to protect himself from everything that had about it the feeling of *uninvitedness*? Or, might it be true that certain kinds of valuable perception only arrive as the wind-blown seed arrives in the water meadow, their provenance for ever unknown or unrecorded?

'What absorbs Christian about all of this is that he does not know the answer to any of it. It resists the definitive. But year by year, his notebooks fill up with these ghosts, these shadows, which, when he reads them again, sometimes seem to have no meaning at all, as if they were the jottings of a madman. One day, he tells himself, he will make a pyre of the notebooks and let all the thoughts and half-thoughts scribbled there rise up as smoke into the vacancy from which they have come'. (Tremain, 1999:154)

Reading of the pyre of notebooks, the novel falls to my chest as I ponder how it might be if I were to consign my ever growing pile of jotters to the petrol can and lighter. It would make quite a blaze, that is for sure, and at the same time leave quite a space on my shelves and an ache in my heart also, I suspect. Yet I need to tear myself away from these fictional worlds and re-enter my own. I extend an invite to the universe to send me the final slender thread that might assist me in closing out this narrative, to provide the clue that would galvanise me into bringing this saga to a conclusion.

For quite some while, the invite remains out there, quite unanswered, to the point where I to begin to wonder whether this might after all remain unfinished, without even an attempt to close on the theme of becoming an academic. At this point of near abandonment of the completion of this project, a clue comes in the form of an earnest inquiry from an old colleague – someone who had been part of my ICC survey - which was to provide the final catalysis for closure. And that clue came – in the best possible tradition – in the form of a letter.

Appendix: Epistolary Conclusions to my Substantive Findings.

Post completion of this thesis I received an email from an old colleague Alan, who had been giving serious consideration to making a similar conversion from the world of independent consulting into full time academia. He too had taken time out over the last two years to work on a PhD and along the way had done some executive teaching, but had not as yet experienced how it might be to be fully immersed in the academic life though he had some picture of it. He wrote asking for my candid reflections on my transit and I was more than happy to respond, not least as this exercise forced me to clarify my mind as to how I would honestly describe my experience to myself, let alone to another.

This appendix demonstrates how learning from this PhD translates into practice and into learning beyond the confines of the academy, and after the supposed 'finishing' of the thesis itself. It is at this point that the thesis develops a life of its own, beyond my control, and where I cannot feel precious about it.

Here is the transcript of my response to Alan's inquiry...

Dear Alan,

I am really intrigued that you wrote now to ask for my thoughts on the process of conversion to academia, given that you are speculating as to making the same passage yourself. In fact the questions that you pose in your email broadly mirror the tentative research questions that I developed as I constructed my PhD, titled 'On Becoming an Academic', a theme clearly relevant to the conversion topic. (What I mean by tentative research questions is that they morphed as the inquiry went along. Your inquiry usefully captures most of them though). I say I am intrigued by your timing as you write at a point when I struggle to clarify my concluding PhD thoughts on this conversion process. I would put this timing down to coincidence were it not for the fact that nearly four years of inquiry into this topic – and into my own experience of it – has taught me that when I put my attention on it, the right stimulus more often than not appears at the right time, often out of

the blue, to assist my writing and thinking to move to the next stage. Call it synchronicity or whatever, but this process of grabbing a mysterious 'slender thread' that builds into a strong rope has occurred time and time again. This time around, the stimulus is your inquiry, which I trust will assist me in getting through my block regarding writing my conclusions, and hopefully provides some insights along the way for you too.

Part of what has blocked me in concisely summarising this research – apart from the somewhat meandering nature of the narrative - has been the impossibility of generalising from this tale of my own experience. The other part is that, from what I know of my own and others experiences, that there is no precise formula for this transit from business to academia, as experience indicates that each convert makes their transit in their own way. Hence what I write here in response to your catalytic inquiry is covered in health warnings. It is a reflection more than prescribed advice. What I reflect on here is my path is not your path, travelled in my institution not yours, though I feel sure that there are parallels to be found. Having laid down all of these disclaimers, it is also true that the questions that you ask largely chime with broad themes that were developing in my conclusions. Let me address each of these areas of inquiry in turn, under the following thematic headlines, and please make of them what you will.

Is it possible to make the conversion transition, and has it worked for me?

Your first question asked whether it was actually possible to make this transition into the management academy. Well clearly it is possible, I have recently done it – as far as it can be 'done' - and I am not the first to navigate this passage. There have been many others before me, and there are plenty of others on this same path as I write, some of whom I meet with at conferences or wherever and engage in intense conversations regarding this journey. What I learn from each of these encounters reinforces the notion that there is as yet no formula, no prescribed passage. This knowledge may in turn beg the question – a theme which I will return to later - as to whether there should be a formula – a prescribed passage - for academic entry, as there is in other countries, notably the US.

So we know that it is possible to make the conversion. But successful navigation is by no means guaranteed, not by a long chalk. For each of us that have made it across the divide I feel sure that that many along the way that have fallen at the first fence, and that there are many others who have thought long and hard about making this transit but in the end have not made it to the starting gate. I say that many have considered this option because

I am aware that there does seem to be a magnetic attraction attached to the notion of having a full-time job in management at a reputable university. I know many of our mid career professional students come over all misty eyed at the prospect. Some are coy about it, some more direct in their expression, often couching their motivation by saying that what they want to do is to 'give something back' after a successful commercial career, as if university teaching were a mission, which I guess in some ways it is. But in my view it is a far more hard nosed mission that it might look from the outside.

A colleague has drawn my attention to the fact that among each new cohort of post experience students one can detect a common gleam in their eyes. She surmises that it is something to do with professionals stepping into a world quite distinct from their normal milieu, where all the students are being the best they can be, dedicated to their own and others learnings. This is a brave new world where they surprise and delight themselves and each other with what they come out with, in an environment where the teachers seem to share and revel in this crucible of creative and soulful endeavour. I imagine that part of the impulse to cement a longer term relationship with 'their' institution is a fear that this magical world which they have tasted as a student may be snatched all too soon away from them post the graduation ceremony; unless they could somehow become a part of this ethos, even perhaps on a permanent basis, as they move towards what is often described as the 'second age' in their portfolio careers.

As lecturers we are happy to inhabit this hothouse of intellectual and personal exploration with these professionals as they go through studenthood, but I notice that we are instinctively far less inclined to give departing students facile encouragement, when the question is begged, as to the reality of them gaining full time employment within academia. We are at pains to explain that the first stage of entry is to enrol for – and to gain - a PhD, a task which should never be underestimated, and which it is dangerous to envisage simply as an extension of Masters level learning, when in fact it is different in kind, without frameworks or cohort support. This sober reflecting of reality is done not to keep our magical kingdom to ourselves, but rather because the statistics speak to many casualties along the PhD road, with a frighteningly low completion rate among mid career entrants, who can toil for four, five years or more before admitting defeat. But we also see a few who we know would make great scholars and great teachers, and we are happy to encourage their talents and also aspirations, although not without cautions.

I am cautious to unreservedly recommend full-blooded conversion to academia to you or anyone else because I am all too well aware that there exists a whole variety of points at which this conversion project can all fall over. When I reflect on the moments when this journey might have dried up for me, I realise that my discouragement was brought about a mix of internal factors such as failure of will, or a bad attack of under-confidence combined with external factors such as my institution not doing everything it might have done at various points to support my conversion. As I look back I am also aware that there were moments when - as I teetered on the brink of abandonment - that there hovered into view vivid 'tipping points', or transformational moments where the possibility of conversion became tangible and when I moved strongly towards them. I have learned from these experiences to be highly attentive to the subtle signs and portents indicating the imminence of such tipping points, becoming playfully opportunistic around them.

The term 'becoming' is apposite ... as conversion is a question of psychological adjustment.

I entitled my PhD 'On Becoming an Academic', and the more I have reflected on this title the more apposite it feels. I could not imagine this conversion process being reduced to my simply dropping into a pre-designed apprentice academic slot. I realise now that at the heart of this process of 'becoming' is a series of inner adjustment processes that need to be made to allow the becoming to flourish, adjustments which will prove to be unique and unpredictable in nature for each of us making this journey. I have grown to believe that no amount of external incentives or coaching or support to convert would have enabled my transition if I had not been aware of and made that commitment to this process of inner adjustment. Putting my self at risk of accusations of making rampantly Calvinistic 'no pain no gain' avowals, I would also say that many of the difficulties, impasses and stumbling blocks that I have encountered have in the end proved powerful catalysts in this adjustment process. For that reason these ideas for you focus as much on the inner processes necessary for successful conversion as much as on enabling external structures and processes.

Four years ago I was not planning on an academic career; I committed to working on my PhD for reasons to do with making sense of my career to date, not to laying the foundations for a new career. Early on in the PhD process that I discovered that embarking on a doctorate was likely to prove a life changing process. Furthermore I realised that I *wanted* it to be a life changing process; this was not an idle pastime. It was

when I asked what it was that I wanted my life to change into, that the possibility of an academic career dawned. Looking back, I consider it a real virtue that I did not have a fixed vision of academic life or what it might entail at the point of entering the university. I am taken by the fact that this possibility has grown upon me, finding its own natural direction. This gentler organic path feels very different in kind from either a wild-eyed messianic pursuit of a vocation - with all of the attendant pressures and capacity for disappointment that such missionary zeal might bring - or at the other passionless extreme the mechanistic, pragmatic seeking of an academic accreditation, and subsequent gaining of a job ticket. (This latter 'entitlement' orientation can be evidenced in the approach of many twenty something PhD students, and while their need is understandable, given the investment they have made in dedicating themselves to their PhD while their friends get rich playing the futures market, I judge it to be fundamentally flawed in terms of scholarly motivation).

Expect twists and turns along the way.

I learned early on that once I had embarked on this conversion process that it was hardly likely to follow a straight line. Along the way there have been many interruptions and unexpected epiphanies; and for each of these moments of joy I have experienced lows of reference book chewing angst and frustration. If you are serious about pursuing this path, then I would say to expect to experience many such twists and turns of your own particular fashioning along the way, and to be prepared to roll with them. Some of these frustrations you will be able to attribute to external factors, but the truth is that there are some – often the essential transitional tests - that you need to take ownership of as occurring deep inside of your being, if you are to progress to fully inhabit the academic space that works for you.

You need to expect to be spending significant time in what Bridges (2004) describes as the 'neutral zone', that disquieting yet also generative space where you feel caught between two worlds, between endings and new beginnings without fully inhabiting either. I know that you have had many previous experiences of life in the neutral zone and that you are robust and agile in the face of change and transition. But I need to say that what I have found is that there is something unique about the excruciatingly glacial rate of change and decision making in academia that is at a different order of magnitude from that which I for one have experienced in the past in other organisational contexts. For example imagine being asked to fundamentally re-write three years work as if there were

an unexceptional request and think as to how that might feel. Or being told that an exciting new degree course that you have designed and that is ready for market might take up to two years to go through committee, if indeed it ever will. Or to know that a paper you have submitted to a high end peer reviewed journal might easily take three or four years to eventually find its readership, though the odds on that happening stand at less than twenty percent. Such prolonged time lags – especially when they occur in combination - can prey upon the soul; to the extent that too much dwelling on these long interregnums can make your previous way of earning a living look very attractive indeed compared to this nebulous and precarious future.

Facing the fear of being found out.

There is something about academic life that makes even the most seasoned of academics feel that they are somehow ‘faking it’, that they are an impostor teetering precariously on a narrow ledge, only inches away from being found out. If this persistent low-grade feeling of inadequacy depressingly plays as the continuous background music for established and seemingly invulnerable academics, then these imagined frailties are magnified a hundred fold for the aspirant academic. In this academic milieu you are invariably surrounded by colleagues who know more than you; have read more books than you, and who seem to have precisely the right reference on their lips at precisely the right time, seemingly without effort.

I have certainly grown familiar with this feeling of serving a perpetual apprenticeship, a sensation which can prove to be undermining and identity sapping, and against which I rebel at times, but never fully eliminate from the back of my mind. And yet I have acknowledged in moments of surrender that perhaps there can be no other way, because the reality is that I am an apprentice with far more to learn than I ever realised. And that each academic peak I climb proves in the end to be a false horizon. At times I have found it profoundly cleansing to stare humility in the face, when my previous existence as a consultant, like yours contrasted markedly with this, seeming as it did to rely for survival on a necessary degree of arrogance, which is the opposite of humility. I have grown to learn that much of this self questioning that I have been propelled towards comes as a necessary part of the critical turf, and that it is an essential to this inner adjustment process. What I feel I have embarked on is a journey into doubt where everything is up for grabs. Not that my previous existence wasn't like that deep down, but as you know the seduction of solution seeking as a consultant was enough to keep us well away from the

existential abyss. What I have learned is that I need to ensure that this perpetual attention to the chatter of my inner critic does not become pathological, though I can quite understand how it could install itself at front of mind.

Dealing with the twists and turns.

My counsel with regard to dealing with these twists and turns is one of patience, and of accepting that things are unlikely to happen in a hurry. You may find yourself looking for career short cuts when the reality is that such shortcuts are few and far between. In addition to pursuing a 'becoming' arc, I was conscious that I was in the process 'finding myself'; a process which I have found distinctly hit and miss. As well as patience, there is no doubt that an ability to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty will stand you in good stead, as this capability will be sorely tested. You may remember that during our independent co-creatives research conversation, we talked of the development of an 'inner gyroscope'; of the ability to go inside when really challenged and to seek from deep within ourselves the best response. This reliance on this inner gyroscope has certainly stood me in good stead when the going has become turbulent, rather than running around in headless chicken fashion pursuing increasingly unlikely options. Falling back on your inner resources doesn't entirely banish the gremlins of doubt but at least you become mindful of where they live and why they live.

I have discovered that 'writing into' this transition has formed an indispensable part of my inner adjustment repertoire, as well as cathartic in its own right. I alluded earlier to the value of paying attention to slender threads. There is no doubt in my mind that this process of personal journaling – of 'writing as inquiry' – has facilitated my awareness of the slender threads, and these have often illumined the way forward for me when all else felt murky. The academic inertia mentioned earlier – or the sheer complexity of PhD choices - have forced me into moments when I have needed to let the whole project 'simmer'. I have found that writing into these impasses has been highly instrumental in detailing the direction forward. It has felt that at moments when I have gotten out of the way, allowing my unconscious to write the script for me on the empty page in front of me – then a clarity has emerged for me that would never have been accessible to me when I was attempting to force the pace through will power and frustration alone. The process of surveying my cohort of independent consultants – you among them – then writing up that account of our various transitions through life was most helpful in enlightening my understanding of the transition dynamics I have been experiencing. Without the write up,

these accounts would have been far less influential than they were when I committed them to the page, though that was often a painful process at the time.

Support of colleagues and networks has proved vital.

In the face of this at times swampy experience of doubt and testing, a number of things have really helped me through. Very high on this list I would place having interesting and interested colleagues in my department. Being part of a small, growing – and sometimes struggling – team has proven most helpful. I know that my experience would have felt very different in a bigger, more mature Management School. I know that colleagues that I have met who inhabit such institutions often express envy of the intimacy, and of the across the board involvement and support I have been in receipt of in our small but growing department. There have also been when times I have envied the mirror of that, which is to say I have desired the structure and predictability of role that they enjoy, but I notice that that covetous feeling does not prevail for very long. I have grown to believe that I would not trade the intellectual edge or the freedom that I currently enjoy for any amount of security or consistency.

Alongside of the support of these colleagues is the support I have received from the wider communities of interest and of practice that I have encountered through conferences and also through my colleagues and their associated networks. The process of telling my story repeatedly to strangers at such conferences has proved most helpful in allowing me to hear my own story, and to understand better what I may be reaching for, as I notice the story changes with each recounting, accenting themes that when repeated often enough suggest themselves as the themes that I need to be attending to. The telling or reading of the story aloud has also really helped me to take my own transition seriously, when I notice that others are prepared to do the same.

An important part of my support has been that I have had a great formal supervisor to help me along – himself a convert to the academic cause - and to challenge me to the core as well as to provide support and some tough loving when it has been most needed. Beyond this formal supervision I have found myself seeking and finding informal mentors in all sorts of places. Indeed my colleagues say that I am good at reaching out for help, observing that I am not afraid to ask the naïve questions. This I have found has stood me in good stead, as all too often I have been given something to do with being given a clue

as to how to do it. Contrasting with this minimalist approach to task support, I have been wonderfully struck time and again by the generosity based culture of the collegial 'gift economy', where academics freely share ideas and findings that are clearly precious to them, and of great value to me. This has proved invaluable, and a welcome departure from some of the worst excesses of the dog eat dog consulting world that you and I have experienced from time to time.

Freedom to explore is really important.

One reservation I have about synthetic career paths is that they can limit freedom of choice and possibility. It would not have suited me to be locked into a research 'fact factory' production line, though I understand that such slots do work for PhDs who enter directly from first degrees. I would contrast such designed career paths with my own entry, which had little structure but was pregnant with possibility. From the outset of my doctoral research, I was thrown back on my own resources, and made to look deeply inside to discover the nature of my inquiry. There is no doubt that being a full time doctoral student was highly instrumental in allowing this sense of freedom. It felt luxurious at the time, but I speculate now that it was an indispensable luxury, as I could not imagine my studies and career taking the shape they have without that experience of deep dwell time. I have learned since to fight for space as it can easily be consumed; and once it is freed, then to make the most of it. I would also contend that for me it was helpful not to have had a defined career trajectory earlier on. I mentioned earlier that sensitivity to potential 'tipping points' has enabled me to experiment with my direction, to test what works and what doesn't. I would not have had this freedom to pursue slender threads if I had been constrained within a predetermined career path.

Working for 'fit' ... be aware of difference, don't try to hide or apologise.

I believe that it is vital to choose an institution that is likely to offer a good fit between what they have to offer and your aspirations, even if that fit is not immediately discernible. This will mean checking fit in first instance, when in my belief intuition matters as much as any deductive process. It also means defending against the impulse to jump at the first thing that is offered to you, especially if the fit is unclear. There are many ways of reality checking your own institution. I have found attending conferences and growing networks to be an excellent way to calibrate your own place against others. It is also interesting to

learn how your institution is perceived, if indeed it is. (Mine is largely invisible to the outside world, being newish and small, while nesting within a venerable institution).

Fit should be about liking colleagues, but at a deeper level there needs to exist a good fit between teaching and research passions, or else this mutual rapport will soon evaporate despite the best of intentions. It could prove very painful and isolating if a broad sense of fit is not there at the beginning. I have seen this happen and have also seen the results, which have proved painful for all parties concerned.

I have been aware of a constant internal chatter around 'fit' runs through this transition process, whereby your 'fit' antenna are super alert to signals as to whether you are matching or mismatching the culture of the institution in any given situation. I conjecture that we are likely to build our adaptation around this sense of fit or compliance. My advice would be to not let this sensitivity drive you too far in the direction of 'matching' in every instance. In fact for the mid or late career professional I would advocate that you be proud of your difference in background to conventional long term academics and not to be reluctant to speak to it. I have certainly found that established academics – or at least the more secure among them - are interested in my past incarnation, just so long as you don't perpetually shove your unique and fascinating history down their throats.

As much as this conversion process is about you fitting the institution, so it is also about the institution fitting you. It is important to dig beneath 'what is in the brochure', so to speak, and to be alive to the seduction that might be in play, to allow yourself to be alive to the more prosaic reality. I have little doubt that for much of your transition and beyond you will be left with overwhelming feeling emanating from at least parts of the institution that it is doing you an enormous favour by hiring you, or even offering you a place at the table. Don't be cowed by this. It is true you will be occupying a highly privileged position, but you need not allow your self worth to evaporate, or to gag your questioning of some of the unspoken assumptions that drive such institutional elitism.

My experience would say that it is healthy for both parties to work towards a sustainable degree of fit. You can't expect those from more traditional academic career routes to have immediate understanding of the mid career adaptation process. Nor can you assume a shared values base, as there still exists much suspicion of consultants in management academia. I found that declaring my 'becoming' agenda has allowed me to seek degree of allowance; but I would also caution against displaying too much dependency or

weakness to the wrong people early on, as I sense that this will be resisted, or interpreted as inadequacy. I developed a notional goal of becoming a 'fully functioning academic', in the sense of the Rogerian 'fully functioning human being' (Rogers 1972). This notion has worked for me, although I am not sure whether it has been as yet achieved. I am sure that it is still a work in progress, but this ambition has been worthwhile bearing in mind when I have felt tempted by compromises that I know would not have sustained for me. One example of this would be to compromise the completion of my PHD, which is a trap I have seen colleagues fall into then regret, but without much hope of recovery.

Expect to negotiate.

There is little question that, to achieve best fit, it will prove necessary for you to negotiate your role. Negotiation takes vision and energy and the gaining of coalition of support. And in this negotiation it is likely that you will be taking a lot on trust from your institution, given how little that you really know of this world, certainly compared to what you know of your old world. In my experience you are more likely to successfully negotiate the 'what' of your role rather than the terms and conditions. I have noticed that what I have actually been doing has borne little relationship to how the formal bureaucracy was describing my work or rewarding my worth, either professionally or financially. In addition it is not uncommon for new comers to experience long term probation, which can prove to be most unsettling. This experience of doing one thing while be recognised for a lesser achievement requires quite a capacity for cognitive dissonance, and for carrying on regardless in the belief that one day the organisational tail might catch up. This dissonance was initially quite a disconnect for me, but I think I have learned to carry on regardless, in the belief that effort would eventually be rewarded. It would seem to be the case that you need to prove that you can do the job before you are recognised and rewarded for that full job description. This lag between execution and recognition may be especially pronounced if you are in the process of creating a new role, which was the reality in my case.

You are likely to be pioneering risk-taking roles in an often risk averse climate.

As a late comer bringing in experiences which might suggest new areas for teaching adventure, or suggest different ways of approaching the tried and tested, then the emphasis will be upon you to pioneer these ideas and to take a few risks, given that the establishment is hardly likely to pioneer risk while you sit back. Should you pioneer a succession of such innovations, then it may well be that you end up negotiating a career

path for yourself where there are few precedents where again the system is bound to be lagging behind what you are doing. Academic life is not like many other jobs in that it does seem to seep into every pore of your life. In fact it can consume you at times. This is part of the exhilaration, and part of the pain. I am not sure if any of that commitment can be negotiated.

A significant area for negotiation will be on achieving the right balance for you between research, teaching and administration. My learning is that it is important for you to know that you are not powerless in the striking of this balance, and that it is vital that you get it as near right as you can for you. As a late entrant it is likely that you will be pushed towards teaching and administration as a way of proving your worth, given that it is unlikely that you will bring a strong enough research track record to give you the academic credibility on the basis of your publications alone. If this weighting between teaching and research becomes unbalanced, then you might find yourself in a downward cycle that paints you into teaching only role, where a neglected PhD, after a certain period of time, becomes a regretfully abandoned PhD that no one has the heart to mention again. My advice would be not to compromise on PhD – or on developing research products from that – as the PhD is vital to the process of becoming an academic. You will need to fight for your research space, which may well mean that – with your high teaching and administration load - that you seem to be working a whole lot harder than your more established colleagues around you are for a while.

A breakthrough for me has been the discovery of a virtuous circle at work between my research and my teaching, where for example my research into 'reflective practice' has actively involved students, and has given rise to new teaching units which draw upon this research, and which in turn can be turned into pedagogical research. I doubt if I would have discovered this virtuous circle if I hadn't been prepared to do something different and to follow my research passion, often in the face of conventional cautions. I have drawn from this that it may be a virtue to be iconoclastic, rather than to follow the research herd. This iconoclasm benefits in turn from a healthy dose of self promotion, which may include presentation of papers at conferences or in professional journals.

Is challenging the institution from within possible or desirable?

You ask whether moving towards a positioning within the establishment would mean the abandonment of challenge to the accepted order. My experience would say that this is the

last thing you need to be doing. It is not a good idea to be supine, as I suggest that you would simply be lost. On the other hand wholesale unrelenting challenge is unlikely to be influential either. To challenge through your research phase of PhD completion does seem like a good idea. In fact, if you cannot challenge when a PhD student, it is even less likely that you can once you are within the system, especially when the audit culture expressed via the Research Assessment Exercise by which all academics are judged come to bites you. I have grown aware that there is a real tightrope to be walked between respectability and innovation. It is difficult to occupy both spaces at the same time.

However, I have learned that there is a limit to the extent to which you can change structures and processes, and as observed earlier the academy does grind along slowly. You may wish to mount challenges relating to the fit of your best talents and to what is on offer, or the way the institution goes about things. You may also wish to be part of a wider challenging of forces within academia which seek to constrain the much vaunted notion of 'academic freedom'. Management schools and business education would seem to be particularly prone to influences which threaten traditions of academic freedom, where commercial interests compromise integrity or freedom, for example the recent accreditation of McDonald's 'Mc A levels' where retail workers are awarded equivalent qualifications to those issued by the academy. As Phillip Hensher (2008) pointed out in a recent article 'a university which had no one intellectually dedicated to its overthrow would be a useless sort of place'.

What is the reality of the need for converts? Will I be needed or wanted?

There is no doubt that there is as real problem concerning the predicted shortfall for business school teachers into the future, and this recognition is what is driving the design of delivery mechanisms by Social Science Councils and the like which will prove more reliable in the serving up of converts than the haphazard or organic home grown pathways such as the one I have been experiencing. I would say that there is certainly a need for such career paths, as from what I observe around me there is a crisis of representation here for management PhDs, many of whom feel neglected or feel that the journey is proving in the end too overwhelming, and then give up. This pattern of abandonment is hardly surprising, as conversion without too many guarantees of success is a high risk step into unknown, where beyond the romanticism and associated prestige of joining the academy the hard nosed cost benefits are difficult to justify. This is especially true if the choice is part time study.

So career paths might well work – especially where they require commitment from the institution regarding eventual employment, and give the convert some financial security during the transition process - but I would caution against spoon feeding converts, or industrialising the process, as this may bypass the crucial inner adjustment process which I have emphasised throughout this response to you. This adjustment process cannot be bypassed unless the academy is willing to risk falling into a convergent path where all converts look and sound pretty much the same, study in the same way, and have the same instrumental approach to their careers.

Is the assumption that ‘converting’ means that you have a full-time academic job?

You ask if there is an assumption underlying the conversion discourse which suggests that a full time permanent academic job is the desired end state of the conversion process. My answer would be in the affirmative, and further I would say that I believe this to be a healthy assumption, as the role that the convert is being prepared for is long term and developmental in nature, and that – even at our time of life – there needs to be a two way commitment, symbolised by offering a full-time job. The ‘real politic’ would also suggest that it is really important within a highly status conscious institution for the convert to be taken seriously, and that is unlikely to happen unless the role is permanent. Having mounted such advocacy, I can also hear a small voice within me asking whether the compulsive pursuit of a permanent job – driven mainly by security needs or fear of failure – is necessarily the best option. I have certainly found a degree of uncertainty helpful on my journey, and have noticed how this has helpfully activated my inner entrepreneur, with regard to making and shaping a role for myself.

If such permanency is not feasible, then it is clear that there is an academic living to be made on the margins, through part-time teaching, involvement in episodic research projects, writing executive books and manuals, facilitating tutorials, dissertation supervision and such like activities. In fact, some who live in this way see a positive virtue in this life, ‘eating what they kill’ and finding a stimulus and freedom in the precariousness of it all which would scare the living daylights of conventionally tithed academics. It may be a rationalisation, but such marginal players would say that there is a cleanliness in what they do, in terms of contract, and that there is plenty of evidence that permanent jobs can make you sluggish and defensive of what you have and the way you do what you traditionally do.

So what happens once you get the job?

It is clear that once you land the permanent job that the transition is not all over at that point; there is little opportunity to sit back and relax, as the tests and trials continue throughout your probation. In fact in many ways they seem to intensify. I now feel the need to be attentive to forces for institutionalisation which I viewed, somewhat laconically from afar when I was a semi-detached doctoral student; but which I now face square on now that I am on the inside along with the others. I find myself in particular defending against the forces of inertia which if I am not careful allow me to start to believe that nothing is really possible around here. As an antidote to these pressures to look perpetually inwards I have found it refreshing to look outside via networks or through interaction with the local business community to provide an external perspective. I have also volunteered for internal roles that I would like to believe have some development benefit, and which have confirmed my belief that it is possible to change from within, through there is little doubting that the constraints are considerable. I am also learning to find where the balance is for me between institutional citizenship and preservation of self interest.

People ask me if I have ambitions for career advancement as far perhaps as a professorship. My answer is that this is not a residing ambition, but it will be interesting to see how what contribution I can make and how far I might travel in the time available. It may even be that age discrimination legislation proves to be our friend, as I have few plans for retirement at this stage. I am not sure how real the job security is, nor am I too hung up on that. The best I can do is the best I can do. There are times when I do wonder if the conversion process is reversible. Possibly is the answer that returns to me, though the adjustment back would require considerable effort and it is not one I desire at this point, beyond occasional nostalgic day-dreaming.

What are the chances of you finding your vein of gold?

I am not sure if I can answer your question as to whether you are likely to find your 'vein of gold', that unique expression of your gifts through becoming an academic. Reflecting on my experience, I would certainly say that where I have ended up after nearly four years of jostling feels like a really good place to be, and I have a feeling that this sense of satisfaction will deepen as time goes on. There are ways in which this role feels as if it

does bring the best out of me, though I am not fully sure if it meets my original ambition of matching the sum of all of the perches that have gone before. One thing I do notice is that this is certainly not a nine-to-five job, anything but. Even when I am not actively working in front of a screen or in front of students, there is always some unresolved thought or dilemma, plan or project spinning around in the background, often to the distraction of those that share my life with me.

In many respects I have found this role like few others I have known in the past. I have deeply enjoyed the mentoring aspects of this life, and the fact that I engage with students on a deep level not just during the duration of their degree but often for years thereafter, including them returning either for doctorates or to assist us in teaching and / or research is highly satisfying. There has been a strong sense of changing and enriching students' lives that has had an almost sacred quality to it.

My encouragement to you would be to continue with your inquiries, but also to keep your eyes wide open. It would be interesting to know what you make of this reply. It has certainly proved useful to me as way of summarising the substantive elements of my doctorate, so many thanks for being catalytic in that. Why, if you find this instructive then I could even start to claim that I was making some sort of contribution to knowledge.

All the best with this,

Daniel.

Footnote to self.

(I found it taxing yet satisfying to consign these summary thoughts to paper. Apart from anything else it took far longer than I supposed, and while I was somewhat satisfied that I had captured most of my key thoughts I remained painfully aware that there was still much that remained unsaid. One overwhelming impression I was left with was that I was not wholly comfortable with the 'academic' sobriquet. There was little doubt that I was becoming something, though it seemed clear that what I was becoming was my own variant on the theme rather than conforming to the classical mould or stereotype.

It felt quite a responsibility to be advising Alan in this way. I was not sure if I had spelled out strongly enough the health warnings that said this is the way that I found through all of

this. It is unique to me and my set of circumstances. By no means please take from this the inference that you should read this as a green light and go for it. Hence it was with some trepidation that I awaited Alan's reply which in the event was not long in coming).

'Dear Dan,

Thanks a lot for the comprehensive response to my enquiry. I really appreciated the time you took over this, and it gave me a clear picture of your experience. Things however have moved on here some since I wrote to you. It feels almost a betrayal to say so – and a repudiation of all the work that you have put into pulling together your thoughts – but the fact is that I am not now going to pursue my adventures into academia. It is not that something better has come up – I have always known that I could return to consulting. That would be easy enough and my networks are still alive and well – but the fact is that my PhD has been knocked back yet again – I hadn't told you had I? - and that has felt like the last straw.

I remember so well the spirit of adventure that imbued us both when first we met, when starting out on this academic escapade. We had the highest ambitions to do this our way and to make our pieces of research our own. Since then I know we each have experienced our knock backs but despite the bruising have carried on regardless. You seem to have ridden the punches better than I without compromising your final product too badly but then you have yet to experience the full external examiners revisions thing. And I sense you have had much stronger support back home in your department while my crowd have been indifferent to bordering on hostile at times.

This time around I have been required to change my submission to such a degree that it doesn't feel like mine anymore. It will pass this time around but it is not longer mine. I am playing the game and I will pass by their rules but I don't like the taste it leaves in my mouth I must say. If I remember correctly we both avowed that at this age and stage we would hold out for what we believed to be true. In this case I feel sadly that I have been forced to capitulate, to fatally compromise my highest intentions. At this point I feel that I am going through the motions here, I have started so I will finish sort of thing, but my heart is no longer in it. This is not a great thing to be admitting to myself, I fully realise that but that is the cold facts of the matter. Hope this doesn't depress you too much but that is how things are.

Something else that has really helped me make up my mind is a number of recent conversations that I have had with Christopher whom we both met at the same time at that first conference, who was on a scholarship to try out the academic life while he researches consultancies? Well Chris is moving to the point where he feels that after three years of inhabitation of the academic tree that he no longer wishes to persist with the experiment, not at this age and stage. Too much competition, too much tiresome putting down of his experience out there, too much derision being pointed at consultants without academics demonstrating any sincere wish to know how the world of consulting really works. They just seem to want to put it down. It is quite a litany and it makes me sad, as though folk who issue the scholarships such as AIM and FME are well intentioned and would be quite horrified I feel sure if they were to know how badly wrong all of this can go.

Your words go some way to persuade me but maybe too late at this point. No doubt we will meet up at some point soon anyway, good luck

Alan.

And my response to this ran thus

Dear Alan

I read your reply with some sadness, frustration and also a large dose of impotence. At one level I feel really fortunate that I seem to have found my perch though some compromises have been made. I have certainly felt that the balance of support and challenge has been right for me while the scales have tipped quite the wrong way for you, and also so it sounds for Christopher. It is growing clear to me that if one is knocked back often enough – or even just caught at the wrong moment – then the fabric of relationship between convert and the academy can be irremediably ruptured, its elasticity of tolerance stretched beyond the point of no return. You have spoken before of the depressing effect of convergence on research and of the academic sterility that that drives us all towards becoming RAE ready research clones. Yet when we step outside of all of that to experiment with say action research or grounded approaches then we can be marginalised. This sidelining also seems to happen when we attempt to research that which we intimately know in management also. Perhaps that is really threatening to those without the experience. And it grieves me to hear of Chris's experience too. I too have

recently spoken to him and he is quite vehement that he has gone far enough and no further with the institution he inhabits though he might consider a full time post in a more benign environment.

All of this causes me to reflect on the fragility of the conversion process. This dissertation began by referencing the need for armies of converts if the demand was to be satisfied into the future. I am impressed by the schemes and structures laid out to a degree. Christopher as we know was on one of these formal tracks to conversion. What is not legislated for and what cannot be legislated for are the inner adjustments and transitions that need to be made, and the true support that needs to be given to institutions to those that embark on this precarious transit.

I will certainly let you know how I get on with my submission of this PhD and with my viva, and I look forward to hearing how yours finally works out.

Best with everything

Daniel.

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