



DProf thesis

Art-based knowing: first-person inquiry into epistemology, voice and agency from a gendered perspective

Pitts, I.A.

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Submission coversheet- Individual's work



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I have read and understood the Ashridge Academic Misconduct Guidelines and declare that this written assessment is all my own work except where I indicated otherwise by proper use of quotes and references, following the referencing guidelines in the Participant Handbook.

Student Signature:



(Ineke Pitts)

Date Submitted: 14/6/2022



Ashridge Doctorate in Organisational Change

Art-Based Knowing: First-person inquiry into epistemology and voice from a gendered perspective

A first-person action research inquiry into feminine epistemological development, voice and voiceless-ness; working with art-based approaches, with metaphor and with embodied ways of knowing

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The Field

After submitting this thesis, I created the work of art on the cover which I later called 'The Field', as a way to manifest a way of being in the world that underpins this inquiry; one I struggled for more than six years to articulate. This five foot by three-foot canvas hangs on the wall in front of me as I type. I squeezed it in a taxi and carried it with me to my room at the Colombo Hilton, where it sat, rich with metaphor and emboldened my voice at my Doctoral Viva.

It represents a tension between the man-made world of words, objects and symbols we take for reality, and the natural world that is sensory, non-verbal and authentic. The gate to the constructed world is padlocked. In the abyss that stands between the worlds, there is a fast flowing river of consciousness. In and around the field there is nature, richness and beauty. I am present in the painting as a subject, as an observer, and as the object of the painting's gaze. I am also the artist. These multiple layers of simultaneous existence mirror my experience of different levels of consciousness and realms of experience that are fundamental to Action Research principles and to my inquiry.

In the chapter on Arts-based Inquiry (Chapter 11), you will see me reflect on the post-inquiry clarity that this act of painting made possible. The painting surprised me and continues to reveal itself.

Chapter one- Inquiry

This is me delving into Inquiry

It feels like we have come to the end of a very long train journey. We have travelled together through polluted cities and their impoverished back streets, looked out over lush green fields and wide lazy rivers. All the while, a low grey mist has obscured the view into the distance.

As we near the end of the journey, the mist is lifting and I am getting glimpses of a stunning vista ahead, the like of which I have never seen. Sadly, I bought my ticket with no clear idea where this train was going to take me and I have to disembark at the next station.

As I enter this final phase of writing up my thesis, I only now begin to understand where I am heading and the work that needs to be done to take me there.

Ineke Ann Pitts

April 2021

This is me delving into Inquiry- foreword

'This is me delving into inquiry' - an expression my supervisor used, to help me create a mental image of the work I needed to do. I am attached to the imagery of diving head first into a pool of swirling ideas and pulling out from its depths profound knowledge that had lain there unexplored and forgotten like a treasure chest in a wrecked galleon. You will see me repeat the phrase 'this is me' to remind me to stay present, to stay curious and to avoid the overwhelming temptation to get stuck in 'telling' mode.

I came to this inquiry with a question about how to validate my artful and embodied practice in a world that seems neither to want nor understand it.

You will see me grapple with language and ideas that are new, and work with metaphor and imagery to try to make them my own.

Expect to be giddy. My mind works in flashes of inspiration and grapples with literature and complex ideas, like a dog with a bone. The significance of imagery will become increasingly obvious as you get to know me and realise that I am entering academia as a practitioner. Words have been my nemesis and my balm. Butting up against words and language, I experienced silence, disempowerment and self-loathing. I found that words are the instruments of freedom, that language is metaphorical, and symbolic; and that we have constructed great monuments from language and called it truth.

You will see me use language in the opposite direction; as a work of art that; to reveal, to shake loose and to uncover truth that is hidden in words that can be shallow and symbolic. This puts my writing firmly in the 'post-structuralist' paradigm that challenges the symbols and social constructions that we mistake for reality.

As we journey together, we need space to walk side-by-side, to take a breath, to listen, notice and catch the meaning of what is evolving. This feels like a walk with a friend. I have enjoyed many such walks during the course of my inquiring. I find the physical act of putting one foot in front of another, meditative and liberating. In my mind, we are walking along as forest path, towards an expansive clearing; 'a soulful-space between sky and earth' (Todres 2011, p111), a place where we embrace vulnerability and ambiguity 'that is the Great Freedom', a place where horses graze and everything makes sense.

The Promenade

As I am writing, alone at my antique villa in the South of Sri Lanka, I am listening to the music I played as a musician in my youth and it feels as if an old friend has come to visit. I am listening to Mussorgsky's iconic 'Pictures at an Exhibition' and am transported to another time, another life.

In the spaces between the depictions of gnomes and castles and catacombs, there is a repeating melody which he called 'Promenade', the French word for walk. It depicts the composer walking at a rhythmic pace between the painted scenes. The musical score requires it to be performed '*allegro giusto, nel modo russo; senza allegrezza, ma poco sostenuto*'; which approximately translates to: 'proceed at a metered walking pace, in a Russian style, without speeding up but slightly lengthened.' Promenade is written in a pentatonic, which is a musical scale with five notes per octave rather than the usual seven. Pentatonic scales pre-date heptatonic scales, and are known for their simplicity to master, particularly for beginners. It lends a child-like drawing quality to this linking stanza. 'Promenade' is a kind of grounded space in measured rhythmical strides between and in contrast to, the vividly-hued and emotionally-charged canvasses of 'The Ox-Cart', 'The Old Castle', 'The Dance of the Chick Amongst the Eggs', the crazy witch 'Baba Yaga' and the magnificent 'Great Gates of Kiev'.

Our promenade is a stream of writing in-between and linking the main works of inquiry. On the path, I give myself permission to speak candidly and at times hesitantly. On this path I can step outside of the narrative data and show a progression of ideas and critical thinking without fear of being judged.

What is this inquiry?

This is a first person, heuristic, action research inquiry into feminine epistemological development, voice and voiceless-ness; working with ethnography, with art-based approaches and with embodied ways of knowing. This is an inquiry into how I come to know what I know, connecting feminine epistemology, embodied knowing and art-based practices.

The inquiry came about through a frustration of not being able to put my message across, of feeling frustrated with the struggle to validate unconventional arts-based and embodied practices, and feeling silenced as a woman working in a predominantly masculine work culture. I am an accomplished and experienced trainer and consultant. For more than twenty years I have coached heads of international development agencies and multi-national corporations. I deliver presentations for large audiences at international conferences, sit on advisory panels and head up a teams of international consultants in

South Asia; spending weeks in some of the most inhospitable parts of the world. Yet sometimes I feel a complete fraud.

On a good day I am lucid, sparkingly witty and sharp as a tack. I have a quick mind and conceptualise, strategize, and have two or three business ideas before breakfast. Recently, I notice that I am filled with self-doubt. I struggle to make the simplest decision and feel powerless, voiceless and intimidated in the face of any hint of disapproval. I remember times I have failed and replay them in my mind. I want to strengthen my ability to make decisions and influence others. I want to know what is behind these feelings of inadequacy and learn to build and sustain power and influence without needing to behave like a man. I want to develop and mainstream my ideas around use of non-verbal learning techniques, working with imagery, metaphor and with horses.

Why is this inquiry important?

Sri Lanka is in the midst of massive transformation. People are starting to raise their voices, to stand up against oppression of human rights, bribery and corruption. Amongst the protestors are women, artists and people of all faiths and levels of education. In the process of this inquiry I have come to understand that this thesis has a reach beyond women in business, and extends to address the broader issue around inclusion of all minority voices.

Twenty years of experience in management consultancy in twenty-four countries world-wide, has provided me with rich and current insights into cultural influences around voice and agency from a feminine perspective. My practice context is predominantly Sri Lanka and South Asia, which is important to know, as assumptions we bring from a middle-class Western-educated standpoint have little tenure in this context, even today.

Yesterday I had an online mentoring session with a young businesswoman. She has established a software development company and is running an academy for young disadvantaged youth to learn programming. It is a great vision and she has a number of major clients, but as a result of economic effects of Covid-19 shutdowns, her business is foundering. When we spoke today she was close to tears. 'My family doesn't support me' she explained, 'they just want me to get married and start a family. It is our tradition you see, and soon I am going to have to make a choice between them or me.'

Another coachee is taking over small specialized manufacturing business from her father. She is struggling to win the attention and respect of her employees who continue to defer to the father and mostly ignore her. The father wants to retire and is secretly very concerned that his daughter may not

have what it takes. Both women are highly intelligent, educated and capable; representative of many brilliant young women entrepreneurs that are confronted everyday with tensions of tradition versus freedom to choose their own destiny. I can relate to their dilemma based on my own early life experiences growing up in a village where getting married and having children is still the ultimate affirmation of womanhood and success.

I want to support these women, but the traditional business development tools that I have access to, are not going to help them overcome this. The organisation that employs me has no history of working with non-verbal tools. It has a culture that privileges, what I now understand to be a masculine epistemological paradigm, prioritising traditional learning techniques and not recognising the legitimacy of any alternative. In the past when I started to develop new approaches they were referred to by a co-director as 'that voodoo'.

Currently, I have neither the mandate, nor the agency to change cultural assumptions of the entire organisation. I know I can help these women to gain confidence in themselves and overcome barriers and fears. I have done so more than one hundred times over the last two years through training activities I developed, that include a lot of non-verbal tools, imagery, visualisation and metaphor. I accomplished this secretly and subversively, trying not to draw attention of the sceptical senior management. I did this under the guise of delivering 'soft skills training' and 'leadership development'. In my experience, leadership training rarely achieves what it promises, as it neglects to address underlying sense of identity that determines our ability to act with authentic authority. In 2017 I wrote a paper for my senior management team entitled 'Why we need to take a fresh look at Leadership Development'. As a result, my boss authorised a complete overhaul of our 'Leadership and People Management' training. It was a good start but very few, if any, of my male colleagues were comfortable with the embodied learning components that I incorporated.

In 2019, I began to include horses in my learning activities. From the initial feedback, working with fifty middle managers from a large garment corporation, I see massive potential to develop therapeutic and coaching practices. This doctorate will give me needed grounding and credibility to take this forward

What you will see in this inquiry

This is a first-person action research inquiry, which means you will see me using my own life stories, practice accounts and first-hand living experience as data. I am presenting this to you using the

metaphor of 'works of art'. My intention in doing so is to connect simultaneously at both language and at a non-verbal level to engender a kind of inter-subjective sensual experience for my reader.

There are three main works of art in this exhibition; one that delves into the question of 'How I know what I know', (feminine epistemology); one that explores the concept of 'Voice and Voiceless-ness' and one that digs into the ideas and experiences around 'Embodied Knowing'.

Aside from these great canvasses, you will also see portraits of 'me engaging with literature', 'me experimenting with action research methodologies' and various vignettes of practice accounts – stories captured in journals of actual experiences, retold for purposes of understanding 'what just happened?'

Linking these inquiries is the Promenade, which I will simply refer to as 'the path'. Stepping on to the path, is also stepping out of inquiry and gives me an opportunity to observe, narrate and draw insights and lessons, much as one would critique a painting. This is a vital space for me to step out of any emotional attachment and fear of criticism. I am using a distinctive 'Ink Free' font for Path dialogue – It reminds me of my own handwriting and gives me permission to use a more informal, conversational tone – as in a conversation between two friends as one guides the other around an exhibition of her work, explaining and critiquing the 'exhibits'.

Locating this inquiry in the context of my recent life lessons

The following narrative is an account of life during the 2020 lockdown. It gives an insight into how I am experiencing embodiment and gives clues to the physical and emotional backdrop to this ongoing inquiry. The purpose of these vignettes is multi-fold, I don't always know exactly what is going to emerge as I begin to write. Often there are multiple layers of meaning, both literal and metaphorical, which I plan to signpost as we go.

The last decade has been one of my most challenging. I have been confronted by fraud, treachery, the brutal murder of a colleague by ISIS, the kidnap of a friend and client in Afghanistan, the premature death of my sister, and recently, the passing of my mother after a year under lockdown due to the global pandemic. Businesswise it has been intensely challenging and rewarding in equal measures.

During the period in 2020 when the global Covid-19 pandemic forced a two month lockdown in Sri Lanka, I had a unique opportunity to experience a very different reality. I had to step outside my normal way of being and live day-to-day, moment-to-moment, in close connection with my horses, with nature and with the physical limitations of my own body. Below is an excerpt from my journal.

UNDER LOCKDOWN

It has been two months since the Government ordered an island-wide lockdown in Sri Lanka, and we have had no income at the riding stables. Unlike back in the UK and Europe, there are no government hand-outs. We rely on donations and our wits to feed fifteen horses and ponies, eight staff and their families, and an assortment of cats and dogs.

Fortunately, I share my house with a Scotsman with a canny way of making a tin of fish taste like gourmet food, and feed us for at least two meals. For the first time in my life I feel hungry through lack of money to buy food. I have holes in my underwear and my spectacles are broken. I can't afford to repair them, nor the chipped front tooth of my now lop-sided smile. During the worst of times, I couldn't sleep for worry; now I sleep from physical exhaustion.

I wake up at 4.30am and feed horses, make a coffee with lots of sugar and a lump of margarine to keep me going until lunch.

I turn the ponies loose to eat whatever they can find in the garden, and give the horses a handful of grass from sacks dropped at our gate once a day. We do all the mucking out and shovelling; put soiled and wet bedding out to dry in the sun. There are no wood shavings, since all the timber mills are closed.

I have lost weight and my clothes are loose and baggy. I hardly recognise the person in the mirror with the shaggy hair and dark circles under her eyes. It has been a long time since I wore makeup or bought new clothes. I make bread and gather fruits from the trees for jams and home brewed liquor that tastes nothing like wine, but gives us something to look forward to at the end of the day.

It feels cataclysmic; like the beginning of the end of the world. I have visions of raging hordes of hungry, desperate people, breaking down my gates and slaughtering my animals. The worst part is guilt; I feel responsible for everyone and everything. As a foreigner, my staff expect me to provide for them, like I have in the past. But there is no money in the bank, and no secret stash under the mattress.

I am helpless and vulnerable. Friends have loaned me money that they can ill afford to give, and I have no means to pay them back. Somehow we make it through each day, one hundred rupees at a time. My ex-racehorses are suffering most; unlike my ponies who have devastated my garden and are now stripping bark from trees, the thoroughbreds have a finely-tuned metabolism, their ribs are showing and they are starting to look like rescue horses.

I am humbled. I now appreciate what it feels like to be completely vulnerable and unable to take care of those you love. I have never worked so hard, felt so healthy and yet so completely powerless. I focus on work, on the task in hand and shut off troubling thoughts. I can't afford the indulgence of self-pity or well-meaning sympathy of others. I play music, I wield a shovel and push a wheel barrow. Each day I am occupied with trying to feed everyone. I allowed myself to be chatted up by the police at the police

station down the road, and manage to get a curfew pass. The roads are empty; the city of Colombo is a ghost town. People huddle in back alleyways queuing for whatever meagre supplies can be had, flour, eggs and tinned fish is our staple. Coffee is contraband; alcohol-a distant fantasy. Luckily vegetables grow freely on this tropical island and we trade fruit from our trees with our neighbours in exchange for bags of paddy rice.

Everything has shifted. I spent my sixtieth birthday under lockdown with a friend one year younger to me, who has since died of a heart attack. All bets are off. I contacted old friends to tell them I love them. I told my mother I loved her; on a Zoom call two days before she died. I hope she heard me. It no longer feels necessary to follow protocols. There isn't time, there is no point.

Under lockdown I spent time interacting non-verbally with my horses. I did not dare to allow negativity to creep into my being, I couldn't afford wasted energy and tried to let go of the guilt at not being able to pay the bills. The only way I could cope was to live in the moment, to keep myself absorbed with physical chores and the daily challenges of survival. Other than the home-made bread which caused joint aches from wheat flour, my diet was unadulterated, simple and healthy. During this time, I was too exhausted and too troubled to write.

Before lockdown I was immersed in stressful thoughts and had become disassociated from my body and my embodied experience of living. I allowed my thoughts to overwhelm my experience of life. As a result of the lockdown I am re-experiencing my body and reconnecting with nature. I have come to recognise the complex experience of being human as one that I had tended to experience more and more virtually, through a constructed world of thought and emotion, and distracted, disassociated world of social media – separated from my sensing-knowing-feeling body.

My work with the body of phenomenological literature reminds me of the complex weave of deception, politics and ego-driven structures that mask our ability to work in authentic reciprocity with our bodies, our environment and with one another. In David Abraham's study of indigenous oral communities, he noticed that 'in the absence of formal writing systems, human communities come to know themselves primarily as they are reflected back by animals and animate landscapes with which they are engaged. (Abrahm, 1997, p123).

I am signposting an ongoing tension between language and body that comes up repeatedly in this inquiry. Languageing of embodied feelings is something I often struggle to do. Also, I am recognising the peace of mind that comes with ceasing a constant stream of negative mind-chatter. In this case, intense physical activity kept me rooted in the present, and likely released helpful chemicals as a result of my physical exertion, that supported a more positive experience than that of others.

I recognise that this physical experience is different from what I had come to accept as normal. Les Todres writes about the primacy of embodied experience when he says 'The intimate inhabiting that the lived body experiences in its interaction with the world is a primary source of knowing that makes language meaningful and possible.' (Todres, 2011, p3).

In appreciation of those who have made this journey possible

In relation to this doctoral journey, which has been profound, I am thankful with a whole and open heart to the following people:

- Dr Mihirini de Soyza, without whom this journey would never have begun; you are my sister, my friend and my daily inspiration.
- Dr SinhaRaja Tammita Delgoda – For believing in me, when I didn't believe in myself. For your wit, your haughtiness and your unquestionable loyalty that inspired me to find my own voice and articulate it in writing. You showed me how to craft my writing into an expression of an inner journey. You continue to shine the torch along the less-trodden path and create opportunities for everyone who encounters you. Your brilliance is rare and inimitable.
- Thank you for the long walks around the lake, inspirational evenings in Weligama and for listening, questioning and encouraging me to develop half-formed ideas and an inquiring practice. You opened my eyes to the multi-dimensionality of this complex feudal society that most foreigners miss and where agency is everything. Your writing inspires me still and it is your voice in my head that edits my work. I am deeply honoured to call you my friend.
- Dr Kate McArdle – For being with me from the beginning and for prompting, probing, questioning and inspiring me. I came to this with a wealth of life experiences but with little understanding of the academic paradigm, with no tools and no experience at all in academic framing, inquiring and sense-making. Thank you for your tenacity, generosity and open-hearted commitment to get me through this somehow, even when I was going off on the wrong track. I couldn't have done this without you.
- Herman Snelder - my boss of ten years at MDF and a source of great wisdom, insight and strength. You trusted and supported me, even when you weren't sure of the wisdom of my choices and actions. You also made possible this doctoral journey. I hope that my insights and experiences will serve the larger management for development community. Thank you for welcoming me into your home and treating me as extended family during my time at MDF.

- My Immediate Family - My parents and grandparents in England and in Holland; I am a product of this generation and all its challenges and am grateful for a chance to re-visit my childhood in the light of this inquiry and appreciate it for its imperfections and its wonder. With this thesis I hope to honour your greatness, your memory and your many sacrifices.

I am grateful to my sister Sally, who died too young from a debilitating disease, yet inspired me with her agency, her humour and her love, despite losing her voice to MS. From her I learned about strength in vulnerability.

My mother, Anneke features largely in my inquiry. We had a difficult relationship, but I am immensely grateful for the magical moments we shared and there were many of them. I hold them dear to my heart after her passing away in December last year. I am sorry you won't be by my side when I complete this thesis. I know how proud of me you were.

My father remains my model of the perfect man, which is perhaps why I am still single. No one could match your infectious laugh, your kindness, intelligence and sense of honour.

To my nieces, Helen and Sarah and to their families; I send an outpouring of love. I hope that one day you might read this and get to know a bit more about your eccentric maiden aunt who lived a bizarre life on the other side of the world and parachuted in from time to time, never giving you enough attention. Forgive me; I was fighting my own battles. I hope there is still time.

Concluding words

This inquiry is therapeutic as well as transformative. The recent lockdown reminded me of how fragile and also how resilient I am. Fragility is evident in the vulnerability of having no savings and no alternative sources of income whilst being responsible for so many others. Fragility through an aging body and the possibility of getting really sick, having no safety net financially, and being faced with the prospect of eviction and deportation from my beloved Sri Lanka. Resilience is evident through the daily experience of surviving, of staying positive and somehow making it through. You will notice the juxtaposition of vulnerability and freedom as an interesting tension at the heart of the transformational practice you will see later in this inquiry.

I have spent six decades hiding my vulnerability for fear of criticism and judgment. I only have a few more decades left, and I want to use them to shine as brightly as possible; outrageously and brilliantly,

and to illuminate the path for others; for this I will need to develop the agency and articulation I have found in my written work, and learn how to apply it consistently in my vocalised interactions.

I have been given an amazing opportunity through my new assignment with one of the top five consulting firms in the World. I am working with young business leaders, some of whom are women struggling with voice and agency in a patriarchal world. I intend to share widely and candidly, insights I have gained over the last six years, to support others in gaining more agency; raising their voices authentically and with authority, to achieve more positive change in the world.

At the same time, I have been awarded a licence by China Harbour Engineering Corporation, a body operating under the Chinese Government, to operate an Equestrian Centre in Colombo Port City, one of the most prestigious and controversial developments in the region at the time of writing. It is an international stage - and on that stage, I hope to shine a light on the rural youth – especially marginalised women, who I will employ to run my stables; and further my ambition to develop programs on authentic leadership, and therapy work using horses.

Chapter Two – Ethical Considerations

My prime ethical consideration is to protect the confidentiality of those who are present in my inquiry, and to assure that nothing is revealed, inadvertently or otherwise that could be misinterpreted, misrepresented or misunderstood in any way that might potentially cause hurt, embarrassment or any other negative outcome through disclosure.

For this reason, names and other identifying circumstances are changed, except in cases where explicit written permission is given.

In the case of stories that relate to close family members, surviving relatives have been given an opportunity to veto publication of materials that might be offensive or damaging. The sad and recent passing of my mother, frees me from the dilemma of how to protect her from ever knowing the extent to which her loving but critical parenting affected my ability to build intimate and sustaining relationships. It was not her fault. Now that she has gone, I want to preserve her memory, at the same time I am conscious not to propagate to future generations, the legacy of disassociation and damaging criticism as a default way of showing love.

Any information shared relating to businesses, past and present client relationships, particularly those shared in practice accounts has been approved in writing by the principals of organisations concerned.

In the case of stories that are ten years or more past, names and identifying characteristics have been altered, but specific permission has not been sought, based on the ten-year rule.

Ethics and Colonialism

I have been invited by my examiners to '*Deepen the discussion of the ethics of [my] practice in relation to the contextual and colonial environment in which [I] work*'- and I struggle to separate context from colonialism and come to recognise that the differentiation is indistinct; that everyday life in Sri Lanka is imbued with nuanced colonial influence, which has become normalised for me to the point of invisibility.

Colonialism is defined by Kroll-Zeldin, (2016) as the 'establishment of foreign rule over a distant territory and the control of its people'. I have lived for most of my life, in a dominant (masculine) culture that discriminated against my (feminine) ways of showing up in my work. I was pre-disposed towards the fear of not being 'good enough'; I have felt like a foreigner in my own land.

I see it all around me, and I rebel against the dominant (donor-country) culture that continues to exclude and silence voices. For example, this week I am delivering a training workshop to thirty small business owners. Despite the privilege of race, age and education, I struggle to convince my conservative client, that my embodied and arts-based practices will be impactful; I am frustrated that convention, and the need to ‘meet the donor’s expectation’ takes precedence over effectiveness and inclusion. I ask myself, how it would have been, if I was not in a relatively privileged position, or if I lacked the confidence or credibility to push through the barriers. I could not have achieved this

I am a white, British woman living and working in Asia and inquiring into whose voices count, I cannot avoid the ‘elephant’ of Colonialism; always present in the room but rarely spoken of explicitly.

Colonialism is generally associated with European imperial powers and political and legal domination over a subordinate people. It can also represent the exploitation of human and natural resources and the construction of racial and cultural difference that privileged the colonial ruler over the populations they rule.

Male dominance, as well as being a dimension associated with cultural norms, (Hofstede, G & Hofstede, G.J., 2005), is by association, re-enforced through colonialism. Hence discriminatory practices of colonialism are compounded when you are a female under colonial rule. Breny Mendoza refers to this in her 2017 article in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, as *The ‘Coloniality of gender and power’*, (pp. 637-645).

As a resident foreigner in Sri Lanka, my ontology is heavily nuanced by intuited power relations that are unfathomable to a casual visitor and unimaginable to the average person brought up in a Western, first-world country. I have servants in my home and they call me ‘madam’. The power relations that underpin this arrangement are in direct opposition to what might be construed from afar. As the madam, I am expected to provide for my staff and their extended families, irrespective of my own economic hardships. Far from the privileged colonial image, my role is often one of servitude and responsibility.

This kind of cultural intelligence has taken decades to assimilate, and still I am challenged every day to reassess my position and reflect on ‘what just happened?’ Living and working in an Asian context, I am at different times revered, reviled, feared or ignored. Engaging with people on an equal level and establishing trust is challenging. Complete openness and candour is counter-cultural and can create a false sense of intimacy based on Western norms. This fools many of us into believing we have made a

close ally, when to the Sri Lankan, we are still strangers engaging in a protracted courtship ritual. I have learned that building trust and genuine alliance can take years.

Sri Lankan society, like many in this part of the world, is extremely complex and multi-layered. This is not simply an issue of post-colonialism, but an issue of colliding cultures operating in the same geographical space. Stephanie Kirk (2021), in her article in 'Revista de Estudios Hispánicos', refers to this as the 'intersection of globalism and colonialism'; encountering each other on a historically unequal playing field constituted by the coloniality of power. In my ten years of experience in this realm, I have come to see this intersection starkly apparent in international development assistance.

Society in South Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka is based on ancient traditions; the culture is complex, tribal and feudal. Little has changed in rural village life in the last two hundred years. Operating within this environment requires one to listen and observe. It takes patience and a highly sophisticated cultural intelligence that most foreigners, including those in the international development sector, seem to lack. A veneer of westernisation lulls all but the most sensitized into false security. I have been privileged to experience much of South Asia under the guidance of eminent local guides, scholars, historians, indigenous physicians, artists, naturalists and village headmen. I have walked mountain paths, slept in the jungle and explored remote villages, hidden from the world until the late 1970's, yet I make mistakes all the time. For example, there was the time that I wore a skirt that was transparent when I stood in front of a classroom window, the time I attempted to shake the hand of an Afghani male colleague, and the time I interrupted and contradicted someone senior to me in front of his students, (Chapter 8, page 178). In 2013, I had the privilege to work closely with the Sri Lankan Military; I had eight soldiers billeted at my house whilst they learned how to take care of horses, prior to setting up their cavalry unit. I drank numerous cups of tea and had wonderful conversations with the officers from Sri Lanka and Pakistan. I learned that if you call anyone in a uniform 'sir', smile warmly and remain courteous and deferential, it goes a long way.

I am constantly watching, listening and assimilating; trying not to offend, trying to fit in. I have become used to this way of being; which is why I find it challenging now, to dissect colonialism as a moral and ethical consideration in relation to this inquiry and to my practice in general.

I was struck by what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) had to say in her paper "Arts of the Contact Zone." Where she opens up a discussion around the privileged voice in what she designates as contact zones: "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths they are lived out in

many parts of the world today.” (Pratt, 1991, p34). The world of international development assistance is one such contact zone; my training spaces are another.

Over the last ten years, I have participated in dialogues within these spaces, where western first-world donor assistance can be as oppressive as the regime, or prevalent cultural context that they seek to uplift. For example, during the post-tsunami relief period in Sri Lanka, were I heard first-hand accounts of counter-cultural activities including coerced conversions to Christianity in exchange for aid.

Living and working predominantly in non-Christian countries these last twenty years, I have come to accept that feminism is culturally defined and different in relation to Islam, for example, than in Christian, Hindu and Buddhist contexts. I no longer associate Islamic decorum with implicit submission, victimization and marginalization on the basis of dress, and have many positive experiences working with empowered women who chose to cover their faces. I am privileged to have experienced a wide spectrum of gender values, from the liberal to the more conservative; none without issues around voice and empowerment.

Subtler and insidious privileging occurs in the use of language within these contact zones where we assume a unified and homogeneous social world in which language exists as a shared patrimony, (Pratt, 1991). Two years earlier I attended an internal training review, where a then colleague proposed the idea that cultural sensitivity is a sham, ‘that we are all just people, after all’. I was horrified at his absolute conviction that his white, male, privileged way of experiencing the world could speak for everyone else. Worse still, not one of us challenged him and a number of people were nodding their heads in silent assent.

As a researcher and educator working in the development community, I take very seriously my responsibility to always act in the interests of the greater good, but even that is a constant challenge. Global imperatives such as women’s empowerment, frequently clash with cultural norms in countries such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. I see examples where Christian gender values are taken as the standard. Pratt reminds us that ‘Auto-ethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, mediation, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue, vernacular expression--these are some of the literate arts of the contact zone’ (Pratt, 1999). This invites me to play with a wider range of learning tools in my workshops such as story-telling, drama and the arts and to be constantly mindful of my own biases whilst operating in these contact zones.

As an individual, I have to do my best to reflect values of inclusiveness, to create and protect egalitarian spaces where language is not an oppression, and alternative expression through embodiment and the arts allows for those who have been silenced to speak out and be heard.

Chapter three- Methodology

This is me delving into Action Research

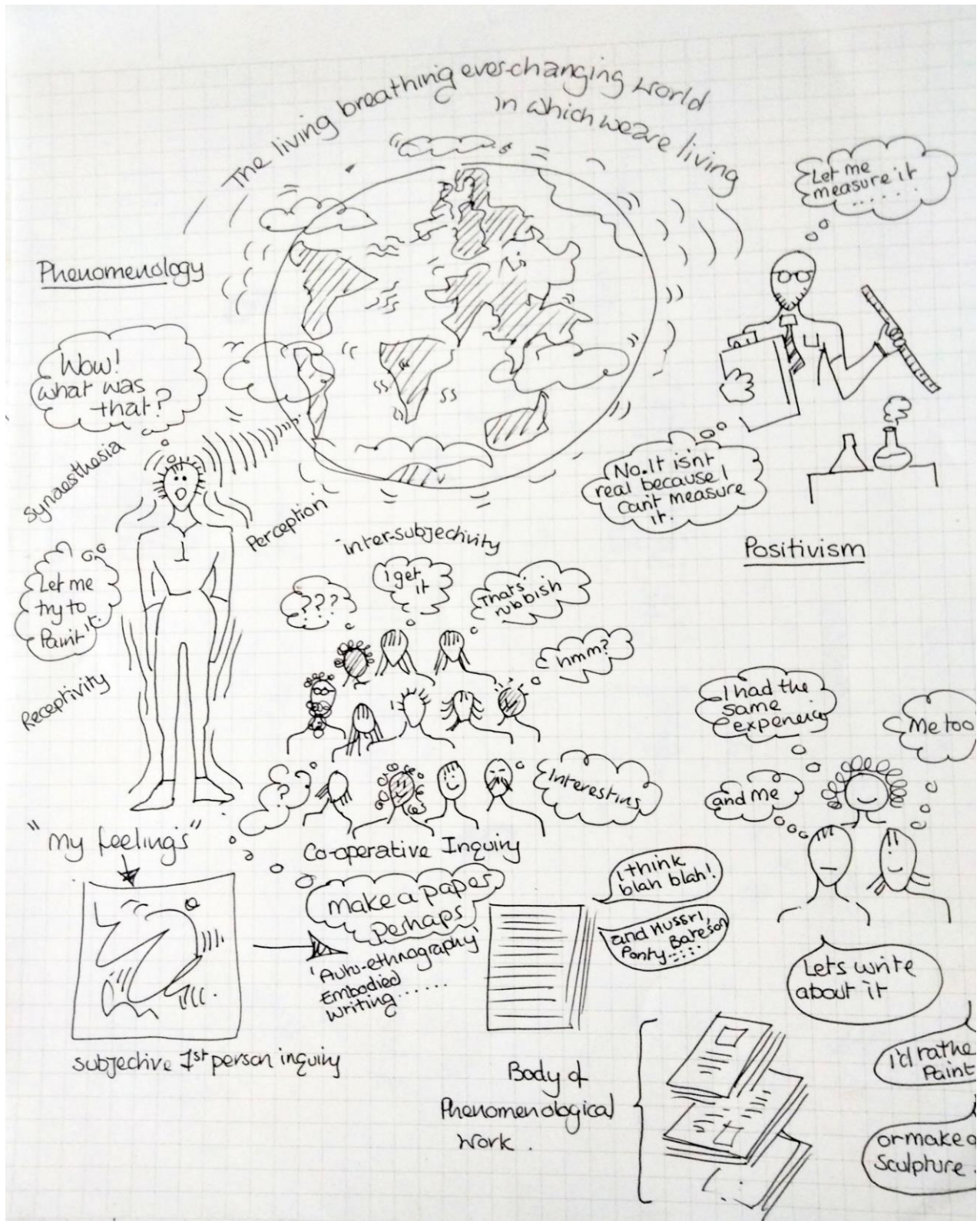


Figure 2. My notebook sketch while grappling to make sense of different research paradigms

This is me delving into action research

My inquiry is a first person heuristic inquiry using ethnography and arts-based approaches. This includes journaling and artistic writing techniques such as free-fall writing, sensually descriptive writing and poetry. I use sketches, diagrams and other art forms including sculpture and painting to generate, present, assimilate and share knowledge. I also work with embodied knowing that is rooted in phenomenological awareness, imagery and non-verbal communication between people and horses

Introduction

I have come to recognise, through my experiences with horses in particular, that most of my knowing is held in my body. None of this I knew when I started out, but by paying attention, I began to notice that my body is communicating all the time, and whatever my words are saying, my body always tells the truth. This is apparent in how my horses respond differently to me depending on what emotions I am holding in my body at the time. You will see an example of this in Chapter 7, where I describe working with my horse, Valentina.

This other way of knowing, which traditional research tends to overlook, is referred to in feminist literature such as *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al, 1996), as a more primitive form of knowing (see Chapter 4, pages 66-70), and in action research it is understood as 'experiential knowing' one of a number of extended epistemologies. For me, it is foundational. Action research is an approach that promotes non-verbal ways of sense-making, which is one of the important reasons for me choosing this approach. As a first person inquiry it is underpinned by the work of Marshall, 'Living Life as Inquiry' (2016) and informed and guided by *The Handbook of Action Research, Second Edition* (Reason & Bradbury et al, 2013), with significant contributions from Torbert, (2004), and Heron, (1996).

In this chapter, I share my experience of trying to shake loose the knowing held inside me, through various artful and phenomenological means, and synthesize it with new knowing that comes from the literature and from knowledge gained from living life in inquiry. In chapter 12 you will see me struggle with the synthesis of ideas and insights gained from the feminist literature and eventually to pick up a pencil and attempt to 'sketch it out'. This is typical of the way I work, yet I only came to recognise this and its significance several years into my inquiry.

This synthesis is a cyclical process that involves holding up ideas as truth, embedding them in everyday reality and then reflecting on what just happened. I was self-conscious at first but after a while, I recognised that it was a natural phenomenon – to reflect and chew over the new information,

experimenting with applying it to thinking and actions. It felt very familiar, and I recognised the similarity with Kolb's Adult Learning Cycle, (Kolb D, 2008), a model that is foundational to my work as a trainer. You can see an example of this cyclical process in Chapter 7, where I experiment with the Feldenkrais Method and the work of Émile Coué, to improve my connection with my horse, Valentina.

I learned how to adopt an attitude of inquiry, which is a quality of disciplined awareness where I step in and out of experience; sometimes re-creating and stepping back into an experience, in order to understand it from an embodied, a rational and a detached perspective. This moving between realms and observing from different viewpoints, is what Torbert refers to as 'Territories of Experience' (Torbert 1972), as described in the Handbook (Reason and Bradbury, 2013, p241), which include '1) the outside world, 2) one's own sensed behaviour and feeling, 3) the realm of thought, and 4) the realm of vision/attention/intention'. You will see me repeatedly use the metaphor of a painting at an exhibition to help me to understand and synthesize this concept where I can simultaneously exist in multiple forms (as the painter, the observer and the canvas, for example). This allows me to move seamlessly, and sometimes unconsciously between the different perspectives and gain a holistic impression of what is going on. I am reminded of Goethe's analogy of a hologram, in which the whole is made up of the parts and the whole is contained within the parts. 'If the whole presences within the parts, then the only way to encounter the whole is within the parts through which it presences, and not by standing back from the parts to try to get an 'overview' of the whole. (Bortof, 1996, p23-24).

In Chapters 5 and 6 you will see me examine my life history from two different viewpoints; firstly with a focus on epistemology, and secondly with a focus on voice and voiceless-ness. There are many overlaps in the two chapters, but only by reading both, can I begin to piece together a three-dimensional picture of my reality. I took the decision to split the inquiry around these two interrelated subjects; I didn't want to assume a synonymous relationship between the two, despite a heavy correlation in the literature. For example, Women's Ways of Knowing states '[w]e found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind and self were intricately intertwined.' (Belenky et al, 1997, p18). In my own experience, this statement paid insufficient attention to the influence of power and politics around whose voices were included and heeded.

Within each chapter you will also see examples of me stepping in and stepping out of an experience, to try to gain deeper insight. An indicator is when I switch to the third person in the narrative; for example, on page 51:

“When I think of painted window frames I am confronted with splinters of paint under my fingernails, a misted pane of glass with droplets of rain, reflecting the world beyond. A little girl sits on the hard painted surface, snagging her woollen tights and marking the wall with the heels of her patent leather shoes. She wants to go outside and play. She is unhappy, but I don't know why.”

Examining the minutiae of experience through a microscopic lens and writing about it has become a habit, and at times, a coping mechanism. I look forward to the day when every nuance of my daily existence is free from this burden, yet I wonder if I can ever put the genie back in the bottle. I enjoy the sensuality of experiencing life in this connected way; it has opened my senses to experience life with a more vivid palette, and I'm not sure I want to entirely give that up.

‘An attitude of inquiry includes developing an understanding that we are embodied beings part of a social and ecological order, and radically interconnected with all other beings.’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2013, p8).

Action Research is a very different paradigm from traditional empirical and scientific practices, and as such it is challenging to explain to those used to a more conventional approach. In Action Research knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know rooted in every day experience; it is a verb rather than a noun. This means an Action Research program is less defined in terms of hard and fast methods, but is ‘[...] a work of art emerging in the doing of it.’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2013, p5).

It is interesting that the introduction to the Handbook of Action Research, uses this same metaphor of a work of art. Later in this thesis I share how problematic that is in terms of measuring the quality of a work of research based on these principles. For example, on pages 88-91, I highlight an ongoing debate from the pages of ‘Qualitative Inquiry’ journal that speak of: ‘Arts-Based Inquiry in QI: Seven Years from Crisis to Guerrilla Warfare’, (Volume 9, 2003), article by Susan Finley of Washington State University. She concludes that ‘Arts-based inquiry (like any good qualitative inquiry) should embrace a set of commitments that are relational, democratic, locally useable and responsive to cultural and political issues and that takes a stand against social injustice.’

This signposts a methodology that is relational, inclusive and purposeful; it re-enforces the idea that knowledge created through action research is validated by its impact on the larger community. It is by necessity a collaborative process. In this first-person inquiry, there is a risk that I create a databank of knowledge that is specific and eccentric. Walking around an art gallery with a friend, invites a dialogue around a shared experience, that is simultaneously individual and reciprocal; one in which new

understanding is created, (Dorit Segal-Engelchin et al., 2019). The quality of this reflexive process and the dialogue that is evoked through this piece of art will be the ultimate test of its worthiness.

Why Action Research?

Action research (AR) is the only approach that provides a framework within which my lived, nuanced subjective experience is privileged and held up to be an intersubjective relevance to other people's experience. AR is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally flourishing of individual persons and their communities' (Reason & Bradbury, 2013, p4). What stands out here for me, is the practical nature of an action research approach that assures what emerges is relevant, because it comes from lived subjective experience and reciprocity rather than static theory.

It has not been about strict adherence to one method, but more about adopting a holistic and qualitative approach of iterative cycles of inquiry that has over time coalesced into a methodology. This requires constant attention to what is going on, stepping in and stepping out of experience, noticing and following where the energy is, to uncover or shake loose, unconscious connections, associations and assumptions – what I like to think of as 'knowledge harvesting'. It then involves a second process which is to create an authentic representation of lived phenomenon, to synthesise knowledge in the light of other data and to gain understanding as to its significance, within and beyond my own world.

First person action research inquiry

To be honest, when I elected for a first-person inquiry it was for practical reasons. At the time, I was rarely in the same place for more than a few days, and spent a great deal of time alone in hotel rooms and transit lounges. Taking part in a collaborative inquiry didn't seem feasible. At the time, I thought it might be easier to be both object and subject of my research as I would always be accessible to myself, even in a transit lounge at three o'clock in the morning. Judi Marshall's ideas around first-person inquiry revealed a very real possibility that 'even I could do this.' What resonated with me was the idea that I could be inquiring at any time and in any place, that all challenges are data, and even in the worst of situations one could find something positive to take away from experience in terms of learning. 'Living

life as inquiry is at the same time philosophy, orientation and practice, seeking to treat all I think, feel, say and do as experiment' (Marshall, 2016, Pxx).

The last six years have been some of the most challenging. Losing my sister prematurely to Multiple Sclerosis, dealing with fraud, death, fear and threat of bankruptcy, have all taken their toll. At the same time, I was travelling non-stop to countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines, where the environment was at times hostile and uncomfortable. It was very important for me, that I could legitimately take time to write about what was going on. It helped me to feel that this was data gathering, it gave me permission to 'spill my guts' rather than try to gloss over experiences that were at times traumatic. I fell into a water feature as I was about to deliver a key-note address and ended up hospitalized; I lost 80% of my hearing - but it was the savage and senseless murder of twelve people in a family restaurant in Bangladesh in 2019, that affected me most deeply. I began to ask myself 'Will I be next?'

The horror of the death of an acquaintance, slashed to death by ceremonial knives in the name of religion, shattered my illusion that 'nothing bad will happen to me'. I began to feel fearful, suffer panic attacks, and ask myself 'Why am I doing this?' It was the beginning of the end of my career as an international development consultant, and the start of a period of self-recovery, re-discovery and nurturing. It took me about three years, during which time the act of reading and journaling was my life-preserver.

'First person action research can be undertaken with many different purposes. It can be used to develop as a person, address how one is in the world, operate more effectively and gain a sense of agency in a situation that seems potentially over-powering' (Marshall, 2016, pxx).

There have been many times in recent years that I have felt hopeless and powerless; and the opportunity to write my story and reframe experience in terms that make it less threatening and less immediate, has been supportive and therapeutic.

'First person action inquiry studies not just past, but also present and future; second, it is a form of research that is conducted simultaneously on oneself, the first-person action inquirer on the second person relationships in which one engages, and on the third person institutions of which one is an observant participant. Third, it generates not just single-loop feedback that incrementally improves a stock of knowledge, but also double- and triple-loop transformations of structure, culture and consciousness that influence ongoing interaction. (Reason & Bradbury, 2013, p239).

Heuristic Inquiry

This is a heuristic inquiry, in that it involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery.’ A heuristic inquiry is one that engages inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration.’ (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p11). Heuristics makes sense to me and lends legitimacy to a process that feels self-indulgent. It has taken me a few years to shave off surfaces and begin to understand the question that this inquiry needs to address. In earlier writing I used the analogy of a Russian Babushka doll. The outer layer is the most highly varnished, decorated and intricate. As I reveal hidden dolls inside one by one, they become less refined. The smallest doll is usually roughly hewn and crudely painted. This is symbolic of the primal (child-like) self that is at the root of all questions and concerns. At each stage, I have felt as if I have arrived. Now I understand the question; only to find that there are deeper and deeper layers still to be revealed. It has taken me seven years to unravel a lifetime of learned behaviours, knee-jerk responses, beliefs and attitudes, and I hope this will set me free from their unconscious influence in my life. The process has been hard work, complex and at times visceral.

Through this process of unpacking, I came to recognise issues from childhood that were showing up in my relationships and self-image six decades later. This was at times painful and shameful. The impulse to cover over and protect myself and others from what was coming up, stifled my inquiry and caused it to get stuck at one particular layer. I began to search in different directions and pursue unrelated and more comfortable paths of inquiry rather than dig deeper into difficult subject matter, such as my relationship with my mother.

In the heuristic process, I am personally involved. I am searching for qualities, conditions, and relationships that underlie a fundamental question, issue, or concern (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p11). In my case, there were many questions; academic questions around ontology and epistemology, and unspoken questions that came to me in the dark transit spaces, lit only by the glow of a laptop: ‘why am I alone?’, ‘why am I unhappy?’, ‘why do I feel so misunderstood?’

Heuristics makes connections between what is out there in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling, and awareness. This involves a continuous process of self-awareness, of noticing and of stepping in and out of an experience to understand it from different perspectives. I discovered that phenomenology was the route to an authentic embodied inquiry and that when I listen to my body, it prevents my mind from telling me what I should be feeling, and focuses in on the actual physical experience. It is imperfect, as the mind always seems to get in the way, which is why you see me practicing in translating between different modes of experience (for example on

page 51 – listening to the sounds in my garden). In heuristics, there is always an emphasis on the investigator's internal frame of reference; self-searching, intuition, and indwelling lies at the heart of heuristic enquiry (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p12).

I am stepping out to take a breath. There is a lot being said here through the words of others. I have included a number of quotations from Moustaka's 1990 book 'Heuristic research: Design, methodology and applications.' As words resonate strongly with my own experience of this type of inquiry and seem to validate a method that at times feels like 'naval gazing'. This deeply introspective approach is exactly what has been going on when I 'chew the bone' of inquiry. It has been a major breakthrough to lean in to heuristics as a valid inquiry approach and drawing back on the analogy of the painting at the exhibition, and action research as an artful inquiry, it makes sense that primal sensed experience and knowing resulting from meditative inquiry will tell me more than measuring content of the painting by scientific means.

In preparation for qualitative research, the investigator should construct a detailed and systematic appreciation of his or her personal experience with the topic of interest.... The investigator must inventory and examine the associations and assumptions that surround the topic in his or her mind (McCracken, 1988, p32, quoted in Clinchy, 1996, p219).

My painting of 'The Field', is the culmination of this internal process of inquiry. In Chapter 11, I explain the process of artful knowledge generation and appreciation, first by the content, its symbolism and also through the process of its execution, and the internal and external dialogue it evokes.

Extended Epistemologies

The Sage Handbook of Action Research, (Reason & Bradbury, 2013), presents various models for 'extended epistemology', all of which are framed within the context of 'ways of knowing'. Below, I am taking a closer look at the four extended epistemologies attributed to Torbert (2004), Presentational Knowing, Experiential Knowing, Practical Knowing and Propositional Knowing. Implicit in definitions, is the concept of understanding, yet it is not explicitly addressed and this was problematic for me at first as I explain on page 32, in 'Knowing, Understanding and Knowledge'.

Presentational Knowing

Presentational knowing is defined as 'knowing made manifest' and 'The knowing that is the bridge between experience and formal or discursive expression of our knowing.' (Reason & Bradbury, 2003,

p451). My experience of presentational knowing is through writing, sketching and painting. Presentational knowing is also referred to as ‘an outcome of inquiry’; perhaps due to the public nature of the form. I experience presentational knowing as both experiential and intersubjective. It is as if the ‘work’ once produced takes on a life of its own that belongs partly to the painter or author, partly to the work itself and partly to the observer; a reciprocal, open-membraned, tripartite relationship that I see reflected, with the student, teacher and subject-matter, (see page 57). I experience this process of making manifest of the knowing held in my body, as the first step in sense-making and demonstrate in Chapter 12, how this serves me to synthesize knowledge that I struggle to articulate through conventional language.

The Handbook describes this feature of presentational knowing as one that brings ‘a quality of curiosity to action phase of inquiry.’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2003, p373). It is the presenting of ideas in written or often graphical form that helps me to synthesise different components, see patterns, create associations and understand relationships that were previously hidden or implicit. It also allows me to experiment with new associations and ideas previously not related. Importantly, it allows me to step outside of the ‘work’ and analyse it critically as an observer, rather than an actor.

Experiential Knowing

Experiential knowing is described in Sage Handbook of Action Research as ‘essentially tacit and pre-verbal’ and is described as ‘an unformulated consciousness of totality which is body-and-world, body being co-extensive with the entire field of possible perceptions, i.e. the world (Merleau Ponty, 1962, reproduced in Bradbury & Reason, (2013, p369). ‘The notion of ‘tacit understanding’ (according to Todres, 2011, p144) is explored in order to indicate a form of functioning by which an insight or learning has been integrated into a person's everyday thoughts, feelings and actions.

To call experiential knowing ‘tacit’, in my experience doesn’t do justice to what I have come to recognise as a gut reaction; it is far from silent or inactive. In my experience it is primal knowing that shouts the loudest when triggered by an external stimulus. In Chapter 6, I begin to unpack a troubled relationship with my mother. On page 133, I finally ‘spill my guts’ in poem form, and it is at the same time, an act of tenderness. I realised later that the journey to real forgiveness began with this poem. Embodied feelings of resentment had lain festering and bubbling below the surface for most of my life. This had resulted in health issues, life-changing decisions and estrangement from my family – far from a silent or tacit experience.

I have found many different techniques for unpacking ‘experiential knowledge’, including painting, sketching, writing in free-fall and even making sculptures out of household objects. In figure 3 below there are a few examples. The paper plates were created in response to a conversation with my supervisor. I explained that my mother was always trying to push food on my plate. She suggested I draw pictures of all the non-food items she was also foisting on me, so that I could push them politely to the side.



Figure 3. Different Presentational forms I used for inquiry and non-verbal articulation

Propositional Knowing

Propositional knowing according to the Handbook, is knowing *about* something. I understand this to mean verbalised and articulated knowledge that is espoused by another; including written text. According to the Handbook in propositional knowing - the passive respondent or 'subject' mak[es] no intelligent contribution to the research endeavour' (Reason & Bradbury, 2013, p347). Propositional knowing is knowledge I acquire from literature and other external sources that I have not engaged with at a personal level, (i.e. knowledge with a small 'k' – Page 33). The challenge in reading propositional knowledge is to dig into myself and find something with which to anchor it, and make it my own. For example, if I am reading about British politics, something my niece is passionate about, and something I neither know nor particularly care about, it doesn't register with me. Something I read today will be

forgotten immediately, because it has no resonance. I have put a great deal of effort to understand some of the required doctoral reading material simply because I have no visual, metaphorical or embodied experience to anchor the propositional knowledge and create understanding.

Practical Knowing

The fourth extended epistemology explored in the Handbook is 'Practical Knowing' which is described as know-how, 'Knowing consummated through action' (Bradbury & Reason, 2013, p375). This is what I mean when I use the term 'understanding' and is more than knowledge; it is knowledge that has been synthesized and assimilated into changed beliefs, associations, attitudes and behaviours. The Handbook goes on to confirm this by saying that practical knowing is transformative, 'which crucially involves individual change of behaviour, acquisition of new skills, new know-how.' (ibid p375).

A good example of practical knowing is in Chapter 7, pages 166-170, where I am experimenting with trying to improve my horse riding using visualisation techniques. In this case, my propositional knowledge acquired reading about Feldenkrais and Émile Coué, is synthesized through experimentation (experiential knowing), and is now assimilated into 'the way I do things' when riding my horse, Valentina, (practical knowing).

This is implicit and embodied understanding – however, I am conflicted to describe this as 'Knowledge' until it has been shared, mediated and validated by the outside world – or is that a given, when propositional knowing is sourced externally? I still have a lot of questions around the wide use (by the AR literature) of the terms 'knowledge'. I am confused and conflicted in using the term without exploring its validity within my own worldview. In the paragraph below, I am clarifying this for the purposes, and in the context of, this thesis.

Knowing, Understanding and Knowledge

In Sri Lanka there are 29 different varieties of banana each with its own local name. I'm beginning to think that a similar taxonomy for knowledge is needed.

For the first few years of inquiry, I was deeply confused between epistemology, ontology, knowing, knowledge and understanding. At different times, the definitions seemed to be inter-changeable. To be honest, the literature didn't help me much here. As someone who by-passed the conventional route to this doctorate, I was confused by the apparent emphasis in the Second Edition of the Sage Handbook on Action Research, (Reason & Bradbury, 2013) on different forms of knowing and as a result I privileged

the accumulation of knowledge rather than the synthesizing of ideas. You will see this journey elaborated in Chapter 5 in my first-person inquiry into feminine epistemology. Things are clearer for me now. I have developed distinctions between knowing with a small 'k' – which is an internal repository of facts and data that were taught rote, or absorbed as unquestionable truth from emotionally-laden experience, and the proffered wisdom of teachers and parents, and Knowledge with a capital 'K' which is intersubjective, mediated, validated and corroborated; Knowledge generated through co-creative processes and collaboration.

Up to this point in my inquiry, I have fixated on the internal process of synthesizing knowledge to create understanding; possibly due to the nature of this first-person action-research inquiry, largely conceived in isolation; on work trips, in hotel rooms and coffee lounges across the world. This is MY STORY; MY EXPERIENCE; MY WORLD and I guarded it jealously. What I have so far failed to give any attention to, is the social dimension of this knowledge, the requirement for validation from external sources; the transformation to Knowledge with a capital 'K' that is co-created through a collaborative process.

'By using the word 'know' instead of say believe or think or feel. For most philosophers, to know something is to make claim to validity.... [...] One cannot assert meaningfully that something is true or valid only for oneself' (Clinchy, 1996, p212-3).

In my mind, I picture an hour-glass. The sand at the top represents all the internal sensory inputs; the inscape that includes knowledge captured but not assimilated, and synthesized, raw data from experiences and memories throughout my life (small 'k'). The pinch point is the moment at which that knowledge is synthesized, made manifest, labelled and let go.... I realise now, that this is not just an internal process, but one that can only happen in relation to the outside world. As the sand funnels through the pinch and out into the world, it becomes Knowledge that is no longer owned by me; it is an entity and has a new life and potentially a new purpose in the world of others.

The danger with Knowledge created this way, is that it has by necessity, become generalized, replaced with symbols, (in order to pass through the pinch), and needs to be embedded within the experience of others to become animate and relevant. Abrahm reminds us of the dangers of privileging language over experience; 'By linguistically defining the surrounding world as a determinate set of objects, we cut our conscious speaking selves off from the spontaneous life of our sensing bodies' (Abrahm, 1997, p56). According to Clinchy in 'Knowledge, Difference and Power', (1996, p205-240), the creation of knowledge is a political act, in that it is different from person to person depending on their epistemological orientation, (I explore this in more depth in Chapter 6). To explain the difference in

epistemological standpoint, she uses the example of a poem, which is, to me, synonymous with all forms of artistic appreciation. These are my notes, written in the margin:

"The separate knower when asked what the poem means, may respond 'whatever the poet (or artist) meant it to mean' - the subjective knower will say it means whatever I think it means' - the connected knower will try to get inside the poet's head and then ask how do I respond? How can I connect to this?"

We are past the pinch-point and our knowledge is out in the world and subject to interpretation (and validation) by others. Clinchy refers to this as the end of epistemological isolation where collaborative construction of knowledge through discussion becomes not only possible but, because truth is now problematic rather than transparent, essential. Separate knowers can engage in rational debate, rather than mere assertion and counter-assertion, in order to adjudicate truth claims. And connected knowers can obtain vicarious experience through mutual elaboration and explication of personal narratives, (Clinchy, 1996, p216).

In relation to artful practice, I wrote these notes in the margin

"Collaborative construction of knowledge is essential. Artful practice is not about creating truth - but instead presenting one (or more) person's internal truth, (inscape) for mediation, collaboration and discussion - In this context Art it is the vehicle not the destination!"

In the Inquiry that follows, (in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, plus the practice accounts in Chapters 8,9 and 10), I am investigating my way of being in the world against the backdrop of the Women's Development Model, (Beleky et al, 1996). This is not my final destination, but an important part of the journey. My intention here, is to layout my own story (and that includes the implicit, unconscious knowledge I hold in my body), in order to address questions around how I know what I know, and issues I have about voice and voiceless-ness, in service of the greater good.

So what IS my methodology?

There is so much that is eccentric to my methodology, that I failed to recognise as significant, because it fell outside of what I associated as academic practice. For me this included finding exactly the right space in which to work, one that is calm and light. Often, I have classical music playing in the background and always a cup of fresh-brewed coffee or a glass of red wine; never tea; never white wine. In the absence of a laptop, my weapon of choice is a fine black fibre pen. The ink must flow steadily and

consistently. If there is no laptop and no notebook, I can get a bit panicky. I will dig around in my bag for a discarded receipt or envelope to write on, borrow from the café or restaurant or run to the nearest stationers. I have a bookshelf filled with almost brand new notebooks. My notebook of choice has a hard, black cover and creamy-coloured cartridge paper. The best ones have an elasticated band which holds my favourite pen and wraps around the entire book of precious scribbles and notes, keeping them safe. I never travel anywhere, not even a fifteen-minute journey in a tuk-tuk without pen, paper or laptop; my next big idea might come along, and I might lose it because I am un-prepared. Eating out alone is a joy when I can lose myself in the world I have created through my writing and sketching. When I am not writing I am capturing ideas, making connections, designing houses, stables, offices, projects. My mind is always reaching out, exploring and synthesizing ideas. I am impatient with people who have nothing meaningful to contribute to a discussion other than mindless chit chat or unshakeable opinions posited as fact. I have come to understand this is indicative of different epistemological positioning, nevertheless, I find this an irritating distraction these days, and sometimes an abduction, (as you will see in my story about the talkative guest on pages 131-132).

All this, including my sketching habit, was omitted from my initial thesis on the grounds that I deemed it to be not sufficiently academic; not doctoral. In Sage Handbook of Action Research, third Edition, I was surprised and delighted to discover an entire chapter, ('Radical epistemology as caffeine for social change', by Alfredo Ortiz Aragón and Juan Carlos Giles Macedo, 2015), dedicated to the informal rituals that enhance or facilitate inquiry. Now, I have permission to notice and reflect on the significance of these micro-epistemologies, that facilitate my process of sense-making.

A well-intentioned friend made a suggestion: 'I see you spending the whole day typing on your computer; why don't you install voice-recognition software, it will be much faster for you?' I rejected the suggestion out of hand, then reflected on why I did that. There is something about hearing my words out loud that is too bold, too public. When I write, I hear the word in my head, and occasionally I speak the odd word or sentence in a whispered, hushed voice; (I am, as I type this sentence). I type with two fingers, tap, tap-tapping as if it is an old-fashioned typewriter. It is comforting and satisfying, especially when I hit full stop, space bar and return, at the end of a completed paragraph. In my mind I hear the satisfying 'kaa-chunk' of a typewriter carriage return.

The act and process of writing and typing helps me to make manifest knowledge held in my body that disappears when I attempt to say it out loud. Reading is different. I often stop to write

or draw, transcribing large swathes of text so that I can 'own' it, and then spew it out reconstituted when needed, like a mother bird feeding her young.

Maybe it is a particular quirk of my ontology that only when I write, I see what is in my head. Perhaps this is because I need to try out different words and phrases aesthetically, to see what works. There is a creative tension between language and intimate bodily felt-sense of a situation, (Todres, 2011, p36). I think it is this tension that drives me to find that piece of paper and a pen. Sometimes I feel like I might explode when I have an insight that I have not been able to manifest through language. This is why you will sometimes see me restless and agitated in a meeting and interrupting others. I have seen something that others haven't seen, and it feels imperative to give birth to this idea and share it with others as quickly as possible.

My mind works very fast and in flashes of imagery. I am impatient and intolerant of others who have a more pedantic rationality; I know that I can come across as pushy. I think this is because, I have insights that are at times brilliant and unique, and that others can't see. What holds me back repeatedly, is an insecurity around language and fear of ridicule that thwarts my ability to articulate clearly and confidently in front of others who think differently or who disagree with me.

Arts-based Practice

When I discovered that art-based practice was a thing, I became very excited by literature that validated this form of expression. Much of the more traditional academic literature that I needed to understand, privileges verbal and written literacy over non-linguaged forms of sense-making. Hence, I have seen few, if any, illustrations in the recommended reading materials I have been studying; even when the subject is arts-based. After each lecture and after supervisory sessions, I would sit with my recording and attempt to sketch out what had been discussed. The sketch at the start of this chapter (Figure 2, page 23), is one such example. I have pages and pages of notebooks filled with drawings in my attempt to understand the literature relating to research methodology. I draw, I sketch, I work out half-formed ideas and complexity through the act of drawing. Additional examples are given through collage and sculpting (Figure 3, page 32) and in Figures 4 and 5 from my notebooks (page 38). The ultimate example of this is the painting-out of my ontology in the work of art "The Field" included at the beginning of this paper (Figure 1), and elaborated in Chapter 11. I also write in flowing script, forming linkages between ideas using arrows and shapes. This process is essential for me to make sense of things that are new and complex; it gives me a sense of spatial connection and ultimately a sense of control over the subject matter. If I can draw it, then I can control and understand it.

Often I don't get it right first time. Like writing, the painting needs to feel right; it needs to evoke the same resonance as my internal experience, regardless of how good it looks to others, or how correct it is technically. Drawing and painting allows me to step back from inside the idea, and to look at it critically. For example, on pages 217-221, I am engaged in an altercation with 'Gerald', and trying to make sense of my feelings by making a model out of clay and later painting it out.

This technique allows me to engage with the work as if it were another person or object, and let go of being defined by it. Criticism of the work, feels much less threatening than judgment of my spoken ideas. Putting my thoughts out into the world in the form of a work of art, creates a split between 'me' and 'my ideas'. In Chapter 11, I unpack this arts-based epistemology in more detail; it is crucial to my understanding, and expressed in my painting 'The Field' as a literal bridge between the world of words and feelings. It helps me to synthesize concepts and create meaning that I can openly share and discuss without fear or shame.

When asked by one of my supervisory group "what does this painting say about your ontology?" I responded intuitively and without hesitation; 'that art is truth'.

The act of producing this artwork, as well as the content surprised me. As I stand back now and appreciate both, I recognise the significance for me, of art as epistemology and have dedicated Chapter 11 to its exploration.

I remember reading how the mind processes information at different levels of consciousness, and how knowing held in the body is most readily accessed by artistic means such as poetry, art, metaphor, etc. I see this reflected in the literature, specifically by Gregory Bateson who explains it thus: 'The conscious has poor access to algorithms of the unconscious – when access is achieved through dreams, art, poetry, religion, intoxication and the like, there is still the formidable problem of translation', (Bateson, 2000, p139). He also says that 'No organism can afford to be conscious of matters with which it can deal at unconscious levels. This is the economy achieved by habit formation.' (ibid p143). I am curious if this is simply an act of translation, or if there needs to be understanding in order for unconscious body-held knowledge to be made conscious and verbalised. Todres describes understanding as the 'intersection between bodily adventure and language home', (Todres, 2011, p24), which suggests that the act of 'languaging' is also an act of sense-making. In my experience this act of 'languaging' can also apply to other non-lingual forms such as painting.

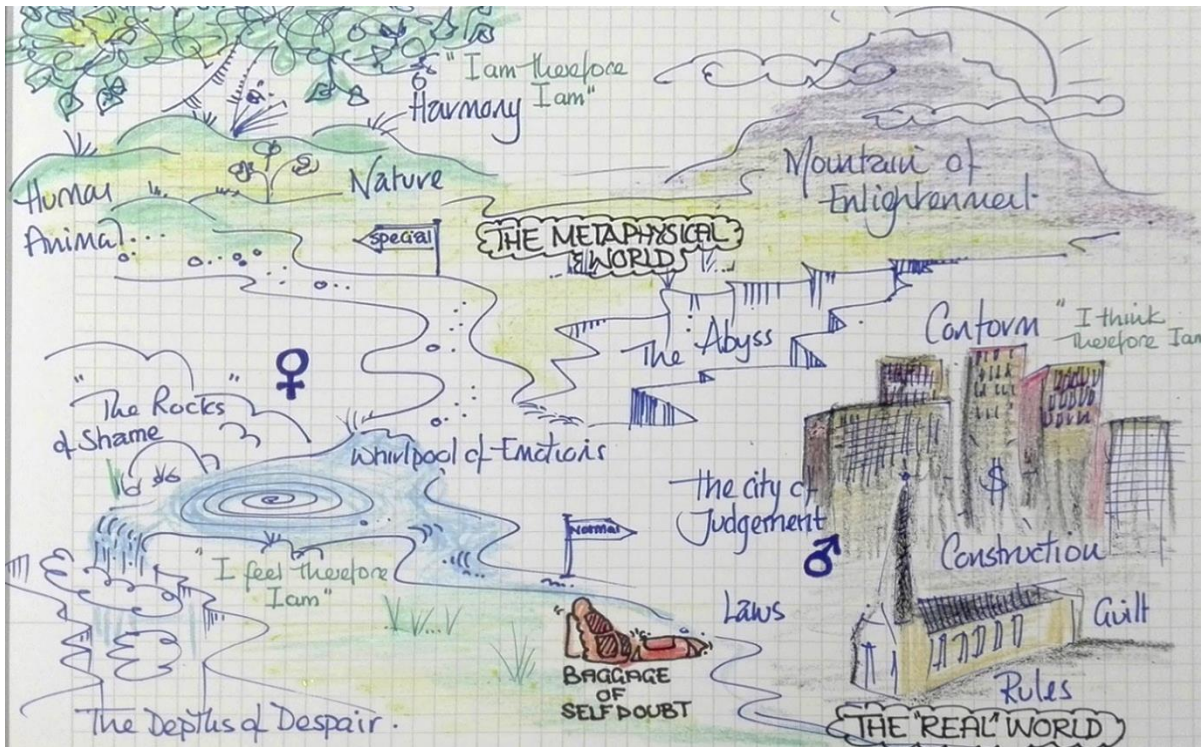


Figure 4. An early sketch of the landscape of my ontology (later developed into "The Field" painting).

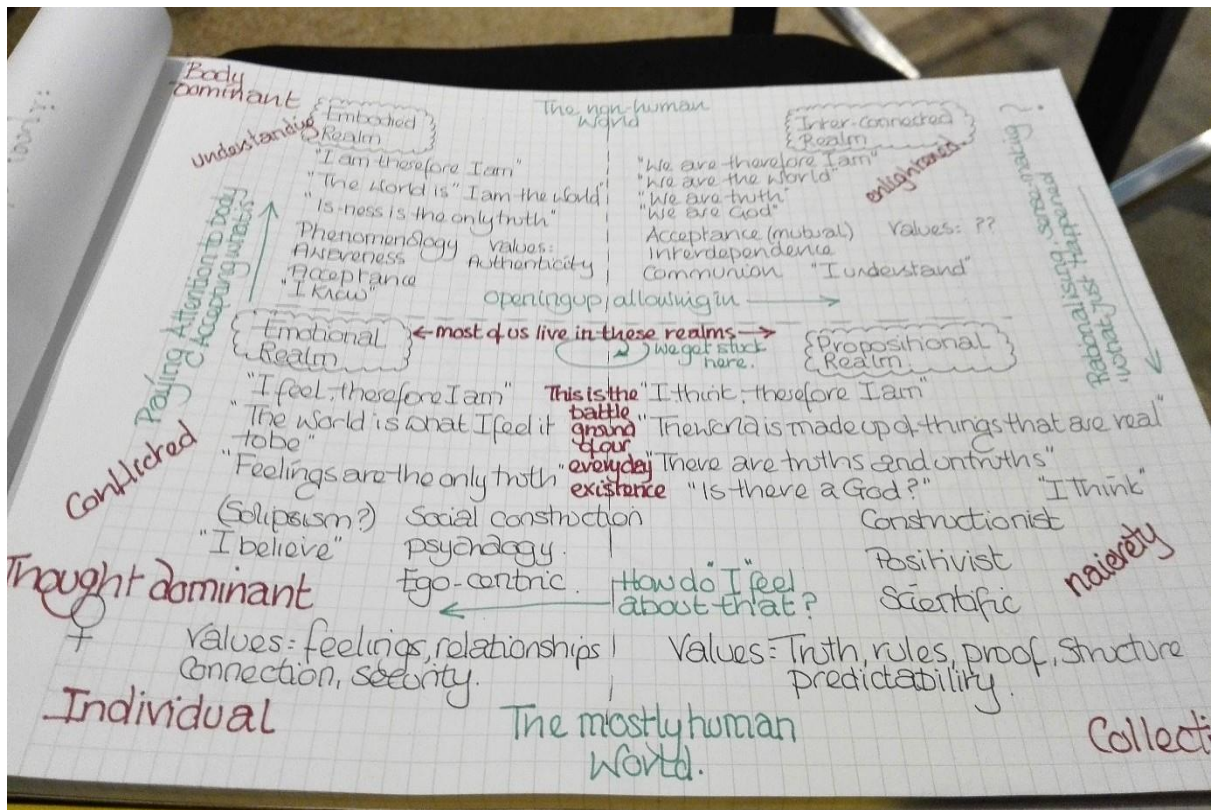


Figure 5. Trying to make sense of different worldviews

My Contribution towards Action Research

'The intimate inhabiting that lived body experiences in its interaction with the world is the primary source of knowing that makes language meaningful and possible' (Todres, 2011, p3).

I have tried to fit my life and my work into the action research paradigm as I have come to understand it; I have questions however, that remain unanswered. As an approach it doesn't go quite far enough to privilege embodied and pre-verbal knowing including intuition, as foundational to all knowing. As expressed by Todres in the above quotation, I have come to experience the primacy of the body, for example, in an embodied response to a fear that is not real, ('Dinner with the Professor', page 141). Through my reading I am coming to see how gender politics can play a role in marginalising or diminishing its importance in mainstream education and research.

For example, why are there so few illustrations in a body of work that promotes extended epistemologies? It also doesn't specifically address the challenge of translation from intuited knowing to language and leaves a wide gap for interpretation by the receiver. In this inquiry, I explore my struggle to bridge feeling and expression, which I refer to as a form of voiceless-ness.

In a reflective review of Judi Marshall's (1999) influential article, "Living Life as Inquiry", Gearty and Marshall call for a wider field of play in relation to action research inquiry. This review examines a textured expansion of the language and practice of living life as inquiry as it is approached from the specificity of people's lives. The article draws particular attention to the embodied nature of inquiry and seeks to capture its fleeting, processual quality. They acknowledge that inquiry is far from only an intellectual matter, (Gearty and Marshall, 2020). This is a recent publication and wasn't available earlier in my inquiry. I feel it supports and validates my critique of the earlier editions of the Sage Handbook on Action Research, as not sufficiently visual, (Reason & Bradbury, 2013); and is representative of a body of work and a growing movement towards more radical forms of knowledge generation. The recent, (third) edition of the Sage Handbook on Action Research, features a chapter entitled 'Radical epistemology as caffeine for social change', by Alfredo Ortiz Aragón and Juan Carlos Giles Macedo, (2015). This chapter focuses on the radicality of reflecting on everyday life experience and skills for engaging with that experience by use of extended epistemologies. "We build on Heron and Reason's conceptualization of radical epistemology by highlighting how drawing, storytelling, having coffee with someone, and other ways of knowing that mimic real life are just as "valid" as any other knowledge type to the extent they generate good questions to ask of real life situations, each from their own perspective." (Aragon and Macedo, 2015). The chapter concludes with the idea that to extend

epistemology is to speak to the plurality and diversity of who we are as people, which allows us to access knowledge from our embodied life experiences.

My unique contribution to this field is to marry feminine epistemology and phenomenology within the outer margins of this field, as ‘feminine intuition’; one of a number of radical epistemologies that is often dismissed or under-valued in management practice and academic research due to implicit bias (see page 62, on disappearing relational practice at work). In revealing my own epistemological positioning, I recognise that arts-based and other more radical forms of knowing tend to sit on the feminist side of the epistemological divide, due to the intuited, ambiguous and relational orientation of the practitioner.

I have found arts-based approaches to inquiry and to practice, carry the greatest promise of bringing non-verbal knowing back into the frame, and particularly in the interests of more egalitarian knowledge sharing processes. I hope that my study work will contribute to a movement towards a deeper and wider language of inquiry, where embodied knowing and arts-based epistemologies are central.

Radical Epistemology: Drawing from a deeper well

In July 2015, I was part of a team of doctoral candidates which included: Kathy Skerritt, Vidhura Ralapanawe, Bente Van Alpen and Joseph Riggio, that designed and implemented a two-day workshop, which we called “Radical Epistemology: Drawing from a Deeper Well.”

The sessions included topics such as ‘Radical Seeing’, ‘Ecological Grief’, ‘Somatic Knowing’, ‘Telepathy with Animals’; and my own contribution, ‘Dance of the Elements’ where I invited the participants to a free-flow dance and movement exercise, whilst I played different styles of music to connect to emotions around the five elements of the Panchamahabuta, (air, water, earth, fire and space).

In addition, together with fellow candidate, Kathy Skerrit, we created the ‘Room of Sensual Delights’. A small break-out space off the conference room, which we filled with colour, taste, music, texture and smells. It had big floor cushions and tables filled with children’s artistic materials, modelling clay, glitter, painting and drawing materials. On the mantelpiece I added eight bottles of essential oils from Sri Lanka; concoctions of citrus fruits, lavender, rose, basil and lemongrass, for example, blended and labelled, ‘Happy’, ‘Sleep’, ‘Calm’, ‘Breathe’, and so on.

Each session was meticulously planned to stretch the boundaries of what we have come to know as institutionalised learning experiences; (widening the field of play). We wanted people to feel emotional; to experience something new and to reflect on both the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of the learning. The workshop

facilitation team made a conscious choice to close sessions without reflection time and allow people to sit with unprocessed content/grief so as not to rush to make meaning and thereby miss touching a deeper, richer understanding of what the experience may have been. The feedback from the participants (all doctoral candidates themselves), was generally highly appreciative. In the notes from the post workshop reflection, the facilitators noted the following learnings:

[We could have been] far more explicit about [our] intention and to repeat it and other key principles throughout the workshop, especially as people began to engage with discomfort and may have forgotten the intent to leave an “open space” for deeper, richer meanings to emerge over time. We think a reflective process through which a deeper exploration of some of the material could have been engaged would have been of value.

I experienced the joy of working with like-minded practitioners and the freedom to play, to follow my intuition and create radical learning experiences, without having to compromise or justify myself. What I also learned, is the importance of carefully framing an experience to others, and in particular creating space and time for them to process their own discomfort, allowing things to be, even when the outcome is different from what I was expecting or hoping for. Most importantly, I learned that by removing my own expectations and needed outcomes from the process, I allowed for deeper and more profound personal learning to emerge for the participants. In other words, not to panic and to trust the process.



Figure 6a – Participants and Faculty members engaging in walking- and ceremony-as-inquiry, July 2015

**Radical Epistemology:
DRAWING FROM A
DEEPER WELL**

Location: Monks Barn (arrivals and coffee & tea from 8.00)
Welcome and Introduction at 8.30

**Day 1
July 15**

morning, Session 1
Radical Seeing

Grounded in the informing theories of artful knowing as articulated in "Artful Organisation" by Chris Seeley and Ellen Thornhill (2014) and the "Phenomenology of Perception" of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, this session takes us into a practice of noticing what is evoked when our gaze is allowed to linger with no goal to be accomplished beyond a sustained seeing of what is in front of us.

morning, Session 2
**Somatic Knowing –
The Autobiographical Body (# 1 of 3)**


Much of what we experience as "change work" is epistemological in nature, yet there is no epistemology that is possible without there being an ontology from which it emerges, i.e.: you must "be" before you can "know." We'll explore ways of being in the body as the ground of ontology in this session and how being embodied gives rise to our life story.

**Lunch
13.00 -14.30**

afternoon, Session 3
**Knowing Through Resonance: Embodied
Expression of Panchakarma**

Resonance: A quality that makes something personally meaningful or important to someone; a sound or vibration produced in one object that is caused by the sound or vibration produced in another. (Merriam-Webster 2015)

In this session we will experiment with and explore different resonances and our collective and individual responses. We will work with the conceptual model that Ayurveda uses to understand the principles of nature's functioning, the **panchamahabhuta** or the theory of the five great elements, i.e. space, air, fire, water and earth. (Ioshi, S. V. 1998) "The same dynamics that orchestrate the processes in the human body also orchestrate life everywhere in the universe." There is no specific goal of this session, other than to be present, to be open and to notice what emerges.



afternoon, Session 4
Exploring Ecological Grief, Part 1

In this session we will be witness to the magnitude of the ecological devastation our species has brought to the planet. This session is intentionally designed with little framing or closure in order to avoid immediately moving to explain and rationalize what we have seen and, instead, to simply feel the ecological reality of our times and perhaps the despair that many experience in the face of it.

Dinner 19.00 – 20.00

evening, Session 5
Exploring Ecological Grief, Part 2


Engaging in walking-as-inquiry and ceremony-as-inquiry, we will bodily and ritually reflect on what has been evoked by the first session on ecological grief in light of what Native American scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. (1999) has said about ceremony – that it is "world-renewing" because "the object of ceremony is to cleanse the participants and offer them a new beginning." This session is entirely out-of-doors and includes walking the labyrinth and the grounds in a guided process.

Figure 6b – 'Radical Epistemology: Drawing from a Deeper Well' Workshop Outline Day 1

**Day 2
July 16**

Morning, Session 6 – PARALLEL ROUND A
**Expanding our consciousness:
telepathic contact with animals**

Many indigenous peoples communicate with the spirits of the natural world. We too have ability to practice mind-to-mind communication with animals. In this paradigm shifting session we will invite you to expand your consciousness and enter into a world of thought energy and interconnectedness. Choose for this parallel session if you feel open and curious (a small dose of criticism is ok. :-). If you are very critical then we would like to invite you to participate in parallel round B.



Morning, Session 6 – PARALLEL ROUND B
**Foolish Wisdom:
The Tradition of the Trickster as the Wise Fool**

"Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of a living soul." - Carl Jung

"Action Logics is the master trait." - Jane Loevenger

In this session, we will be using the archetypes of the "trickster/wise fool" to uncover and shift the world-view, or weltanschauung, we hold and how it shapes our experience of what is real. Working through a playful process designed to provoke change and the stability of a singular worldview, or epistemological position held. We'll seek to create new ways of seeing the world in terms of how we experience reality, as we know it to be from our default perspective. As part of the process we will use a validated self-testing instrument to identify the starting point of the worldview each of us hold individually.

Morning, Session 7
Somatic Knowing – The Implicated Body (#2 of 3)

We'll continue the exploration we began in the morning session on Day 1 into the form of the narratives that arise from the way we experience ourselves as embodied beings, and how shifting our experience of embodiment affects the stories we tell ourselves, the stories we tell others about us, and the stories others tell about us too.

**Lunch
13.00 -14.15**

Afternoon, Session 8
Art Happening

A time for honoring and engaging with the artifacts, images, poetry, and other expressive forms we have given to what we have experienced in the workshop. We will practice encountering this expressive content relative to what the spiritual teacher and master artist Adi Da has described as a way of seeing that invites the viewer into a "state of freedom...beyond the usual presumption of separation between artist and subject..."

Afternoon, Session 9
Somatic Knowing – The Embodied Story (#3 of 3)

We'll complete the cycle of somatic exploration with a final session around how we know ourselves and others as embodied beings, and how our way of being embodied affects others we interact with, as well as how their embodiment affects us, especially in relation to the work of being a change artist.

Closure at 18.00

Figure 6c – 'Radical Epistemology: Drawing from a Deeper Well' Workshop Outline Day 2



Figure 6d. The author sitting on 'The Empress Throne' – Radical Epistemology Workshop

Data sources

I have come to understand that data encompasses many different forms of input. Much of my data is in the form of historical narratives; memories of childhood, in particular, and manifestation of significant events from the past, often written in free-flow without editing. I found this technique helpful and was often surprised by the amount of detail that I was able to recall. If I had to put a label on this data-harvesting, I would call it an *artful, ethnographic inquiry*; for much of my writing, I discovered, has a sensory, poetic, story-telling quality to it. This was not a conscious strategy, rather one that evolved as the most effective way to capture and share, experiences that were often multi-sensory and complex, difficult to articulate and painful.

The second source of inquiry data is my journal. For four years I kept a journal and wrote (typed) in response to living life in a mind-set of continuous inquiry. I began to notice a lot of things that were going on; and at a very difficult time of my life. My journaling helped me to make sense of some intense experiences. At times, where words eluded me, I drew pictures and wrote poems. This allowed me to express complex ideas and semi-conscious knowing, that I struggled to put into every-day language. This form of artful inquiry helped me to step out of an experience and notice my thoughts, senses and feelings, and critique them as if they were artefacts. My reading around phenomenology was particularly helpful, and I wrote several pieces where I step back into the experience and reflect on it in an embodied way; (for example Pages 127-128).

The third source of data is that which comes about through conversations with others, or in response to others ideas and experiences in literature. As a first-person inquiry I found it hard to judge with whom to share my emerging inquiry. Most of my close family and friends were curious to know what my inquiry was about – and I used this question as an opportunity to hear my answer, which differed slightly each time I gave it. Eventually, they stopped asking, and I avoided the question by giving platitudes, or gave up trying to explain. I became increasingly unsure of the right answer to the question and anything close to an accurate response involved a complex explanation. At this time, the feedback from my doctoral supervisory group was invaluable source of strength and insight. Now that the inquiry has matured into a full-blown thesis, it has stimulated many conversations with peers and sometimes with complete strangers. Finally, I have found an authentic voice that is confident and comfortable to explain and defend this thesis.

After the first submission of my thesis, I painted 'The Field' with an intention to 'paint out' my inquiry. The painting became a resource and an artefact. There is no doubt in my mind that it helped me organise and articulate my ideas through the Viva process, and beyond in my conversations with everyone who is curious. I posted the images on social media and hung the painting up in the office at the riding school. It became an instrument through which many deep and philosophical conversations were had; some with complete strangers.

Quality, choices and rigor

I anticipated a major challenge in relation to my action research inquiry in balancing the need for rigor with a process that is emergent and organic. According to the Handbook of Action Research, a key dimension of quality is to be aware of one's choices, and to make those choices clear, transparent, articulate, to yourselves, to your inquiry partners, and, when you start writing and presenting, to the wider world, (Reason & Bradbury, 2013, p7). As I investigated other literary sources, I came to understand that the issue of quality is more complex and politically loaded than this statement might indicate. There is an underlying imperative to assure that the choices I make are not just clear and transparent, but also serving the interests of humanity.

As an action researcher, I have a duty of care to make decisions on the basis of the guiding principles, towards greater participation and human flourishing; and that immediately puts me into a political arena.

Articulating as clearly as I can, I can say that I am guided towards greater inclusion, in all decision making activities that affect the greater community. Inclusion means overcoming barriers of language, gender, education, culture and power politics. For I firmly believe that more voices around the table, at work and at home, different points of view and the collaboration of diverse opinion holders, is one of the ways that we can secure a better future for our planet and for future generations of humankind.

As the world shrinks, differences among us are becoming magnified and too often perceived as threats. [...] In a pluralistic world, can individuals and communities justly set criteria for what is right, what is true, and what is good without demonizing strangers? (Goldberger, 1996, p17).

But this is not the end of the story, for Knowledge with a capital 'K' (page 33), as I have come to understand it, is co-created. Knowledge creation is a political act as it reflects the cultural, power dynamics and world view of the creators included in the process. I became interested to learn about institutionalized qualitative standards for qualitative research; and this led me to the publication

“Qualitative Inquiry” (QI). Arguments by contributors such as Susan Finley of Washington State University and her article ‘Arts-Based Inquiry in QI: Seven Years from Crisis to Guerrilla Warfare’, in the article in ‘Qualitative Inquiry’ (Volume 9, 2003), reconsiders emerging standards for evaluation of the field of practice of qualitative inquiry and arts-based approaches. As my inquiry evolved into one that privileges qualitative inquiry, I feel it merits a deeper and more thorough investigation. In particular, I am interested to examine the criteria that are being proposed for validation, (See Chapter 4, pages 79-83). Specifically, this is a review of the dialogue around issues of standards that has continued through the first seven volumes of Qualitative Inquiry (QI), from March 1995 through June 2001. I examine this ongoing dialogue and how it relates to my inquiry, especially the politics of whose rules count in Chapter Four, and through the first person inquiry of an arts-based process in Chapter 11. In conclusion, I find that quality really depends on purpose and context.

I am interpreting rigor as a commitment to quality of process. In terms of AR, this seems to refer to a thoroughness of reflection through cycles of inquiry and action. The Handbook provides guidance in terms of cycles of ‘single, double and triple-loop feedback’, (Reason & Bradbury, 2013, p240), which describe the growing capacity of a system (person, team or nation) to be in productive and emancipatory dialogue with difference, diversity and incongruity. For me, this is about the seriousness with which I expose my work to continuous critique (by self and others), in a continuous loop of doing, reflecting and adjusting; internally and externally. I feel it is also necessary to identify and break down my protective behaviours, such as when I make it OK for everyone else, but at my own cost rather than facing fear of rejection. This is evident in the life stories in Chapter 4, (for example, on pages 97-98). These are the fears that seem to be distorting and corrupting my ability for honest self-reflection and growth. This is painful and often difficult, as I experienced in writing about the relationship with my mother and father in Chapters 4 and 5. I have learned that transformation can happen to me instantly when the experience is a visceral (embodied) one. I once bit into a chocolate bar and found I had bitten into a maggot. Even though this happened several years ago, each time I pick up or even smell the same brand of confectionary, I am transported back into all the details of that multi-sensual memory. I have learned that the quality and nature of feedback is more important than the number of feedback cycles. Judi Marshall emphasises this in her book ‘First Person Action Research; Living life as inquiry’ (2016, p.xx) ‘The potential for arrogance, misguided interference and damage are great as we become self-appointed change agents to organisations, society, planet, universe. [However] We owe it to our fellow creatures to engage in some form of self-questioning, seeking to pay attention to our purposes and patterns, and inviting challenge from others in these terms. [...] adopting some form of self-reflective

inquiry practice is a responsibility, despite the impossibility of doing this 'perfectly'. I have come to understand that a quality inquiry requires one to make one's self vulnerable. If what I am doing has no edge of (twinned) excitement and fear perhaps I am just going through the motions without placing myself fully in the process.', (Marshall, 2016, p60).

I had the opportunity to meet Judi Marshall in person at her workshops held at the University. She candidly shared her own experience of struggling with a process that is often misunderstood and misrepresented as 'self-indulgence, if not narcissism'. Drawing a line in the sand between inquiry and everything else in my life, was a constant challenge and her candid sharing was really helpful in making quality choices around what to include and trusting my gut-feel to determine if something needed to be explored more deeply.,

Honesty and transparency in inquiring was a challenge, as it required me to recognise and state my intention, and also to dig into childhood and parental issues that felt uncomfortable and out of place in a doctoral inquiry. Only by 'going there', have I been able to really understand the urges and biases that have shaped my experience of the World. I found that this story was actually one of the most significant in that it revealed a great deal about early-life conditioning and a gendered experience of struggling to be heard in a masculine dominated work environment. For this reason, my own (feminine) epistemological story has become one of the three great works of art in this thesis.

Exploring writing as an approach to inquiry

Writing has become very important to me as a means of self-expression, sense-making and escape during some particularly difficult times. It has become the world that I inhabit when I am inquiring. Spending so much of my time in inhospitable places and in transit between them, writing has become a place of retreat, and writing has become my friend, my mirror and my therapist. Through writing I see beauty and take it inwards, I make sense of things that are hurtful, frightening or confusing and create humour in the darkest of situations; in a bunker in Afghanistan, riding a horse, in minus thirty degrees on the plains of Mongolia, and on a full flight out of Dubai, with an engine on fire.

Free-fall writing

As a Consultant, I am hard-wired to present objective and conclusive findings, to put them in boxes, categorise these under labels or sweep them under the table if they don't fit previously accepted management theory. Learning to live with ambiguity has been an interesting experience.

Letting go of this pre-disposition took a little time, and results in a methodology chapter that tends towards messiness. I crafted the idea of a vignette; pieces of freefall writing or art, created in ‘free-flow’ without editing, a stream of unfiltered consciousness. I am including several pieces in this chapter, like the one below, to illustrate how my inquiry starts.

I am in the back of a tuk-tuk; an open-sided, Sri Lankan motorcycle rickshaw; we are in heavy traffic, and as usual, I am typing on my laptop.

What is my methodology? I pause in my typing and look up for a moment. In that instant I gather my thoughts... Now I am stuck. The act of paying attention has stopped the flow of ideas, of words. My mind is looking in on itself and I am not able to both ‘look’ and ‘be’ simultaneously. I consciously let go of paying attention to process and after a few seconds the words begin to flow once more.

I am allowing my fingers to type, without judging what is written on the page. My thoughts and the typed word become the same thing. There does not seem to be a process of thinking that is separate from the act of typing. When I make a mistake or type a word that feels wrong I go back and correct it afterwards, I am not narrating whole sentences in my head and then typing them. I am working one word at a time and constructing my sentences at the same time that I am typing. I wonder if others work this way or if they construct whole sentences, whole paragraphs even, in their mind first. I decide to try that out and see how it impacts the quality of my writing.

This sentence is one that I carefully rehearsed first in my head. I tried to conceive a complete paragraph but after the first sentence, I got lost. The words were difficult to form and I found myself trying to anchor on an image; the image of me typing and trying to make out my thought processes at the same time. I feel like a dog chasing my own tail.

I notice the level of self-consciousness that I am bringing to the act of writing, and different qualities of attention; noticing my thought processes and when I am ‘narrating in my head’. This requires me to be both in thought and outside of it. This moving in and out between thought and experience takes practice and attention. I notice myself moving in and out of language. I am paying close attention to what is going on at an embodied unconscious level; (I am allowing my fingers to type without judging what is written on the page); and at two conscious levels: consciousness that is constructing sentences and correcting errors, and consciousness that is noticing this and narrating it. I find this useful as a way of disciplining my attention between different levels of consciousness, and being attentive to what I am focusing on. I notice, for example that I am unaware of what is going on around me whilst I am absorbed in my writing.

It was Barbara Turner-Vesselago (2013), who expressed that ‘writing is living’ and I have come to understand what she means by this. I use a freefall writing technique to lay out my immediate, unadulterated subjective experience as data for later reflection. I notice that I often write in the past tense. This tells me that I needed to step away from experience slightly for some reason; similarly, when I have switched unconsciously to the third person in a narrative. I weave in and out of past and present tense seamlessly. I have not corrected this as a grammatical error but instead use this as an indication of an interesting unconscious process. In relation to written narratives, both historical and phenomenological, I have discovered that I am able to write evocatively and with influence. This has been a joy and at times a distraction. I needed to ‘rein myself in’ during these latter stages of thesis writing, to ensure there is a rigor to my selection and analysis of ‘stories’. However, the ability to write sensually has allowed me to say the unsayable, to shake loose unconscious knowledge about a particular time and experience; ‘Nurturing our own voices, releases the censorial hold of “Science writing’, (Richardson, L. & St Pierre, E.A, 2005).

I create these narratives by immersing myself in the remembered experience, (such as when I was trying to recall the feeling of being silenced, in ‘Dinner with the Professor’, Chapter 6, page 136). I am always surprised at how much detail comes to mind. The remembering comes in flashes of sensual experience, sometimes as an image, sometimes as a particular essence of an experience which has the ability to evoke sounds, textures and even tastes and smells. One memory evokes the next and the next in a network of connections and associations; a cascade of images. The challenge is in knowing where to stop; to decide what is relevant and what is not. In historical narrative, I attempt to bring the account (what I know) into the realm of sensual embodied experience (what I feel), so that I can unlock what my body knows about experience that has lain hidden and forgotten by my conscious mind. I have noticed that when I move into past tense narrative, there is a tendency to ‘tell’ rather than ‘show’. The same thing happens when I shift from perspective of a third person and refer to myself as ‘she’. I recognise when this happens it is telling me something about nature of what is being re-experienced. I then need to ‘step back in’ to understand what it is I am avoiding.

Synesthetic and Embodied Writing

I use writing to express ideas that come up whilst I am living life. I kept a journal for four years and maintained a discipline of writing every few days. Sometimes in the act of writing about one thing, something totally different emerged. This is never planned but instead a spontaneous response to the environment or situation which creates associations with remembered sensual experiences from the past. Below I am sharing an example of a journal entry written about painting and decorating.

INQUIRY BY PAINTING AND DECORATING

I have started painting my furniture white, in preparation for the big move next month. It feels so satisfying that slip, slip slap of paint on paint covering up dark wood and all its brooding memories. I feel reborn in this room of whiteness and I wonder what it is about paint, the act of painting that feels so right, so wholesome, so complete. I painted chairs and the dining room table slip, slip, slap; the texture of Ponds cold cream out of a blue glass jar on my mother's dressing table; slip, slip, slap. Especially satisfying is the white gloss, leaving everything smooth, rounded and safe; like shutters on the playroom window of my childhood.

Today I have decided to paint the garden wall. As I pick up the four-inch brush and dip it into creamy white paint, I contemplate the task ahead of me and my heart feels heavy. I throw myself into the work with full gusto and in a few minutes I am straining to keep up the pace. I tell myself to stay in the moment, to stop looking to see how far I have come and how far there is still to go. I try to halt the unending chatter in my brain, to think wordlessly, and to make every stroke of the brush, a loving embrace to an old friend. I imagine that the paint is a soft cream that I am rubbing into his or her tired skin. After a while I notice sensations that are intuited rather than constructed. I try to dwell in feelings and half-formed thoughts and understand what it is telling me. The sense is one of 'protection'. Applying paint feels like I am building a nest. It is a primal sense of creating a safe space; laying claim to it as my own. It dawns on me that much of what I am doing these days is nest-building and in so doing I am drawn towards those sensual experiences that tell me I'm OK, I'm safe, 'I'm home'.

The first thing that I am aware of in this narrative is evocative language that serves the function of engaging the whole body. I am feeling, smelling and sensing the experience of paint from childhood. The memories that flood my senses are more than images, what is unlocked is a complete and familiar phenomenon. It is as if the memory is locked in my body-brain. There is one quotation from Merleau-Ponty's 'Phenomenology of Perception' that really struck me and helped me to synthesise the experience as one that engages the memory to bring out a deeper level of sensual experience which is part here and now, and part there and then.

'[T]hanks to the unity of the body, tactile perceptions obtained by one organ are immediately translated into the language of the other organs. [...]Hardness and softness, coarseness and smoothness, and moonlight and sunlight, in our memory are presented before all else not as sensory contents but as a certain type of symbiosis, a certain manner that the outside has of invading us, a certain manner we have of receiving it and the memory does nothing here but bring out the framework of perception from which it was born.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, Lander, 2010, p330/331).

Merleau-Ponty. In the end I found Les Todres and his book 'Embodied Enquiry' (2011), more accessible and relatable. As a psychologist, Todres illustrates his findings using examples from current practice. I began to lean heavily on his work, whilst I came to terms with its relevance to my own. In relation to the tension between embodied and languaged knowing he says 'This responsive process is more than checking against a logical conception of whether an interpretation hangs together and 'makes sense'. Rather such 'sense-making' requires this more complex tension between languaging and embodying - so that logical rules and computers cannot validate interpretations: only beings who participate bodily and move in and out of language and situations can.' (Todres, 2011, p35).

Exploring the use of metaphor

I see myself unconsciously using metaphorical language to communicate an embodied experience. For example, I describe the scene in 'Dinner with the Professor' (Chapter 6, page 136): 'We sat around a low coffee table in opposing corners of the room like boxers before a fight.' Perhaps the fact that I am choosing this analogy reveals my unconscious fear that by stepping into the ring I might get knocked out, or perhaps that I unconsciously feel 'I am boxing above my weight' an expression that means, I am out of my depth epistemologically and am intimidated by the other contenders who are heavyweights in this field of conversation.

The reason that metaphors work for me is that they bring home a concept that is alien or complex and make it accessible to imagery and investigation through association. I have noticed that phenomenological literature uses a great deal of metaphor and analogy to bring home specific sensual and subjective experience and make it accessible to others. Another example from the literature is Romanshyn's use of terminology such as 'abyss' to reflect the gap between what we know and perceive through our bodies and what we express in language. Similarly, he makes extensive use of the story analogy of 'Orpheus' to explain concepts around what he terms 're-search' re-discovery of knowing, and the inevitable sense of loss once we find it, (Romanshyn, 2007, p29).

Bateson is another advocate of use of what he terms 'wild analogy' which speaks to 'the advances in scientific thought' which come from a combination of 'loose and strict thinking' which he claims to be 'the most precious tool of science' (Bateson, 2000, p75). He explains how an analogy is held up as a kind of comparison; as if to test out phenomenon to see in what ways it is the same and how it differs from the rules that govern the field from which the analogy is taken. For example, I am using two analogies in formulation of this thesis; the great musical work by Mussorgsky 'Pictures at an Exhibition'

and the analogy within the music of walking around a great art exhibition. These two intersecting layers of symbolism provide rich ground for metaphorical description and analysis based on the combination of physical, sensual and spiritual manifestation of ideas.

When I notice a metaphor or analogy popping up in narrative, I am trying to explore the unconscious intention behind it. I find it helpful, and sometimes surprising what comes up when I spend time unpacking it and asking questions, why did I choose this? What is hidden? What is assumed? For example, in the above analogy of painting and decorating I am 'covering over brooding memories' and 'rubbing cream into tired skin of an old friend', imagery that is sensual and evocative but also reveals an underlying tiredness. Is it my skin that needs soothing perhaps? Bateson explains it thus 'The point is that the first hunch from analogy is wild, and then, the moment I begin to work out the analogy, I am brought up against the rigid formulations which have been devised in the field from which I borrow the analogy,' (Bateson, 2000, p75).

Exploring the use of poetry

Similar to metaphor, I have found that poetry works for me by occupying a space between what I am thinking and what I am feeling. It seems to help me to manifest things that are unsaid, by pointing in their general direction and allowing the reader to make his or her own associations. In terms of extended epistemology, at different times, it is both experiential and presentational. Like other arts-based practices, there is an implied inter-subjectivity; I am writing for an audience at the same time that I am reflecting on my own subjective experience.

I discovered that I can often express myself better using poetic form than in narrative, when I am unsure what it is I need to express. Most often what comes up is a surprise. The urge to write a poem often comes from a desire to feel or know something more deeply, to tap into a more profound level of consciousness and connect with a primal sense of beauty, of joy, of fear, or of grief that lies hidden. It allows me to experience life more deeply and to share that experience with others.

I would like to give an illustration here, and am choosing a poem written on an early morning walk in the grounds of Ashridge House. The first few verses were conceived consciously in my head, at the time, and with a clear intention to write a poem about the experience. The final two verses were added in spontaneous response to the experience of meeting a deer. On reflection there is a lot more being implied, relating to deep ecology, climate crisis and monumental grief that I sensed at the time but only managed to find expression for, once I returned to my room and began to write.

RECONNECTING

*I step into a misty soup,
of whoops and trills, arpeggios,
chorus of a thousand leaves,
not yet awake, still in a dream
stretched out like cats,
the golden beams*

*Expectant skies touch earth's sweet cheek,
a morning blush, a sleepy kiss
The shameless rose,
dishevelled mess,
still in her pale pink party dress,*

*In morning chill, fat fingers ache
The icy breath, breathes cells awake
Yet in my head, the words yet have no shape
wet dents, feet form
across the mossy lawn*

*At once, I see you in the space
You turn, alert, prepared to run
Caught in the headlights, unblinking gaze
Shared history and a common fate
And we are one.*

*If you are you, and I am me
and this is that, and he or she
then why is it that when I'm close
I feel your thoughts,
I share your words?*

*And at some distant point in time
There was no you nor me, no yours, no mine
Then we were one, we shared a heart
It makes no sense
To drift apart*

*To fight, to hate, to disengage
From one another, from life, from rage
There is still time to realise
To wipe the scales from tired eyes
Make peace with God, with life, with man
And start the whole thing all again*

(Pitts, 2016)

Chapter four- Literature

This is me grappling with ideas and engaging with the literature

This is me grappling with ideas and engaging with the literature

I am challenged to critically appreciate the literature; perhaps because I am prone to feelings of scholarly inferiority. In his 1983 paper, 'Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process', Peter Elbow quotes D. W. Robertson 'A Preface to Chaucer, (1973) that "likens it [poetry], to a nut with a tough husk protecting a sweet kernel. The function of the poem is not to disclose but rather conceal the kernel from the many, the unworthy, and disclose it only to the few worthy." I feel the same way about scholarly literature, and I am desperate to be worthy; to be one of the chosen few.

I have come to recognize through my reading, that I share a lot of behavioural traits that would categorize me as a 'Connected Knower', (Goldberger et al, 1996); I accept your truth quickly and easily because it is of vital importance that I meet with your approval, (see page 77). With academic text it is often the same. I read, first to understand, to be as one with the writer, to assimilate and take the knowledge. Then I try to hold it up against my own experiences. I look for congruence and I look for metaphors that make it easier to visualize. I am destructive and irreverent with books; I devour them like a gratifying meal. I write in the margins and across the pages, underlining, highlighting and transcribing. I take it in, copying vast chunks into the memory of my laptop, hoping that by owning it in this way, I can lay claim to understanding it.

For a person who finds words difficult at times, engaging with literature was a daunting task I am a visual reader. I scan the text and form images that help me to locate text within a meaningful metaphor. When the text is thick with extended abstraction, I lose the thread and am easily distracted. To overcome this, I make copious notes on fluorescent post-it stickers and in margins. I use a highlighter pen or underlining to make parts of text more visually prominent as a way of claiming knowledge. When the text became too dense I draw a picture. This collection of books, now dog-eared and worn have become dear friends and travelling companions on a hundred different journeys and as many different guesthouses from Kabul to Ulanbataar.

I read widely and voraciously. I think this can be attributed to trying to keep up and fit in, (as I describe in Chapter 5, pages 103-104). Much of the early reading didn't make it into this dissertation for practical reasons. I have, however included references in the Bibliography of those works that most influenced my thinking, including a delightful work by the late Desmond Tutu and HH the Dalai Lama on the subject of 'Joy', which helped me to understand the phenomenon I experience when I am close to nature. I was advised it was not sufficiently scholarly to include as a reference. Aside from literature around action research methodology, the two main bodies of writing include books around 'feminist epistemology'

and ‘phenomenology and embodied knowing’. Of the two, I found the latter easier to engage with, due to richly metaphorical and evocative language that allowed me to create mental images, and escape from sometimes harsh reality. The feminist writing had the opposite effect and drew me back into an unsettled childhood and an adult life of low self-esteem. You will see both these worlds reflected in the great works of art that constitute the main body of this inquiry.

Ideas around feminist literature

A Reluctant Feminist

I was very reluctant to engage with feminist literature; something connected to unconscious negative associations around the female stereotype. Understanding this, I am now questioning choices that I made, to work in predominantly male workplaces and take up traditionally male roles. I am wondering if there is something to uncover here.

I was encouraged multiple times by my supervisor to engage with feminist literature. If I am honest, there was a real fear that by labelling my inquiry as a feminist inquiry, I would weaken my position; that I would stigmatise and undermine my credibility. Reading Sara Ruddick’s Chapter ‘Reason’s Femininity’ (Goldberger et al, 1996, p248-270), I see that I am not alone in this troubled relationship with femininity. In setting out to prove their rationality, ‘The challenge is daunting. Vulnerable to insult, susceptible to arrogant dismissal, often enough deprived of the resources that a developing reason requires, the excluded must none-the-less convince their judges of their worthiness’ (Ruddick, 1996, p249). It is hardly surprising that many women, like me, opt for impersonal reason as the best defence; rejecting feminism and excluding women from a place in our hard-won intellectual circles.

My doctoral supervisor asked me ‘What are you avoiding?’ In answer to that I wrote the following in a piece I dismissively called ‘The bit on gender’:

THE BIT ON GENDER

I still find feminist writing and paradigms challenging. I have a resistance to this, possibly based on the fact that I feel vulnerable when I allow my feminine side (i.e. more emotional-relational side) to come to the fore. I am nervous that I might lose control and credibility within male-dominated context of my workplace and industry. I am frequently pushed to play a more masculine role in order to be taken seriously. This often goes against my instinct and is a role I play through necessity rather than passion. In my leadership work and in resolving complex organizational issues, particularly in effecting organizational change, I find that (feminine) intuition is key.

I am increasingly acknowledging the gendered orientation of my inquiry, and this writing is an attempt to dig into that. I recently had conversations with other single female professionals in high stress, high responsibility positions in their organisations and they re-emphasized for me challenges we face in balancing male and female roles we need to play and in nurturing ourselves in feminine ways when the going gets tough at work.

I began by reading Carol Gilligan's seminal, publication, 'In a Different Voice; Psychological theory and women's development', (1996). What I learned from her work is that there is a body of research findings that supports the idea that men and women experience relationships (and life), differently, and that gender identity (sex role), turns out to be one of the most important determinants of human behaviour (Gilligan, 1996, p14). I felt deeply affirmed. For the first time in almost six decades, I came to understand that it wasn't just me. Feelings of inadequacy, of separation and of not being understood, particularly in relation to my role as a manager, had shaped me emotionally, robbed me of confidence, and dogged me throughout my career, in a world where the masculine paradigm is taken as the norm.

In the book, Gilligan tells the story of Jake and Amy. These two children, both 11 years old, and in the same sixth-grade class at school, participated in a study to determine whether sex roles influence the measuring of human moral development. Gilligan describes Jake and Amy as bright and articulate, but not stereotypical of sex-roles since Amy wanted to be a scientist and Jake preferred English to math. In the study, they were each asked to respond to a moral dilemma, where Heinz steals life-saving medicine for his sick wife.

The girl looks at the issue with a concern for human relationships. Both agree that the life must be saved, but Jake resolves the problem by applying rights and responsibilities, with a logic based on a hierarchy of values, while Amy resolves the problem by applying dialogue and co-operation. The conclusion Gilligan draws (in this one of many examples in the book) is that Jake and Amy see the situation from a different perspective. She rationalizes this by looking at the issue of parenting and dependencies.

"Consequently, relationships, and particularly issues of dependency, are experienced differently by women and men. For boys and men separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity, (Gilligan, 1996, P8).

I also learned about the influence of an early care-giver on that polarity. In her theory she explains that as primary care-giver, it is often the mother who imprints feelings of 'sameness', or of 'difference' on a

young child, which can lead to an orientation towards ‘separation’ or ‘connectedness’ in the young adult. I began to see how my early childhood experiences may explain my habitual approval-seeking and set a pattern for harmful relationships, plus explain a tendency to work too hard.

I learned how men’s experience has consistently been taken as representative of all experience and that ‘since there is a tendency to construct a single scale of measurement, and since that scale has generally been derived from and standardized on the basis of men's interpretation of research data drawn predominantly from studies of males, psychologists have tended to regard male behaviour as the 'norm' and female behaviour as some kind of deviation from that norm. Thus when women do not conform to the standards of psychological expectation, the conclusion has generally been that something is wrong with the women.” (Gilligan, 1996, p14). Whilst this was on the one hand reassuring, my day-to-day experience showed me that the business world in which I am engaged, has not updated the basic precepts on which it was founded; which makes this was not just a personal issue, but a profound miscarriage of justice for a whole generation of working women.

I recalled the day I was pulled up by my boss for being ‘too soft’ on my staff, and for not being sufficiently ‘results-focused’. I remember, feeling frustrated and disappointed that I had to justify time spent coaching or listening to the problems of my staff. In the end, I worked twice the number of hours than my male colleagues, so that I could meet my personal productivity targets and still support the team.

At the same time, I could see my male colleagues being congratulated for achieving financial targets, whilst ignoring the needs of their staff. I noticed that staff problems and coaching was delegated by them, to other female staff members.

While she places herself in relation to the world and choses to help others through science, he places the world in relation to himself as it defines his character, his position and the quality of his life, (Gilligan, 1996, p35).

This positioning of the male self as central to experience is something that I have come to accept as ‘just the way it is’, without really understanding and empathizing with my male colleagues, that they are just wired differently. In fairness to them, I have tended to see them as bad managers, and sometimes bad or weaker people, due to their lack of ability for empathy, and have likely treated them accordingly. I recognize, that I need to adjust my own model of performance, to appreciate the difference as strength, rather than repeating the same mistakes of the past, by assuming different is somehow wrong or weak.

Because the feminist literature affects me deeply and emotionally, it is harder to step out of the content and examine the ideas with complete objectivity. It is as if I have become mired in subjectivity; and it feels messy, weak and wrong.



Figure 7a – Masculine-centric versus feminine-centric worldview

As an artwork, I have found the feminist literature extraordinarily difficult to visualize. I am noticing my anxiety around the topic, and am curious if this lack of creativity is connected to feelings of vulnerability. At a certain point, I recognized that I needed to face my demons and if that was going to be squishy, messy and embarrassing, so be it. I am also wondering if it is simply a matter of left brain-right brain activity; that it engages a different set of mental processes, that are intrinsically, left-brained (logic and reason). To move this into a right-brained space, perhaps it will engage emotions that I need to control and repress, for fear of not being taken seriously, or making myself vulnerable.

I have been struggling with how to illustrate my takeaways from the body of feminist writing, and after two days of juggling with words, I pick up some more art materials and decide to engage

the right brain with what I call 'freefall drawing'; sketching shapes and ideas until a picture starts to form. The output from this process is included above and later in the chapter.

In this first image, I am focusing on the messages of gender differentiation in terms of masculine and feminine orientation. In this figure I am illustrating a number of different insights from the reading, and re-enforced through my personal experience at work. You can see the separation of the public and private sphere (Fletcher, 2001) and how women who want to succeed in business need to wear a cloak of masculinity in order to be accepted and to progress in their career. This suggests that they are at some level acting in a way that is different from their core gendered orientation. In my personal experience, this has caused me great stress and eventually caused me to be hospitalized with an ear infection, to fall and crack my ankle, while suffering depression and an emotional breakdown (see p118-121).

Central to each realm, the coveted prize of becoming the 'domestic goddess' or the 'business champion', as if these goals are mutually exclusive. It seems to me that the private realm is more accepting of individualism; people are able to be more authentically themselves, (indicated by the multi-colour figures at the bottom left of the picture). In contrast, in the public realm, particularly in the corporate world, real diversity is far less appreciated. You will see the housewife, crossing the boundary into the public realm and having to wear a cloak of masculinity in order to fit in and be recognized. In each realm I noticed that I placed an audience of blank faces; 'they' who are anonymously judging. On the bottom of the steps at the top left of the picture, a woman is kicking someone else off the pedestal. This is indicative of the women (and men) who are not able to express themselves authentically and feel the need to protect themselves (and others image of them), by isolating others.

'Disappearing Acts; Gender, Power and Relational Practice at Work'; Joyce Fletcher (2001)

Joyce Fletcher gave the way women tend to be at work a name - 'Relational Practice', and it explains why I am driven to nurture the team rather than set them competing against one another. She also helps me to understand why the institutionalized disappearance of this work by my organization, as non-productive, contributed to my emotional burnout, and that of a significant number of my female colleagues. What we did, the way we worked, was considered unnecessary and submissive. We were consistently reminded of the need to be tougher, have stronger boundaries, more discipline, and not lose focus on results. As I re-examined my stories through the lens of the 'Women's Development Model', I saw sixty years of frustration, isolation and guilt as symptomatic of systemized oppression and marginalization that had eroded my self-belief and affected a good part of my life. I felt victimized, I felt

angry and I felt ashamed. I needed to forgive my mother, whose oppression and constant criticism predisposed me at an early age, to seek refuge from a world that was disapproving and hostile; and finally, I needed to forgive myself.

For me, the most interesting findings that Fletcher makes in this work are summarised in the following excerpt:

“Findings show that there is a masculine logic of effectiveness operating in organisations that is accepted as so natural and right that it may appear odd to call it masculine. [...] This logic of effectiveness suppresses or disappears behaviour that is inconsistent with its basic premises, even when that behaviour is in line with organisational goals.” (Fletcher, 1996, p3).

Joyce Fletcher built on the ideas of Carol Gilligan, proposing that not only were men, dismissive of feminine contribution to management, that they (and women themselves) were ‘disappearing’ acts of building and sustaining relationships at work. I refer again to Sara Ruddick’s chapter ‘Reason’s Femininity’ (Goldberger et al, 1996, p248-270). Many intellectual feminists move, as particular situations or intellectual tasks suggest, ‘between endorsing and rejecting both dominant and allegedly “feminine” voices of reason in order to revise ideals of rationality so that they better represent and serve women.’ (Ruddick, 1996, p250). It is clear to me, that the relationship between the traditional workplace and its models of rationality, and traditional models of femininity, is a troubled one.

‘[...] because men are socialised to devalue and deny in themselves relational skills needed to survive psychologically, they tend to rely on women to provide these attributes. Women on the other hand are socialised to provide these skills, usually invisibly and without any acknowledgement that any need exists or anything valuable is being done. Thus, women become the "carriers" of relational strengths in society, responsible for creating relational connections for others and meeting basic relational needs without calling attention to the needs themselves’ (Fletcher J. 2001, p9).

When it came to synthesizing Fletcher’s work into an artwork, I produced the coloured pencil sketch overleaf. I intentionally, didn’t over-think it, but instead started drawing without a clear idea of the finished product. When I look at it now, I see similarities in the symbolism of ‘The Field’; in particular, the polarized world of masculine and feminine, divided by a gate. There is no cemetery gate, but instead a banner which reminds me of the entrance to a church fete, a sports meet or perhaps the start of a race. Nevertheless, there is a tombstone, that reads ‘She was kind’; almost by way of explanation for her demise. People (women) are being pushed from the top

balcony, whilst on the other side of the tower someone (presumably a man), is being accoladed for meeting traditional expectations. The university gown and hat, symbolic of a traditional educational paradigm.



Figure 7b – Disappearance of feminine epistemologies in the Business World

Below is my synthesis of the feminist literature that focuses on different definitions of business performance and in particular highlights the celebration of individuation and the rejection of feminine models of effectiveness in the modern business context. It is a sad recognition of the failings of the modern business world, that celebrates business success in terms of the masculine paradigm of performance and ignores or rejects women’s ways of contributing to business success, (Fletcher, 2001).

In particular, I notice that all the ‘messy stuff’, of children, animals, nature and fun and games are excluded from the workplace. It is as if women have to leave this side of themselves behind and act like a man, if they want to stand a chance of competing in business. In my experience, it is this ‘messiness’ that differentiates a business, the creativity, the unique culture, the personality of a business and its special story that tends to be left behind, when an organisation strives for success defined in traditional

terms. In the global pandemic, the boundaries between our public (workplace) and private (home) lives were blurred beyond recognition. I propose that in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world we live, traditional ways of working no longer serve us and have forced us to rethink *how* and *where* we work, and blur our personal and professional roles.

The 'first horizon' is when companies begin to acknowledge that the world revolving around them is no longer what it used to be and that their 'business as usual' has outgrown its relevance. This is the juncture at which organizations begin to experiment with new modi operandi of functioning. (Sinha, D. and Sinha, J S, 2020, 'Managing in a VUCA World: Possibilities and Pitfalls').

Fletcher explains, "When behaviour motivated by a relational or stereotypically feminine logic of effectiveness was brought into this discourse it got disappeared as work because it violated the masculine logic of effectiveness that was in operation" (Fletcher, 2001, P91). This proposition woke me up to the reality that I have been shouldering a burden of responsibility for relational wellbeing of my team, that I assumed was an essential part of my job as Branch Director. What I came to understand, is that male directors were not taking this upon themselves, and instead ignoring it or delegating it to another (female) team member. Hence my workload, on what the organisation classed as unproductive, (i.e. non-fee earning) work was double that of my male colleagues. Plus, given the emotional nature of this relational work, took much more of a toll on my mental health and wellbeing.

In Fletcher's study she notes, 'Output was defined as the result of real work, and that meant something tangible, concrete, measurable, and quantifiable. There was a strong belief that if you cannot define metrics of something upfront, its value cannot be assessed.' (ibid p90). This was profoundly illuminating. I came to recognise that not only is it difficult to instil relational skills into managers that operate from a masculine effectiveness paradigm, my own organisation is disappearing relational work of female senior managers, and we are also disappearing it for ourselves and for one another. I assumed that everyone understood the importance of listening, of conflict resolution and of motivating staff. Unfortunately, this relational tendency is misrepresented as a weakness; particularly when things go wrong. When my Financial Controller committed a fraud against the branch, I was held accountable, and my tendency to trust and delegate widely was used against me as proof of incompetence.

This is a tension that is present in my work, as much today as it was twenty years earlier. There is advancement in terms of the number of women in senior positions of management in Sri Lanka. However, I see little evidence that these women are promoting more relational systems of performance. They have struggled long and hard to win positions of authority that they now hold and

remain entrenched in a masculine paradigm that determines how long they are able to retain these positions and how they are judged. I am yet to be convinced that anything has fundamentally shifted.

Women's Development Model – 'Women's Ways of Knowing; The development of self, voice and mind'; Belenky, M, Clichy, B, Goldberger, N. and Tarule, J. (1997)

One of the more consequential pieces of feminist literature of the last thirty years remains 'Women's Ways of Knowing; The development of self, voice and mind' by Mary Belenky, Blythe Clichy, Nancy Goldberger and Jill Tarule, (1997). This study of a diverse group of women, focusses on identity and intellectual development across a broad range of contexts. It is grounded in the work of William Perry around intellectual development in general, and Carol Gilligan's work around male and female morality and personal identity.

The now obvious omission of women's perspective, attributing men's experience as representative of all people's experience was addressed in this study by Belenky et al (1997). In addition to direct reference to the book, I also found 'Investigating women's ways of knowing: An exploratory study in UAE' Issues in Educational Research. 20. 105 – 117, Khine, & Hayes, (2010) a useful guide; I was curious to see how the model had been interpreted for use in an Asian context.

The study identifies five stages of epistemological and psychological development in women based on their environment and how they come to an understanding around truth and authority. From a study of 135 life stories of women, researchers came to recognize five distinct worldviews, relating to psychological development and a woman's ability to move beyond intuition or information gathered from others or from content, to conscious systematic and generative thinking, (Belenky et al, 1997, Khine & Hayes, 2010, p105-116).

In contrast with Perry's work, the study identifies gender specific behaviours and identities that relate to voice and understanding of origins and identity of authority, truth and knowledge. Specifically, the study identifies five stages in epistemological and psychological development of women; (1) silence, (2) received knowing, (3) subjective knowing, (4) procedural knowing (including separate and connected knowing) and (5) constructed knowing.

This body of work came into my hands at a time that I was looking for answers to questions around 'why do I do what I do?' I was trying to get my head around a difficult relationship with

my elderly mother coinciding with conflict at work with male colleagues and a general feeling of confusion around my sense of identity. I remember picking up the book and walking around a park in Colombo one evening; killing time on my way to a dinner appointment. I sat down on a park bench, took out my phone and spoke into the recording device for around ten minutes, recalling a life lived under the oppression of trying to 'be'; trying to 'fit in'. Finally, I understood that perhaps I was simply looking at the world through a different lens from others around me. That this was neither better nor worse just different; it was a massive feeling of relief. I found great comfort in words that seemed to speak directly to my own situation.

I recognised parental and environmental influences of my childhood and very clear stages that represented my maturing to a different level of understanding and an increasing separation from epistemological paradigm of childhood friends and close family members. Visits home were stressful as I tried to squeeze my now larger self into smaller version of me that was recognised and accepted. This tension between the oppression of my home world, and the great freedom of living abroad, was not without problems and consequences. There were many years of loneliness, many changes of lifestyle and fresh starts, each requiring me to pack up my life and start again.

Through my engagement with the feminist literature, I felt immense relief and affirmation. I came to recognise that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with me, as I had suspected. Many of my earlier life experiences made sense within the model of women's development proposed through this study.

What started out as a simple exercise in 'ticking the feminist angle box' turned out to be an exercise that was profoundly affirming. 'Women's Ways of Knowing' (WWK), helped me to understand tensions between my mother and I, as largely symptomatic of an epistemological rift. I found that I had outgrown certain relationships that were stuck in what I perceived to be, less sophisticated epistemological paradigms such as received knowing and subjectivism. I found myself getting annoyed with my mother at what I perceived as a lack of empathy and disregard for others to the point of narcissism. Perhaps it irritated me more, because I recognized that I could be like this too.

I began to notice myself switching between different modes of being, depending on the circumstance and company. More often, I aspired to fit in to what I perceived as a higher level of epistemology, yet lacking tools and/or confidence to do so; (see examples on page 107, meeting with the Thunderbird Alumna, and page 141, Dinner with the Professor). These experiences contributed to my obsession with

self-improvement that has culminated in this doctoral journey. At the same time, I have been very lonely, and searching for a special relationship or family where I fit in.

This journey of epistemological and psychological development is core to my inquiry and merits a chapter of its own. I don't feel equipped to properly support another's growth until I am more comfortable within my own skin, and have explored and elaborated my own journey. I have learned how important voice and agency are to the women I work with, and I want to help them to raise their voices and engage in decision-making that affects them. I realise that I can't authentically do this, until I have moved beyond my own complexes, and made peace with the childhood afflictions that still affect me.

WWK turned out to be one of the more significant works of literature for this inquiry and timely. I had been going through a series of crises at work which had lasted for a sustained period. Contributing factors included several personality clashes with male colleagues. I now understand the role played in this by tensions between our different epistemological positions; our different truths, particularly relating to gendered definitions of performance and effectiveness. The second important insight was as a consequence of creating a historical narrative account around the five epistemologies in the Women's Development Model (Belenky et al, 1997). I came to recognise the moment at which I broke away from parental control, after the break-up of my early marriage when my embodied truth was in direct conflict with norms and expectations of my parents. From that point forwards, I recognise that I was set adrift and searching for a new 'family' where I could belong. This search continued for several decades until I finally found my own sense of belonging which is related to maturing out of a subjectivist paradigm into connected and constructed ways of knowing and meaning-making.

In the following chapter (Chapter 5), I share the details of an inquiry based on my own historical narrative, and relate it to each of the five epistemological positions from the WWK model; silence, received knowing, subjective knowing, procedural knowing and constructed knowing. At the close of this section, I am sharing the impact of more recent reading that elaborates on Procedural Knowing, in particular the struggle between connected and separate knowing (Clinchy in Goldberger, 1996, p206-240).

My first observation is that sequencing of the five stages does not reflect my own experience which tends to move back and forwards through different stages, depending on context. Elements of context

that seem to be significant include, power dynamics of relationships, level of knowledge, competence and confidence in regards to specialist subjects. This is different from more general epistemological positioning. For example, in my specific area of expertise I can be a procedural knower, and at the same time a subjective or received knower in another less-known subject, where I only have personal feelings and opinions to draw on.

Knowledge, Difference and Power; Essays Inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing'; Goldberger, N. Tarule, J. Clichy, B and Belenky, M. (1996)

The writers of 'Women's Ways of Knowing' were perhaps dogged by similar questions that inspired them to write 'Difference and Power; Essays inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing', (Goldberger, N. et al, 1996). It was this book, addressing the cultural and political influences on the Women's Development Model, that provided answers in the form of a much broader and deeper understanding of 'Connected Knowing' in particular, and lent legitimacy to a much looser epistemological positioning in which all stages may be simultaneously present and equally valid. In relation to the steps of the WWK model Clinchy writes as follows:

"[...] these [WWK] epistemic positions themselves relate deeply to women's relationships with predominantly male authority suggests that across the contexts of women's lives, individual women will exhibit the characteristics of more than one position. In other words, if women's engagement with authorized knowledge relates to their relationship with male authorities, then assuming a unitary epistemological perspective obscures power struggles that women may necessarily incorporate as splits in subjectivity and different ways of knowing." (Goldberger et al, 1996, p91)"

This recognition of women's multiplicity of epistemology has highlighted for me, the potential significance of art-based approaches to learning as a more inclusive medium that allows for complex expression without perpetuating discrimination and tacitly engaging in methods of oppression. In this work, Goldberger et al, call for truly radical paradigm shifts, as well as a thorough re-examination of traditional research strategies (Goldberger et al, 1996, p193). I have come to recognise myself primarily as a 'Connected Knower' as defined in the broader terms of this later work as one that embraces all epistemologies, squeezing myself into different positions as needed in response to the company and the context. Whereas separate knowing requires 'self-extrication', [...] connected knowing requires 'self-insertion' - (receiving the other into the self)' (Goldberger et al 1996, p218). This self-insertion is often mistaken for acquiescence and weakness; 'she's too easily influenced', but the truth for me, is that I can't start to make a judgment or express an opinion until I have had time to immerse myself in your truth. That is not to say I will agree with everything you say; especially if it a subject in which I am

confident and well-informed, but I will always try to see your point of view if you are a reasonable and likeable person. I will insert myself into your reality and when I disagree, I will do so apologetically, which might give you the impression I am unsure, when I'm not; I just want to maintain our relationship. Some perceive separated knowers as stubbornly attached to their own ideas and deaf to the views of others, connected knowers are sometimes perceived as excessively open-minded - indeed as having no minds of their own. (ibid, p208). This is how I know I am not a subjectivist. Where subjectivists are confident that they can arrive at the truth (the truth for them) simply by reading it off from experience [...] or attending to their infallible guts, procedural knowers [including connected knowers,] have no such assurance.' (ibid p218).

I have found in 'Knowledge, Difference and Power; Essays inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing', (Goldberger, N. et al, 1996), a bridge between feminist epistemology, mine specifically, and my work on embodied knowing and artful practices. I have come to understand the relevance of being 'a connected knower' and how it gives me the freedom to step in and out of different paradigms without feeling spilt or compromised. I have learned that connected knowing is a reciprocal process and one that takes great sensitivity, skill and effort, plus a toolbox of learning mediums and methodologies depending on what works best in any given situation. It's about focusing attention on what is not being said, what is ambiguous, and where the respondent struggles to articulate or express themselves. 'One must remain open to subtle surprises', to emerging discrepancies between the map and the person's inscape. (Goldberger et al, 1996, p220).

This work of literature gave me the bridge I was seeking between epistemological privilege, disenfranchisement and power. Though the book focused on feminine epistemologies, I was already connecting the dots, and relating what I was reading to disenfranchisement of marginalised communities through the use of language, discussed in the chapter on Ethics and Colonialism (pages 16-20).

I am choosing to share below, a piece written at a time when I felt disenfranchised. It gave me an important insight into the contextual and political nature of truth. It is a short vignette from a journal entry during a work trip to Afghanistan. I was confused and conflicted by different versions of truth that were being presented to me. I just wanted to shout out 'It's not fair'.

Crisis of truth

“I am caught in a crystal maze. Each way I turn I see myself reflected differently. I see a myriad other realities owned and created by someone or something else. I see the back of my head and my side profile with its prominent features. I see their image of me and I want to scream out, but that’s not ME!”

“They are no longer listening, not hearing me, not seeing me. They are talking about me as if I am not there; I am an outsider, an intruder, an embarrassment. I feel like I have been falsely accused of cheating in a once intimate and perfect relationship. ‘Do you not feel my pain? If tell you I am exhausted, I am fed up of spending every waking moment thinking about how to be positive today, how to hold the world in my hand and make everything right again; global warming, animal abuse, the extinction of life, the abuse of children; like all these, the financial malaise of the company is not my fault. I say it out loud in my head; it’s not fair, I didn’t make this happen, I did my best every day. I didn’t lie, I didn’t cheat, I trusted, I delegated, I believed in people. I bang my head against the crystal mirrors. I feel lost and confused.”

I felt disorientated as I tried to reconcile ‘my truth’, based on an ontology that prioritises intelligence, honesty, loyalty and kindness, against a perception of me as weak and gullible. I see that truth, in this instance, is not absolute but inter-subjective and situational. A number of people have co-created a version of truth based on their limited knowledge and perspective, and have become deaf and blind to the possibility of an alternative version. I feel hurt and unfairly treated.

At first the insight that each of us looks through a different lens can be profoundly disturbing, because it suggests that each of us is profoundly alone. (Belenky et al 1997, p97).

I have come to recognise that the exploration into feminine epistemology, is an exploration of all marginalised epistemologies. What started as a personal reflection, has emerged as an existential reflection around truth, reality, good, bad, right and wrong. The answer that hangs in the air, for me is “it depends”. In the concluding paragraphs above, I am sharing an experience where I am reflecting on the unfairness of a situation, where I have been judged against epistemological models and paradigms that are not my own, and I feel deeply misunderstood.

More than anything else, this is my takeaway from the feminist literature, that truth and reality are all rooted in a particular worldview which is inherently biased on the basis of gender, but also on other cultural factors such as education, religious and other cultural beliefs. I conclude that truth is not an absolute but can only be understood through openness, inter-subjectivity and inclusion. In learning and decision-making spaces, women are not the only voices to be marginalised. When I refer to women and

feminine, I really refer to diverse epistemologies, and because masculine epistemology has been historically accepted to represent all epistemologies (Gilligan, Fletcher, et al); those ways of knowing that differ from the norm are most often associated with women.

Ideas around phenomenology and embodied knowing

Whilst this body of literature there is some overlap with feminine epistemologies, mostly this work is non-gender specific. Interestingly, the heavy-weights I am working with in this genre, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Goethe, Bateson, Abrahms and Todres, for example, are all men, whereas the feminist writers are unsurprisingly, exclusively women. Do only women write about feminist issues, or is the label 'feminist writer' applied exclusively to women who write about gender issues?

I am opening with the work of Peter Elbow who in his 1983 paper 'Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process' a refreshingly honest look at what is wrong with the traditional teacher-student dynamic and how it stifles real learning. His work sheds light on the possibility of real democracy in learning spaces and addresses at a philosophical level, the need for different thinking around the role of a teacher as a mediator between the subject matter and the learner. This is foundational to the relevance of an inquiry that attempts to privilege unconventional ways of sense-making.

'[P]art of the job is to get the subject matter to bend and deform so that it fits inside the learner (that is, so that it can fit and relate to the learner's experiences). But that is only half the job. Just as important is the necessity for the learner to bend and deform himself so that he can fit himself around the subject.' (Elbow, 1986, p147).

This suggests a dynamic tripartite relationship between learner, subject and teacher that is primarily focussed on creating deep understanding and transformation.

'Good learning is not a matter of finding a happy medium where both parties are transformed as little as possible, Rather, both parties must be maximally transformed-in a sense deformed. There is violence in learning. We cannot learn something without eating it, yet we cannot really learn it either without being chewed up.' (ibid, p147).

In opening this chapter with ideas from Peter Elbow, I am framing this exploration of the body of literature around phenomenology and embodied knowing as one that both informs me as a researcher

and resources me as a practitioner towards democratization of learning. This is not just about classrooms but also about greater inclusion in boardroom discussions and decision-making, it's about including the opinions of minority groups in policy decisions that affect them, it's about the unconscious decisions we make that affect who is included and who is left out.

In comparison with feminist literature and more technical nature of literature around action research methodology, I found this body of material engaging. The rich sensuality of the language had an appeal particularly for a person who like me, thinks in images. This body of literature includes volumes of extremely rich and diverse thinking around 'how we show up in the world' and 'why'. It ranges from very practical metalogues that Gregory Bateson has with his young daughter (Bateson, 2000, p3-53), to understand quite sophisticated ideas in a simple way; to the origins of language, (Abraham 1997, et al), how we perceive and make sense of the world as a human, (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1945 et al), and the spiritual nature of our human existence (Romanshyn, 2007 et al).

Steps to an Ecology of Mind; Bateson, G. (2000)

In this work by British anthropologist Gregory Bateson, I learned a great deal about how to leverage the power of the mind in order to make sense of things, and to be able to express ideas with greater clarity.

Bateson provided me with a wondrous smorgasbord of tools and tips to unpack ideas, to sharpen up my thinking and to think more creatively. I found myself dipping into Bateson, at times when I needed to resource myself for a deeper investigation of 'what just happened' and at times when I simply got stuck. One of the key contributions from Bateson is his acknowledgement of what I have come to refer to as the bridge over the abyss; the way in which we bring the unconscious into consciousness. You will see me refer to this consistently in relation to embodied, artful and other non-verbal ways of knowing, (see page 38). *"The conscious has poor access to algorithms of the unconscious – when access is achieved through dreams, art, poetry, religion, intoxication and the like, there is still the formidable problem of translation."* (Bateson, 2000, p139).

You will notice that I refer to Bateson and his approaches to sense-making, throughout this chapter. In particular, I want to mention his use of the 'slash mark', analogy and metalogues. The slash mark is something I have used to help unpack a complicated emotion. For example, at the time, I was attempting to understand my relationship with my mother, and as preparation for the poem I wrote about this (page 133), I came up with the following:

"Mother/protector/controller/duty/dissatisfied/disappointed/guilt/pain....."

Meaning" may be regarded as an approximate synonym of pattern, redundancy, information and "restraint", within a paradigm of the following sort: Any sort of aggregate of events or objects (e.g. a sequence of phonemes, a painting, or a frog, or a culture) shall be said to contain "redundancy" or "pattern" if the aggregate can be divided in any way by a "slash mark". such that an observer perceiving only what is on one side of the slash mark can guess with better than random success, what is on the other side of the slash mark. (Bateson, 2000, p130)

His explanation of the use of analogy, helped me to broaden my perspective on the value of metaphor, symbolism and analogy in relation to art and poetry in particular, and helped me to dig deeper into the analogies I was using (the choice of symbolism in my painting of the Field, for example), which caused me to reflect on the choices I made, and what those choices might be telling me that was hidden (see Chapter 11, pages 212-215).

"I think we might do something to hasten matters, and I have suggested two ways in which this might be done. One is to train scientists to look among the older sciences for wild analogies to their own material, so that their wild hunches about their own problems will land them among the strict formulations. The second method is to train them to tie knots in their handkerchiefs whenever they leave some matter unformulated-to be willing to leave the matter so for years, but still leave a warning sign in the very terminology they use, such that these terms will forever stand, not as fences hiding the unknown from future investigators, but rather as signposts which read: "UNEXPLORED BEYOND THIS POINT". (Bateson, 2000, p87)

The third example of a mind-tool that resourced me in this inquiry, is the metalogue. I loved the child-like naivety of the questions that gave me permission to explore complex ideas without having to resort to complex language and extended rationale. I experimented with this technique, with my friend and colleague, Hazel. Below is the transcribed dialogue, on the topic of 'Living in the and'; a proposed title to my draft thesis.

Living in the 'And' – a Metalogue

Me: What do you think about 'Living in the and'? what comes into your mind

(Long pause...)

Hazel: You mean like not having to say this or this but instead this and this?

Ineke: Yes, I guess so.

Hazel: That's powerful.

Hazel: So for example I can be a good carer for my mum and at the same time be an independent business woman?

Ineke: Exactly

Hazel: But people judge you and so even if you want to live in the and, it's hard not to feel guilty for doing it.

Ineke: So maybe living in the and means coming to terms with that.

Hazel: Yes. And you have to have boundaries so that you are able to do both things fully without doing one and constantly worrying about the other. For example, even when I was working I would be constantly thinking about my mum, and feeling guilty.

Ineke: I can relate to that. When I used to travel all the time, I was constantly worrying and fretting about my horses and when I was at home with the horses, I never spent enough time with them as I was constantly worried about my work.

Ineke: So Living in the and needs to be guilt-free?

Hazel: Yes, otherwise you are constantly compromising and can't feel good either way.

Ineke: So do you think 'Living in the and' means being more selfish?

Hazel: No not really, because if I'm really happy and fulfilled, I'm a much better carer for my mum. It's more about taking care of my needs not being a martyr. Martyrdom feels more selfish really. Giving the outward appearance of caring but underneath resenting it, being false.

Ineke: So do you think living in the and, also requires you to be authentic

Hazel: absolutely. You can't fake it.

Ineke: So what's the difference between living in the and, and just doing the right thing?

Hazel: It's more expansive, it's a choice you make really. Living in the and means I can be the person I want to be and do the things I want to do, without compromising.

Ineke: That's interesting. You would think that being a carer and a businesswoman would take a lot of compromise.

Hazel: Yes, but not in a way that takes something away. Living in the and, to me means being a better carer for my mum by virtue of the freedom I give myself to follow my other interests like singing and my business consultancy. If I were to give that all up for the sake of my mum, it would be very unfair to her and also would make me resentful at some level.

'Steps to an Ecology of Mind' was one of the first reference books that I picked up, to resource my inquiry. I never managed to read it from cover-to-cover, but instead dipped in from time to time. It was only really in the latter stages of inquiry, once I had fully committed to arts-based

practice as a red-thread, that his insights had the most purchase within my inquiry, and influence on my thinking.

The Wounded Researcher; Research with the soul in mind; Robert Romanshyn (2007)

'The Wounded Researcher' (2007), is an exploration of how to do qualitative research as a calling. I was profoundly influenced by a work, that encouraged me to explore my childhood wounds and find my unique message for the world. Romanshyn's work has an alchemical and mythical quality, he re-imagines the research process as praxis that keeps the soul in mind. Through the practice of 'mourning' and acknowledging our wounded state as imperfect and damaged human beings, we open up what he refers to as 'transference dialogues' with our unconscious psyche. By opening up transference space between the researcher and his or her deep psyche, the researcher creates a place of ambiguity and uncertainty where the 'soul' of the work can reveal itself. He calls this process 'alchemical hermeneutics'. Romanshyn gave credence to writing evocatively, and inspired me to experiment with multi-sensual (synaesthetic) form. One of my favourite excerpts from his book is this piece written as he begins to experience beauty again, for the first time after the death of his wife. Contextualising this narrative in this way lends an even deeper significance to the writing.

"The green field of grass spread out in front of me began to undulate. Waves of pure greenness were pouring out of the bushes and trees, vibrating in some kind of wild ecstatic dance of freedom. It was as if greenness itself had escaped its forms in blade and leaf, in stalk and stem. No longer bound by form, color was shamelessly revealing itself in riotous, even erotic, abandonment. Green! A deep, rich, fresh, moist, wet, dripping green! A blue-green, green-green! A green so green that only the sky could be more blue." (Romanshyn, 2007, p8).

What excites me about his writing is the use of mixed sensual language such as 'A deep, rich, fresh, moist, wet, dripping green.' For me, this creates a multi-sensual experience, engaging kinaesthetic imagery as well as visual imagery – I find this far more powerful than just engaging one sense. The reason this is important will become more evident when I start to explore how the body knows and makes sense of experience. The senses play a vital role in knowing and this kind of synaesthetic language works well to create sympathetic resonance and an intersubjective experience, which helps to convey an experience at a primal level.

With similar sensitivity, Romanshyn uses metaphor to explain his ideas around language, meaning and memory. He speaks of loss and of grief, which perhaps parallels his own. The gap he speaks of, and later

refers to as ‘an abyss’ represents for me, the void between what I know with my body and my senses and what I am able to express through my words. He says ‘words become an elergy for what has been forgotten, ignored or left behind. I understand him to be alluding to symbolic use of language to express concepts (such as grief), that have lost their connection with vital, primal sense that once gave life to expression. Words such as quality, feelings, loyalty, performance, trust. We have so over-used and mis-used these words that they have come adrift from the original sensual, embodied experience and now float un-tethered, almost as if they are entities in their own right.

“In the gap and on the bridge across the gap between presence and absence our words become an elergy, not only for what one must let go of, but also for what has been lost, forgotten, ignored, left behind, or otherwise marginalised; a hymn of lament and thanksgiving, which keeps open a space for a return of what has been forgotten and waiting to be remembered.” (Romanshyn, 2007, p29).

I understand from this, the necessity to ‘let go’ of attachment to my childhood wounds, in order that I can create a space in which to learn from them and grow. He speaks of presence and absence, the elergy for what has been forgotten, (we are reminded that Romanshyn, is exploring his own grief at the loss of his wife), and the importance of allowing grief to come; in my case, the grief of a lonely child who longs for the unconditional (and demonstrated) love and approval of her parents. In my painting ‘The Field’, I had Romanshyn in mind when I painted the abyss and the bridge crossing it. It has been one of the foundational ideas that I engaged with, and re-appears as a nagging question repeatedly in my inquiry. How do articulate across the gap? How do I build a bridge across the abyss, between what known intuitively and what we have the means to understand and express? It was through Romanshyn and later Abrahms and Bateson, that I found the path to my inquiry into embodied and artful ways of knowing.

Spell of the Sensuous; David Abrahm (1997)

David Abrahm’s ‘Spell of the Sensuous’ (1997), inspired me to explore my reciprocity with the natural world. A little more accessible than Romanshyn, but also alchemical in nature, Abrahm opens with a story of a spiritual epiphany that he experienced whilst travelling in Bali. He is struck by the magic of ecology and starts to notice, and be curious about our animal nature and reciprocity with the world around. “It was as if my body in its actions was suddenly being motivated by a wisdom older than my thinking mind, as though it was held and moved by a logos deeper than words, spoken by the Other’s body, the trees and the stony ground on which we stood.” (Abrahm, 1997, p21).

‘That tree bending in the wind, this cliff-wall, the cloud drifting overhead: these are not merely subjective; they are *intersubjective* phenomena- phenomena experienced by a multiplicity of sensing subjects.’ (ibid, p38). From Abraham, I am reminded that I am part of nature, to listen to my instincts and non-verbal ways of understanding. He reminds us that language is but a metaphor for lived experience; a man-made construction that tends to replace lived experience. There is much in my painting ‘The Field’ that is inspired by Abraham’s work; in particular, the division between natural, sensed experience, and man-made construction represented in my painting as the two sides of the abyss.

Abraham explores this violent disconnection of the body from nature and contrasts it with thousands of generations of indigenous communities that experienced an active and reciprocal relationship with the natural world. (see page 34, ‘By linguistically defining the surrounding world as a determinate set of objects, we cut our conscious speaking selves off from the spontaneous life of our sensing bodies’, Abraham, 1997, p56). Abraham elaborates in detail how language evolved as a means for intersubjectivity. As we evolved we needed to cooperate, to achieve consensus in order to survive and language gave us means to achieve this (p38). The problem with language is that over time, it has come to replace original primal experience and this has led to us becoming increasingly disconnected from our sensing bodies. Gregory Bateson cites Aldous Huxley, arguing that ‘the communication and behaviour of animals has naiveté, a simplicity, which man has lost. Man’s behaviour is corrupted by deceit-even self-deceit-by purpose, and by self-consciousness.’ (Bateson, 2000, p87).

It is this naive simplicity in communication of animals that I experience with the work I do with my horses. Horses don’t seem to understand ego and react negatively when there is incongruence between outward and inward energy. Simply put, horses don’t buy our self-deceit; they respond to us based on their primal survival instincts. You will notice throughout this thesis, that I am closely attached to the natural world; I feel joy, I feel nurtured and at peace when I am close to nature, more than any other time. In Chapter 9, I share an experience of the transformational work I have been doing with horses. Abraham, was the first text to inspire and emboldened me to explore this richly rewarding reciprocity that is beyond human language.

Repeatedly in the literature, I see the idea of speech as something that has become disassociated from its original meaning and instead fabricated into a monument that takes on a life of its own. In line with post-structuralist thinking, Abraham argues that language does not need to be static or inert but instead can be ‘an evolving bodily field’. He describes it as ‘a vast living fabric continually being woven by those who speak.’ Merleau-Ponty here distinguishes sharply between genuine, expressive speech and speech

that merely repeats established formulas. The latter is hardly "speech" at all; it does not really carry meaning in the weave of its words but relies solely upon the memory of meanings that once lived there' (Abraham, 1997, p83). I began to notice within my own sphere of practice, the extent to which the field of management development leans on empty container words to lend legitimacy to its practices, regardless of whether the speaker or the listener is able to connect the expression to its original source.

Unfortunately, the world of International Development, is still governed by demands of big donor organisations often run by bureaucrats who, in my opinion, lack authority or imagination to question use of language that has long since lost its original meaning. As a result, vast libraries of acronyms and technical jargon are employed and have the effect of further distancing the implementers from the important work they need to do by tying them up in bureaucratic knots in order to win essential funds they need to do their work in the World. Finding a way back to sensual expression is an important job of work for advocates of the post-structural paradigm.

I became interested to explore how language can be used for its original task of promoting consensus and congruence. For that we may all need to become artists; to familiarise ourselves with synaesthetic expression that connects us once more with primal lived, sensed, felt experience.

Phenomenology of Perception, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (1945), translated by Landes in 2014

Phenomenology is the key that helps me to unlock an experience in order to begin to translate it into language or art. Embodiment, for me is the 'settling in' to an experience and allowing understanding to manifest, directly through feelings and emotions, and through art or language.

'The operation of expression, when successful, does not simply leave the reader or the writer himself a reminder; it makes the signification exist as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in in an organism of words, it installs this signification in the writer or the reader like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/ Landes, 2014, p188).

In applying a phenomenological lens to my own experience, I am able to recreate the feeling I felt at the time, and move in and out of the experience and take whatever learning is available. For example, in Chapter 6, page 145, I am articulating an emotional, embodied experience by stepping back into the experience and finding metaphors that produce a comparable feeling.

“I feel like I’m pushing a flotation device under water; it is taking all my energy to stay but the pressure is building up and my body is preparing to fight or flee. I feel controlled and violated and I am angry at her selfishness and at my compliance.” (see page 132).

I engaged with Maurice Merleau-Ponty through the 2014 translation by Donald A. Landes of his 1945 book, ‘The Phenomenology of Perception’. I found the text difficult to penetrate, but it was helped by the sensual-style of this work. I often had to read paragraphs several times before I was able to internalize understanding. I learned a great deal about how the body works and how I make sense of the world around me. Due to visual and metaphoric nature of his writing, I often sensed understanding, even though I found it difficult to verbalize. It is as if understanding in this form leaps across the abyss and arrives already synthesized without being languaged. I can liken this to hearing a piece of music and understanding it without analysis. Merleau-Ponty describes this perfectly in the few lines that follow.

‘This power of expression is well known in art, for example in music. The musical signification of the sonata is inseparable from the sounds that carry it; prior to having heard it no analysis allows us to anticipate it. Once the performance has come to an end, we cannot do anything in our intellectual analyses of the music but refer back to the moment of the experience. During the performance, the sounds are not merely the “signs” of the sonata; rather, the sonata is there through them and it descends into them.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/Landes, p188).

In the same way, evocative sensual writing carries significance in the experiencing of it. The meaning is held there and descends through the words into a deeper level of understanding.

Embodied Enquiry; Phenomenological Touchstones for Research, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, Les Todres, (2011)

Les Todres, in his book ‘Embodied Enquiry’ (2011), explores the primacy of the body - ‘In research methodology: how embodied understanding is not just ‘cognitive’, but involves embodied, aesthetic experience and application’ (Todres, 2011, p3)

‘What kind of qualitative descriptions of human experience produce a feeling of understanding in the reader? [...] The answer involves issues about truth and also about beauty (aesthetics). The themes discussed include the relationship between the structure and the texture of an experience, the

relationship between the concrete and abstract uses of language, and the relationship between the individual and general levels of description.’ (Todres, 2011, p5).

Les Todres helped me to synthesize the ideas I gleaned from Merleau-Ponty, Bateson, Romanshyn and Abrahms, and understand how to relate them to my practice as a consultant. Todres is a psychologist and he shares real-world examples of working with embodied ways of knowing in his therapy work.

Todres, brings the work of Heidegger and Boss into his practice and makes it relevant to modern day therapeutic processes. ‘Martin Heidegger and Medard Boss have offered me an understanding of the human realm, and its grounding in Being that has ultimately informed how I am as a psychotherapist.’ (Todres, 2011, p110).

They have communicated this human realm, between sky and earth, not just in philosophically logical ways, but also in evocatively human ways that may be 'held' and embodied. It is in this spirit that I wish to use the term 'freedom-wound' in order to indicate and evoke what I will call the 'soulful space' of being human - how we are grounded in both great freedom and great vulnerability. (Todres, 2011, p110).

Probably one of the most profound paragraphs (for me) from his book, is the one above. There are three important concepts he is offering here – firstly the idea of ideas being held in the body (embodied), secondly the concept of a wound being a liberating concept. By confronting my wounds, I am setting myself free from their control; finally, the idea that ‘great freedom’ and ‘great vulnerability’ can exist in the same space and are mutually dependent. This is potentially a ‘game-changer’ in terms of leadership development. I love the concept of soulful space and connect it to the ‘contact zone’ (page 18) and the concept of ‘the field where horses graze’ (page 234), both metaphorical and physical realms, where trust and safety is of prime importance, where judgment is suspended and authentic communication is finally possible.

Engaging in literature around arts-based approaches

I am using the term ‘arts-based approaches’ to cover both arts-based inquiry and arts-based practices. The literature I have chosen, speaks to three aspects of an arts-based approach; (1) arts-based methodology and reflections on first person inquiry into arts-based epistemology, (2) the politics around arts-based and other qualitative approaches to knowledge gathering and sharing and (3) the technical and political issues of quality and validation of arts-based approaches.

Arts-Based Methodologies

One of the key early influencers in my doctoral thesis was Dr Chris Seeley. In particular, I have read two of her academic papers, the first being her thesis 'Wild Margins: playing at work and life' (2006) and the second 'Uncharted territory: Imagining a stronger relationship between the arts and action research', (2011).

In her thesis, Seeley explores the possible landscape of a holistic action research which more fully realises different ways of knowing (especially the presentational knowing of the "arts"). (Seeley, 2006). She looks at her own and other's practices in the visual and improvisation arts, specifically clowning, and proposes an epistemology that marries these forms of more radical presentational knowing with action research. In her 2011 publication, she offers a detailed taxonomy for presentational knowing which goes beyond the (re)presentation of experience to explore how a stronger relationship between the arts and action research might look. She offers seven arts-enriched actions as a proposition of what arts-enriched action research might entail; articulating, juxtaposing, illustrating, evoking, sense-making, enriching and provoking. In Chapter 11, you will see me offer a first person reflexive inquiry into my own process of creating art and of other art-based practices. I will be holding Seeley's seven definitions of arts-based actions as a kind of palette to reflect on my experiences and choices and ask in what ways her taxonomy is relevant to my own experience.

Action research theorists stress our need to know the world in many ways beyond the intellectual. How we receive, understand, and respond to ourselves, others, and the contexts we are part of comes from tacit and explicit knowing through our senses and bodies as well as the ideas, assumptions, and theories that live in our heads. Yet in the West such 'more-than-intellectual' knowing tends simultaneously to be dismissed as worthlessly 'not-academic' and reified as 'Art' (with a capital 'A'). (Seeley, 2011, p84)

In respect to this first person inquiry, I have drawn knowledge from various sources in an effort to step into the experience phenomenologically, and to make sense of what is happening. Of the various works of literature and academic publications, of which there is rich pickings, I leaned into the writing of Merleau Ponty (1945), (Abrahms (1997), Bateson (2000) et al and later discovered academic papers such as Mitchell Green (2015) and Karen Scott Hoy (2003), where I came to experience art for its metaphorical imagery as a form of internal epistemology as well as outward expression. I started to find tools that legitimised and validated my arts-based practices, and provided yardsticks against which I could begin to separate out the intentional and responsive from the implicit and unconscious actions. For example, Green distinguishes between what he terms the *image permitting metaphor* and the

image-demanding metaphor; words or images that allow us to bypass imagery and those that stimulate imagery in order to create new meaning. This differentiation is crucial for me to be more intentional and conscious of the subliminal biases in particular that I apply in my practice. Something as simple as assuming that my class of Bangladeshi mid-level managers share the same metaphorical language and internal imagery, when I use expressions such as ‘hitting the nail on the head’, ‘jumping through hoops’ or ‘it was a piece of cake’. I need to be meticulous in my language as well as my symbolism and recognise that their symbolism may be very different. The politics of whose symbolism counts, is not lost on me. On the contrary, I see the use of ‘image demanding metaphors’ as a vital tool in my practice as an international trainer and coach. You will see me use ‘The Big Picture’ exercise with a management team in Sri Lanka (Chapter 6, pages 157-159). I will explore this use of metaphor and symbolism in more detail in my first-person inquiry into arts-based practice in Chapter 11.

In her paper ‘Form Carries Experience: A Story of Art and Form and Knowledge’, (2003) I find a kindred spirit in Karen Scott-Hoy and her experience of evocative artistic ethnography. I find many parallels in her intertwining of story and painting and my own experience of creating “The Field”. In her case, she is using this tool to create connections between her academic work and the rest of her life as a health care worker on the island of Vanuatu in the South-West Pacific; in my own case, I am also connecting my academic writing with my lived, felt experience.

Power, Politics and Art-based Approaches

I have found that where there are arts-based approaches and other more unconventional practices (radical epistemologies), there tends to be political issues and power relations. Despite increasing advocacy from within the Action Research community, Seeley notes that it is still not ‘normal’ to do ‘arty’ things which can end up in the realm of ‘alternative’ or ‘other’ ways to know., firmly positioned away from everyday practice, (Seeley, 2006, p84). It seems impossible to speak of arts-based epistemologies without experiencing the power politics around it. I am discovering that this is more than a gendered issue, it is becoming clear to me that it is also one of neo-colonialism.

In her paper ‘International Opportunities for Artful Learning’ (2005), Lotte Darso highlights the possibility that practical arts-based learning and experiential opportunities are rapidly gaining acceptance and application siting a workshop at Davos in 2004, entitled “What if an artist ran your business?” She goes on to demonstrate a growing trend towards increasing integration of arts-based learning into business school curricula at Harvard, McGill, The Banff Centre, Chicago, Cranfield, Nyenrode, Oslo, Copenhagen and Slovenia. She concludes that the main value-addition is the emotional

and experiential learning that arts-related approaches can evoke. In my opinion, she doesn't go far enough to examine the issue of arts-based approaches and inclusion, not as an add-on, but as a fundamental component of all academic learning process that hold inclusion and diversity as core values.

In the third edition of the Sage Handbook of Action Research (Bradbury et al, 2015), an entire chapter is dedicated to the politics of knowledge, (Chapter 46, Power and Knowledge by John Gaventa & Andrea Cornwall). Here the discussion of research and knowledge involves strategies of awareness building, liberating education, promotion of a critical consciousness, overcoming internalized oppressions, and developing indigenous or popular knowledge (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2015). I am reminded of what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) has to say in her paper "Arts of the Contact Zone." Where she opens up a discussion around the privileged voice in what she designates as contact zones: "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power." One such contact zone is the World Social Forum (WSF), a global civil society movement aimed at redressing the power inequalities of the World Economic Forum from which it takes its name. However, there has been little analytical work done on the degree to which the praxis of the WSF is enabling communicability across previously unbridged difference, and how relations of power, particularly the coloniality of power, shape these interactions, (Conway, 2011). The first WSF, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2001, attracted 15 000 participants. It's astounding success led organisers to commit to the WSF as a permanent process. Each January since then the event has taken place, growing exponentially in size, diversity, complexity and importance, so that it is now regularly attracting over 100 000 people annually (Conway, 2011).

The complex issue is debated around how to create open spaces that are free from the power hierarchies they are trying to avoid. How do you organise spaces that assure egalitarian participation, without any sort of power structure to manage and protect that egalitarianism? Similar to the arguments around qualitative criteria to assess qualitative processes discussed in the following section, the debates around what constitutes oppression and openness and how to manage spaces that encourage full participation is an arduous and largely philosophical one, that feels a lot like a dog chasing its own tail. My experience and inquiry leads me to believe that the answer to both issues lies in the formulation of arts-based spaces and practices and an agreed set of guiding principles, rather than institutional-led ones.

Foucault focuses on how power creates its subjects through the architecture of institutions, through the construction and reproduction of social mores and through the disciplining of the body itself. His

analysis of the micro-practices of power shows how the effects of power/knowledge create particular kinds of subjects, who are subjugated through ‘regimes of truth’, (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2015).

By highlighting the elitism around power and knowledge, and how this produces and sustains inequalities, we are forced to confront the hegemonic control of truth (and beauty). Foucault affirms “The right to discover what one is, and all that one can be” (Foucault, 1979: 145), Reproduced in Sage Handbook of Action Research Third Edition, (Bradbury et al, 2015). This is necessarily an arts-based process.

Quality and Qualitative Expression

One of the seminal contributors to an ongoing dialogue around qualitative research, is Susan Finley of Washington State University and her article ‘Arts-Based Inquiry in QI: Seven Years from Crisis to Guerrilla Warfare’, in ‘Qualitative Inquiry’ (Volume 9, 2003). “This commentary reconsiders emerging standards for evaluation of the field of practice of qualitative inquiry and arts-based approaches. Specifically, this is a review of the dialogue around issues of standards that has continued through the first seven volumes of Qualitative Inquiry (QI), from March 1995 through June 2001, and is inclusive of this special issue of QI devoted to arts-based inquiry. She concludes that ‘Arts-based inquiry (like any good qualitative inquiry), should embrace a set of commitments that are, as Lincoln (1995) said, relational: first, to community—to dialogical, nurturing, caring, and democratic relationships between researchers and participants who share their commitment to understanding of social life; second, to action within community—to engage research work that is locally useable and responsive to cultural and political issues and that takes a stand against social injustice (Denzin, 2000).

In this special edition of QI, Finley addresses the seven years of probing for quality standards in qualitative research, which she refers to as ‘an uncomfortable conversation marked by equivocations and conspicuous ambivalence for the task of establishing quality guidelines for narrative forms borrowed from the arts and humanities. L. Richardson and Lockeridge, (1998, p330) expressed at least passing concern that there are “umpteen problems here with hegemonic control over what constitutes the beautiful”.

In the last fifteen years since Chris Seeley’s paper was published, the action research community has embraced a more expansive definition of extended epistemologies such as presentational knowing, and this is evident in the dialogues around more radical forms of epistemology such as situational, nuanced, metaphorical, arts-based and embodied epistemologies (Aragón & Macedo, 2015, Segal-Engelchin, Huss & Massry, 2019, Gearty & Marshall, 2020).

Specifically, and relevant to my own inquiry, I note her recognition of the politics of power relations in international development settings and a recognition that for a more inclusive educational setting, the need for action research to become more “arty” and art to become more “action researchy” in service of the pressing issues of sustainability”, (Seeley, 2006). This is also reflected by Segal-Engelchin, Huss & Massry, 2019 ‘Arts-Based Methodology for Knowledge Co-Production in Social Work’.

Quality of Qualitative - it’s a can of worms!

I’m starting to feel nervous excitement about the realm of inquiry I have entered into, and the community I am now part of. The politics around whose voices get heard, particularly in an international development context, is a perplexing and political issue. I can understand how a discussion around quality in relation to qualitative inquiry, could end up as an infinity loop; by dissolving hegemony are we not at risk of opening up to chaos? Alternatively, are we at risk of infusing hegemony of a more insidious form? How to determine the quality of an arts-based inquiry depends entirely on the subjective opinion of the person doing the assessing. Similarly, any attempt to place qualitative criteria around the assessment, by the same token is biased by the worldview and/or subjectivity of the individual or institution determining those criteria.

For example, when I worked in international development assistance, I was responsible for project evaluations and reporting. Frequently, the qualitative questions were problematic as they tended to be written and assessed by someone with an entirely different objective and world view from the respondent and beneficiaries. A typical questionnaire would ask the respondent to assess in qualitative terms how their life had changed as a result of the development aid intervention. The answers varied widely within the same community based on intangibles such as the expectation of more aid, the desire to say the right thing and the individual’s comparative perception of how they had benefitted relative to others in the same community.

I can only imagine how difficult it would be to put qualitative measures around an arts-based participative inquiry. In the days when I worked as an engineer, a broadly accepted definition of quality was ‘fit for purpose’. When I apply this logic to an arts-based inquiry process, I find myself asking – ‘fit for whose purpose?’ The answer would seem to be ‘that depends’; and political, ethical and moral considerations weigh heavily on the answer to that question.

Lincoln (1995), began the QI dialogue about emerging quality criterion for qualitative research by identifying three interconnected commitments embraced by new paradigm scholars: first, to deep participant and researcher interactions and involvements; second, to professional, personal, and political actions that might improve participants' lives; and third, to future-oriented work that is based in a visionary perspective that encompasses social justice, community, diversity, civic discourse, and caring. (Finley, 2003). In Finley's paper she presents an argument for a postfoundationalist stance towards arts-based research where authority is situational and fluid; however, she recognises that any standards invite elitism (Finley, 2003, p293), even if the purpose of those standards is ultimately towards positive social reform. She asks the question 'am I the right person to be reviewing this work?' and also raises questions around craftsmanship, 'does expertise matter?' According to Eisner (1997), it does. 'the quality of art or music teaching needs researchers who know something, not only about art and music, but about their teaching.' (Eisner, 1997, p269). My opinion on this is that there is a balance to be found between the elitism implicit in any 'expertise' and the expert guidance needed to evoke meaning through art. I agree with Eisner that 'what arts-based educational seeks is not so much conclusions that readers come to believe, but the number and quality of questions that the work raises' (p266).

There's that problematic issue of quality again – I struggle with how to phrase this differently. I agree that the purpose of art is to provoke, to stimulate and to evoke thoughts, ideas, associations emotions, memories; either through the process of creating art, or in its appreciation. If not, then there seems to me, to be no real benefit other than a pleasing adornment.

If the art raises questions, (or answers questions) for the artist and within the audience, then those questions may be relevant only to themselves. The questions that help to address common issues or stimulate inter-subjective experiences, can be useful in giving voice to individuals or communities that are otherwise silenced. An example from my own experience, would be the children who are victims of sexual abuse. They may not have the sophistication of language to articulate and process what has happened to them, and arts-based inquiry can be a necessary and therapeutic instrument for putting the experience outside of themselves, creating a space in which they can separate the experience of what happened to them from their experience of being. In these cases, the expertise needed is not of an artist or a teacher, but of a counsellor and a therapist. The drive to please others or conform to an arbitrary standard of 'good' might inhibit free expression. I also fear that good craftsmanship may be detrimental to authentic experience. A skilled musician, artist or writer will subtly and subliminally influence the audience, in the way an emotive television advertisement can influence people to donate

money to a worthy cause, or buy the latest labour-saving, life-enriching gismo. The crude stick-figure drawings of the tsunami-affected children haunt me with their naïve truth, even though fifteen years have passed.

Expertise in the arts can be used to judge, oppress or influence another for political or other purposes. Finley, in her concluding statement poses nine questions which she describes as a ‘postfoundational rubric for assessing arts-based qualitative inquiry’ which I have listed below with my comments. She acknowledges that craftsmanship, artistry and expertism are not among the qualities (she) seeks in arts-based research. ‘I am impressed with, and find great artistry in, experiences of passion, communion and social responsibility.’ (Finley, 2003, p294).

Finley’s Post-foundational Rubric for Qualitative Research:

1. Are the researchers performing a useful, local, community service by conducting the research?
 Could the research be harmful in any way to the community of participants?

I am reminded that perceptions of ‘harm’ are also political and potentially elitist. Conflicting definitions of what constitutes ‘Harm’ for example. The employment of women as housemaids in the Middle East, for example, can be a good thing economically to the household and at the same time harmful to her children left behind and to her family relationships. Even the breaking of cultural norms in certain countries to send girl children to school, from certain perspectives could be deemed ‘harmful’ to the relationships within the family. Who decides? Whose voice and worldview is privileged?

2. Whose voices do I hear most clearly, those of the researchers or those of the participants?

Whose voice and worldview is privileged? These questions are important if inclusion is to be more than a sham. They also require careful listening, self-awareness and observation. I have learned that it is easy to make wrong assumptions and generalisations, (such as the idea that all Muslim women are disempowered), based on my Western Worldview. Silence, I have come to understand, does not necessarily mean, I have nothing to say, I have no opinion, or that I agree. Silence can mean that it is unsafe for me to raise my voice, the language you speak excludes me from raising my voice, or I am excluded from the table. It can also mean that I don’t speak the same (epistemological) language as you or your institution and lack the tools to express myself authentically in yours.

3. Is there evidence of an ethics of care among the participants and the researchers?

This appears to be a worthwhile consideration; however, like the terms 'useful' and 'harmful' – the researcher needs to be aware of their own cultural and contextual biases in this regard. Furthermore, the researcher should avoid becoming emotionally entangled in the life and worldview of the participant to the point where objective assessment is lost. They need to cultivate the ability to step in and out of the research and be aware of his or her own bearing on it. Finley calls for advanced competencies for qualitative researchers that includes competencies of interpersonal, political, emotional, ethical, intellectual, openness and spiritual intelligences, (Finley, 2003, p283).

4. Is there evidence of a blurring of roles, of researcher being researched and of participants as researchers?

I assume that Finley is referring to a democratising of the research process, where roles are not set in stone and the power balance between researcher and participants is not a negatively influencing factor. I can see this is important, however, there is a necessity for someone to be responsible for overseeing the administration of the process and assuring that the space is egalitarian and open, where implicit power politics are not silencing voices. This requires a separation of duties, and a sophisticated ability for the researcher to step in and out of the different roles, as suggested in point 3, above.

5. Have researchers been willing to experiment with form, both in their practice of research and in their representations? Are they limited by the hegemony of research discourse?

This, for me is one of the most critical and relevant criteria as it is one that affected me deeply when I began to research. I was completely overwhelmed by the research language and paralysed by the fear that I would make a fool of myself in front of my fellow doctoral candidates. In secret I would sketch, doodle and write poems to help me to make sense of the new ideas I was being presented with. Very little of this made it into my draft thesis, simply because it didn't feel scholarly enough. Finally, I understand the significance of these micro-practices, and the value of articulating them specifically and phenomenologically, as a key component of my process.

6. How does the form of representation (regardless of whether it is, for instance, painting, dance, or narrative) create an open space for dialogue between readers/perceivers and research participants, as well as opening dialogue with researchers and artists? Are research documents writerly, or painterly?

I recognise the importance of dialogue around arts-based inquiry, particularly as part of a movement where people have an opportunity to synergize their knowledge and create a deeper more broadly significant understanding. However, I also feel it is important not to lose the experiential nature of producing and artwork or participating in improvised dance, for example. My concern would be that the significance at a first person level may be deeply personal and visceral and subjecting this to scrutiny by ‘experts’ in the field might kill the opportunity for authentic phenomenological first-person inquiry.

7. Does the research (practice and representation) allow a heuristic, “open” text, in which there are spaces for multiple meanings to be constructed? Does the research provoke questions, rather than draw conclusions?

I have come to understand that art as an expression, is metaphorical and a form of language; like text it is culturally located. I am reminded of the difference between ‘image-permitting metaphors’ and ‘image-demanding metaphors’ (Green, 2015), and require that by ‘open text’ we assure that the text is ‘image-demanding’ and we are politically sensitized to the imbued ‘truth’ of our use image-permitting metaphors; that we are not making tacit assumptions based on our own perspective or political position and if we are –that we make this explicit.

8. Is the practice and the representation of research passionate and visceral? Does it involve activity that creates opportunities for communion among participants, researchers, and the various discourse communities who might be audiences of (and participants with) the research text?

I mentioned earlier (on page 87), the paintings of children affected by the South Asian Tsunami of 2004. Something about the stick-figure portrayal of broken houses, dead bodies and helplessness that conveyed so much more meaning than a thousand photographs of the scene. This is where artistry can be counter to the representation. If I am more skilled as an artist, I can work to perfect my presentation, to make it look ‘right’ rather than allow a more visceral and less appealing expression to manifest.

9. Does the representation, both through its form and its content, have the capacity to connect its local, community service purpose with purposes of its audiences? Is the reader/viewer, or participant, likely to be moved to some kind of action?

The ultimate goal of Action Research is to further human flourishing and for that collective voices are a necessity. We live in a socially enabled society where positive change can be a result of inclusive collective action. I am also asking myself about the role of art-based practice and

its effectiveness in raising previously silenced voices. I am also expressing concern that arts-based approaches, are not immune to manipulation for political gains. They may be more insidious than written text, due to the subliminal nature of their message.

Conclusions

The dialogue around the need for quality and validation criteria for arts-based inquiry, remains a tangled one. The expression of what is arts-based inquiry, and its significance for enabling participative collaborative and inclusive dialogue is gaining impetus, and with it the recognition that rules of engagement and of interpretation that are exempt from political influence, need to be worked out. Meanwhile questions remain around whose rules matter, what can be reasonably deemed to be ‘art’ with a small or capital ‘a’, and how can it be validated and according to whose quality criteria? In Chapter 11, a first person inquiry into my arts-based practice, I hope to be a little clearer about my contribution to this ongoing dialogue which seems to expand like an opening vista; the further I travel on my journey, the larger the horizon appears. I have come to recognise that it is essential I remain open and self-aware; that I need to develop intelligences that permit me to step in and out of other’s truth paradigm; to empathise and appreciate, but not be absorbed into an alternative reality; a political definition of beauty and truth. I also recognise the importance of deconstructing qualitative expressions (however, well-intentioned), that project Western, middle-class values as the standard, when it comes to ‘care’, ‘helpful’, ‘harmful’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. As a researcher, I need to continuously examine and re-examine my motivations and remain open to different ways of listening and learning from the stories of others. Furthermore, I have a duty to call out constructions, from some of the most powerful global institutions, that are political, gendered and divisive.

Chapter five – the piece on feminine epistemology

This is me making sense of how I know what I know through a gendered lens

This is me making sense of how I know what I know through a gendered lens

I have come to identify myself as a 'Connected Knower', (Goldberger et al, 1996); I accept your truth quickly and easily because it is of vital importance that I meet with your approval, that I fit in, even if my own experience and intuition tells me otherwise. I try to see things from your viewpoint, which I tend to assume, is more knowledgeable, than mine. When I need to disagree, I make apologies for my uncertainty and I flail around under your gaze until I reach 'safe ground'; I hope to see you nod in agreement or smile, inviting me to continue. At times I can come across as flakey, uncritical and accepting, but this is not the case.

This piece of inquiry is really about my personal growth and maturing ability to make sense of the world. When I first began inquiring, I struggled to distinguish epistemology from all other aspects of my being and of my inquiry. I kept tripping over this term in relation to how I am, how I act and how I make sense of the world around me. In the first section below, I am clarifying the distinction between knowing and understanding, which also frames a heuristic inquiry that is deeply self-reflective.

Understanding 'understanding' and the historical narratives

I am taking time to frame this inquiry into epistemology, so that it is an authentic inquiry rather than an unconsciously constructed one. In my quest to understand 'understanding', I came across various ideas; in particular, from Les Todres, who focuses on understanding as a synthesis between what we sense with our bodies and what we know through languaged (cognitive) thought, (Todres 2011, p24). He refers to 'primacy of the body'; that embodied understanding is not just 'cognitive', but involves embodied, aesthetic experience and application, (Todres, 2011, p3). Abraham is saying the same thing when he says 'our spontaneous experience of the world, charged with subjective emotional, and intuitive content, remains the vital and dark ground of all our objectivity', (Abraham,1997, p34). Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the act of sense-making as a 'constellation of images that begin to reappear for no reason.' He explains connection between words, images and sensations is spontaneous and refers to them as 'inexpressible impressions'. He says that 'understanding is a deception or an illusion, knowledge never gets a hold on its objects, which drag each other along, and the mind functions like a calculating machine that does not know why its results are true. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p15).

What all these sources seem to agree on, is the idea that sense-making is not a purely cognitive function, but something that arises from lived, felt, sensed experience. They also seem to be suggesting that sense-making is a spontaneous response, that 'like a calculating machine' makes connections and associations between present and past images and sensations, in constellations that appear based on some unconscious algorithm.

I'm wondering if this phenomenon relies on memories of lived experience, or if it is possible to synthesize a felt-sense from something conceptual, but not experienced, i.e. something imagined, dreamed or visualised. According to Todres, "This responsive process is more than checking against a logical conception of whether an interpretation hangs together and 'makes sense'. Rather such 'sense-making' requires this more complex tension between languaging and embodying - so that logical rules and computers cannot validate interpretations: only beings who participate bodily and move in and out of language and situations can." (Todres, 2011, p35). As psychologist Paul Hunting explains '[it takes] the action of an extremely intelligent mind attempting to bring the un-knowable into the realms of the known by likening it to something already known' (Hunting, 2006, p130).

I recognise that this inquiry requires more than remembered stories; it also needs to connect with my present and past felt-sensed experience and draw out understanding. For inquiry to make sense to a reader, my language needs to spontaneously connect with aspects of their own specific felt-sensed experience, and 'drag them along' with me (the writer). In a practical sense, my inquiry needs to synthesise languaged memories, the spontaneous associations from those memories and the embodied experience associated with both.

In the chapter that follows, I am sharing my story in a way that allows language expression of that story to emerge, processes my thoughts and associations around that memory and connects it to current experience and embodied knowing.

Essentially this is a heuristic process. I am creating a story that portrays qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences. The initial "data" is within me; my challenge is to discover and explicate its nature. 'Self-understanding and self-growth occur simultaneously in heuristic discovery' (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p13). This is a process 'that affirms imagination, intuition, self-reflection and the tacit dimension, as valid ways in the search for knowledge and understanding.' (ibid p49). The most objective assessment is surely one that takes the personal viewpoint fully into account. 'My perception is known to me as the truth of what is and is, therefore the source from which the initial phases of inquiry originate.' (ibid p43).

'Pictures at an Exhibition' remains a useful analogy for the stepping in and stepping out of the work of art, and serves to explain metaphorically the multiple levels of consciousness that inform this inquiry.

First-Person Inquiry into Feminine Epistemology

If the way I am in the world is indicative and symptomatic of my 'sense-making', and my 'sense-making' is a response to deeply held beliefs about truth and authority; i.e. my epistemology does not stand in isolation from my ontology; this will require some peeling back of unhelpful, cheery, coping mechanisms. This is a difficult chapter to write, which is why this lengthy framing is needed. The question for me remains: 'at what point does authentic vulnerability become narcissistic, self-serving and indulgent?' I don't know the answer, but I sincerely hope that I will instinctively feel the difference. The potential accusation is that the voice of representation is then a 'confessional tale' focussed more on the researcher than their field of study (Van Maanen, 1988)' (quoted in Marshall, 2016, xi).

The Great Work of Art: 'Epistemology'

This is a grand canvas that covers an entire wall. The painting depicts a journey - from innocent vulnerability of early childhood, through ups and downs, the foothills of success and failure, to mountains of happiness and chasms of despair, to a place where I find myself feeling whole and at peace for the first time in my life.

Reminiscent of my favourite Dutch masters at the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam, in places the painting is hauntingly dark and indistinct, in others it sparkles with light and life. This painting is a series of tableaux linked by a meandering path, starting at 00:00 (midnight) in early childhood, and continuing in a clockwise spiral through six discreet decades of life, and back up to the top, 12:00 (midday) and 60 years. I have grown significantly, and inhabit a very different paradigm from where I began.

I have noticed that each decade is indicative of a different epistemological positioning and roughly speaking, of a different stage in my life and work. On this occasion, it is not a physical artwork, but one that exists in my mind, and in that of the reader. My words paint the scene and allow the reader to create their own image. However, as I describe this, my hand has already found a pen and is starting to sketch out on a scrap piece of paper, a spiral, equally divided into six ten year segments.

As in life, in the painting I am depicted walking between the different scenes. I am present in this artwork, in multiple forms, as a subject, as a narrator and as an observer, and I am simultaneously present in different realms of experience and levels of consciousness. This can be confusing and I will

try to make it explicit through my use of form and font. You may notice a shift between past and present tense and at times into the third person as I step in and out of the scene and try to connect with long-forgotten feelings in order to understand.

As we approach this piece of art, I am briefly reminded that I am the last remaining witness, the last one standing from the intimate family unit that nurtured and formed me in its image.

The first segment: childhood 0-10 years

In the first of several scenes I am five or six years old. I am living with my parents and my older sister, Sally, in a semi-detached house on the corner of a new housing estate, in a village called Yapton in rural Sussex. It is the early 1960's and the décor is modern for that time; parquet flooring, formica-topped kitchen units and a cushioned window seat with a ledge filled with houseplants in decorative pots.

From the age of five or six, I remember hiding myself away under the bed or in the cupboard under the stairs; any quiet secret place where I could be free to think my thoughts, dream my dreams away from the influence or judgement, and the ever-critical maternal eye. These were magical spaces where I hid my treasures, an old biscuit tin of buttons, my favourite comic books, and several fluffy toys. In these spaces I staged my silent rebellion. I would hear my mother calling my name from the hall below and I would see how long I could keep silent and remain undetected. I liked to go off into my space, both physically and psychologically. I would spend literally hours in the bath, day-dreaming and letting the water go cold. I don't think I was particularly anti-social; I think it was something to do with the comfort of being alone with my thoughts.

I notice in the narrative that I am hiding away, and I wonder why? I clearly remember ignoring my mother's calls and staying hidden as long as possible. I remember that I wanted her to search for me, to feel anxious, and to be relieved when she eventually discovered my hiding place. I wanted to feel her attention and her care.

I didn't grow up in a reading household. There were no deep and thought-provoking dinner table conversations, Dad would listen to the Evening News each evening on the black and white television, and that was the time we needed to be quiet or go outside and play. Don't disturb dad, he's watching the News. It seemed like a terribly grown up and masculine thing to do. I don't ever remember mum watching the News; she was in the kitchen preparing dinner. The people who read the News, the newsreaders with their BBC English voices, to me were like policemen, schoolteachers and politicians; they were unquestionably wise, and to be slightly feared. Accountants also fell into that category. My father was an accountant and he was the smartest person I knew. He worked hard at the office and always seemed tired when he came home. At the weekend, when he worked at home behind his huge

oak roll-top desk, I would climb under his feet and feel safe in the cubbyhole between the thick wooden pillars.

My parents had grown up during the Second World War, where ‘the Enemy’ had a face and a name and people were polarised by traumas they suffered. My father was sent to boarding school at just four years old. My mother grew up under German occupation in Holland. Her father bred rabbits in the cellar which they ate with tulip bulbs to survive. Both of them had their education cut short. They met and were married within a few months. I am a product of this union; half-Dutch-half-British and was parented by a father who didn’t know how to give spontaneous hugs and worked all the time, and a mother who was a constant critic; perhaps judging herself in the clumsy failings of her two overweight daughters.

Truth was a heterosexual, white, male and echoed the authority of the Evening News and the Daily Mail. Any view to the contrary was false news, heresy or here-say; what William Perry referred to as ‘dualism’ where knowledge is viewed as ‘black-and-white absolute truths handed down by infallible authorities’ (Belenky et al, 1997).

Being a ‘good girl’ meant approval, and being caught doing something naughty or wrong was what I feared most; withdrawal of affection, being sent to my room without supper, or getting a smack. My crimes usually involved making a mess, breaking something, or fighting with my sister. Outbursts of emotion were naughty too. I learned that silence was safe.

Words were dangerous and often critical. According to the Women’s Development Model this stage of unquestionable acceptance of authority would seem to reflect ‘a typical state somewhere between silence and received knowing, which is based on one’s ability to receive, retain and invoke words of an authority’ (Khine & Hayes, 2010, p105-116). To be a ‘good girl’ was most important and that meant conforming, listening and emulating my parents.

I yearned for greater comfort, for physical touch and hugs from my parents. I did things to get their attention and was told-off for being naughty. It was confusing and upsetting. I think that this was the seed of my belief that I am intrinsically bad, wrong, and unworthy of affection.

The second segment: the teenage years 10 – 20 years

This morning I watched a video of the 1971 version of ‘Pictures at an Exhibition’ by the rock group Emerson, Lake and Palmer. I was transported to the era of Pink Floyd and Peter Gabriel, of platform shoes, flared jeans, tight shirts and men with long hair and girl-like features. I remembered my teenage crushes, and I thought of my sister, Sally, the rebellious and irreverent

teenager, that this music spoke to. I was eighteen months her junior, and lived in her shadow. I secretly admired her, and wished I had courage to rebel. I was a quiet little mouse who played with toy horses and fantasised about owning her own pony. I was the 'good little daughter' even though I dreamed of a different life.

At the age of 10, I was obese and so was my elder sister, Sally. My mother made our clothes; matching outfits in coordinated crimplene, our fat legs stuffed into white lacy woollen tights and patent leather shoes with buckles. I wore my hair in pigtails. My mother cut my hair until I was about fourteen. One day she slipped with scissors whilst trimming my fringe and left me with an embarrassing pelmet of hair, making my round face even more pudding-like. Children were cruel (as children are), and my early school-days were not always happy ones.

By the time I moved to grammar school, I was mortally embarrassed by my swelling body. Fortunately, I eventually sprouted up like a birch tree and lost much of the puppy fat of my younger years, though I still considered myself ugly and fat. I hated my body for much of my teens, and even into adulthood I considered myself unattractive.

This decade of my life was traumatic as I started to question the absolute authority of my parents. In light of my sister's increasing rebellion, my duty was to be the good daughter. I was shy and obedient. In keeping with stereotypical 'received knower', but secretly and in small ways, I rebelled against their authority. I had little confidence in raising my own voice and had few opinions of my own about the world. 'There is a tendency to think of truth being 'out there', with authorities and people of status and an emphasis on words as central to knowing. The received knower learns by listening.' (Khine & Hayes, 2010, p105-116).

As I was exposed to different people and places, I became aware that my parents' view of the world was not held universally. I was torn between loyalty to my parents, especially my father who had come to represent truth and authority, and wanting to 'fit in' to a young crowd, with contradicting and potentially subversive viewpoints. I started to operate on two levels, one which afforded me approval and protection of my parents and one which allowed me to explore and try to fit in outside of the home.

Though my teens and early adulthood right and wrong was polarized into 'what we did' against 'what others did'. The collective 'We' represented mum and dad, but it could also represent 'The British' or the white upper middle class. 'Others' included anyone non-Christian, non-white or anyone of any shade who was either working-class, American, German or particularly the French for some reason that I never really understood.

Up to the age of five, I was alone at home with my mother for a lot of the time. My father was in hospital with a spine injury for year during my first two years of life. My identity seems to have become strongly attached to, and associated with my mother, and at the same time at odds with negative associations of her behaviour, which I found embarrassing, (See “Tea with Aunty Greta” in Chapter Six). She was critical and not equipped to give the physical affection I yearned for as a child, which many years later, I attributed to my feelings of shame, that I am unworthy and un-loveable. This tension between my association and identity with my mother, her constant criticism and my silent rebellion against her oppression, is something that possibly affected me throughout my life.

It seems apparent to me now that my decision to take up a job in engineering and follow a career path normally pursued by men, was possibly a rejection of the female archetype. Earlier, I share my reluctance to make this a feminist inquiry, rejecting associated behaviours and attitudes of archetypical female, in preference to a male model of behaviour. Later in this chapter, I examine masculine-feminine tensions that recur in my work-life when I become a boss.

I wonder if I have ever felt good enough, or sufficiently physically attractive to be one of the girls. It was easier to join the boys club and be ‘one of the boys’ than to compete for their attention against girls who were prettier than me. I followed a career path that put me shoulder to shoulder with boys, and competed with the girls by being smarter and more knowledgeable about ‘boys stuff’ such as motorbikes and engineering.

The third segment: early adulthood 20-30 years

At twenty-one, I married my boyfriend of two years; a kind, quiet man from a nearby village. We had little in common (epistemologically), and after a while I found myself in the role of caretaker, especially when it came to dealing with authority figures such as the bank manager. I felt I was becoming the parent in our relationship and it killed the attraction I once felt.

I was working for an engineering design company, and just starting to explore life outside of narrow confines of the village community. I was a petro-chemical draughtswoman and the only female in an office of fifty men, studying mechanical engineering and microprocessors at night school. At twenty-four I started a new job with a research and development team of a pyrotechnics manufacturer and met a man who changed my life.

He was my boss. Two years my senior, and the first person who really listened. He knew things about the world and we had long conversations. He told me I was smart, and we shared an ideology, and a perspective on life beyond the confines of the small town where we had both grown up. He believed in

me and encouraged me to aspire to achieve my potential. In his company, I felt alive and smart and sensual. At the same time, I knew that this was profoundly wrong.

I'm stepping back to reflect on how significant this moment was in my life. I felt loved, admired and understood. This man changed my life and I am grateful to him, despite the pain I felt when he chose to stay in a loveless marriage. I have since had a number of different relationships with men, but none was as impactful as this one, perhaps because we shared a vision for adventure away from oppressive expectations of our culture. He was the catalyst for my next stage of growth.

For two years I lived a double-life. I was deeply conflicted by messages of my senses, and the conditioning of my upbringing. I was in love for the first time, and I couldn't speak of it, nor could I act on it. I retreated into a solitary world, withdrew from my husband, my family and friends. I put on a mask of normality, and felt deeply lonely and conflicted. I chose silence rather than to speak words that others didn't want to hear. The gulf between surface normality, the smiley clown mask and the deep hurt inside, grew wider. I experienced a profound sense of disconnection with much of which I had accepted as 'right' and 'normal'. I remember sitting in the car with my mother and sister, we were going to a nearby swimming pool. It felt as if my heart was hurting; every breath felt like a stabbing pain. I was coming to terms with the rejection of a man I loved, and having to pretend that everything was OK. I felt the weight of their expectation and the pain of loss, I was angry and hurt, and held it all inside.

For perhaps the first time, I was openly rebelling against the norms of the society that raised me. I felt a huge gap between my intuited reality; what my body knew to be true, and what my cultural conditioning was requiring of me. My embodied truth was stronger. I couldn't reconcile authentic knowledge of who I had become, with the person that others expected me to be.

My unconscious rebellion took form, and became a conscious and shame-filled rejection of my parental oppression. I stopped subscribing to a truth that wasn't mine. I was making decisions and taking actions based on what I knew intuitively to be right (for me), and rejected the life and the parental truth paradigm, that no longer served my interests. – I was still conflicted between the urge to make my parents happy, to be the good girl, and for my own happiness and fulfilment. In terms of the WWK model, this shift is stereotypical of a shift to subjective knowing as defined as a shift to prioritising my own needs and happiness over obedience and compliance with parental expectations.

'Truth, for subjective knowers, is an intuitive reaction-something experienced, not thought out, something felt rather than actively pursued or constructed. These women do not see themselves as part

of the process, as constructors of truth, but as conduits through which truth emerges. The criterion for truth they most often refer to as 'satisfaction' or 'what feels comfortable to me'. "They view truth as unique to each individual, an accident of personal history and experience." (Belenky et al, p69)

I had glimpsed the possibility of a life beyond that expected of me, and I was not about to give it up. I left my marriage and took a job with an international design consulting firm in London, 100 miles away from the place I had lived for most of my life; I was searching for a place where the new me fitted in. I bought new clothes and had my hair cut short in a bob. I had followed the call for adventure, it was both terrifying and exciting.

I made new friends and began to emulate them. I wanted to fit in and adopted their life-style as my own. I learned to compartmentalize my life. When I came home to the village where my parents lived, I had to squeeze myself back into the smaller version of myself. My parents didn't like my new friends much and I was embarrassed by their (my parents) lack of sophistication.

I came home less frequently, as I assimilated the culture and habits of my new friends. I see this transition reflected in the lives of the women in subjective knowing, described in the study by Belenky et al: 'Looking more closely at some of the life stories, we saw that often the subjectivist's escape from parents or inhibiting marriages and relationships had all the aspects of what Erik Erikson (1968) calls a 'negative identity', that is a definition of yourself primarily in opposition to others, or what you are not.' (Belenky et al, 1997, p78)

I started dating one of the designers. He chose my clothes, the way I cut my hair. I remember having a fight with him, because I had brought a dried flower arrangement and put it in the bathroom. He freaked out, shouted at me and threw it away - I had put something in the house that offended him so much we had a huge row over it. I had exchanged one kind of tyranny for another.

I was looking for someone to help me find a new identity. I no longer identified with the home world I had left behind and I wasn't sure where I belonged anymore.

This was a problem, and continued to be so for quite a number of years. I tried on various identities, assimilating them easily, by adopting others likes and dislikes as my own in order to fit in. I lacked any clear self-concept, and was easily shaped by my over-bearing boyfriend, into the person he wanted me to be. 'The women in subjectivism often seemed bewildered over the sense of loss of themselves once they distanced themselves from the feedback and reinforcement that family and community provided' (Belenky et al, p81).

I came to recognise this search to fit in as a pattern. I moved between relationships, between jobs and between countries over a thirty-year period, never quite finding that sense of acceptance and belonging. This perhaps explains why I was unsuccessful in finding and sustaining an intimate relationship. Outside of relationships, I felt adrift and alone. The possibility of a relationship meant a chance for affirmation and acceptance. I was very lonely for extended periods of time, and when the possibility for connection presented itself, I dived in head first. I gave everything I could, and expected the other to do likewise. It was as if the ultimate relationship would be a physical melding of two people into one; and this was the only way that I could be whole.

I am reminded of a quotation in relation to women's development: 'At first the insight that each of us looks through a different lens can be profoundly disturbing, because it suggests that each of us is profoundly alone' (Belenky et al, p97). I can't explain why there was this desperate need for connection. It was as if I had no solid sense of identity; I had out-grown the community that had nurtured me, and I was looking for someone, or something to belong to. According to Steinbeck's interpretations of Husserl (1995, p179), 'our journey to understand and create meaning, starts with tension between 'home-world' and 'alien-world' – the familiar and unfamiliar – normal and abnormal', (Todres, 2007, p15).

The fourth segment: adult hood 30-40 years

This period of my life is characterised by my adventuring out into the world. Single, independent and free from family responsibilities and expectations, I am called to adventure. The terrain is rocky, and at times dangerous. The imagery around this period is colourful and loud, like the smoke-filled streets of Vietnam during Tet festival, discos and nightclubs of Lang Kwai Fong, Hong Kong with backstreet markets of live produce, both shocking and exciting. I lived my life in wonder; grasped relationships like they were life preservers offered to a drowning woman. I was at different times a goddess, a heroine and at others I was broken and lonely.

I am reminded of a passage in WWK that talks about women in subjectivism. "Some of the women we interviewed had both the financial resources and the personal wilfulness to launch themselves into the world at large. They were the will-o'-the-wisps, the wanderers, the world travellers. Assertive and self-absorbed, they had thrown themselves into life, taken risks others would not, tried out new selves as their contexts changed." (Belenky, 1997, p76).

I notice that in order to get on at work, I have needed to find ways to compete with my male colleagues on their terms. This has meant for me, pursuing a career path in which I am working predominantly

with men and relying on being as good as any man, rejecting stereo-typical feminine behaviours (possibly based on the role model presented by my mother), in order to be accepted into their world.

This is a mantle that I wear, in order to be taken seriously at work, and to protect myself from negative associations of being feminine. Within a relationship I revert to home-maker; and with it I surrender my power. I still associate domesticity with disempowerment and disappearing. Perhaps this relates to an expectation that the man in my life will play the hero role. I've just realised that the heroine disappears in relationships, and re-emerges only when she is a single independent woman.

Hong Kong

In 1992 at the age of 32, I experienced my first overseas adventure, working as Computer-aided Design Manager on the then famous New Hong Kong Airport Project. I was experiencing success. I had a fantastic job that others envied, and a beautiful, expensive apartment over-looking Hong Kong Harbour. I was in demand to speak at conferences and seminars, and I was leading a grand life, earning more money than ever before. I could afford to buy the best clothes, and eat out at expensive restaurants several times each week. I was free from family expectations. I was able to experiment - to redefine myself and do things that were not possible under the watchful influence of my parents. I was in my early thirties and single for the first time as an adult; it was exciting. I could drink too much, party hard and experience the thrill and drama of a casual relationship, without feeling ashamed.

Each week on a Sunday, I would take a table at the elegant Peninsula Hotel at Kowloon and order Afternoon Tea served on a silver stand. This was before email became popular, so I would take a fibre pen and a piece of cartridge paper or a decorative card and write a long letter home. This is an excerpt from my journal of the experience.

Working twelve hours a day in front of a computer screen, it is the simple sensual pleasure of creating beautiful and meaningful squiggles on paper that enthral me. The exquisite joy of putting fibre-tipped pen to conqueror paper is such a treat, which together with toasted teacakes, and rose tea, I relish on a Sunday afternoon at the Peninsula Hotel; one of the few remaining Colonial vestiges, with its white-gloved service and piano-accompaniment. It is my treat and my sanctuary.

I share in sensual prose my experiences of still colonial Hong-Kong with its multi-sensual urban culture of bird markets, snake sellers and all manner of culinary curios. In my first few months, I spent many hours alone, in evenings and weekends, walking hilly streets of old Hong Kong, narrating in my head to an imaginary and captivated audience represented by my mother and father.

From an outside perspective I was a great success. My mother and father couldn't have been more proud to tell all their friends about their successful daughter, Ineke, working for Sir Norman Foster on the biggest and most prestigious project in the world. Yet at times I felt alone and very unsure of myself.

The project consortium team consisted of five different companies, representing different engineering and architectural disciplines from Australia, USA and the UK. It was extremely challenging and highly stressful at times. As my role and responsibility grew, I became the target of rumour, and the object of resentment by my colleagues, many of whom were trained architects and earning a great deal less than me. Ill-equipped to confront them, I retreated into my own space and avoided socializing with them. Eventually I resigned. I was exhausted, mentally and emotionally worn out, and felt deeply misunderstood and under-appreciated.

I felt that I needed to behave like a man to be taken seriously. Lacking the competitive instinct, I felt that I needed more knowledge and skills than my male counterparts to assert authority over them. I took the rap for a mistake made by one of my male team members and he allowed me to do so. In the end, I left my job feeling frustrated and unappreciated. I struggle to balance the male-female behaviours and roles and when I get it wrong it is disastrous for my credibility at work. After a particularly difficult period when the CADD (Computer-aided design and documentation) system crashed due to faulty software, I was held accountable and responsible; though the root cause had been wrong decisions taken by unqualified people at the project start-up. Exhausted from working through the night on two consecutive nights, I broke down in tears in front of my boss. At that moment I lost all agency and credibility. I never regained it, and six months later I resigned.

This is a typical example of me trying to do it all. Unlike my male colleagues, who left me to sort out the mess, I took full responsibility, even though it was not my fault. I did the 'right thing', (what my father would have done), sucked up the blame and shouldered the full burden without complaining. I am reminded of my earlier writing (pages 63-65) and the understanding that shouldering the blame for other's mistakes is a relational practice.

The same happened twenty years later, when I found myself yet again in a position of authority and in opposition to my male colleagues. It seems as if when I find myself on an equal footing or in a more senior position, to men in my workplace, they are resentful towards me. Is it because I am not aggressive and competitive enough, or is it because my mix of masculine and femininity confuses and unsettles them?

I want to step aside at this point and take a more detailed look at my gendered approach to work practice and leadership. I have had a number of conflicts with male work colleagues, which are easily dismissed as a simple conflict of personalities. I feel there may be more to it than this, and am sharing some of my thoughts relative to this in respect to the literature I am engaged with, (also refer to Chapter 4, page 62).

Gender-based challenges at work

I am turning to Fletcher, Gilligan and the body of feminist literature for insight. From Fletcher's study of women working in traditionally male work environment, she finds that when women give up their feminine side and start to act like men at work, they become more of a threat to their male colleagues, than when men act in a more feminine way.

'[A] man who exhibits more relational tendencies is not threatening to give up aspects of himself that others need, to survive psychologically. His move out of sex-stereotyped behaviour may be somewhat threatening, and there may be a line (homosexuality, for example) he must not cross. But a woman moving away from a relational stance represents a different kind of threat. If she should give up her responsibility for taking care of relational needs - whether at the individual, family or even societal level - the psychological health and well-being of all these systems would be jeopardised. Her move away from relationality is in a very real way, life threatening.' (Fletcher, 2001, p10).

The biggest shift in my relationship with male work colleagues, happened as a result of being promoted into a position of authority over them. I understand now, that I have always tended to prioritise maintaining good relationships; and I didn't give that up when I became a boss. Generally, I was popular and well-liked by my team as a kind, humane and understanding boss. When things got tough, I rolled up my sleeves and worked alongside the team, and often worked late to clean up their messes. The problem arose with team members who said (in a performance review), that they wanted me to be tougher, to assert myself more, and behave more like the male boss they were used to, yet hated it when I attempted to do so. I tried to balance discipline with listening, trust and kindness - my kindness was perceived as weakness. I just didn't seem to be able to get the balance right.

I was continually running into conflict situations with certain male colleagues, particularly the more aggressive and ambitious ones, (those exhibiting more separated epistemological positioning perhaps). I was expected to behave like a man, and was judged against performance criteria that privileged the male model of effectiveness. To echo Fletcher's experience of studying women in masculine work

culture: ‘What was troubling to me was that no one seemed to be questioning the male standard that was being applied’ (Fletcher, 2001, p12). In Chapter 4, page 62, I speak of how common it was for my female colleagues and more sensitive male colleagues to experience burn-out, due to the additional relational burden they were carrying.

I am not a naturally dominant person, perhaps due to my rejection of dominant female behaviour in my mother. By contrast, I tend to be naturally appeasing; a peacemaker and people-pleaser. I had written in my journal about an aggressive exchange with a male colleague. He and I had a history of conflict and I was trying to work out what is going on. At a fundamental level, I want and need affection and approval of others. This is illustrated by the use of less direct, more ambiguous phrasing including words such as ‘kindly’, ‘please’, ‘would you mind?’ ‘If you are OK to give it a try can you kindly...’ I also use emoticons smiley faces “:-)” at the end of sentences to convey friendly emotions and to keep the exchange light-hearted. In contrast, ‘Brett’ tends to use short direct phrases such as “This is a no go” and “I suggest that if you want to discuss new systems in [the organisation] you will go through the proper channels”. I notice the references to things being done ‘properly’ according to systems which he seems to accept as concrete and either right or wrong. He seems to find my friendly and unofficial approach frustrating, as it violates his need for compliance and structure. This is congruent with Gilligan’s findings in regard to Jake and Amy, ‘Both children recognise the need for agreement but see it as mediated in different ways - He impersonally through systems of logic and law, she personally through communication in relationship, (Gilligan, 1996, p35). When I revisit Brett’s communications through the lens of logic and law, I notice how important this is to his worldview. Historically within organisations we have tended to regard male behaviour as the ‘norm’ and female behaviour as some kind of deviation from that norm. Thus when women do not conform to standards of psychological expectation, the conclusion has generally been that something is wrong with the women, (Gilligan, 1996, p14).

My experience with male colleagues is that they tend to be more comfortable with critical thinking and scientific approaches; (what WWK model would refer to as ‘separate knowing’), according to Khine & Hayes (2010). Often they would be sceptical, cynical and sometimes downright adversarial towards alternative ways of knowing. According to the WWK model, typical behaviours include argument, debate, playing devil’s advocate or shooting holes in another’s position. The separate knower is the doubter, the one who looks for flaws in reasoning, examining arguments with a critical eye’ (Khine & Hayes, 2010). “Separate knowers attempt to ‘rigorously exclude’ their own feelings and beliefs when evaluating a proposal or idea” (Belenky et al., 1986, p.103).

I notice I am typically relational in my approach to communicating with colleagues. However, in response to feeling under attack, I see myself adopt a superior attitude, countering aggression with highbrow responses and levels of logic. As a native English speaker I have a wealth of subtle tools with which to fight back. My male colleagues, many of whom speak English as a second language, likely find this oppressive. I am guessing this as they have mentioned my use of language in ways that suggest, they find it 'over-elaborate'.

In a nutshell, I feel that as a woman leader, I am relational and connected rather than a separated knower. When challenged I often resort to excessive use of (written) hyperbole in order to assert control. I can imagine that this could come across as aggressive and superior; particularly if the other person is not as fluent. I can also see how this mix of hesitancy (i.e. English politeness) and passive aggression might be confusing and perhaps even considered subversive.

This is a significant insight. I am starting to see how I unconsciously have been using written language as a weapon. In chapter five on Voice and Voiceless-ness, I come to recognise that I have agency in written language; unlike in spoken form. These days most of our communication between colleagues is in written form which gives me ample opportunity to use my strength in written English to subjugate colleagues with a lesser command of the language, a lower intellect or a different (masculine) worldview.

I am no stranger to imposter syndrome. On the surface everything seems perfect but underneath I am still insecure, lonely and longing to find my clan. I remember an incident in Hong Kong; an evening with a small social circle of Americans who were Thunderbird Alumni. They all spoke fluent Mandarin and Spanish as well as English, and in the evenings they would have conversations about politics, world economic affairs and literature. On this occasion they were having a philosophical discussion about Ayn Rand's, *The Fountainhead*.

'Seriously!', the conversation stopped and all heads turned towards me with incredulity. *'You mean to say you have never read Ayn Rand?'* It was an innocent remark but one that drew me deeper into my shell. I had nothing to say, nothing of value to add to the discussion. I withdrew and became silent. I felt dumb in both senses of the word and resolved to never feel that way again. I bought an expensive set of tapes on *'How to improve your vocabulary'* and a copy of *'The Fountainhead'* which I devoured in less than one week. I was conscious of my lack of a university education and became obsessed with self-improvement.

I notice this issue of intellectual strength coming up again. As I associated lack of intelligence with stereotypical feminine behaviour, the idea that I am lacking compared to the clan that I aspire to be part of, is deeply troubling to me. The transition from subjective knower to procedural knower was, I feel, a response to being exposed to many new experiences, and through meeting people who saw the world differently. It was also a conscious decision, based on a drive to develop my intellectual capacity. Procedural knowing according to the WWK model is the fourth stage in the Women's Development Model. Procedural knowledge as an epistemological position, indicates that knowing does not rely on intuition or information gathered from the content but requires conscious, systematic thinking (Brownlee, Boulton-Lewis, & Purdie, 2002). Procedural knowledge was found to consist of two forms: connected and separate knowing. In broad terms, connected knowers are more empathetic and receptive while separate knowers might be described as critical or detached. In later reading, I came to understand that connected knowing is not one thing, but an orientation towards knowing that includes less scientific ways of knowing, such as art and instinct in combination with a reflexive and collaborative process. (Goldberger et al, 1996, p218). I elaborate on this on pages 67-68.

The goal for the connected knower is to understand and be understood, whereas the separate knower seeks to convince and be convinced. (Khine and Hayes, 2010).

This was not a smooth transition, and was highly contextual. In my area of expertise, I was very confident in stating my truth, constructed partly through knowledge, largely through first-hand experience. However, in more general terms I still felt insecure about my knowledge and ability to synthesise information. In the company of those I deemed 'more sophisticated' I was still insecure. I am wondering if it is possible to simultaneously operate in different epistemological paradigms. For example, I am much more matured epistemologically in my professional life than I am in my personal life. Gallotti et al. (2001), quoted in Khine and Hayes (2010), noted that 'according to the WWK framework, learning occurs in different ways for different people in different situations, and may be affected by the learning styles of others who are present'. (p114).

Sri Lanka

In 1997 I relocated to Sri Lanka with my partner. People told me they thought we were the perfect couple. We had dogs and a huge house with an acre of garden. Every evening we would sip gin and tonic on the veranda and congratulate ourselves on the magnificent life we had created. I felt safe, and I felt I had come home. He reminded me of my father; he was a strong character and we had interesting conversations; I felt I had met my match intellectually. After moving to Sri Lanka and setting up our

horticultural business, I was dependent on him financially and I began to act differently; I felt vulnerable and needy, and it changed the dynamic in our relationship. He told me that he had been attracted to the strong woman I had been when he met me, and I had been attracted to his similarities with my 'hero-figure' father. He became controlling, belligerent and emotionally abusive. I tried to adjust myself in order to be the perfect person for him. My concept of self was diminishing, and I was intensely lonely. I excluded myself from others' lives because I needed to uphold an image of normality, despite feeling deeply unsafe. I silenced my voice for self-protection and to preserve an unhealthy status quo. I recognise this 'duality' from previous experiences, where a transition is imminent (e.g. from pages 100-101), at a time I am trying to reconcile two states of existence that are incompatible. Eventually I plucked up courage to leave him. I had lost all self-confidence and sense of personal identity. I had no home and no job. I lived out of a suitcase and on the charity of friends for about four years; but I was finally free to lead an existence that felt more authentic, if somewhat tentatively so.

The WWK model notes that of the women surveyed, those who experience separation from their home culture and environment, either emotionally or physically find themselves in a state of instability and flux, lacking the grounding in a secure, integrated and enduring self-concept, (Belenky et al, p81). Since leaving my home environment in 1985, I have experimented with different identities; I have worn them like the clothes my designer boyfriend picked out for me, but I have yet to find an 'enduring' sense of identity, thus everything up to this point is experimental and temporary. 'Home' was a shifting concept that included the camaraderie of women friends, various spare rooms and the affection of my rescue dog Monty. I began to find myself again, and enjoyed the company of women friends for the first time in many years, as they were no longer threatening to my fragile relationship and self-confidence.

Then I met a man who was different, he was interested in science and nature and knowledgeable about many different things. He had all qualities I sought in a protector. As with other men in the past, he was drawn to my self-confidence and the underlying vulnerability. He could be my protector and mentor and I was drawn to that too. Very quickly, he became my foundation for self-conceptualisation.

He pushed me to read and to develop my powers of reason. I wanted so much to be in a relationship (to feel safe), that I absorbed his identity as my own. I lost myself and fell back into needing to be liked, of wanting to fit in and that meant giving up my sense of individuality. He responded badly to the shift in my demeanour and became a bully. I began to believe that I really was the unworthy person that he told me I was.

This period of around ten years is characterized by a desperate need for connection. I tolerated bad behaviours and clung to relationships rather than be alone. In most cases, I was more invested in the

relationship than they were. I was seeking validation and to feel whole and part of a family. This urge became an obsession for connection at any cost. I lost myself. I felt desperate, alone and adrift. A pattern of unhealthy relationships confirmed for me that I was the problem, and my feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing were compounded into a clinical depression.

Below, I include an excerpt from a poem that I wrote while reflecting back and trying to make sense of these times. Written in free-fall, as an act of inquiry, it expresses the extent of self-deprecation and self-destruction that characterized several relationships during this period of my life. These are the ‘Catacombs’ of my journey, the dark recesses of the mind, filled with primal shame. Like the dark and brooding musical representation of the Paris Catacombs in Mussorgsky’s ‘Pictures at an Exhibition’, they are in a piece of my memory that I prefer to keep hidden from public view. They represent an ugly and visceral fear, a genuine terror that at the time, feels life-threatening.

Little girl - fatty, awkward, ugly, clumsy
Shame has no voice, no power, shame is a victim.
I am a good girl
I am a good girl

I will show him!
I’m angry, I’m hurting
Hit me again! I dare you to....
My knee hits the gutter, I’m drunk in an evening gown

I took so much trouble, it cost me a month’s wages
I did my nails especially
You spent your time with her, you didn’t even see me.
I sipped my drink too fast

Please dance with me, hold me close.
Get away from me! Stop nagging! he says
Ok. I’m sorry. Can we go home now?
Please forgive me!

I didn’t mean it – I’m so sorry how can I put it right?
Please don’t leave me...don’t stop loving me
I know you love me
Even through you never tell me

Just hold my hand, OK don't hold my hand

I understand you, others don't...

Just a hug... I know I'm being unreasonable.

I need a hug.

You're not in the mood. It's OK

You danced with that girl. I found her number in your wallet

I'm sorry. I'm not like this normally

It's just that I love you so much

So much it hurts

And I'm under pressure at work

Please take me back

I promise I'll be good

I'll try harder this time

I'm so sorry for who I am.

Coming from a family in which physical expressions of affection were absent, I craved intimacy and clung to relationships as if my life depended on it. I went through a series of dysfunctional and abusive relationships, in which I subjugated my own needs to the point of self-destruction. I recognize the feelings of shame associated with my emotional outbursts. As a small child I would be sent to my room as punishment for such an outburst, and would cry myself to the point of hysteria, just to get a reaction from my parents.

I see this stage as one of connected knowing, (according to the WWK model). My prime objective is to connect and be understood. The men I was drawn to were operating from a very different epistemological paradigm, and that was problematic. I tend to be attracted to men who are aloof and unavailable. Perhaps this is an imprint from my first relationship with a man, (my father), who was absent for much of my early childhood years, through illness, and later due to the demands of his work. The men I have chosen are separate knowers, operating from an individualistic and rules-based paradigm. They believe in the absolute nature of truth, and have polarised views about right and wrong, good and bad. This comes across as 'I am always right and if you disagree with me, then you are wrong'. I based my decisions about right and wrong on feelings and intuition, however there were times that I

needed relationship so desperately, that I accepted as truth, that I was wrong much of the time. It is reminiscent of the relationship I had with my mother, and equally painful and confusing.

'The goal for the connected knower is to understand and be understood, whereas the separate knower seeks to convince and be convinced. Connected knowers do not seek logical or empirical explanation of a position; their aim is to understand the position rather than to test its validity (Clinchy, 1996). They are the ally, and their thinking cannot be divorced from feeling' (Khine & Hayes, 2010, p105-116).

The problem was that I lost myself. I fell back into the old ways of wanting to be liked, wanting to fit in, and that meant giving up myself. So I did, and then what happened? Goodness... I started to lose my self-confidence. There was kind of a war going on. On the one hand I so wanted to be a relationship. I put up with a lot of stuff and I blamed myself when things went wrong. I didn't question the fact that I was the one who was doing something wrong. Then I rebelled. I had again this sort of separate thing going on. I would disappear on my own. Have my own thoughts. my own sense of who I was without him. I broke away and as time passed I started to hear my own voice- yet I was alone. It felt that to not be alone it seemed I had to split in two, to be someone else, to give in to someone else's authority and lose myself again.

I want to step out for a moment and address this issue of authenticity. I notice as a recurring theme, my reluctance to live an authentic life and instead try to be the person everyone else expects me to be. Reflecting back on this now from the advantage of helicopter hindsight, it seems unfathomable, that I was trapped into an inauthentic life for so many years in my quest for wholeness.

I recently stumbled across an earlier piece of writing about authenticity, written in the thick of experiencing this sense of loss. It was also stimulated by my reading 'Being and Time', and trying to get my head around Heidegger's notion of authenticity. I am including an excerpt below, where it speaks about owning my sense of self, rather than losing myself in the public-ness of the 'they'. (Being and Time 1927, Heidegger, translated by Macquarrie and E. Robinson in 1962, 38: 220).

How do I know authenticity?

Authenticity as a concept merged in my inquiry, as I started to seek something other than what I had come to articulate as 'all that negative stuff'. At first I simply avoided things that made me uncomfortable, and wrote instead, poetically, about gardens and flowers, and walking in tea plantations. I escaped into nature, and nature protected and nurtured me. My supervisor kept re-directing me back to the messy stuff, reminding me that I needed to go, there if my inquiry was going

to lead to more than just a nice collection of short heroic stories. If I want to be taken seriously, to inquire rigorously, I needed to find a path that would help me understand the dark in me, as well as the light. Journaling helped. I started to catch myself in the act of story-telling, and to stop and go deeper, (in a different font or colour), asking probing and critical questions of myself in order to reveal, and start to understand what lay beneath. The opposite of authenticity, according to Heidegger, is 'being-with' which he describes as a state of averageness—a "Being-lost in the public-ness of the 'they'" (Being and Time (1927, 38: 220). The Austin Philosophy Discussion Group (APDG) posted a discussion in 2013 on Heidegger and authenticity, in which one respondent wrestles with Heidegger's notion of authenticity.

This analysis opens up a path to Heidegger's distinction between authentic self, and its inauthentic counterpart. At root, 'authentic' means 'my own'. So the authentic self is the self that is mine, (leading a life that, in a sense to be explained, is owned by me), whereas inauthentic self, is the fallen self, the self, lost to the 'they'. Hence we might call the authentic self the 'mine-self', and the inauthentic self the 'they-self', latter term also serving to emphasize the point that fallen-ness is a mode of the self, not of others, (APDG, 2013).

To be authentic, (as defined by Heidegger), I need to be leading a life that is owned by me, not by others. My interpretation of this, is that I need to be true to myself, my values, my needs and wants first; not in an ego-centric way, but in a way that pays respect to my uniqueness, rather than labels or categorises me as 'one of them'. When I reflect on this, I sense an internal struggle to be 'me' and at the same time to fit in, be accepted and not alone or ostracized, as I was as a child. It feels that to be really authentic takes a lot of courage; it takes self-belief and trust that the world, or at least those close to me, will embrace a more authentic version of me, without rejecting me or feeling threatened by my lack of conformity.

Am I leading a life that is owned by me? My flippant response would be 'Hell Yes!' I am pursuing my dream, deciding where I want to live and who I want to share my life with. I wouldn't say I have lost or fallen into a 'they' kind of existence; I have a fairly unique life but does it make me better, happier, more complete?

What's the good of authenticity if it means I spend my nights alone? How difficult is it to find a match, a partner who can deal with authenticity, be subservient to it even? Will he bring his own brand of authenticity, and will that make us more authentic together, or will we cancel one another out in our efforts to become 'one'? Will we compromise and conform in our bonding, and become less authentic as a result?

As Heidegger puts it: “Authentic Being-one's-Self does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the ‘they’; it is rather an existential modification of the ‘they’”, (Being and Time 27: 168). I understand that authenticity is not about being isolated from others, but rather about finding a different way of relating to others, such that one is not lost to the they-self’ (APDG, 2013). Therein lies the challenge, how to be authentic, i.e. different, and yet still relate and be relatable? I have immediate family who cannot relate to me and my lifestyle choices. I find myself pretending; immersing myself in ‘they-self’, in order to relate and connect to them. Perhaps it is me who struggles to relate to their sense of authentic. I wonder if perhaps one person’s they-self is another’s ‘mine self’? Another problem here, is the likelihood that we have both changed, grown and in different directions. Perhaps the self we share is a moderated, compromised self that exists somewhere between two extremes.

This was written at a time when I was caught up, during a brief relationship with a Spaniard, who declared my positivity in the face of horrendous challenges to be ‘crazy’ and ‘unrealistic’. I was in internal conflict, a crisis of self-determination in the face of a powerful force drawing me into connection with an ‘other’ who demanded that I change in order to fit into his world. This was The fundamental question I seem to be asking is, ‘if I am authentically myself will I still be attractive to another and worthy of their love?’ The sting of early childhood rejection is still impeding my ability to be fully myself. It was a really painful period of self-reflection. Late at night, I wrote in my journal

“The inner voice I am hearing is an embodied voice; a feeling of unrest and disquiet that tells me this is wrong, this is incongruent with an emerging and solidifying sense of self.”

An earlier version of my thesis was titled ‘wholeness’ and I had written several pieces of inquiry narrative around feelings of wholeness in connection with nature. It is as if nature completes me. I notice now that it is only after I introduced horses into my daily life, that I ceased feeling restless all the time, like there was some big party going on somewhere else and I hadn’t been invited. I began to feel settled, despite the fact that I was still travelling most of the time; I had a home to come home to; and that made all the difference.

The fifth segment: early maturity 40-50 years

I am living and working in Sri Lanka. I have a small group of close friends, and have just moved into a small house overlooking open land that I share with my two dogs and three cats. I am no longer living out of a suitcase, and am finally able to call this place a home. I have moved away from a four-year toxic relationship, and am starting to climb out of a long period of depression. I have bought myself an electric juicer. It is a small act of self-care that feels indulgent and significant. I feel numb, possibly

due to anti-depressant medication. I feel like I am going through the motions, putting on a mask, an act, and doing my work; but my heart is not really in it any more.

I had a strange flashback today in the washroom. I was in the hotel complex in Bangkok where I am delivering training in Results-Based Management. I remember other washrooms, other trainings. The washroom is a liminal space, neither one thing nor another, on the fringes of the stage where the action takes place, a kind of dressing room, where one prepares to wear the mantle of pretence, and act out one's part in the drama that is life. In these places, truth leaks out. It has been a place of refuge and always a place of complete unadorned honesty.

Sitting in a lavatory cubicle barely bigger than my knee span, I have wept. I have cried huge gulping silent tears. The washroom is the place I confront myself, raw, human, vulnerable. I adjust my makeup, my clothes and put on my mask in preparation for my next performance. As I exit I take final look in the mirror and practice that brilliant smile; fix it on my face and step once more onto the stage.

I was going through the motions of living. I remember this time as a one of sadness, pretence and coping. There was little joy in my life at this time. Any spare cash I had, I used to fly home to spend time with my sister, Sally, stricken with Multiple Sclerosis. Compared to her I am so lucky, I told myself. Yet sometimes, I could tell she could see behind my mask of a smile. "How are you?" she once mouthed, 'I'm worried about you'. It was hard to hold back tears, 'I'm doing fine', I lied.

At this point I want to step back and ask myself 'Why do I need to make everything OK? Why is it so hard for me to admit when I am struggling, tired, unhappy or lonely?

I feel the need to adopt masculine behaviours in order to be taken seriously in my work, plus I had a negative association with feminine behaviour, hence being in control of things was necessary but the urge to maintain connection, meant an overactive sense of responsibility to put things right for everyone, else and not to show my own vulnerability. Much of this dynamic is reflected in feminist writers, Carol Gilligan and Joyce Fletcher. I am curious how this plays out in my case as a woman working in a predominantly male environment and living an independent life, who is pushed to be more aggressive in order to be taken seriously at work, and to cope with demands of running a home and staff in Sri Lanka. On the one hand I am rejecting the feminine, and on the other hand, I am hard-wired for connection and empathy.

THE TSUNAMI

It was early morning of December 26th 2004 and I was at my mother's house in the UK. I got a call unexpectedly from my office in Sri Lanka. I couldn't understand what my accountant was trying to tell me; something about three metre waves, and I wasn't to worry, everyone was safe. I put the phone down and switched on CNN. 'Three-metre waves?' 'She must have meant three feet waves, I smile to myself.

Then image by image, the horrific realisation dawned. Images on the television of a place that looked vaguely familiar. Buses lay on their sides and rivers of water were swirling around them, people clambering over, desperate to reach safety. I recognised the walls of the old Dutch Fort at Galle, looming in the background and my heart did a flip. I had been sitting on that wall just a week ago. 'Oh my God' was all I could say. There were images of piles of dead swollen bodies, and people standing around moaning, howling or just staring in disbelief... Oh my God' ... 'Oh my God'.. was all I could find to say.

The South Asia Tsunami of 2004 changed everything. Stories of incredible bravery and resilience emerged, plus stories of unbelievable hardship and suffering. The plight of those already disadvantaged was highlighted through international media attention, and the world came to Sri Lanka to do whatever it could to help. I learned that heroism has many faces. Even those who wrote stories and took photographs made a difference. I once met a poet, whose poem on giving selflessly remains one of the most iconic reminders of the politics of international aid.

My father set up a trust fund in the village back in England, and busied himself raising money for Sri Lanka in the local community. I set about making myself as useful as possible, assessing needs and delivering shelters and supplies to places that we were hearing about through the local news. I wrote long letters home, which my father unbeknown to me, printed and shared in a newsletter to people I have never met, and who had donated money to the cause. I had become something of a local-girl-does-good story back home.

I felt useful, significant and I was able to make a difference to people's lives. I worked long hours and under difficult circumstances, but it felt good to be working with a purpose, and I had no time or energy for self-pity. During this time, I met some really amazing people from all around the world. We were drawn together through the Tsunami relief effort, and soon became a close-knit tribe who supported and trusted one another.

The sixth segment: maturity 50-60 years

During the post-tsunami years, I was offered a position as regional director for a large international consulting firm, working in the field of international development. At the time I had written: *I have a*

dream job in international development, that takes me all over the world, working with amazing people and really important humanitarian projects. I am financially secure for the first time in a while, and at my beautiful Sri Lankan home I have four beautiful horses in the garden.'

I travelled a great deal for my work, spending significant amounts of time in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and the Middle East. I delivered workshops on personal effectiveness, and told my own story as an example of how you too can achieve your dreams, when you believe in yourself.

The contrast between my new life in Sri Lanka, and the familial home in the UK, is vast. I used to travel back to visit my mother and sister, and listen to friends from high school espousing racist and Islamophobic sentiments - proliferating hate and ignorance. For two months each year my mother would visit me in Sri Lanka. After my father passed away in 2005, I struggled to endure these prolonged spells of my mother's company. The effort to keep her happy and to balance my life with her demands of me, at times made me ill. I would often experience physical pain in my arms and my back. Friends would stay away. Her influence over me was profound. It was as if I was ten years old again. After one of her visits, I wrote the poem that is included in the chapter on Voice. It was a necessary and cathartic.

My relationship with my mother has been one of the major tensions in my life. During this period, after my father's death, she needed my support and I wanted to give it, but neither of us had the tools to set aside a life time of emotional isolation. I have rarely hugged my mother and the first time she told me she loved me, I was already 53 years old. It came as a shock.

The contrast between home in Sri Lanka and home in the UK, was stark and troubling. I was still compartmentalising these two separate states of being, and feeling increasingly inauthentic and sad that this was necessary. I wrote a journal entry which I called 'Breathing In and Breathing Out' reflecting different tensions of being inauthentic versus authentic, and comparing and contrasting the two realities, in an effort to reconcile the two worlds; the 'they-self' of England as opposed to the 'mine-self' of Sri Lanka. Heidegger describes this in *Being and Time*, (1927), 38:220 as 'the opposite of authenticity', a state of averageness—a "Being-lost in the public-ness of the 'they'".

BREATHING IN

The bus from the airport has the heating turned up too high. I am wearing my winter woollies in preparation for the cold shock of English winter, and I am now roasting. Endless airport lounges, carrier bags cut deep red lines across my palms; an over-stuffed luggage trolley with a mind of its own.

I end my journey with a tight hug from mum, a battling of suitcases in and out of too small spaces. Up the narrow staircases, I sink under a puffy yellow duvet.

Time in England is measured in terms of cups of tea or coffee; small rituals that let us know that everything will be OK; memories re-lived for the hundredth time. There is shopping, shopping and more shopping to do. There is little time and so much that needs buying before I leave. Mum has a plan; lunch with this person or another, church and the Women's Institute market on a Friday morning and an expectation we will cram it all in. Cramming food, frozen from the supermarket, cooked in the microwave, cramming visits, cramming hugs, and catch ups, cramming relaxation. I escape to the bath, a long bubbly soak and my head is still spinning - Stolen moments in front of the laptop, usually in the middle of the night. Switch on the telly, let's watch 'Emmerdale'. A gin and tonic at 6pm and asleep on the sofa by 9 - there is no time to be; too busy keeping busy. There are rules to be followed, protocol, manners, expectations - a stretching boredom of predictability, a slowly dying.

The first thing I notice is the overall discomfort of the experience, from the overheated bus, to the over-stuffed luggage trolley to the puffy yellow duvet. I notice myself expressing feelings of suffocation. I am suffocated by the overwhelming expectation to conform to a way of being, that I have long left behind.

By this time, I had worked in more than twenty-four countries, many of them Islamic. I was used to adapting myself to cultural norms, covering my head, showing due deference, not making eye-contact, eating with my fingers, and enjoying immense hospitality of my hosts in every country I visited. I came to recognize that norms were situational, even truth had its context; I questioned everything that I had previously taken for 'normal' and found it difficult to tolerate limited and bigoted views of my former colleagues, friends and family members. I was wary of coming across as arrogant, and mostly choose to keep silent. My close family members showed little interested in knowing about my life; they never asked. I would walk in the door after three years and they would barely notice. On a good day I might be offered a cup of tea, but there was never a sincere 'how are you?' I started to think that they must hate me. It hurt, and still does. I later discovered it was because in my parent's eyes, and after I moved overseas, I could do no wrong. At the time, I learned to swallow my hurt and make polite conversation.

In contrast to this experience back in the family 'they-self' home-world, in the next piece of writing, at the same time, I am arriving home to 'mine-self' home-world.

BREATHING OUT

I turn the corner to my house and the lake comes into view in its early evening splendour. The May trees vibrant in their greenery and scarlet adornments, the buffaloes wending their way home like

factory workers off for the day, bumping and cajoling on the familiar route home. There is no hurry anymore. I take a big breath out. I didn't realise how long I had been holding my breath, hunching my shoulders, holding it all together. I'm home.

The dogs are waiting just inside the garden gates. They hear the van and I see them jumping up and down excitedly; the big spotted ears of Molly, the Great Dane are flapping up and down, as she leaps and bounds. I climb down from the van and all chaos breaks loose. Molly and Bella, her diminutive side kick, run in huge circles around me, faster and faster around the tree, like the tigers in Helen Bannerman's childhood story, I think they might turn into butter at any moment; chasing and leaping and then snapping and growling as they tumble and roll, each blaming the other.

I breathe out again.

The birds; I had forgotten how loud they are, and how bubbling, popping, chirrup-ing and tropical they sound. A feast of green greets me once again. From the soft grass of the lawn, to the tufty close cropped paddock, to the lilies and wild grasses of the wetlands, and the jungle beyond; a textured carpet of green rising up into the far distance. I feel cosseted and at peace with the world.

Six pairs of nostrils fluttering, soft whinnying from the nearby stables; welcome home. A ritual reconnection with all my family members, a hug from Karuna my housekeeper and surrogate mother of 15 years, a broad smile and handshake from Wilson the gardener. Each animal vies for attention, a hug, a stroke, a word, a smile.... I am home.

My experience of home in Sri Lanka is an embodied one; caressed by nature, in communion with my animals sharing a rich multi-sensual experience.

I have built a beautiful home in Sri Lanka, and attracted a clan of like-minded people, who are knowledgeable and cultured, into my life and my home. I had applied for, and been accepted, into a doctoral programme, and for the first time in a long time, I felt whole.

At work, things were less harmonious. My 'dream job' was turning out to be more challenging than I imagined; not in terms of the work, but in terms of the people and culture. They are always fighting and complaining about one another. I come back from abroad to a litany of complaints. There is a real gap in understanding between myself and that of my colleagues. At work I begin to challenge the way we do things, and the masculine hierarchy is suspicious and cynical of the changes that I feel are necessary within the organisation.

I am keen to move away from the 'development paradigm' to a more corporate culture and environment. My goal is to create an engaged workforce that works autonomously. I am thwarted at

every level, both within the local team, and from the head office in the Netherlands. It seems no one is interested to shift the paradigm, even though the current one is unfair, hierarchical and archaic.

An auditing requirement forced me to replace our unqualified accounts clerk with an experienced, qualified accountant. I chose someone mature with a strong track record, and employed him as Financial Director and General Manager. I was so happy and relieved that I would be able to focus on fee-earning work, and trust a Sri Lankan management professional to run the business during my long absences. My trust was misplaced. He defrauded the company of several thousand Euros. Worst of all he misinformed me about the financial position of the company and we ran headfirst into a wall. I lost the trust and respect of my senior management team at Head Office and it almost destroyed the company. Someone had to be held accountable, and my trusting nature was thrown back at me, as a major flaw.

I fired him and hired an audit firm to conduct a forensic audit on our accounts. For six months I shared my office with a team of forensic accountants and tried to repair damage he had wreaked upon us. I worked seven day weeks, and was at the same time delivering complex consultancy services in Afghanistan and Bangladesh. It was during this period that a friend and client was kidnapped in Afghanistan and another brutally murdered by Isis in Bangladesh. I was losing the battle to keep everything under control and make it OK. I began to suffer stress symptoms and eventually was hospitalised with a chronic ear infection. Even as I lay in my hospital bed with 80% hearing loss and an antibiotic drip in my arm I was working on my laptop preparing documents for my colleagues working in Afghanistan.

Eventually, I succumbed to the stress and I was forced to take sick leave. During this time, I was incapable of making a decision; even the smallest decision such as what to have for dinner, for would paralyse me.

I was silenced, but more through grief than fear. I felt overwhelmed and no longer capable of making a decision. It was as if my head was made of fragile glass. I was going through the motions of getting out of bed and getting dressed, but I found no pleasure in my environment, even my animals were a source of further worry rather than joy. I couldn't sleep and when I did, I woke up with aches and an acid feeling in my stomach.

I was never able to fully take up my job responsibilities after this experience, and I had no desire to. During this time, I was still conducting assignments. The branch needed money and so did I. I needed

"I'm so sorry", I said it over and over. By finally vocalising, I made the dreadful reality of my situation substantial.

It'll be OK, I'm OK, honestly. I picked up a wad of sodden handwritten pages, "all the pages are here, you just need to read it out. Put it in the sun for a few minutes, it'll be fine, really." I have the whole thing recorded on my phone, if my phone was working, you could have played the recording over the microphone." It was a pointless statement as my phone was clearly not working, having been hurled down a five-foot drop, and immersed in eighteen inches of water. Somehow the possibility of it, made me feel better. I was in control, I told myself, I wasn't falling apart. It was going to be OK.

For a moment I was aware of existing in parallel realities, one in which everything was fine, normal and I wasn't soaking wet sitting in a business suit in a hotel waterfall, and one in which I was; both realities felt equally valid. I felt myself slipping in and out between the two, trying to merge this alien, unmanageable situation into something that felt normal and made sense. I was conscious of trying to normalise the situation with humour, telling myself and others 'this is no big deal.'

At this point, I it felt as if I still had the ability (if I chose to do so) to run down stairs, get on the stage and deliver my speech. I weighed up in my mind, the extent to which I might actually be faking it. I tried to stand and felt a sharp pain which answered my question. I felt powerless. A man wearing a white coat with the hotel emblem appeared and acted like a doctor. He seemed professional, asked me questions and took an intense interest in my swelling leg. "I think we should take you to hospital." I felt relieved that someone else had taken command.

They lifted me into the wheelchair, one man on either side of me. I knew I would be heavy for them and tried to take the weight onto my good leg. It was awkward. I sat in the wheelchair, my long legs doubled up and my knees too high. I thought about my sister Sally, who had spent half her life this way.

It was embarrassing to be so vulnerable. I felt ashamed, and hated being wheeled through the hotel lobby with everyone looking at me. I remember wondering if the Ambassador, or other VIP guests attending the key note address might cross my path, what would I say? Would they think me drunk or stupid to be soaking wet in a business suit with a big rip in my dress? Would they smile and inquire politely if I am OK? What would I say? 'I'm fine, don't worry about me, it's just a silly accident, I'll be right as rain in a moment'.

I gave up control, allowed myself to be wheeled around, I was no longer a self-determining entity, but instead a piece of luggage, a thing on wheels that needed to be moved from one place to another. In the busy hotel lobby, I avoided the gaze of others, tried to be as small as possible, to disappear.

I was loaded into the back of an ambulance, and driven to the nearest hospital. They put on the siren and we shot through the otherwise heavy traffic. I joked with my colleague, made light of it, tried to normalise the situation.

Even in the ambulance, I needed to uphold an image of being the boss, being in control. Perhaps this is my normal, my home-space. Being out of control is scary and alien and has associations with being in the middle of a complete emotional breakdown, that I experienced in the past.

They put me on my back on a stretcher, face up staring at the light fittings as I was pushed by two young orderlies into the room with painted seagulls on the ceiling. I wanted to cry, I wanted someone to put their arm around my shoulder so I could sob loudly and without restraint, not for the ankle but for me, for my life, my loneliness, for the unfairness of it all.

Finally, alone in the casualty department, on a stretcher looking up at the ceiling, I was overwhelmed; not just by the accident, but by everything I had been suffering over the previous year, the fraud, the accusations, lack of trust, betrayal by those I trusted. It all came crashing in on me, during those few moments. Still I was not able to let go, though I wanted to cry, I held it all in.

I am stepping back from the story to reflect. On what was going on. I see that my need to stay in control, even whilst in the ambulance going to the hospital, soaked through and in pain, I am making light of my situation and trying to find some way to regain a sense of control. I am noticing these strong masculine behaviours. I can't break down, cry, scream, or ask for help. I have to be the one who makes it OK. It is the second time within six weeks that I have been hospitalised and in a wheelchair. The feminine in me, the child in me, seeks the comfort of a loving mother. But – I have to keep up the pretence, the façade that is as much to protect me as it is there to influence others. It is a turning point. I realise that I am not strong enough to fight this; that I need to stop and take care of myself and that no one else will do that for me. My company continues to pressure me to do more work and I am in danger of tipping myself over the brink towards a complete mental and physical breakdown.

I ceased to be able to function in the masculine role. I had tried so hard to hold it all together and to be the one in control, but I could no longer keep up the pretence.

I was vulnerable, and had lost all authority by virtue of my vulnerability. It was the masculine that had abandoned me, and the feminine (in terms of connection with nature and love of friends, that saved me. Ballard & Jackson interpret this as 'the dark night of the soul'. This was a very dark time for me. I could no longer pretend to be in control, yet my friends and family had got dependent on me being so.

I withdrew from all but closest friends and had little contact with my family. I spent time with my horses and close to nature to heal myself. My sister passed away. I carried on working. I told myself it was for the best – I didn't know how to cry and I had not allowed myself to do so for a very long time.

Throughout, I was challenged by a masculine model of effectiveness, (Fletcher et al), that was still being held up as a benchmark, and against which my feminine behaviour was judged, (as weak). I felt guilty for much of the time, but I no longer had resources to wear the masculine cloak, and I resented the company, and people within it, who expected me to still be able to function this way. I took myself inwards, and focused on my writing, which became a therapeutic process.

The Ceylon Riding Club

I established the Ceylon Riding Club in 2017, after the lease expired on my old property. We moved to the new site on the day I left hospital, and for three months I supervised the design and building of new stables and the site preparation. The Sri Lankan Army sent four soldiers to help me. This was an exceptional and rare honour, and in recognition of the support I had given them in setting up their cavalry unit the previous year. It was hard to balance physical demands, with expectations that I would continue to deliver consultancy work. Though we had discussed a period of compassionate leave, my sense of responsibility didn't allow me to take full use of this opportunity. Here is an excerpt from my journal at this time:

These last few weeks I have been up each morning at the first light of dawn, mending fences, brushing horses, walking horses, riding sometimes as many as four different horses before breakfast. My body is changing; I can feel it. For the first time in years, I smiled at the digital photograph my friend took of me astride my horse. My relationship with my body has altered. I smile when I catch my reflection in the mirror; I am starting to feel me again. At least I feel the me I remember being before I became the me I was ashamed to look at; the me that felt sexy, alive and vital, rather than old, flabby and unattractive. It gives me hope that I can reclaim my sexual sensual self; and maybe it's not too late after all.

The physicality of my life, leaves little space for intellectualizing. Perhaps that is why journaling has eluded me these last several weeks; that, and the punishing regime of 'getting my horses fit' in time for the opening of the Ceylon Riding School later this month. I fall asleep like drowning. I often don't make it into bed, and on occasion wake up in the middle of the night with all the lights blazing, and still in my work clothes. It reminds me of the early days of being a corporate trainer and arriving home both physically and mentally drained. I shower in cold water, and delight in the sharpness of feeling awake and alive.

I still juggle job number one with job number two. Job number one still pays the bulk of my salary, but job number two has my heart, and makes me feel more alive than I have in many years. It has yet to make me money, hence the need to keep job and boss number one as happy as I can, without selling my soul back into the slavery, that my life had become over these last nine years. Thankfully boss number one hasn't managed to replace me yet, thus we both play the same game, knowing that it is a game, and that before long, one of us will hand in his or her cards and call it a day. It is a game of bluff and bluster.

In Job number two I am Madam. I am part of the huge eco-system that is a home, a farm, and a workplace for around ten staff, twelve horses, four dogs and two cats. The day starts early; by the time I sit down for breakfast, I have spent three hours riding my horses in a field the size of a football pitch., bordered by paddy fields of the most iridescent lime green. In the early morning light, every blade of rice paddy is clearly delineated, deeply saturated and sharply contrasted. The feeling is awesome; like plugging myself into an energizer battery pack, I feel uplifted and ready to face the world.

I am connecting with my horses. I feel their breath, I sense their emotions, I respond instinctively to their signals as they do to mine. We feel a shared joy in the communion of the greenness and the morning light. After riding we walk together breath to breath, footfall to footfall. I remove the saddle and bridle and Merlin buckles down into the thick sand bath, rolls over and lets out a grunt of pleasure. Legs flail in the air as he rocks from one side to another then lies completely still for a few seconds, kicks out his front legs, and levers his huge body back onto four feet. The whole procedure is finished off with a full body shake like a wet dog, as sand flies out in all directions.

I am on compassionate leave, but still working from home. I have been given the assignment to restructure our Leadership and soft skills programmes. I have a job to do and I am grateful for it, but my passion has dimmed, and my relationship with the organisation is forever altered.

In the next chapter on Voice and Voiceless-ness, I give an example of a Director's Meeting where I feel unheard and ignored (see page 143). I feel increasingly disconnected from the organisation that I have worked for these last ten years, and I begin to envisage a situation where I could leave my company, and work fulltime at the horse riding stables. I feel a new kind of power; a calm confidence that comes from freedom to just be myself, likely for the first time in my life. I am taking care of myself and prioritising my own needs and those of my horses, above the expectations of work colleagues, and even my boss. I have withdrawn from society and am focusing on myself and my new venture. Some of my long-time friends are unhappy about the change, they ask me 'what's wrong?' and take offense when I don't return their calls or ask to meet up. I need to focus, I tell them, but the truth is I feel content with my own company.

I have stepped down from the leadership role of my consulting organisation, and am developing soft skills training and leadership development using embodied techniques that I have developed. We are selected to design and deliver a leadership development programme for the most prestigious garment manufacturer in Sri Lanka, and they have agreed to incorporate equine assisted coaching.

I visit my mother in the UK; she has bought a red sports car and the two of us go for long drives through the countryside, with the top off and the wind in our hair. We stop for lunch in a village pub and have fish and chips at the seaside. At night we play a game of scrabble and drink gin and tonic. I feel calm and relaxed. I give her a big hug and tell her genuinely I will miss her.

In December of 2020 my mother passed away. She had been in and out of hospital for the last year and her passing came peacefully, at home with my two nieces by her side. The Covid pandemic had hit us in March of 2020 and since then I had no possibility of leaving Sri Lanka to come and visit her. I am happy that I had managed one final Christmas together, in 2019, just before we were all locked down and the airports were closed.

It was a special time. She was in hospital and I flew to UK for one month to take care of her. After settling all the bills in Sri Lanka, I arrived at London Heathrow with just one-hundred pounds cash in my pocket. I travelled by bus to bring snacks that she liked, the weather was wet and very cold. Mostly I stayed at the family home and studied. It was the first time I had been at home in England without either of my parents. The house was filled with stillness and weighty with childhood memories. I brought mum home in a wheelchair on Christmas Eve. I'd cleared out a downstairs office room, and made up a bedroom for her. I put her favourite pictures on the wall, and fixed her television. I had to help her to get up and walk to the bathroom, prepared meals and cleaned the house. She was small and frail and helpless.

Meanwhile, under lockdown in Sri Lanka, I had been taking care of my horses, sometimes spending eight or ten hours a day engaged in physical labour. I wrote about this in Chapter One, explaining how it had helped me to reconnect with my body and with my environment.

At the same time, I have been re-claiming the antique Sri Lankan Villa that I had renovated in 2004, and had laid neglected for the last ten years. I turned sixty under lock down, mostly alone, and at the villa, I felt at peace and fulfilled. As I reclaim and restore the villa, one room at a time, I have fallen in love with it all over again, and have fallen in love with myself, perhaps for the first time.

I feel at home here, in a green and tropical garden and an old colonial house, with various dogs, puppies and kittens all vying for my attention. It is here that I am writing up my thesis.

I am in a better space emotionally than I have been for some time. I am curious to know if this is temporary, a glitch, the start of yet another cycle, or if I have genuinely transcended to a high level of understanding.

I would say that rejecting perceptions of toxic femininity was a big step forward for me. I feel that my close identification with my mother, caused me to rebel strongly against any possibility that I was unconsciously acting in the same way. Once I had let go of this, I felt more peaceful, and able to embrace a more authoritative female voice that speaks with agency and authenticity.

I am stepping out here to reflect on what this means in terms of my epistemological development. Engaging in a first-person action research inquiry has required a great deal of critical introspection. Aside from therapeutic value of recognising and letting go of childhood complexes, I feel that one of the most significant illuminations happened quite recently.

It relates to the fog that I referred to at the beginning of this journey and is also associated with feelings of inadequacy; 'imposter syndrome'. I have never really understood the difference between knowing and understanding; (savoir and connaître in French). I 'know' the difference but I hadn't synthesized what that meant in terms of my academic writing and inquiry. At one point I became so frustrated that I thought about quitting. I started to wonder if I just don't have what it takes. The lifting of the fog was facilitated through a recent conversation with a friend, while we were out walking together. 'It's no good just letting it (the knowledge) sit there', he explained, 'you have to work it, knead it, break it apart and put it back together again until it becomes something new'.

Letting go of 'needing to be liked' is a big step for me still. The affirmation, of being engaged by Deloitte, one of the world's leading consultancy firms, has definitely made a big difference to my self-confidence and particularly as they selected me because of my track record in delivering experiential learning. I feel less pressure to fit in to other's expectations, and more confidence to put forward my own ideas – even in the face of some resistance.

I believe I am no longer desperate in my need for connection. I am fed and nurtured by close proximity with horses and with nature, and am content and fulfilled with my own company. I understand a lot more about the way that I create knowledge based on a maturing and more systematic epistemology.

I sense much in common with connected, procedural knowers and a more frequent exploration into constructed knowing. According to the definition in WWK (Belenky et al, 1997), constructed Knowing

is an 'opening of the mind and heart to view all knowledge as contextual. There is equal value given to subjective as well as objective strategies; this is my aspiration.

Constructed knowers have developed a narrative sense of self, have a high tolerance for internal contradiction and ambiguity. They do not want to compartmentalize reality; once knower assumes the general relativity of knowledge, their frame of reference matters and that they can construct and reconstruct frames of reference, they feel responsible for examining, questioning, and developing the systems that they will use for constructing knowledge, (Belenky et al, 1997).

My aspiration towards constructed ways of knowing, is in some part, a conscious decision not to be at effect of unconscious urges, and more self-aware, more self-disciplined. From a cognitive perspective I have embraced the concept of constructed knowing as an eventuality, once I am finally free of the grip of primal reflexes that still cause gut-wrenching anxiety, when I am taking actions in opposition to these primal urges. I feel the stress when I have to deal with criticism and opposition, for example on page 216-220 where I am engaged in an altercation with 'Gerald'. My natural urge is to try to make things right and OK for everyone I come into contact with. In the past this has got me into deep financial, as well as professional difficulty, by trusting too easily and being fooled. The journey is incomplete and a daily challenge.

The greatest barrier to my own growth remains the last vestiges of childhood reflexes, to keep everyone happy, to make everything OK. Though I have identified it, this 'fixation' is still having an impact in my life. I struggle daily to overcome this urge, and to find a balance between self-care and caring for others, that is nurturing of both. I know the work that has to be done, and I believe that this is half the battle. This is a work-in-progress and will take time, imagery and attention. This is just the beginning.

Chapter six – the piece on voice

This is me getting my head around issues of voice, voiceless-ness and power

A young Sri Lankan mother cradles a baby in one arm, the other fist raised up in defiant protest. The infant's face, half-hidden by a shawl, embodies the innocence of a generation who have yet to know oppression and fear. Their parents and their parents' parents learned at a young age the price of free speech is incarceration, torture and death. Caught by chance on a mobile phone, the photograph became a meme on social media and went viral. It is representative of a revolution that has turned into a phenomenon. For the first time in my 25 years of experience, and possibly in Sri Lanka's colonial history; the people of Sri Lanka are speaking with one voice.

9th May 2022, Colombo

There it is – Right there! - The relevance and significance of my inquiry to the work I do, day in and out as a trainer, coach and motivational speaker. I am not a politician, and work hard to avoid politicizing my work in Sri Lanka, yet through this inquiry I have come to understand, deeply and personally, how fear breeds silence. If through this inquiry, I can contribute to a more inclusive political process in my chosen home, then that is a cause worth striving for.

This is me getting my head around issues of voice, voiceless-ness and power

This chapter represents the second great work of art of this exhibition. It stands adjacent to the piece on epistemology in Chapter 5, and illustrates much of the same journey but this time from a different perspective. These are just two, of hundreds of such facets that reveal the whole person. I am reminded of Goethe's essay's on Authentic and Counterfeit Wholes. He begins by describing how, when a laser-illuminated hologram is cut into a number of parts, the whole picture appears in each of the fragments. Similarly, light from the whole of the starry heavens is enfolded in each point in space from which a picture of the night sky can be seen. Thus, in an authentic whole, each part is a place in which the whole can be present. Using such examples as a template for thinking, he goes on to show how, in reading, the whole of a text (its meaning) is revealed through its parts as we read it word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence. Each part reveals a different aspect of the whole, (Bortof, 2012, p17).

In Chapter 5, I explored different aspects of my epistemological development and gender tensions and associations that contribute to my way of experiencing and understanding the world. In this chapter I am focusing in on what could be referred to as an 'aspect' or 'part' of epistemology; the part that relates to self-expression. This chapter on voice and voiceless-ness is written in response to a question that keeps surfacing in this inquiry: 'Why am I sometimes silenced?' and related to that: 'What is going on when I am silenced? and thirdly, how do I break-through silence and find an authentic voice?' I am anticipating the possibility that I may open up to even greater uncertainty and even more questions; however, it is my intention to set out what comes up so that it may be examined, critiqued and be of use to others.

Finally, I hope to see how this inquiry into voice, inter-weaves with inquiry into epistemology, bearing in mind the proposition by Belenky et al (1997) that 'women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind and self were intricately intertwined.'" (p18)

The Work of Art on "Voice and Voiceless-ness"

This work of art, similar to that in Chapter 5, is made up of different tableaux linked by a path. Unlike the artwork in Chapter 5, this is not a strictly chronological sequence of events, more of a constellation. The inquiry follows a random path in pursuit of a line of questioning radiating out from the centre and

going where the energy is. For example, I begin with a very recent event that reminds me of a similar feeling in my past. I am following the energy from last week, to several years ago and eventually back into my childhood. The beauty of a work of art, is the opportunity for the observer to step back and see linkages and connections between the stories and to appreciate the work of art as a whole.

As in the previous chapter, this is a first-person action research heuristic inquiry. You will see me moving between different levels of consciousness and different territories of experience, (Torbert, 2004). I am stepping in and out of the tableau in order to shift perspective and *understand* what is happening by synthesizing cognitive and embodied experiences from the past, and staying present and aware, to re-experience things in an embodied way. The challenge remains, how to translate algorithms of lower levels of consciousness into algorithms of language and then make it shareable.

First-Person Inquiry into Voice and Voiceless-ness

When I reflect on the concept of voice and voiceless-ness there are quite a few experiences that come to mind. I have chosen two such memories, one from childhood, and one more of a more recent experience. Both are taken from journal entries, at a time when I was trying to make sense of my troubled relationship with my mother.

You will see me attempt to re-experience voiceless-ness through a phenomenological lens, to compare and contrast the experience with times when I feel lucid, sharp and ingenious, and try to understand where the difference lies. At first I reflect on the narrative sequentially, noticing thoughts, feelings and connections with earlier writing and phenomenological literature; trying to feel where energy is, and explore what comes up. You will also see me work with feminist literature to explore the politics of language, particularly from a feminine epistemological standpoint.

The talkative guest

Something happened today that feels significant. I almost had a full-blown panic attack; something I haven't experienced for more than ten years. It is easy to justify, I lost my mother in December, I am under pressure to complete my thesis, I have just started a new job; all major stressors are there. But it was an encounter with a woman the night before that triggered it; the last straw you might say. It is early morning and everyone else is still sleeping. Lying in bed, still feeling anxious, I was struck by the

realization, that an old familiar dynamic was being enacted. Rather than berate myself or my guest, I see it for the gift it is. I am writing into the experience, certain that important information is coming to light.

My pulse is racing. I feel in panic. She's been wittering on for almost thirty minutes; a self-serving monologue in interminable detail about nothing important. "Get to the point" I want to shout, but I am far too polite. I have been taken hostage by my good manners and her niceness. I am really tired, I want to sleep, but her tone is insistent and her monologue relentless. There are so many pressing matters that need my attention and they are playing on my mind. I feel like I'm pushing a flotation device under water; it is taking all my energy to stay, but the pressure is building up and my body is preparing to fight or flee. I feel controlled and violated and I am angry at her selfishness and at my compliance. 'She's a nice person, what is wrong with you?' I ask myself.

Then I notice the barbs. They are subtle, hardly noticeable, 'It's nothing', I tell myself, 'don't be so paranoid'. There was that small comment about age. It went by almost unnoticed. Then there was the issue of my appearance. At first she was gushingly complimentary; she fussed over me like a loving sister, adjusting things, as my mother would do. She insisted I borrow her makeup and wear her earrings and necklace. They didn't suit me; I didn't like them but it would be rude to refuse. She is just being kind, I tell myself. She confided in me – "I'm telling you as a friend", she said. "I knew you all those years ago, and ... well.. to be frank... you look haggard."

This is exactly how my mother would be. She would come to Sri Lanka and stay with me for months at a time and hold me captive in her monologue. She would demand all my attention, destroy my self-confidence, my way of life, my feelings of success, my love of life and my soul.

I tolerated her oppression out of duty, pity and guilt. But suppressing toxic feelings for an extended period took a massive toll on my health. By the time, my mother was ready to leave for the UK, I would be emotionally and physically battered and exhausted. I remember having shooting pains down both arms and sleeping with my hands curled in tight balls. I have been experiencing a lot of conflicting emotions around my mother and decided to 'write it out'. The poem below is part of what emerged.

Guilt is my shroud. I am weary of carrying it on my shoulders.

A hand squeezed so tight that nails cut a bloody trail

I wake exhausted. Eyes squeezed tight, an aching jaw

Aching fingers, aching shoulders.

Judgment sits, a murderous crow, an angry brooding malevolence

*The indignation of entitled ignorance;
Empty words float on the surface of an oily pond
I scream inside. JUST LET ME BE!*

*Each small judgment another rock to be carried
Umbilical cord around my neck
The ties that bind, constrict and suffocate
Knot her hands into unconscious fists
The child that is an adult cries each night to be free
Of the shackles of shame and love*

*Fragile, frail a featherless bird
Your skin hangs loose like folded tissue
Yet still I can't reach out and hold you close
The fresh-brewed coffee, the homemade soup
Small acts of love, tears never far*

*A daughter's duty done, but this time on my terms
I mourn for the intimacy we have never shared
And for the perfectly manicured childhood,
Bereft of touch and a million miles apart from understanding.
Tighten up that smile, take a deep breath
Polish up your performance
For the final act*

(Pitts, 2019)

When I started to write in free-fall about my mother, what emerged was shocking. The words point to repressed anger that I have been carrying inside for most of my life. The dark imagery of guilt as a shroud, the murderous crow of judgment and the strangling umbilical cord, give an indication of the unresolved feelings that emerged through this inquiry. I came to see roots of self-doubt, seeded in an unfulfilling relationship with a critical mother, who just wanted me to be more perfect, less messy and less noisy. I was never good enough to earn her praise and as a result I craved it all the more. The source of nurture was also the source of criticism, and that was a hard thing for a young child to bear.

At the end you see a shift of power as my very independent mother is frail and unable to take care of herself. I am filled with compassion but I am also released from power dynamic, 'A daughter's duty done, but this time on my terms.' At the end, I was finally able to tell my mother that I loved her, and come to a point of acceptance and forgiveness. Albeit 'Bereft of touch and a million miles apart from understanding'. The role reversal with my mother in the last years of her life finally freed me from the emotional prison of being her daughter, and allowed me to be compassionate and loving towards her, without feeling compromised.

With my mother's passing comes an opportunity to raise my voice, with confidence and without fear of hurting her, or being contradicted. The power games are over, I don't have to pretend anymore - I don't have to swallow my words or my anger and can be unashamedly myself. I feel relieved. I want to explore who I have become, other than my parent's daughter, and separate from the community that nurtured me as a child; and I can finally do so free from brooding guilt and shame.

You will see from the next piece of writing, that I am still afraid of not being good enough. I am afraid to say the wrong thing and be thought a fool. This IS my inquiry; this is the work that needs to be done.

I am called to do this work, because I cannot spend the remainder of my life afraid to speak out loud and afraid to be judged, to offend or to make a mistake. The only path to real freedom is the one that leads me through this. I step forward bravely into the fire, confident that what lies beyond will be healthier and more fulfilling than what lies behind me.

The Zoom call

In this next small tableau, I am bringing my inquiry into the present once more, to explain how and why I intuited the need for an inquiry into voice. I had had this experience of feeling 'useless' in front of my supervisor, and in playing back the video recording of the session, had seen myself with new eyes, older and more frail than before and as an echo of my parents and the child turned adult. It is time to lay down ghosts from childhood and enjoy the remainder of my life free from affectation and inauthenticity.

My face shows more lines and wrinkles than I remember. The months of lockdown since the Global Pandemic came to Sri Lanka, and subsequent weight loss from working every day at the stables, have left me looking gaunt with pronounced cheekbones. Soft folds of skin hang from my upper arms, and my neck and shoulders are lean. I see excited side to side of my eyes and in the flickering of a muscle at the corner of my mouth, a nervous smile, never far away, to make everything OK. My eyes tell another story; the story of someone tired of keeping up appearances, of putting on a brave face and making

everything OK. I notice my nervous hesitation; I am trying to find the right words, to say the right thing. I don't want you to think me stupid. I smile a lot; too often, and habitually. I am nodding my head in an exaggerated way; trying to please, trying to connect; trying to get it right. I have my father's jaw and eyes of my sister; I see my elderly mother in the shape of my mouth. I am their legacy and remnants of their lives cling to my maturing form.

I pretend that everything is OK, but it's not, I'm a deer caught in the headlights. I raise my eyes to the ceiling again. I don't know how to answer your question; my mind is a fog and I can't form words. I know implicitly and instinctively what I want to say but am unable to vocalize it. Words are swimming around in my head but nothing is making sense. I see myself frown and then blurt out something half-formed and apologetic. I am angry at myself and ashamed, I look and sound like the idiot I feel. (December, 2020)

I am a senior international consultant with almost thirty years of experience working in some of the most dangerous and inhospitable places on the planet. I am invited to speak at international forums and have facilitated training workshops for a hundred or more people at a time without fear. Yet sometimes, in a small gathering or one on one, I freeze. I feel intimidated, overwhelmed, mute and tongue-tied. I struggle to understand and to be understood. At these times, I feel as if I have descended into a thick fog, my mind ceases to function effectively and though I know in my gut, what I want to say, the algorithms of language are beyond my grasp. I am literally wordless.

It is really important to me to gain some insight on what is going on and why. My wordlessness at critical moments has held me back from raising my voice against injustice, from getting my views across convincingly and inhibited me from asking to get my needs met in relationships. I would have greater agency at work and in all my endeavours if I could consistently raise my voice with clarity and conviction.

Surprisingly, in writing, I express myself fluently, evocatively and coherently. Perhaps because there is a time lag between feeling and articulation; a space in which to experiment with words and get it right. Perhaps it is something to do with the visual nature of the written word that helps me process things differently.

I notice a natural hesitancy, if there is something really important that I want to say. I choke on language that is strange and terminology that I don't fully understand. I am often tentative and apologetic, which may be a trait I inherited from my father as I remember he used to do this too.

Narratives around voice identity and silence

The first narrative is a memoir from my childhood. I am around twelve years old and I have gone with my mother to visit an elderly great aunt. My mother is talking and I am silent. This narrative also sets out details of my early childhood development and maturing epistemology. The second story is a recent journal entry, selected from a number of similar experiences. I am at a dinner party, where I am expected to express opinions about world affairs, and am tongue-tied. Equally this could have been a business meeting; the experience and emotions are ones I am intimately familiar with.

TEA WITH GREAT AUNTY GRETA

My grannie, Doris and her two sisters, Greta and Joyce were brought up during the Second World War and were all strong, independent, opinionated women. Aunty Greta drove a lorry for the land army; the women who took over farming and manufacturing jobs of fighting men, to keep the production of essential supplies including food and weapons. They were no-nonsense women who grew up with Victorian parents, nurtured by nannies and with the belief that 'children should be seen and not heard'. I was mortally afraid and in awe of all three of them. They were multi-talented horticulturalists, Doris was a gifted writer, Joyce, an internationally acclaimed landscape gardener and Greta, a gamekeeper and accomplished angler who later produced stunning tapestries. Dutiful periodic visits could be interminably boring for a pre-teen; endless cups of tea in the formal reception room with a big old grandfather clock ticking away the moments until I could run free.

Sometimes, I would be allowed to visit the greenhouses where my sister and I would prod and poke the Venus fly traps to make them spring closed. We would throw crusts of bread to carp or ducks; steal ripe berries from the bushes and play hide and seek between the roses.

As I got older, I was expected to eat my garibaldi biscuit nicely, not picking out the currants and saving them 'til last. I sit without fidgeting while the adults talked, sometimes for hours and hours. While sitting, I would examine things in the house; especially the books, photographs, tapestries and paintings. I came to know each in intimate detail. Grannie had two porcelain horse statues on the mantelpiece. I wasn't allowed to play with them, they were too fragile, but in my head I was galloping across the fields with them.

On this particular day; we hadn't been invited, we just 'popped in' as mum and I happened to be in the area. I hated it when mum did this; often people were too embarrassed to send us away at times that

were clearly not convenient. One family actually hid behind the curtains when they saw our car pull up in the driveway. Mum talked about it for weeks; I was hugely embarrassed.

Aunty Greta, now in her eighties with short cropped hair had been in the garden and was wearing gardening gloves and carrying a trowel and wooden trug full of seedlings. Mum was in dark sunglasses, as usual, wearing small heels and a low-cut summer dress, showing an embarrassing amount of cleavage, matching head to toe as always; the contrast couldn't have been greater.

I sat in the parlour and looked down at my bright red fashionable patent leather shoes. Greta filled the kettle and pulled out a tin of biscuits from the larder; she offered me one with a conspiratorial wink before closing the lid. I had been struggling with obesity and been on a strict diet from the age of ten, and chocolate biscuits were a rare treat. Mum hadn't stopped talking from the moment we arrived. She talked incessantly, barely stopping for breath. It was all about herself; it always was with mum, she never acquired the gift of listening. Somehow in the company of my aunt and in her house that felt like a sacred place, my mother's superficiality struck me as deeply embarrassing. I waited for mum to turn the conversation around, to ask 'how are you? It never happened and this seemed rather rude. As the time ticked by loudly with the hall clock, I sensed that Aunty Greta was tired and just being polite. Like me, she just wanted us to leave.

It feels necessary and relevant to include lengthy contextual framing of this narrative with details about my paternal grandmother and my great aunts who I both feared and admired. At a time when I am exploring who I am and where I belong, their stories give me a sense of continuity. Perhaps this is as much their story as my own, for how can one 'own' something that is a product of the gene pool, blood sweat and tears of generations of forefathers?

I feel tension between my experience of my parents and legacy of my paternal ancestry. My parents were too young to be conscripted, but suffered the impact of separation and rationing during their early development plus the interruption of education due to the War and its aftermath.

I see myself retreating inwards during these adult conversations. This is something I often did as a child. I have always had a vivid imagination, and I am wondering now if this was also a way of coping with situations in which I felt uncomfortable or compromised.

Even now as I am writing, I can still feel the tingling embarrassment, re-living this memory of the visit to Aunty Greta, almost fifty years earlier. I am confused and conflicted by thoughts and instincts that 'the way we are' is different to others. I had begun to notice that others were quieter, less busy, and

there were silences that didn't need to be filled with endless chatter. Perhaps it was an early awakening that challenged the absolute authority of my parents.

Even at this young age, I sense that arriving uninvited at someone's house is inappropriate. It feels wrong and rude and there is an awkwardness that my mother fails to sense or care about. There is a whole issue here around power and boundaries; the power of a mother to inflict her personal fashion preferences on her teenage daughter for example and of arriving uninvited to someone's home and imposing on their hospitality and time without consideration. It is almost as if she doesn't sense the personal boundary and need to respect it; yet I feel it keenly, which is perhaps surprising since I didn't learn this from my mother's example.

When I reflect on this, I recognise that I have struggled to manage healthy boundaries in relation to others. I quickly let them into my confidence, and then feel overly responsible for their well-being. For example, I paid for the wife and son of my Nepalese employee to come and live with him in Sri Lanka, then helped to set her up in business. In the end, I paid a heavy price for this decision, one of many that contributed to my economic struggles and nearly destroyed a number of my business ventures. I am certain that better boundary management would have massively reduced my stress levels and contributed to healthier intimate relationships and more prosperous business associations.

I have come to understand that taking responsibility for others, is also something that may be pre-programmed epistemological orientation, as a female (Fletcher, 1998, et al); a pre-disposition to make everything OK for others in order to be a 'nice person' and a 'good girl'. The issue of boundary management is a significant one for me. I have a strong yearning for connection and intimacy, which perhaps explains why I have been so trusting and open, with people I hardly know. In personal relationships, I find it difficult to keep secrets and to keep distance emotionally from the object of my affections. When I consider this from a sensory perspective, I experience a sense of completion, of connection, of wholeness in intimate relationships which suggest that my normal state is one of incompleteness; of separation and loneliness.

This piece of writing below is the result of an exercise to 'say the un-sayable'. It opened up a rawness that I had previously buried deeply in my unconscious memory.

I breathe deep into my chest and feel a pain, a gulp, a sob, an emptiness that has no specific place no specific form. At times it encompasses me, engulfs me, overwhelms; at other times it is a small dark tenderness, a scar from a long-healed wound, the ache of a missing limb. I feel it when I take a sharp

breath. It is there at the end of the breath and then it is gone. In that small dark space, I hold my shame and my loneliness.

The girl child, self-conscious and misunderstood hides in the corner, behind the door. She pulls her knees to her chest. Her white socks bunched up at the ankles. She picks at the thread of her red patent leather shoes and rocks herself silently; comforting, against a world where friendships are traded in party invites and popularity and she is clumsy awkward and ashamed.

(Pitts, 2016)

In the powerful piece of spontaneous writing, above, I start to express a sense of shame. In the earlier narrative too, there is evidence of feeling shamed by the actions of my mother, and of the inappropriateness of her and my appearance. I notice the ‘fashionable’ red shoes that significantly appear in both narratives, despite the chronological anomaly, and my mother in her dark glasses and low-cut dress.

Outward appearance is something that my mother has always valued; known for her bright and matching outfits, fully coordinated from head to toe. My appearance was often first and most frequent subject for criticism; ‘your hair needs cutting’, ‘why don’t you wear something bright?’ and the irritating flicking away of dust or crumbs, invading my personal space, like I am a child even as a grown independent adult. These small infringements of space and power feel like violations. It is interesting that though I apparently crave intimacy, I repel my mother’s invasion of my personal boundaries, as if it were an attack.

There is something about the juxtaposition in this narrative, of my seeing her apparent lack of social and intellectual capacity and at the same time noting ‘inappropriateness’ of her (and my) appearance that leads me to sense they are connected in my perception. I am feeling ashamed on account of her behaviour and I am finding it difficult to distinguish between her shame and my own; I am embarrassed and ashamed on her behalf. Perhaps this is why I add detail about conspiratorial wink from my great aunt; as a way of distancing myself from my mother’s actions.

I retreat into silence and have very little to say throughout the entire visit. I am noticing contrast in the way that my mother speaks and the way that my aunt responds. The entire conversation is centred around my mother, and her thoughts and feelings about the world. My aunt says little, it is almost as if she recognizes that there is no point and the ‘conspiratorial wink’ is an indication to me that she and I understand this. I like to think that my great aunt understood; that it was OK, that I was OK? In my mother’s eyes, I was never OK. If the conspiratorial wink happened or not, I have no way of knowing, but I like to think it did. I am reminded of the Women’s Development Model presented in the book

'Women's Ways of Knowing', (WWK), (Belenky et al, 1997), and notice that my mother displays characteristics associated with a 'subjective knower', i.e. '[W]omen who relied on subjective knowledge professed to be open to anything, they were in fact stubbornly immune to people's ideas. They saw what they wanted to see and ignored the rest' (ibid, p98). In Chapter Six, I explain in some detail how I feel that my mother's own early-life experiences in occupied Holland, stifled her growth and locked her into a way of knowing that she fiercely protected. At various times, when I attempted to engage her in philosophical discussions, she became agitated and fearful.

I see many threads to this story; not least the underlying voice of the narrator, carefully choosing her words and crafting a story to illustrate and illuminate aspects of her being that she struggles to understand.

There is a story here about a child experiencing separateness from her parents, in terms of ontology and worldview, she sees her mother as 'wrong' but doesn't know how to separate herself from her mother and her mother's influence, and is both angry and ashamed. She feels powerless and conflicted and finds solace in retreating from reality inwards to a world of vivid imagery where she is running free with the horses.

I remember the difficulty with which I separated my own opinions from those of my parents. To disagree with them about core values and beliefs felt like the greatest betrayal. Whilst my sister fought them, I remained the good girl up to the point where I could no longer do so for fear of losing myself.

I am at friend's house for dinner. He has invited three other guests and they are all highly-educated and refined professionals, at the top of their field. One is an international musician and musical director, one a young politician representing the country (Sri Lanka) at DAVOS and other international forums, the other a high-ranking civil servant, working under the President. Our host, an internationally renowned art historian and professor has staged this evening carefully, picking guests with care and attention and for the purpose of sharing of minds and ideas; I froze.

DINNER WITH THE PROFESSOR

There were four guests for dinner that night. We sat around a low coffee table in opposing corners of the room like boxers before a fight. Our gracious host sat to one side, choreographing the event. He liked to hold these intellectual soirees and had made it very clear that it was a great honour to be invited. I was on edge.

In one corner sat 'J'. He is British and an incredibly accomplished musician and conductor of international renown. He is a marvellous orator and spoke lucidly and with great passion about his experiences in Afghanistan and Peru. Furthermore, he understood the delicate interplay of politics in Sri Lanka and sparred elegantly with other guests on matters of National identity, governance and power plays. His opponent in the red corner, 'A' an upper-class strikingly good-looking young Sri Lanka gentleman. Our host described him as 'Sri Lanka's future President'. He had been selected as one of the world's 'Next Generation Leaders' and was being groomed as an international delegate. He crafted his response with professionalism and skill, weaving in anecdotes and dropping the odd Latin expletive like a master. In the third corner, sat a quiet, poised and impeccably-dressed Sinhalese woman, around forty-five. Our host explained to me that she was one of Sri Lanka's leading lawyers and the fact that she had come at all was something of a triumph.

I sat in this esteemed company and sipped vintage champagne out of a champagne glass; not a flute you understand, but an old-fashioned French champagne glass. I was drinking too fast. It tasted oaky and I knew that I would regret it in the morning. 'What do you think of the champagne?' 'It's lovely', I lied.

I don't remember much about what was said that evening. I do remember our host repeatedly bringing me into the conversation and I floundered; muttered indistinct phrases and banalities. My cheeks were flushed and I already had a headache. I struggled to find my Voice and my mind which seemed to have eloped simultaneously leaving me mute and ashamed. I felt physically sick and excused myself as quickly as possible after dessert. The next day our host called me and was obviously quite upset with me; 'What happened? Where were you?' he asked, 'I was feeling unwell', I lied again.

I remember feeling a rising panic. I was trying to focus on the words; to listen carefully so that I could formulate something clever in response. I was sweating, feeling increasingly uncomfortable physically and in my mind, I was desperately searching for a 'foot hold' into the conversation, an intelligent question even so that I could be an active participant rather than an onlooker. Everything I knew seemed to be anecdotal and I struggled for a simple statement of fact on which to base an opinion. For example, I had an idea to speak about my time in Afghanistan and the amazing dinner party conversations with advisors to the two Presidents, but I couldn't remember even the simplest detail, I remembered one President was called Abdullah Abdullah, or was it Abdul Abdullah? But the name of the other President escaped me. I wanted to say 'Morsi' but then I remembered he was the Leader of Egypt, and the name Karzai (which came to me later), had completely deserted me.

I sat in silence, performing mental gymnastics and trying to formulate an informed contribution to the ongoing conversation, and I failed. Rather than make a glaring mistake, I chose to remain silent. Even my extensive knowledge of music and classical composers, evaporated. I grew hot and increasingly uncomfortable. My host was expecting more from me. We had had some wonderful conversations in the past, but this was different. When it was just two of us, he allowed me my silences, time to sort my words out and attempt to formulate an opinion, or at least a thoughtful question. Here, I felt ambushed, unprepared, unskilled and unwilling to risk failure.

In this narrative, I see a woman desperate to say the 'right thing' to the point where she is tongue-tied by fear. This is an illustration of how voice is silenced through politics and power; of who owns the truth and whose opinion is more acceptable. The framing of this piece is significant. The description of the other guests and their achievements serves to highlight my own insecurities. I am already asking myself 'what can I say? 'What can I possibly contribute?' It is not their judgment, but my own, that is gagging me. The physical setting plays its part. I mention that room is set up like a stage or a boxing ring. It is as if each is expected to take centre stage and perform. Perhaps this is simply a case of performance anxiety. This reminds me of the experience I share in Chapter Five, of being in Hong Kong with a community of alumni from one of America's top business schools and feeling confronted and ashamed by my ignorance. I feel a fraud.

This is a time when I have reached a level of success, but it is an inauthentic success based on other's values. This is the success of the 'They-self', the version of myself described by Heidegger as "lost to the 'they'" (The Austin Philosophy Discussion, 2013). This is an inauthentic success, based on an inauthentic self-concept. I recognise this feeling from different stages in my life, for example: moving to London, getting a job with Norman Foster, moving to Hong Kong, leaving Hong Kong and setting up in Sri Lanka. At each of these stages, I have felt this 'they-success'. My inability to function within this group is indicative of this feeling of inauthenticity. It is as if I fear being found out; of being judged and found to be a fraud.

The reason I am including this narrative, is that this experience is a familiar one. Though I am an accomplished orator on a public platform when I have had the opportunity to prepare and practice, given a live interaction with people who might challenge or judge me, such as a dinner party or an important work meeting, I am easily intimidated and struggle to articulate my case with clarity and conviction. I am including below, a poem that illustrates how this phenomenon plays out within a work context. This was written around the same time as the dinner party narrative, at the culmination of an

offsite Directors' retreat in the Netherlands. I have an objection I want to raise, and I have been stealing myself up to make my point.

THE DIRECTOR'S MEETING

*My moment has come and I am ready
Full of power and truth a sharp intake of breath
"I don't agree ... I'm sorry"
I kick myself for words of contrition
J plays with his phone some affair needs attention
C chooses this moment to go for a smoke
But M nods her assent to my unspoken question
Her smile fills the vacuum, a sister at arms
I slip un-noticed beneath the silent waters
look up at the world through the dark green light
no one notices that I am gone
they continue their discourse unhindered
minutes pass, still they don't notice
my chest is tight, throat closed
I am lost, I am here, but invisible
"I AM HERE" I shout, but no one is listening*

In common with the earlier narrative, I see how hesitant I am to raise my voice within a group of people who might judge or criticize. I am apologizing before even starting my argument. It is as if I feel the need to soften my contradictory view with an apology, in case you are offended. This is habituated; the need to apologize before speaking. I don't know what that is about. I recognise it as a particularly English trait, as my American friend once pointed out to me. I find it hard to shake this habit.

Almost all are ignoring me, or finding an excuse to absent themselves from the discussion. Only one person, a fellow lady director, feels my pain and smiles and nods empathetically. In my poem, I use the metaphor of drowning; I feel powerless and ignored, and I feel upset that nobody seems to care. This is slightly different from the dinner party narrative, where my host and fellow guests were encouraging me, and open to hear what I have to say. However, the metaphor of drowning fits both scenarios. In this example, I feel my words are falling on deaf ears. Whether through dissent, or lack of interest, they are ignoring me. In the last two lines, I describe being lost, invisible; I am shouting but no one is listening.

I feel that this poem is about agency; not just about raising my voice, but about engaging with others, seeking connection, and having the skills, presence, whatever it takes, to influence their opinion.

Stepping out of the picture, I see that in the two main narratives, I am being silenced by a more powerful and judgmental voice. To raise my voice is risky, dangerous even. In the poem above, I am raising my voice and being ignored. It is as if my worst nightmares are coming true. I finally find the courage to raise my voice, but almost no one wants to hear, or feels necessity to even politely listen. I have given away my power and I feel like I am drowning.

It seems that there is an underlying gender dynamic, and I explore this more deeply in Chapter 4, page 62, in relation to Fletcher (2001), 'Disappearing Acts; Gender, Power and Relational Practice at Work'. I feel that my colleagues, mostly men, do not subscribe to my version of reality and are judging what I have to say against a masculine model of effectiveness. Perhaps my uncertainty and lack of assertiveness, re-enforces their view. 'When behaviour motivated by a relational belief system [...] was brought into this organisational discourse it got disappeared as work because it violated many of the norms [of a masculine work paradigm]. In other words, when behaviour motivated by a feminine logic of effectiveness was brought into this discourse, it got disappeared as work because it violated masculine logic of effectiveness that was in operation.' (Fletcher, 2011, p91)

I wonder what agency would feel like, and what I would need to differently to achieve it? How do I develop confidence to engage, even when I am feeling this way? It occurs to me that my experiences around voice and voiceless-ness are loaded emotionally, and influenced by assumptions about identity; - how a 'good' person behaves. Raising my voice feels risky, which is perhaps why I feel the pull towards working with embodied ways of knowing and expression; there is no need for translation and less chance of getting it wrong.

In order to understand what is happening, I am stepping back into the moment to re-experience this silencing through a phenomenological lens, and listening to what my embodied experience can teach me. This is a work of abstract art where ideas and associations form spontaneously and unconsciously.

What is happening phenomenologically?

As I am recalling and re-sensing experience, I am searching my literature for language that will help me express this better. I am drawn to the work of Goethe; ('Taking appearance seriously: The dynamic way

of seeing in Goethe and European thought', Bortof, H. 2012). "The aim here is to visualise the phenomenon as concretely as possible - not to fantasize about it, embellishing it, but to imagine it as closely as we can to the phenomenon we encountered through sense experience." (Bortof, 2012, p54)

In that moment of wordlessness, it feels as if all the knowing I hold inside has evaporated from the realm of conscious rational thought, and gone deep inside. I struggle to manifest words and sense, to synthesize memory and visual images into coherent ideas, and I can't even fake it. There is a void, a blank space, where words and language used to reside. As I stare into whiteness, a kind of panic creeps over me. It starts with a raised heartbeat, an adrenaline rush that increases my agitation, but gives me no place in which to focus this energy. I am trembling and my eyes are darting backwards and forwards. I am trying to access my memory and my imagination, to find some remnant of cognitive function that will rescue me. I have an overwhelming desire to flee.

Another time I experienced this complete loss of language function, was at the effect of a severe migraine, when I literally lost the power of language and facial recognition. The part of my brain that synthesizes letters and makes them into words, and individual features into a recognizable person was malfunctioning. I'm wondering if chemicals released in a state of panic are somehow blocking certain functions of the brain that impact my ability to pull together thoughts, memories and sensual experience and translate it into language. I am curious to try to understand what is going on in that moment when I am silenced. Is this due to lack of knowledge, a lack of skills, or is it an emotional or chemical reaction that is affecting the brain function that normally allows me to synthesize and articulate my knowledge? Is it that my knowledge is held as unsynthesized cognitive data, rather than embodied understanding? In order to recall it at will, I sense a need to create embodied linkages and associations with embodied and cognitive memories.

I have been working with a broad body of literature that has something significant to say about voice and language, and I am integrating ideas from the translation of 'Phenomenology of Perception', (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1945, translated by Landes, 2014), with a body of more contemporary literature around language and consciousness, (including Bateson, 2000, Abrahm, 1997, Todres, 2011). Merleau-Ponty says: 'Conscious thought is language, and a uniquely human trait, but behind and beyond language we communicate with the world around us through our sensing bodies, (Landes (2014), p190; Abrahm,1997, p56 & 57). The words 'behind and beyond language' reflects a proposition central to this inquiry, that the body is the primal source of communication, knowing and understanding and language is the means by which we synthesize knowledge and understanding and communicate it

with a wider audience. This translation from bodily sense to language, is a complex one as it involves how each of us uniquely experiences a phenomenon, and creates meaning from it based on our senses and our prior knowledge and experience; much of which may be unconscious, (Bateson, 1972, p142 & 143, Todres, 2011, p31). In Chapter 6, I refer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's description of the act of sense-making as a 'constellation of images that begin to reappear for no reason.' (Landes, 2014, p15). I experience this sense-making in flashes of sensation, part language, part memory, part felt-sense. Merleau-Ponty describes his ideas on this process as follows: 'From visual images we form words and vice versa. In thought, our images may reside fully or partially in our imagination, and process of associating words with images happens internally, before it can be expressed verbally; 'the external sign of an internal recognition' (Landes, 2014, p182).

Looking at the two main narratives, I see that in both scenarios I lack specific relevant verbal imagery from which to formulate relevant dialogue. There were other emotional and political factors present, feelings of fear, shame and powerlessness. In the second narrative I see myself '*performing mental gymnastics and trying to formulate an informed contribution to the ongoing conversation*'. Perhaps these mental gymnastics included searching my databank of unconscious sensed and language images for ones that are relevant and hold 'true' for the audience, then going through the difficulty of translating them into cohesive and engaging speech. I have reached an impasse. Like a dog chasing its own tail, I am stuck for words to describe my stuckness.

Counterfactual Inquiry

Perhaps by examining what happens counterfactually, at a time when I am speaking lucidly, spontaneously and generatively, it will shed light on what is absent when I am silenced. Fortunately, today I was able to experience this, and immediately write about it. Even whilst immersed in speaking, I was conscious of inquiring, glancing upstream to try to capture embodied experience so that I could recall it later. Here are my notes after the experience.

Today is my first face-to-face meeting with my new project team coordinator. I have been engaged by one of the 'Big Five' consulting firms for the first time and I am very excited by the prospect. This is an organisational strengthening initiative, with thirty-one small local export-orientated businesses that have been economically affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. We are meeting in a coffee house as Covid rules allow, and both wearing masks for the first fifteen minutes, though we are sitting more than a metre apart. This is a kind of 'on-boarding' session and 'D' is briefing me on progress thus far.

She has been speaking for around ten minutes and I am taking brief notes, and trying to look her in the eye and absorb what she is saying. I want to come across as approachable and engaged, but I also need to be able to respond in a meaningful way. I am calm, alert and focused.

As I am listening an idea starts to form. Before the thought is fully formed verbally, I start to speak. I am so excited, I want to put words out before I lose them and so I excuse myself and interrupt her. I am leaning forwards, my eyes are bright and wide open and my fingers are waving, asking her to create a space for me to speak. “We are going to find a lot of commonalities between these businesses”, I offer animatedly. “If we can develop a way to capture our learning and translate it into tools that industry associations can use, we can impact many more businesses. We can even develop a special toolkit for the Women’s Chamber (of Commerce)” We had been discussing the danger of disenfranchising certain women-headed business, due to a lack of sufficient strategic material to meet basic acceptance requirements for the programme. I was bothered by this and my idea was in direct response to that felt need. She likes my idea a lot, and I was also rather proud to have come up with it. Immediately the idea had been made manifest, a rainstorm of other ideas followed.

I am now stuck with how to bring this experienced phenomenon into language form. To explain to you what just happened, and how it is different from the times when I feel voiceless. It's like 'trying to catch something as it's happening, and which is over before I can do so. As Goethe describes it: '[...] It can perhaps be described most simply as 'stepping back' into where we are already. This means shifting the focus of attention within experience away from what is experienced into experiencing of it' (Bortof, 2012, p54).

Digging into this phenomenologically, I am prompted to 'become participant in the phenomenon instead of an onlooker; bringing it 'inwards'. '[W]hilst focusing on the phenomenon in this way, what we are doing effectively is to make the phenomenon more 'inward'. We are going into the phenomenon, as we do in active looking, but now we are going into it by bringing it into ourselves. This means that we are creating a 'space' for the phenomenon by means of our attention so that we can receive it instead of trying to grasp it." (Bortof, 1996, p55).

At first the possibility of an idea exists in a kind of nebulous energy-field. [It later occurs to me that this is perhaps the same fog I experience when I am voiceless.] The forming of an idea happens in flashes of clarity. It is almost as if I experience the synapses in my brain arrange, rearrange and realign themselves to create a new pattern as associations and connections are being formed, (as in Merleau-Ponty’s constellation of images, mentioned above, Landes, 2014, p15). Now I have a solution; it is still

not fully formed but there exists sufficient language and imagery to 'know' and begin the tricky task of translation into coherent sentences.

As the visual associations trigger new language and new imagery, other connections are being made, which perhaps explains the 'rainstorm' of other ideas that follows. The specific question that we were discussing, was how to handle the organizational strengthening process for thirty-one small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) simultaneously and systematically, with a focus on replicability, scale-ability and how to encourage development of more women-headed businesses?'

I have an extensive store of specific verbal and non-verbal memories of every meeting, every discussion and every new idea formed, from more than thirty years of organizational development consulting all around the world. Specific projects that contributed to my thinking processes, including work that I did with an agency in Afghanistan working with business partners, where I came up with a whole set of tools to help them assess their business and programme needs. Other memories surface from a four-year programme in Bangladesh, funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs to build capacity in women's leadership, innovation, sustainability and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) in the ready-made garment (RMG) industry. I was Project Coordinator and was involved in overseeing the generation of learning instruments for the Universities. Before this, I ran a multi-country programme for high impact training for informal tourist industry. The tools we used needed to be simple, straight forward and effective. In each case ease of use, replicability, scalability and inclusion of women are critical success factors.

From these, and many more examples, my brain extracts 'flashes' of verbal imagery; micro-movies, moments which include images of our workbooks, computer spreadsheets, people, places and conversations; none of which are fully formed, and are more sensed than seen. As in a dream, when a person is familiar to you by their essence, rather than any specific feature, these projects and associated experiences are known to me in essence, and fully recognisable, without need for words.

I sense that what is emerging is important and relevant to our purpose, not as a reflection of what has already been said, but as a new brilliance that is conceived partially by what has been intimated and partially by what I perceive as undefined potential. It is a sensory experience, one of anticipation and excitement, coupled with glimpses of visual and sensual memories.

I am fascinated by what just happened; because it provides important insight into 'translation process' that happens when bridging intuited sense with language expression. This is really

significant to my inquiry, given the struggle that I speak of in earlier narratives, to translate felt knowing into clear verbal discourse.

To know something in non-verbal, sensual images is one thing, to express that knowing (presenting to others), takes a different kind of mental activity that is perhaps more sensitive to emotional triggers.

In the following piece of writing, I am reflecting on a conversation I had yesterday with another team member, on the same project. I had been provided with a series of reports, mostly quantitative in nature; the first, findings from a 'quick scan analysis' of the organisation in order to determine its financial health. The second report was a narrative report, highlighting certain problems and perceived needs of the organisation. My job is to read reports, and based on my professional knowledge and experience, to infer from them, what might be going on and identify potential areas for consultancy support.

As I am reading the report I am creating mental and sensual images and associations, based on a lifetime of experiences and recent experiences with staff at my horse stables in Sri Lanka. Certain words and phrases, resonate more than others; 'quality issues', 'high absenteeism', 'high employee turnover', 'inability to hire qualified staff' in my mind I am creating associations with my own lived experience over the last fifteen years of running businesses in Sri Lanka. I replay scenarios, short micro-movies, that are more sensed, than seen or languaged.

Immediately, I recognise familiar patterns and draw conclusions about likely causes. It is tempting to jump to conclusions, and in my mind I am already languaging a proposal.

We continue our journey, following the energy around voice and voiceless-ness. I want to share a profound experience that I had, around six years ago, whilst on assignment in Bangladesh. The reason I am including this story, is for its contribution to my own knowledge and experience around voice, gender and power-politics.

It is important to share something of the context around this experience, through a lengthy framing of the overall situation (at that time) regarding acid attacks in Bangladesh.

The acid survivors

In the following narrative, I am sharing an experience from my days as an international development consultant. I am in Bangladesh and working for a charitable agency that cares for survivors of acid attack. In those days, acid attacks on women were commonplace in a culture where gender violence remains a major issue.

“Despite specialized criminal laws for protecting women and children - the 2000 Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children Act, the 1980 Dowry Prohibition Act, and the 2002 Acid Violence Control Act, to name a few - the incidence of violence against women has not decreased in any significant manner. In Bangladesh, one particularly vicious and damaging form of violence is acid throwing. Acid is a corrosive substance that can burn holes in wood and metal. When acid is thrown on a person, the skin tissue melts, in some cases dissolving the bones or leaving the bones underneath exposed causing irreparable damage. Most seriously, acid striking the face can cause the loss of hearing, one or both eyes, or irreparable damage to hands raised in defence. In most cases, permanent physical disfigurement is unavoidable and serious disability, frequent. Acid attacks also have traumatic psychological and social consequences. Many survivors experience a dramatic change in their lifestyle. Most stop their education or work during the lengthy recovery or beyond, due to disfigurement. Survivors often face social isolation damaging to their self-esteem and economic position. An unmarried women attacked with acid will likely never marry. Often, they are housebound for fear of social repercussions. The social stigma against this form of violence is common, as many believe the survivor committed something to encourage the attack.” (Source: Acid Survivors Foundation website)

One of the first comprehensive studies of acid violence was carried out by UNICEF in December 1999 and updated in 2002¹. According to this study, acid violence was gendered violence: in 2002, 65% of the survivors were women, of whom 53% were attacked because they repelled unwanted offers of marriage or sexual advances, or because there were disputes about their dowry, or other family matters. In addition, disputes over land were a frequent cause - 27% of all cases in 2002. Survivors were young people (28% under 18 years in 2002), or those of middle age (29% between the ages of 25 to 34). Attacks occurred national wide, mostly affecting the poor. Acid violence is generally higher in

¹The December 1999 study was titled: *A Situational Assessment of Acid Violence in Bangladesh*. A summary of the 1999 study with updated 2002 data was published by the researcher, Kate Wesson in the journal *Development in Practice*, February 2002. The 2002 situational information presented in this paragraph is taken from this article.

the summer months with attacks increasing after May and beginning to decline in October. Though males are affected, the overwhelming major of victims are women.

I am providing statistics that were available at the time I undertook this work during 2009-2010. I have included them to illustrate the scale and nature of the issue. It is also out of the deepest respect for the Foundation that is tackling this gender-related violent crime aimed to destroy women by robbing them of their agency, dignity and voice. Despite this, these women are some of the most inspiring and influential I have had the privilege to work with. I want to learn from them.

BEAUTY POWER AND VOICE

By some strange twist of fate, today I found myself in a hospital ward looking into the terrified eyes of a 12-year-old Bangladeshi girl. Barely more than a child, Shani has already seen far too much of life's cruelties. Married off by her parents to a beggar man, Shani was attacked with acid 2 weeks ago, by a rejected suitor. The tell-tale black stain that masks half of her beautiful face indicates the early stages of a deep burn that will disfigure her for the rest of her life. Looking into her angry and wounded soul, I suspect the psychological wounds will never heal. Despite the best effort of the amazing medical team, Shani is resolutely refuses vital surgery that will save her from contracture and permanent disfigurement.

Kanthi is only three. The attacker's intended victim was Kanthi's aunt. Kanthi was sleeping in her aunt's bed and as a result suffered severe burns to her head and body. Beautiful big bright eyes peered from under swaddling bandages. It was all I could do to hold back the tears as she attempted a painful half smile at the soft furry monkey, I fortuitously picked up at the Duty-Free in Colombo.

Jonni is six years-old, though he could easily pass for three or four. He excitedly runs around the corridors of the hospital and cheekily peers at me from around the corner. The Acid Survivors Foundation is his home and the staff his family. In his young life he has already experienced seven operations to restore his jaw and throat, including reconstructive surgery in Hong Kong. Jonni was fed acid by his uncle when he was just one month old, in an attempt to acquire land from Jonni's father.

You might be surprised to learn that the small ASF hospital in the backstreets of Dhaka, Bangladesh is a place of tremendous fun, love and hope. Meeting the resident surgeon, Dr Dawsen, a jolly, bear of a man, and his team, I am convinced that his healing touch goes far beyond the surgeon's knife. From the girls who run the physiotherapy team to gifted surgeons who perform small miracles every day in

an operating theatre that would be considered primitive at best anywhere in the developed world, their love and commitment is tangible.

Many of the nurses and the helpers, were themselves victims of burns. Their names: Beauty, Lovely, Dolly, an unsettling reminder of the superficial values that now parody, their ugly, angry scars.

Tahmina holds my hand. She leans forward and whispers in my ear "you are very beautiful" and I smile. "No. YOU are beautiful" I find myself saying and I realise that I really mean it. Her scarred face prettily decorated with strong makeup and hair hanging seductively over one eye. Only when she leans forward, I see the damaged cornea, hidden behind her silky curtain of black hair. She is beautiful and I tell her again with conviction. Only a pure heart could possibly radiate such beauty through such a broken mask.

I am Ineke Pitts, British-born expatriate from the South West of England, living and working in Sri Lanka for the last 14 years and currently Branch Director for MDF South Asia. My work regularly takes me to unusual places to meet extraordinary people doing exceptional things; frequently in Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as Sri Lanka. My job and that of my colleagues, is to help organizations like ASF to prepare a logical framework for their programme and that helps them manage the programme more effectively and also helps them to secure important funding. I don't know by what force or fate; I find myself here in Bangladesh with these courageous people; but I am certain I will be changed by this experience.

I wrote this account from my hotel room, in the evening of the same day. I was overwhelmed by a whole range of thoughts and emotions that included shock, shame, love and gratitude. It also raises issues of identity and purpose: 'how and why, did this young woman from Salisbury, find herself here?'

I am sharing this story now, as it reminds me of lengths that people will go to, to try to silence one another. It also illustrates issues around gender, power and voice that these courageous survivors embody. In the case of Shani, we see a twelve-year-old girl, still a child, rejected by her family, as many girl children are in Bangladesh, and sold to a beggar. She is pursued and attacked by another man for rejecting his advances. I am overwhelmed by her incredible strength of will, despite everything she has endured at her young age, she still fights for the right to choose her own fate. Here is a child, who has stood up for herself and been viciously attacked as a result. Even now, through her pain, she refuses 'vital surgery that will save her from contracture and permanent disfigurement'.

The story of three-year old Kanthi is equally heart breaking. I was grateful that I had thought to pick up some toys at the airport and could at least reach out to her with the soft furry monkey as my proxy.

Although there were no words in any language that could soothe her pain; I hoped that in some small way it would help.

Jonni has literally been rendered voiceless by his uncle; who destroyed Jonni's throat and vocal chords by feeding him acid when he was a baby. Surrounded by his surrogate family at the hospital, he runs around like any young boy, unaware of how different he is from other boys his age. He is surrounded by love; he is a favourite of all the nurses and doctors and because he has been with them since he was very small. He is just a normal child with a cheeky grin, running around and getting under everyone's feet with no comprehension or fear of challenges that lie ahead of him in life.

The ASF hospital is a place of refuge and it is a place with its own norms around work, gender and beauty. Many of the staff that work there are survivors themselves; some are relatives of survivors. The hospital and the offices are all in one building, in a back street of Dhaka, anonymous from the front; to protect survivors and staff from threats by those, who prefer the survivors to be invisible or permanently silenced, because their words (the survivors' stories), threaten to bring shame and dishonour to, (and possible criminal action against) the perpetrators and their families.

The survivors create a new identity and new names, as an act of defiance against the brutality that robbed them of their physical beauty, and a system that judges women against different set of standards from men. I wonder what the connection is between beauty, power and voice.

My exchange with Tahmina unsettles me. Her face is badly scarred and she is wearing a thick layer of makeup and bright blue eye shadow on her good eye, to cover over the scars. I am self-conscious for a split second, caught off guard by her comment 'you are beautiful'. A wave of compassion and connection overwhelms me and I 'see' the beauty of this woman behind her veil of hair and heavy makeup.

I am in shock from this deeply moving experience. In the last paragraph, I'm asking why me? By what series of strange coincidences did I end up in Bangladesh and with opportunity to experience something so profound? I feel privileged and deeply grateful.

Stepping back to look at the picture, I see a lot in this story that speaks of voiceless-ness and power. I see perpetrators of this heinous crime as people desperate to silence the powerful voices of these survivors. In many cases, this was a deliberate act of defilement, as if by robbing the woman of her beauty, she would lose her power in society (such that it is) and be destined to a life as an outcast. What

I experienced was the tenacity and courage of these survivors, who, with the support of this charitable organisation, reclaimed their beauty by redefining it on their terms, and speaking out against this social injustice with confidence and determination.

I was humbled, and I was tested. The burn injuries are ugly and shocking to look at. I had to make instant micro decisions whether to look away, pretend I didn't see the melted flesh, or to look with honesty and compassion, and hope it didn't come across as pity. I want to be the person that Tahmina thinks I am. I want to do and say the right thing, but I am uncertain what that is. I thought about my friend 'C', a person with great agency that I admire for her deep compassion and integrity. What would she do, how would she be? I subjugated thoughts and feelings around what was right or wrong, what was appropriate or not, and just let compassion take over.

Observation: I don't know how to be so I emulate the behaviour of a person I admire. I have no reference data that tells me how to be, so I borrow someone else's example to help me to act with integrity in this new situation.

Tahmina holds my hand. She leans forward and whispers in my ear "you are very beautiful" and I smile. "No. YOU are beautiful" I find myself saying and I realise that I really mean it. [..]

She is beautiful and I tell her again with conviction. Only a pure heart could possibly radiate such beauty through such a broken mask.

This is why I say "I realise that I really mean it" In my head I was trying to be appropriate and authentic; once I connected with compassion, I found myself acting authentically without having to put on an act or emulate someone else. From my earlier writing I recognise this complex issue around truth and beauty showing up again and I am asking myself what it's all about.

There is a lot in the first piece of narrative (Tea with Great Aunty Greta) that is around the contrast in the way that my mother and I are dressed, compared to my Great Aunt; yet I gravitate towards her and seek out her approval – As suggested by the 'conspiratorial wink'. It is also perhaps significant that during my teenage years, my mother had a shop at the front of our house called 'Anneke's Fashions'. It felt as if she valued outward show above inward beauty, and this was an embarrassment to me, even as a young child.

My mother came to Bangladesh at the time I was working with the Acid Survivors. It was important to me that she met these amazing people, and understood the importance of the work I was doing. I was

very proud that she was brave enough to suffer the discomfort of Dhaka and its pollution and craziness; but I was disappointed that she didn't want to meet the Acid Survivor Women, and on the one occasion, we met with the Dutch donors over lunch. She was far more interested in whether her vegetables were sufficiently cooked (given her delicate stomach), than in the programme we were supporting, and the amazing women who were leading it. When the need for comfort is inbred into your DNA people find it difficult to see past, and work and feel through it. I saw it in my mother's behavior in Bangladesh, and in many consultants working in this cross-cultural arena.

Am I like this too?

This is another example of my rejection of behaviours of my mother that I have come to associate with feminine archetype. I am uncomfortable with too much attention to outward appearance, possibly as a result of poor body image as a child, yet I aspire to be pretty 'like other girls'. I reject female company and prefer to connect with men as 'one of the boys' to avoid the possible rejection of not being pretty enough. These women at the Acid Survivors hospital have lost their looks but they still have dignity, courage and inner beauty. I am challenged by this as it breaks with stereotypical conditioning. The presence of my mother and her behaviour during this time confronts me. I ask 'am I like this too?'

There is a lot that has surfaced in this inquiry. The purpose of this final section is to distil out really significant insights, and unanswered questions around voice, voiceless-ness, power, agency and identity. I'm not clear at this point if voiceless-ness and silence are the same, and similarly if agency is just another form of power. I am keeping all the terms; setting them out like actors in a play in the understanding that their characteristics will reveal themselves through the process of this continuing inquiry. Perhaps like a 'whodunnit' there will only be one character remaining at the end. At this point in the tradition of all good detective stories, they are all suspects.

The first insight is my search for identity; 'who am I really?' It is clear to me from the first narrative that there is an emerging sense of disconnection from my parents' ontology, and a sense of isolation in recognizing that my mother's view of the world is very different to what I instinctively feel is right. I also inquire into this relationship in Chapter Five. This is particularly upsetting, as I seem to be seeking her approval and validation, even up to the point as a mature adult that she comes to visit me on an important assignment in Bangladesh. I am hoping that she will change, and am disappointed and that she remains stuck within a paradigm that to me, feels shallow, and I recognise this as something I see

everywhere, particularly in the development community. I need to know if I am like this too and am pretending otherwise; am I authentic, or just a good actor?

The second insight is the need for connection; to 'fit in'. I feel like I am looking for my clan, a community where I fit in and am accepted and understood. I have seen this before in Chapter Five. It is alluded to in the 'conspiratorial wink' from my great aunt. I desperately want to fit in amongst this dinner party of intellectuals and at the directors' meeting, but I lack agency to command attention and respect I crave. I speak of feeling incomplete and that the search for intimacy, is a journey towards completion, wholeness and acceptance. This means taking on an identity that fits and is approved of – 'the attractive person', 'the good girl', 'the smart person', the 'genuine person'; all identities that I wear in order to be accepted. However, without these cloaks, I am accepted without question by the acid survivors' community. What have I done to deserve this?

The third insight, is that I am either brilliantly lucid, or stupidly blank. I feel in my heart that I have capacity for brilliance. There are people in my life that I respect and admire who tell me so. I have achieved more than I ever imagined possible, and experience brilliance, in the way I solve problems and innovate daily. On the other-hand, I am dogged by self-doubt. I accept that in my childhood, I was under constant critical eye of parents who lacked the tools to nurture me through positive re-enforcement, and instead applied criticism as a default. Hence, I grew up believing myself to be fundamentally flawed. I tend to see myself at the extreme of these two poles. I am either dazzlingly brilliant, or stupidly ignorant, depending on the mental and emotional capacity that I apply to the task in hand. There is an embodied phenomenological response to this dichotomy, that renders me either lucid and coherent, or blank and stammering.

The fourth insight, is an important lesson I learned from the acid attack survivors. I experienced the way in which they redefined themselves, and took back the agency that was robbed from them, by doing things on their terms, rather than trying to conform to a socially constructed stereotype. I was reminded of something I had read earlier by Joyce Fletcher in relation to the politics of language: 'Words can be oppressive. Language can never be isolated from its cultural and political roots. Thus language not only reflects a certain reality, it also actively creates that reality and sustains power relations that depend on it.' (Fletcher, 1998, p23).

This reminds me that language and voice are outward expressions of our inner world. When the inner world is at peace with itself, voice is an expression of that self-confidence, when inside I am feeling

uncertain, insecure, or I am being inauthentic in order to 'fit in', then my ability to express myself is impacted.

The final scene in this painting is one that took place last week. I want to give a little context so that the reader can understand how differently I am positioned now, to earlier times illustrated in this inquiry. I was asked to join an elite team of just three consultants working on an international aid funded project to build resilience in small businesses. I am working for one of the top four international consulting firms in the world. I was chosen because of my track record, and because of my approach to adult learning which is one of a synthesis of embodiment and cognitive knowing.

Challenging voiceless-ness through embodied approaches

I am at a client's workplace to deliver a workshop on strategy. This is my third meeting with the management team. At the last session I spoke with each of them on a one-on-one basis. I am shocked to find, in the presence of their young CEO, they are struck dumb.

Six blank faces stare up at me; I see a familiar look of fear. Perhaps they didn't understand my English, I repeat the question slowly, measuring each word. Still there is no response, not even a nod of acknowledgement. The room feels like a vacuum and I am being sucked into its void. I smile and try not to show my irritation. I am happy that the CEO is following my instructions to remain silent; still I wonder if her presence is affecting them.

I am standing in the Boardroom of my client's factory with her senior management team. We are about to begin a facilitated Strategic Planning workshop

I have to break this deadlock. I start to feel seeds of failure, a tension in my shoulders and queasiness in my stomach, as if this is a reflection on my ability as a facilitator, or as a person. Perhaps they don't like me. I take a deep intentional breath, smile and tell myself 'you got this'.

I dramatically tear off a sheet of the precious flipchart paper, and start rolling it into a ball. I noticed it had been cut with great care into half-size sheets with scissors and pinned to the whiteboard behind me. I had been rationed just six sheets. I hoped that my wanton disregard for this apparently precious resource, might jolt them out of this catatonia. I took the rolled up ball and threw it to one of the group members. 'Nalin, what do you think is the main problem we are dealing with here? Take your time, there are no wrong answers', I added encouragingly.

His eyes widened, and I imagined I could see the neurons firing behind his eyes, searching for the right response, the correct answer to this question. It was almost as if his survival depended on it.

I briefly wondered if the CEO had been honest with me, that perhaps behind her sweet demeanour she was a fierce and intimidating force. I glanced at her briefly, but saw no evidence of this.

‘Would someone like to translate the question into Sinhala, in case it is not clear?’ I smiled again weighing up the chance I would further alienate the group by alluding to their lack of language proficiency. I know they can speak English, because previously I had met with them one-on-one. Still there is silence. They were waiting for me, willing me to give them the answers, and I was reluctant to do this, knowing how easy it would be for me to guide them in the direction that I wanted them to go.

‘Ok let’s do a small exercise.’ I took command, and they seemed tangibly relieved. I put them into three teams, with the CEO working on her own, and asked them to draw a picture of the organisation without using words. I asked the CEO to translate the ideal of ‘metaphor’ and ‘analogy into Sinhala, which sparked a small discussion, and I handed out three large boxes of children’s crayons. I had come prepared for this exercise, which is one I have done before, however this time, as a result of my inquiry, understand with much more depth, what is going on, and how and why non-verbal expression is so effective.

With only a slight hesitation, the managers started drawing. I noticed that it was the ladies that picked up the crayons first, and began enthusiastically to draw. Of the two men present, one sat back and watched his teammate draw, offering a few inputs but never picking up a crayon.

The three pictures were very different, each rich with its own meaning. The first depicted a stationary bus with workers as passengers and management pushing and driving. The HR team was depicted as a bus conductor standing at the entrance, monitoring who came on board and who left.

The second picture depicted a raging river, which the artists explained was the management of the organisation. The fish being swept along by the flow were the workers she explained. I was starting to get a sense of why the organisation is having issues around productivity, quality and employee satisfaction.

The final drawing was perhaps the most revealing. The young CEO had drawn a standing unicorn with a long flowing purple mane and rainbows, pink and blue stars on its body. She explained that this represented a magical and unique organisation, and the stars and rainbows are the staff. ‘Where are you?’ I asked, ‘and where are the unicorn’s eyes?’ – A blind rider-less unicorn is how she describes the organisation that she is running.

As a result of my inquiry, I feel confident to challenge each of these anomalies as I see them expressed non-verbally. ‘Why are the employees depicted as passenger?’, ‘Why are they just swimming with the tide?’ ‘Where is their effort and engagement?’, ‘Why is your unicorn blind, and where is the rider?’ These questions and more allowed the group to interact with the organizational issues from the safe distance of a metaphor. We now faced the significant task of translating the image into words. I know from my inquiry, that this is the point where we are danger of losing the richness that is invested in the drawings, much of which is still hidden. Choosing the right words, there is a danger that they will focus on not offending anyone, making it nice, appropriate and acceptable rather than dwelling in the dis-functionality that the drawings have revealed.

I decide to stay in the metaphor. and ask the groups to now reflect on what they see and what it represents to them. Finally, I ask the three teams to work together on just one picture that ‘corrects’ all anomalies in the other pictures and shows the organisation as a well-functioning highly successful organisation. I left the room to create a sense of kinship. They would now work as a team to present something to me (the outsider); or so I hoped.

It took just five minutes. They had filled a sheet with images and it is evident that they have all contributed, to have achieved it in such a short time. The image is of an all-terrain vehicle struggling through deep mud with CEO walking in front guiding the vehicle and the production management at the wheel. The HR team members are running around removing rocks and generally helping to get the vehicle moving forwards. Significant by their absence are the workers, (who I hope aren’t still sitting as passengers in the back).

In answer to my question, the manager explained, they are the engine, and our processes are the wheels. I remember letting out a big breath and allowing a broad smile to cross my face. ‘YES!’ I exclaimed out loud. I could see that they were starting to understand the work that they needed to do. Now we had a rich metaphor that I could work with to help the team to redress imbalances in roles and perceptions. We need a few more analogies, I explained to them; this is just a start.

Stepping back, I see myself working with metaphor and non-verbal tools to overcome issues around silence. I am recognizing that silence doesn’t necessarily mean that people have nothing to say or that they don’t know what to say. It can simply be as a result of being overwhelmed by the need to speak in an environment that feels unsafe. Using the metaphorical language of drawing, they were able to express themselves safely and articulately. What was revealed through the drawings was a complex mismatch of perspectives, perceptions and expectations. I recognise the lack of leadership and vision,

and the need to mentor the CEO to develop her own agency and her own authentic voice. I am recommending that I take her through a horse-assisted coaching session which is also an embodied and metaphorical process in which she will come to recognise the layers of protective mechanisms preventing her from being authoritative.

Through the inquiry so far, I have come to recognise that imagery and embodied experience is fundamental to understanding. I see that associations and constellation of images and senses that emerge spontaneously are as important, if not more so than the carefully thought through languaged explanations. I have also come to recognise that voice and voicelessness have little to do with outward expression and everything to do with what is happening in the inner world.

Conclusions on Voice and Voicelessness

Stepping back to the questions at the beginning of this chapter, ‘What is going on when I am silenced?’, and ‘How do I break-through silence and find an authentic voice?’ I am sharing my insights as follows:

I have learned that silence is a way that my body unconsciously deals with situations that feel risky. Either because I am intimidated by the company I am with, because I am ill prepared, or because if I say the wrong thing it could be dangerous for me, psychologically or emotionally. This is connected with childhood feelings of inadequacy, and lacking of self-confidence, and also because I am drawn towards people who replay the childhood dynamics of an over-bearing critical parent.

To break through silence, I first need to recognise where the anxiety is coming from and assure that I have prepared myself well, that I am calm and relaxed, and able to ask as many questions as necessary to ‘bring the conversation’ onto territory where I feel enabled and empowered to contribute. As someone who aspires to continually improve myself, I will frequently engage with people who know more than me. My challenge is to embrace the not-knowing; to step outside of my comfort zone and remain curious rather than protective. In respect to the Women’s Development Model, this means working towards and within a constructed knowing paradigm, and requires moving on from old habits and reflexes that I am increasingly aware of.

Chapter seven – the piece on embodied knowing

This is me finding a space to explore what I know implicitly and try to understand why it's important

'Knowledge and society only exist embodied - that is, flawed.' (Elbow, 1983, p328)

This is me finding a space to explore what I know implicitly and try to understand why it's important

Our visit to the exhibition has brought us to an art workshop. In the centre of the gallery is a large plain canvas. The process of sense-making is an active one, and understanding and interpretation is emergent and spontaneous. I learn through the 'doing' rather than in the reflecting.

In the last two chapters you will have seen me explore my epistemological development against feminist models, and in tension with the masculine. A significant insight has been the influence of embodiment on primitive responses to the world, and my ability to understand. Up to now much of my inquiry has been in relation to historical narratives, both my own and those of others in the literature I am engaged with. This inquiry is different, as it is firmly located in the present, which as Paul Hunting reminds me, 'is the only place where truth resides' (Hunting, 2016, p152). I am using myself as a lab rat, to experience embodied learning from the inside.

What you will see, is a framing around the relevance of horses to my inquiry and a brief history of my life with horses. Next is a deep dive into a series of embodied learning experiences, guided by a Feldenkrais practitioner. Next you will see me dig into the roots of the Feldenkrais method and Émile Coué, the grandfather of embodied ways of knowing, to understand something of the history to this approach.

I am also engaging with the ideas of Les Todres 'Embodied Inquiry' (2011), who supports the idea of sense-making as something other than a personal cognitive process. He talks about 'participation of the lived body as an authenticating or validating procedure'. (Todres, 2011, p31). For me, this doesn't go far enough. My claim is that embodiment is more than validation, it is the primal source of knowing and validation of understanding; behind and beyond language.

'Conscious thought is languaged and a uniquely human trait, but behind and beyond language we communicate with the world around us through our sensing bodies, (Landes (2014), p190; Abrahm, 1997, p56 & 57).

I am taking a moment to share the context for this inquiry, placing it within a life-time love of horses and an ongoing struggle to overcome a lack of belief in myself and my riding.

'[M]ood is intimate to understanding: [...] In its immediate concreteness, the appearance of things always first tells us about the state of our relationship to them. Before we reflectively abstract our

understanding, we 'register' how we are in relation to things in a pre-reflective and un-thematised manner. Such pre-reflective 'registrations' functions as a background quality that is not merely neutral, but colours our perceptions and understandings with emotional texture. (Todres 2011, p11).

This reminds me of the reciprocity of my work with horses. I come with my fears, my worries and my expectations and impose them on my work and relationship with the horse. This is not a static relationship, but an engaged reciprocal one, and I have duty to the horse to be aware of this unconscious energy and reflexes.

Similarly, this reminds me of the reciprocity with my reader, and my duty to set the mood for you too. For this purpose, I am setting out the background story which explains the significance of horses in my life, and the relevance of my current relationship with them. It is only from this place that you can abstract your own understanding.

Framing – My story with horses

I am working with one of my horses, Valentina, a native Indian breed with iconic curled ears. There is a powerful rationale behind working with horses rather than other people, or any other domesticated animal, and it lies in their flight or fight response. Unlike a cat or dog, a horse is a prey animal with a highly tuned but primitive social intelligence that is continuously asking the question 'is it safe?'

I have loved horses since my mother bought me horse riding lessons at the age of ten. I spent most of my weekends as a teenager, volunteering at the local stables. I remember sitting in the old caravan cradling a cup of sweet tea and a crumbling digestive biscuit, while older girls put on pony voices and made us laugh. It was one of the few places where I felt OK about myself.

I loved the horses with a passion; my bedroom was full of everything horsey and my 'rough book' at school full of doodles of the riding stables I was going to have when I grew up. I learned every little detail of how to take care of them, and each year, with equal optimism, took part in the WH Smith's 'Win a Pony' competition. I took this mission with all seriousness and determination to win. Each year I was more certain, that this time I would succeed. Throughout my life, horses have been a place of 'coming home'. Horses and horsey places felt comfortably messy; a small rebellion against the tidiness required of me at home. One day my neighbour announced he was buying a pony for his daughter and a horse for himself. He asked me to share the horse with him, so that his daughter, my best friend, didn't have to ride alone. The horse was called Nimbus, a big old grey cob; he was my best friend. After

several happy years, Nimbus had a heart attack and died while I was out riding him. I felt a deep sense of guilt. It was as if somehow, through my neglect, his death was my fault.

It was many years later, living in Hong Kong that I took it up again, riding at the Hong Kong Jockey Club Public Riding School. I soon learned that my technique was all wrong. I had learned a lot of ‘bad’ habits that were tough to shift, and I came to believe that I was a hopeless rider. I tried really hard to improve myself. I watched videos and read books, but each time I rode with my old instructor from Hong Kong, she would yell at me that my arms were too stiff, my elbows bent out, my shoulders crooked, my legs too far forwards. She tried her best, and I did too, but I just couldn’t seem to grasp what I was doing wrong, and even worse, I started to think I was hurting the horse. By now, I had six horses at my home in Sri Lanka. Gradually, I found more and more reasons not to ride them, except for the occasional ride out, I believed my riding days were over and told myself I was just as happy to watch others doing the riding.

In 2017 the lease was up on my Sri Lanka home, and I needed to find a new place for myself and my ten horses and ponies. Eventually, I found a three-acre site with a small bungalow in the centre. I wrote a business proposal and managed to secure funds to build stables, and I set up Ceylon Riding Club with a local business woman. It was the first and only English riding school in the country. It was a tough journey. The horses were sick and lame for several months after we moved. I had no proper instructor and little understanding of what I had taken on. I was living my dream, but at times it was a nightmare. I was working full time as an international consultant in order to pay bills, spending most of my time on assignment in Afghanistan and Bangladesh, and still only just managing to cover expenses. I suffered an emotional breakdown, after the events that I detail in Chapter 5, and I quit my job to focus on building up the riding school.

Slowly things started to turn around for the school, we had built up a regular membership of around one hundred. Finally, I was able to enjoy a healthy and relatively stress-free life style, and the business was growing and beginning to cover its costs. Then on Easter Sunday 2019 six terrorist bombs exploded in churches and hotels around Colombo. Many people died, together with the fragile tourist industry and economy. Parents took their children out of school, and some left the country for good. It took six-months for the business to recover, and I took a short term contract with a charitable organisation just to pay the bills. We recovered, and brought in a lot of new clients, including two schools. The future was looking bright again and we had plans to expand and buy more horses. Then the Corona Virus struck. Exactly one year after the Easter bombings, we are under strict lockdown again, this time for an

unknown period. We have had no income for more than six weeks. Luckily, I now have Keith, a volunteer and experienced equestrian, who helps me to run the school. Between the two of us, with huge effort, we have managed to keep the horses fed and exercised. As I described at the beginning of this thesis, these days have been of mixed blessing, I have come to build a closer relationship with my horses and with my own body.

Towards the end of last year, I had started riding again. I lacked confidence and still held a deep belief that I was useless, but with encouragement from Hana, a friend and volunteer from Czech Republic, and under Keith's guidance, I began to consider that I wasn't beyond help.

A lot of my problem relating to horse riding, is a lack of confidence. I am a successful consultant turned entrepreneur, running her own business, following her passion and experiencing difficult times. The confidence I exude as a consultant, is undermined by my emotional entanglement with my horses. On top of this, I have lost my nerve after a fall, and I know that the horse senses this. I am faced with a choice to give up and call it a day, or to try a different approach. Hana intervenes and encourages me to try again, but this time using imagery rather than words.

Horses are hardwired for social intelligence. They continually ask of us (and of one another), 'are you the boss or am I?' and 'is it safe to be around you?' These signals are sent and received non-verbally. It can't be faked, which is why horses act as the perfect mirror. My own hesitation and fear is communicated to my horse. I know this, and I know that the chances of my taking a fall are much greater, until I can overcome this. In 2016 I met psychologist and philosopher Paul Hunting, and began to work together with him to develop a leadership practice that involved working with horses. I describe this in more detail in the practice account in Chapter 10.

THE FIRST SESSION

Valentina is a black Sindhi mare with a white star. She is seven years old and I have had her from the age of two. She has the iconic curled ears of an Indian horse but unlike the Marawari or the Arabian horses, the Sindhi is bred as a farm horse, she is big and strong and designed for endurance riding and weight carrying. Valentina was bred in Sri Lanka and has some conformational issues, coming from a small herd of interbred mares. Her front feet point inwards and because this was not corrected at a young age, she has a tendency to stumble and on a few occasions she has tripped and literally fallen flat on her face. On the two occasions this happened while I was riding her, I was catapulted over her shoulder and onto the ground head first. Luckily I was wearing a safety helmet, but it was a shock, I injured my shoulder and neck, and both of us were left wary. Each time I rode her after that she sensed

my hesitancy and that caused her to feel unsafe. As time went by, I became more fearful of falling off. It has been two years since the last accident and we are not making much progress. I put it down to me being no good as a rider, and came up with a thousand reasons not to ride.

Hana is from the Czech Republic. She volunteers as an instructor at my stables and despite the fact that she rides beautifully and elegantly, she is constantly looking for ways to improve her position and connection with the horse. She introduced me to the Ritter Dressage online instructive videos, and to the visual imagery approach to improving horse riding, that she was following herself. She encouraged me to get back in the saddle, and gave me some ideas on how to use sensual imagery to improve my position in the saddle. I have a tendency to ride with my legs too far forward; this is a bad habit instilled in me in a life-time of riding incorrectly. 'Imagine that your knees are attached to a long pole and you are touching the ground with the end of the pole, she said. With this image in mind, I pointed my knees towards the ground and immediately and automatically my legs moved into the correct position. I was inspired by photos and videos she took of me riding in the correct position for the first time in my life.

Keith came on board at the stables as a coach and I asked him to help me to regain my confidence and balance with Valentina. We decided to focus on getting Valentina going nicely in walk and then in trot before attempting anything faster. At first it was a battle of wits and of strength. She would pull the reins out of my hands by violently jerking her head forwards and down. It was frustrating and exhausting and neither of us was enjoying the experience.

Over time, I got a stronger and more confident, but I still haven't plucked up courage to work her in canter, which is a faster, three beat stride and one that requires us to be in perfect balance. The first time I fell off Valentina was doing a canter transition. The outbreak of Covid-19 and extra workload at the stables gave me the perfect excuse to stop riding again.

THE FELEDNKRAIS COACH

It has been two weeks of shutdown in Sri Lanka, and my head is filled with fears of impending doom. I get through the day on auto-pilot. I sleep restlessly and my body aches from tension; I am addicted to stories of an impending Armageddon on social media.

Last night, again sleep eluded me. Scanning through pages on social media, I found myself on a live chat page with 'Ritter Dressage' run by German dressage coach, Thomas Ritter and his American wife Shana. I joined the session as he was speaking with an English lady, presumably another dressage coach. The title of the session, was 'softening your hands', alluding to the contact between a horse and a rider through the reins; something I have always struggled with as a horse rider.

Though I have a stable full of horses in my garden, I stopped riding about three months ago. The excuses I give myself and others range from ‘I am too stressed’, ‘I don’t have time’, to ‘It’s too hot’, or ‘I prefer to watch others ride’. The truth is I am scared that I am a bad rider, that I am no good, awkward and will cause discomfort to the horse by being too heavy. I know this is rubbish, but I lack confidence and commitment to even give it a try, and it’s so easy to find excuses not to.

As I listened to the live chat, I heard an English lady’s voice, ‘imagine your upper body is like a fountain of water, surging up from your pelvis and flowing down from your shoulders to your arms. Your head is like a ball kept floating on the top of the fountain, supported by the water flow.’

I immediately felt a release in my shoulders. I hadn’t realized how tightly I was holding them. She went on to describe three rings in the body; one inside the pelvis, one at the top rib and one around the head band. ‘They need to be in alignment’ she explained. I visualized a spiral spring, linking my pelvis to my collarbone and to my head. Even though I was lying down in bed, in my head I was sitting on the horse, and I felt centred and light. Texts were scrolling up on the lower part of the screen with heart emojis and smiling faces; participants all around the world were joining in the live chat with questions and comments.

I typed in a greeting and asked a question: ‘I have a tension in one shoulder that makes me lopsided, do you have any suggestions for me?’ I waited expectantly. It felt strange to be participating in this chat experience whilst lying in my nightshirt in bed at 02:00am. It felt like a strange dream. Then I heard him speaking my name. “We have a question from Ineke Ann Pitts.” He was talking directly to me from Germany. I felt the attention of a hundred people across the globe. It was a strange sensation of inappropriate intimacy, as I lay barely clad in my bed, in the dark. The dressage coaches gave me a lot of really good ideas and inputs, taking time and attention away from the group to focus on my question. Then the English lady, who I later found out was called Catherine McCrum said, “Imagine your collarbone is smiling”. The image and the accompanying imagined experience, really struck me. I could already feel my chest opening up and expanding and long-held tension dissipating from my neck and shoulders.

The title of the session was “Awareness through Movement”, a lesson by Feldenkrais Practitioner, Catherine McCrum; the English lady. I am curious to learn more about the Feldenkrais method which I look up on social media. I learn that it is a ‘a synthesis of biology, physics, neuroscience, and motor development, and is designed to interact with the brain’s neuroplasticity to benefit the body.’ The Feldenkrais website, (www.Feldenkrais.com) claims that ‘By interacting with the brain’s naturally flexible, always-learning quality, Feldenkrais lessons can facilitate development of new neurological

pathways to expand our options for healthy posture, movement, musculoskeletal organization, and self-use.

I am curious to learn more about the man behind the technique. I learn that Dr Moshe Feldenkrais, (who died in 1984), was a martial arts expert who developed the technique, prompted by a chronic knee injury. It uses a combination of physics, body mechanics, neurology, learning theory and psychology; a 'synthesis of science and aesthetics' which he called the Feldenkrais Method. Dr Feldenkrais wrote five books about the method as well as four books on Judo. In the mid-1960s he published "Mind and Body" and "Bodily Expression."

Feldenkrais was influenced by some of the greatest scientists and philosophers of his time. While convalescing from his knee injury, he wrote Autosuggestion (1930), a translation from English to Hebrew of Charles Brooks' work on Émile Coué's system of autosuggestion, together with two chapters that he wrote himself. He studied the 'Alexander Technique' (F. M. Alexander 1869 – 1955) and was also influenced by the spiritual teacher, Armenian philosopher, composer and writer, George Gurdjieff.

THE SECOND SESSION

In the morning I put on my jodhpurs and riding boots early and surprised everyone by announcing I was going to ride my horse. It was a wonderful experience. I rotated the sensual imagery of the water fountain, the three rings and the smiling collarbone. Valentina seemed to respond differently, she was softer in my hands, light to control and her curled ears were pricked up and forwards, signifying that she was relaxed and attentive.

After riding, my mood has shifted. I feel more positive than I have in days and am writing at my laptop rather than procrastinating.

I turn to the reading material from yesterday, (Todres, Embodied Enquiry; phenomenological touchstones for research, psychotherapy and spirituality, 2011), and am drawn to a paragraph I had jotted down in my notes:

[..] 'sense-making' is not just a personal cognitive process but requires participation of the 'lived body' as an authenticating or validating procedure. Such lived body participation is always 'more than words can say', and the experience of 'sense-making' involves an engagement with a kind of language that is bodily and sensorily involved. (Todres, 2011, p31).

I thought about how my body and my mind, through my imagination, had been engaged in this process of sense-making. The key for me was the visualization exercise that engaged my mind in a sensory way.

The use of the water metaphor was impactful because it carried with it a certain resonance from a remembered experience; I was able to recreate the sense of a ball bobbing on top of a water fountain, because at some time in my past, I had seen, felt, experienced this phenomenon directly. If not that exact experience, then I was able to draw from my databank of sensual memories, experiences of water fountains, experiences of a ball floating on water, that I could construct in my imagination a multi-sensual, virtual experience of imagery and translate it into an embodied experience, by somehow stepping into it and becoming it.

Todres goes on to say: “Taking this one step further, one may wonder about the extent to which such embodied understanding can be communicated or shared.” (ibid, p31). This speaks to the heart of my inquiry question, which is how to work with embodied ways of knowing to create transformative experiences for others. My experience with the two dressage coaches, proved to me that this was indeed possible. I am curious how this came about, and what factors were necessarily present for me to be able to connect bodily to their use of sensual imagery.

Referring to the work of Eugene Gendlin, (A member of the Philosophy Department of at the University of Chicago, and famous for his 1963 book ‘Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning’), Todres explores the issues around credibility, trustworthiness of qualitative research, and the term ‘felt sense’ as a way of knowing that is responsive, and ‘awake to the bodily evocative dimensions, that makes words personally relevant and workable.’(ibid, p31). Todres focuses on Gendlin’s work around tension between language and the lived body.

I watched another session of Ritter Dressage today. They focused on ‘Core Stability’. Using the sensual imagery of flowing water, the coach suggested we imagine our body as a system of water pipes. With the pelvis as the source, she asked us to imagine water flowing down through our legs and into the ground and simultaneously flowing upward through the spine, out from the shoulders and down through our arms to the horse’s mouth. It was a powerful felt-sense that I experienced as a kind of positive tension, an elongating of the body upwards and downwards at the same time. Because it was flowing water, the tension was healing and gentle, I could sense my joints being lubricated and softened at the same time.

Words and sensed memory

I am curious to understand that which is unsaid, when Gendlin refers to the ‘*more than words can say*’, in lived body experience. Accepting that the body is our primary sense organ, I see that words are constructed sounds that articulate lived body experience, but can also stimulate body experience by

provoking the sensual memory of specific personal experiences. Thus I personalize and make specific, this generalized concept of flowing water by the 'more' that I add, that is uniquely perceived but unsaid.

In my memory bank are millions of micro-experiences of water, its texture, its sound, its smell and the lived multi-sensory memories of water flowing on my skin - standing under a shower, standing under a waterfall, of the water rushing past me as I dive head first into a rock pool. None of these specific instances can reproduce the exact experience of my body becoming water, of me being the phenomenon, yet somehow my brain is able to synthesize an experience that my body accepts as the real thing; that my muscles, my sense organs accept as reality, and creates an experience that is of service to me. What I notice is that the language changes my bodily experience, and the words disappear; Todres seems to be referring to this when he speaks of 'in and out of language' (Todres, 2011, p34).

Todres refers to the 'primacy of the body'; the recognition that our pre-verbal knowing is embodied; that without or before language, everything that we know is experienced sensually. With language comes an interdependent relationship; a continuity in which knowing is both an embodied and a languaged process. I'm wondering if this phenomenon relies on memories of lived experience, or if it is possible to synthesize a felt-sense from something conceptualised, but not experienced. According to Todres, this responsive process is more than checking against a logical conception of whether an interpretation hangs together and 'makes sense'. Rather such 'sense-making' requires this more complex tension between languaging and embodying - so that logical rules and computers cannot validate interpretations: only beings who participate bodily and move in and out of language and situations can, (Todres, 2011, p35).

Todres seems to be saying that this is less a logical process than an emotional one. I am curious as to this tension between embodied experience and the 'languaging of it'. He goes on to give an example of interviewing a girl, (Mandy) about the experience of homelessness, and recognizes that her process of putting into words this deeply subjective and emotive experience, leaves her struggling to find words that 'fit', to give a faithful representation of her embodied experience. He notices a 'creative tension between language and her more intimate bodily felt-sense of her situation'.

I relate this to my experience of writing colourful narrative accounts of my life, and filling my text with sensual language. I often find that when I allow my subconscious mind to select words, they resonate more strongly than when I stop and take time to find the most logically accurate representation. When I write poetry, there are combinations of words that just feel right, even when the words don't make

logical sense. For example, in a poem written about the experience of visiting my small villa in Sri Lanka I wrote:

THE ANTIQUE VILLA

*Swathed in jungle foliage, the little house stands, a silent sentinel
a garlanded policeman at the mardi gras
an island in time and space, where thought has no demands,
a deep yawn, a full body stretch
after many tiring journeys, I am home.*

*Bathed in blue-green, floating face up in the coolness
timelessness washes over me
Tibetan temple bells herald a soft breeze
the distant breath of ocean tides, hinting at a mid ocean chill
where blue whales dance and sing under the Poya moon*

*The beach: A toothpaste ad, a salty tequila shot,
sizzling spray, and shards of Christmas tinsel
Fishy pungence recalls a memory of drying seaweed
flashback to childhood summers at Climping beach,
of plastic inflatables, gritty sand and dripping ice lollies*

*Sturdy and reliable as the mahogany chairs,
claw topped taps adorn a porcelain memory of home
Cocooned in this hammock, suspended in the moment
the White Raven unfolds its wings
at peace and at one, I am complete.*

(Pitts, 2016)

Even now when I read these lines I can recreate the body-sense of being at the house, and the physical and emotional ‘more’ that has multi-layers of remembered experiences. Experiences that are specific and uniquely mine, an intricacy impossible to represent accurately through any other means, but relatable to others who may have had similar experiences, growing up in 1960’s England near to a seaside town.

Bodily mediated intricacy, he notes, is greater than conceptualisation - we 'always already' use the 'more' than our bodies open up to us when we speak, and can speak from this 'more' in different ways logically and more-than-logically - both contribute to the more intricate understanding.

Firstly, I recognize that there is always a 'significance' to words that is greater than their precise definition; not just in the words but also in the combination of words and imagery that is evoked when speaking, reading or hearing them. By offering language that is evocative, but not specific and detailed, the listener completes the picture from their own data banks and makes it their own; what Todres refers to as 'inter-subjective validity', which can accommodate both unique personal references as well as shared dimensions. (Todres, 2011, p35).

THE THIRD SESSION

I rode Valentina again this morning. I spent about five minutes adjusting the stirrups to the perfect length and trying to move out of my head and into my body. It was a perfect crystal blue morning and a cool breeze played across the adjoining rice paddy.

I was stiff and aching after riding yesterday. I scanned down through my body, seeking out places of tension and working to release them. I imagined a surge of water flow through my spine, across my shoulders and cascade down through both arms, and I imagined that my head was a floating ball, bobbing and rolling on top of the fountain.

I noticed my body begin to relax. Random sensory memories, the smell of chlorine and sharp sparks of light, a rainbow under a cascading water feature. There is a fizz of cascading water like an opened soda bottle; the water is icy-cold a sharp intake of breath. I am six years old and at the Southampton Lido; there are bright blue tiles under my feet with sharp edges, ready to cut a toe or crunch a knee, if I slip. Mum has a large jug of orange squash in the Tupperware picnic jug; there are packets of crisps and egg sandwiches.

All these associations happened non-verbally, and almost instantaneously like a stack of dominos, one after the other in fast succession. Merleau-Ponty, in his book 'Phenomenology of Perception' (1945), translated by Donald A. Landes (2014), in the chapter "Association" and the "Projection of Memories", proposes that all impressions we have are in some way associated with past experience so that we are able to perceive new things, new ideas and concepts only in their relationship to something that existed or co-existed earlier. He explains it as a 'constellation of images that begin to reappear for no reason'. I experienced this in relation to voice. Understanding *is a deception or an illusion*, knowledge never gets

a hold on its objects, which drag each other along, and the mind functions like a calculating machine that does not know why its results are true. (Merleau-Ponty, “Association” and the “projection of memories”, 2012, p15).

What I take away from this is the idea that the mind is creating an impression by designating meaning to words, by associating images and senses, but not in a way that is necessarily logical. Like a calculating machine that calculates that $(a + b = c)$, but doesn't necessarily know why 'c' is the result and why it is 'true'. Accordingly, he seems to be saying that truth is about 'fit' and is entirely subjective

[N]or does an impression have the power to awaken other impressions. It does so only on condition of first being understood from the perspective of the past experience where it co-existed with the impressions to be awakened. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p18).

I'm back in the saddle and I notice my elongated shadow; my back is over-arched. I round my shoulders slightly and pay attention to the way my pelvis tilts forwards. In a moment my shoulders are tense again and I remind myself and become a water fountain.

I continue like this for about twenty minutes. Valentina starts to get restless and avoids my leg as we go near to the corner; I give her a sharp word and a strong push. She nods her head up and down and leans slightly against my hands.

I wonder how it's going to be possible to visualize all these images simultaneously especially with the 'more' that comes with each visualization. I wonder if it's a bit like playing a musical instrument or driving a car; the visualization is an instruction to the body, the nerves, the bones, the senses, to behave in a certain way. I'm really tired at the end of the session from concentrating on so many different sense images.

There are two things going on. I am noticing myself in relation to the words and visualization exercises by Ritter dressage, and I am starting to recognize the ways in which visualization is engaging and changing me physically. I am also recognizing qualities of language that are making it possible for me to engage more deeply in the experience; when I say 'deeply' I mean that I notice myself engaging emotionally and unconsciously. I put that down to the extent to which words evoke prior positive embodied memories from my own specific sensual experience. Trying to 'get it right' has been a life-long challenge. What I am noticing, is that through this method I am able to 'feel it right', because it connects with an actual lived experience. I am filling the gap in what is said, with my own sensual memories. Merleau-Ponty refers to this phenomenon of achieving 'good form', not because of the quality of it being 'good', but because I can directly connect to the feeling of 'goodness' (or 'rightness'),

because it 'fits' within my memory of experience. [T]he contiguity and resemblance of stimuli are not prior to the constitution of the whole. "Good Form" is not achieved because it would be good in itself in some metaphysical heaven; rather it is good because it is realized in our experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, P17).

At a certain moment, it occurs to me that when shifting between sense-images, the time taken between evoking the sense trigger and my body responding is becoming shorter. I am developing a kind of shorthand where the 'more' has embedded itself into the embodied response and I am becoming embodiment; at that moment for example, I am the water fountain.

When I become 'into' the experience, my body is able to recreate the sensual experience without need for language. Todres refers to this as 'in and out of language', This 'more' in which the body intimately reveals a world is never completely in view - it is not an object that is presented in front of us - it is always dispersed - we are 'in it', (Todres, 2011, p35).

THE FOURTH SESSION

Yesterday was Monday, and normally a holiday for the horses. After the lockdown, every day here feels a bit the same; coffee on the veranda, half-asleep at 6am followed by two hours of mucking out stables and grooming horses. Yesterday was no exception, except it was just me and Keith and Lite Rock FM radio. Today is Tuesday and my body is aching from the physical exertion of filling and pushing wheelbarrows. I made a commitment to myself to ride every day I can, so despite the pain in my shoulders, I wake up, put on my jodhpurs and chaps, have my coffee on the veranda, and though I'm still not fully awake, I tack up Valentina and take her down to the riding arena.

My mind is foggy. I put her on a loose rein and put my legs on her sides to drive her forwards. I seem incapable of intricate visualization so I decide to just 'go with the flow' and focus on just one thing at a time. I check my knees are in the right position using the pole visualisation, then I focus on relaxing the shoulders 'make your collarbone smile' I remember, and my body responds without too much effort. Valentina nods her head rhythmically and I open and close my legs to keep the momentum going.

As we get to the corners of the arena, I hear Keith's voice in my head and I give pressure to the inside behind to push her out and into the corners. I momentarily wonder if Keith is watching, and remind myself that it shouldn't matter. Since I started riding again, I have waited for Keith to encourage me, to give me some feedback and fought against the urge to believe that his silence indicates disapproval or contempt. I recognize those feelings as old friends. I make a deliberate and difficult choice to work on it not mattering.

In a microsecond, all these thoughts have distracted me. Valentina is trotting and I am focusing on smiling through my collarbone and keeping my 'three circles' aligned. For about five minutes we seem to have achieved a nice steady rhythmical pace and Valentina puts her ears forward. This is the affirmation I am seeking, that my horse is relaxed and enjoying the experience. I fight the urge to halt the session early and decide to practice a few circles and bending exercises. I feel very happy and relaxed when we finish.

In this next piece of writing, there is a tangible, brief shift in my ontology from 'doing' to 'being'. Up to this point, shifting my body-state in different ways is an action that takes intention and focus. There are moments when one thing feels right, but then something else needs attention. In the next diarised entry, there is a brief moment when everything comes together, and the feeling is quite different to achieving a 'good' result from the separated parts. Even though the session ends badly, in those few seconds I experience something that feels like a resolution, or a state of equilibrium.

THE FIFTH SESSION

Today I rode Valentina for just half an hour. I focused my attention on staying soft in my mind and in my hands, I reminded myself to 'smile' through my collarbones and I prioritized keeping the imaginary three rings aligned. I can't exactly say how I triggered each body-sense, it was mostly non-verbal; when I thought about collarbones smiling there was a feeling of widening and the same chemical rush I feel when I smile. For the three rings, I first imagined a band around my head and then worked downwards, visualizing a short necklace creating a ring around my collar and finally imagining that my pelvis was also shaped like a ring. There was a little subtle shifting of weight until it felt as if all three rings were aligned.

Suddenly something shifted. I felt incredibly light, she arched her neck and engaged the powerhouse of her rear end. It was sublime; the horse and I were working in harmony and it felt as if I were floating above her. It only lasted for a second. Valentina tripped badly and pulled the reins out of my hands. It was frustrating. I started to feel the pressure of not meeting Keith's expectations and also, almost more importantly, I worried that Valentina would hate me for it. I finished the session.

I want to step back here and take a moment to examine the canvas in front of us. I am excited by what I see. I have evolved from a nervous, reluctant rider to an engaged and confident rider working in balance and reciprocity with Valentina. She senses my energy – especially my authentic authority. I have achieved this with the help of visualisation techniques which have put me in non-verbal dialogue with my body, and with my horse.

I am drawn to the following passage from Merleau-Ponty where he gives an example of walking on the beach and seeing a boat that has run aground. When he first experiences the boat, he is unable to distinguish it from the line of forest trees behind, but as he comes closer, the 'truth' of the boat reveals itself to him. The unity of the object is established upon the presentiment of an imminent order that will, suddenly, respond to questions that are merely latent in the landscape. It will resolve a problem only posed in the form of a vague uneasiness; it organizes elements that until then did not belong to the same universe and which, for that reason [...] could not have been associated, (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p18).

What I am particularly drawn to in this analogy is the idea that learning a new skill or understanding a new truth, is like a question that needs to be answered. It suggests that we have within us all the memories and knowledge to 'make sense' of the question, but at first the answer, or the parts of the answer, belong to different universes and there is no reason for me to make an association. The resolution of the problem, or the answering of the question, comes about by organizing the different elements into a landscape that makes their association comfortable and 'right'.

In my riding, I have in my head various sense-images that are competing with one another for primacy. My thoughts and the immediate sensory feedback are also competing. For example, when Valentina trips, my flow is interrupted, I instinctively grab for the reins to regain my balance, my ego kicks in and I start to doubt myself again. At a particular moment, there was a 'rightness' about the associations that made sense at some primitive level within my body and allowed me to just accept the incongruence and make it work. I am wondering if it is possible for the moment of 'rightness' to become an entity, the resolution, the equilibrium, a new congruity that I will later be able to manifest as a memory in its own right without need to assemble and associate with the constituent parts. I am conscious of many cycles of learning and reflection on the issue of embodied knowing and want to take a brief 'time out' from the inquiry to synthesize 'what I understand so far' from what has come up.

I see that learning by engaging the mind in visual and sensual imagery is effective in creating transformation within the body, when the body is able to associate language and imagery with a remembered physical sensory (embodied) experience. I noticed the associations in my own experience of imagining a water fountain which I located in early childhood experiences of an outdoor water park (or Lido), that I visited with my mother. The memory helped me to step into sensual experience and 'become' the experience. This phenomenon is illuminated by Todres, particularly when he refers to the 'more' that is present when language is used. He specifically gives the example

from a counselling session with a client, talking about homelessness. He notices a 'creative tension between language and her more intimate bodily felt-sense of her situation', and that there are gaps in her story where she struggles to find words that 'fit'. Marshall describes this moment of struggle as follows:

'My sensory experience of what is puzzling, may not be initially amenable to clear expression. I may want to pause tentatively for some time, trying to establish what shape the dilemma is taking, what words can hold its ambiguities and nuances', (Marshall, 1999, p49).

Merleau-Ponty also speaks to the issue of "association" and the "projection of memories", and devotes an entire chapter of his book to this topic. He proposes that in understanding a phenomenon there may be a series of impressions; where those impressions awaken a memory of an association, with an impression experienced in the past, there can be understanding. From my own experience, I relate this to the poem written about my villa in Sri Lanka, where I say: 'The beach: A toothpaste ad, a salty tequila shot, sizzling spray, and shards of Christmas tinsel' For another to understand this poem, i.e. make sense of it and experience it in an inter-subjective embodied way, they would need to have had an impression of being on a beach, of having seen a toothpaste advertisement in a magazine or on the television that showed waves thundering on a beach, of drinking a tequila shot with a rim of salt on the glass and of the sparkle effect of Christmas tinsel in the light. All these impressions point to a certain demographic, predominantly first-world, affluent western society. Only someone from that specific background would easily make the associations and experience a 'fit' with this impression. Merleau-Ponty gives a wonderful example using the boat analogy, of how an incorrect impression or series of impressions can transform into something completely different, a coming into understanding through a process of self-organising and creating associations, until achieving a harmonized impression (truth), i.e. one that is in equilibrium.

I refer to this in my transfer paper (2016) as follows:

My process of first-person inquiry feels like a 3D picture. I try to make sense of a page that is chaotic nothing but patterns and colours. Suddenly I let go and the 3D image leaps out of the pages. In my process of sense-making there is a lot of metaphoric squinting to see images at the periphery of my vision and usually it is only when I let go in some sense, that the image becomes clear. I engage in spontaneous scribbling, creative story-telling, contemplating, re-reading and visualising as an experiential knowing process. Sometimes the image leaps out and sometimes I am left frustrated and confused

In relation to the horse-riding exercises, I can see how use of simple, sensual imagery by the coach has enabled me to create associations with powerful childhood experiences, that engage my entire sensing being. As a result, I am already experiencing small glimpses of the new harmonized, associated, integrated ontology and impact it is having on the connection with my horse.

A question remains in my mind, how to practice and grow this way of learning to be more effective in my own development, particularly in areas where I struggle, (i.e. where there is creative tension between language and my more intimate bodily felt-sense of my situation', such as in this doctoral inquiry process); and to improve effectiveness of my practice in helping others to develop themselves.

THE SIXTH SESSION

It has been three days since I have been able to ride Valentina. She stepped on my little toe, which is now very tender and slightly swollen; I can't get my riding boots on. I feel frustrated and in a low mood today. I am still under lockdown with no clear idea of what the future holds. My body is unaccustomed to the physical effort of cleaning stables and pushing heavy wheelbarrows; I am physically and emotionally tired.

Since my last experience with Valentina, I want to see if I can manifest that 'body-zone' where I felt in balance and harmony; it felt so good. I catch myself over-thinking and anticipating failure. I sense a heavy cloud of negativity wash over me. Whilst I'm brushing the stables and filling wheelbarrows, I sneeze dramatically. It occurs to me that if I contracted Corona virus, I would be sent to hospital and the local villagers, who are deadly scared and superstitious, would come and burn down my barns and kill all my horses.

I'm lying in bed trying to take a mid-day nap. I check in on my body and find my shoulders really tense and my limbs are aching.

In this last session, I am reminded that I am still impressionable and vulnerable to negativity. This is a work of continuous attention. I recognise the importance of being kind to myself at these times, and recognising that these feelings are part of the process of transformation. The fact that I am aware, means they no longer have the authority to dominate my reality as they once did.

Émile Coué

Earlier in the day I had been reading Harry Brooks translation of “The Practice of Autosuggestion; by the method of Émile Coué (2009), the same book that Feldenkrais had translated into Hebrew in 1930. Émile Coué had been a non-medical practitioner who had a reputation for healing people through changing their mind-set and association with disease. His basic law of autosuggestion accepts that every idea which enters the conscious mind is transformed into a bodily reality, if it is accepted at our unconscious level. Hence, if we believe ourselves to be sick and we accept ‘sickness’ as a state of being both consciously and unconsciously, our body will transform the idea into a reality. ‘This is the process called “Spontaneous Autosuggestion.” It is a law by which the mind of man has always worked, and by which all our minds are working daily.” (Brooks, 2009, p21).

Coué describes the state of unconscious as thought released from its task of serving our conscious aims in the real world of matter, and [serving instead] the more primal wishes and desires. He explains that in the state of unconscious or semi-consciousness (as in the moment immediately before or after sleeping, or in a state of meditation), as the time when we are most open to auto-suggestion.

Below I am sharing in detail, Coué’s description of the importance of the unconscious realm of the human mind when compared with its conscious realm. This is central to my understanding of the relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness, language and pre-verbal knowing. For this reason, I am including below much of Brooks transcript of Coué’s words in its original form.

“The Unconscious is the storehouse of memory, where every impression we receive from earliest infancy to the last hour of life is recorded with the minutest accuracy. These memories, however, are not inert and quiescent, like the marks on the vulcanite records of a gramophone; they are vitally active, each one forming a thread in the texture of our personality. The sum of all these impressions is the man himself, the ego, the form through which the general life is individualised. The outer man is but a mask; the real self, dwells behind the veil of the Unconscious” (Brooks, 2009, p19)

What is novel for me here is the idea that our unconscious memories are ‘vitally active’, i.e. they are present and influential in all our decision-making, but because they are unconscious, their power over us is absolute.

“The unconscious plays the part of supervisor over our physical processes. Digestion, assimilation, the circulation of the blood, the action of the lungs, the kidneys and all the vital organs are controlled by its agency. Our organism is not a clockwork machine which once wound up will run of itself. Its processes in all their complexity are supervised by mind. It is not the intellect however, which does this work, but

Unconscious. The intellect still stands aghast before the problem of the human body, lost like Pascal in profundities of analysis, each discovery only revealing new depths of mystery. But the Unconscious seems to be familiar with it in every detail”, (Brooks, 2009, p19)

Coué explains simply and in a few sentences how the mind and body are intertwined. For it is the unconscious that controls the organs of the body and the unconscious that is actively engaged in our memories. Thus when, for example, we come across a certain stimulus, (for me, this could be an act of criticism), my unconscious triggers a physical response based on the childhood memory of being criticised by my mother. My heart beats faster, adrenaline courses through my body and I literally have to consciously take control of myself to avoid acting out childhood impulses which may be an irrational and inappropriate over-reaction to the stimulus. This acting out of childhood physical coping mechanisms and responses has been a source of much pain, shame and self-loathing over the years. I am glad to gain a deeper understanding of why this happens and start to forgive myself for the destructive behaviours that characterized many of my intimate relationships.

The Unconscious is also a power-house. It is dominated by feeling, and feeling is the force which impels our lives. It provides the energy for conscious thought and action, and for the performance of the vital processes of the body. [...] It may be added that the Unconscious never sleeps; during the sleep of the conscious it seems to be more vigilant than during our waking hours, (Brooks, 2009, p19).

This explains how it is possible to wake myself up at a specific time, the fact that this is not only possible, but also accurate to a fraction of a second, reflects the vigilant nature and unlimited power of the unconscious mind.

The artwork is finished. It is an abstract collection of ideas linked by embodied experience and memories. In the final section, I am stepping back to appraise the work that has emerged and discuss its relevance within the larger inquiry.

Conclusion

I notice that I am becoming more confident in accepting the primacy of the body, and working with the unconscious knowledge stored there, from every unique encounter, every earliest memory. I am noticing what is going on and embracing this as a valid and credible source of subjective, qualitative data. I can see how easy it is to be influenced, and to influence others when we tap into this pre-verbal knowing, and connect to the unconscious mind. In the past I have been trained in hypnosis, cognitive

behavioural therapy and neuro-linguistic techniques; however, what I am experiencing here is something different. From Feldenkrais and Coué, I learned the origins of auto-suggestion and how the work of these two pioneers helped us to understand the connection between language, mind and body.

In particular, I see this approach as an orientation rather than a specific technique. What I mean by this is that both as a trainer and as an individual, I am interested to adopt an appreciation for working in three dimensions (embodiment, thought and memory) to create and synthesize knowledge and build understanding and create transformation in myself and others.

Chapter eight – practice account #1: Engaging Bangladesh

This is me figuring out how to deal with Bangladeshi delegates on a cross-cultural exchange, who don't want to cooperate

Practice Account #1: Engaging Bangladesh

The following, is an example of an action and inquiry cycle. In the middle of this crisis, I am reflecting and adjusting myself in the moment. I have added my observations, (in square brackets and italics), from the perspective of an ongoing inquiry, where I notice relevant stuff coming up.

I am hosting sixteen faculty members from a private University in Bangladesh. It is a four-year project funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and involves building skills and expertise in corporate social responsibility (CSR), innovative leadership and women's empowerment.

In the wake of the Rana Plaza collapse, and devastating fire at the Nazreen Factory, the high street finally has a conscience about the exploitation of Bangladeshi women factory workers in the interests of fast fashion. I learned this in my discussions with factory owners and other stakeholders at the time. The manufacturers felt squeezed between the ideals of the European and North American brands, and the buying houses, who seemed unwilling or unable to compromise to the tune of a few cents on the price of a mass produced T-shirt. Fortunately, there were non-profit organisations and international government bodies willing to step up and assist the Bangladesh Garment Industry to transform itself from within. My project is one such initiative.

I am the Project Coordinator of a consortium which includes a leading University from the Netherlands and several other international and locally based consultants. We are half way through the project and struggling to achieve tangible results with an inexperienced and somewhat privileged faculty team, who are yet to take ownership and become fully engaged in the project. As a project management team we decided it might be helpful to expose them to garment production in Sri Lanka. More than ten years ago with cessation of the multi-fibre agreement and associated quotas, Sri Lanka garment industry was at a crisis point, and was forced to reinvent itself, which it achieved magnificently. Garment factories in Sri Lanka are the best in the world and their CSR practices are exceptional.

It is two days into the visit and the Bangladesh delegation are complaining. They were complaining from the moment they arrived, and despite the best efforts of the coordination team, they are still complaining. We had organized a visit to two highly innovative, exemplary factories. At the factories, the sustainability team and the women's empowerment team had spent hours in discussion with the delegates, they really rolled out the red carpet. We had seen extraordinary things; a boxing ring in the canteen, dancing production lines, bras made using NASA technology. I had had to pull favours from my personal contacts to secure the visits, and they had exceeded all expectations. It had been a long day. My translators at the back of the bus quietly tell me that the group are complaining. 'When do we

get to take a rest?’ We arrive back at the beach resort hotel and it is already getting dark when we disembark from the small bus.

NOTES FROM MY JOURNAL

Dr S turns to me “What time are we starting tomorrow?” “9 am” I respond with an airhostess smile. “It’s too early” he states without a trace of humour, “We will start at ten”. “No!” the word came out a little too quickly...” we have a lot of work to do tomorrow. We’re not here for leisure”. I shouldn’t have added that last comment. Dr S’s face went stiff and dark and I knew I had crossed a line. No one speaks to Dr S that way, particularly a foreign woman and particularly in front of his team. Had I committed a fatal error of judgment?

I am trying not to let my frustration show, yet it slips out in a knee-jerk ‘No!’ Immediately I realise that I am crossing a cultural divide. As a female, and as a foreigner I am disrespecting this senior male person. I am also undermining the institution and the way of working in the country. I am berating myself over the slip up, and wondering if I have further distanced myself from the group and my ability to influence them.

The day had started badly. I had been up since 3:30am, it was now 5:50am and we were waiting in the bus for the last few Bangladeshi visitors who had overslept. We were supposed to leave at 5:00; they were almost an hour late. We had a packed day planned and the traffic was building up. I had presumed upon friendships and they had delivered a full day of activities to visit two of their award winning plants. These are not people you keep waiting.

By the time they surfaced I had pushed my anger deep inside and replaced it with airhostess civility. My ‘Good mornings’ were a tad too cheery. There is neither explanation nor apology from their side.

During the entire day there was an aura of thinly veiled contempt. No sense of urgency nor of respect to their hosts, talking continually during presentations, fiddling on the phone and long absences in the bathroom. I feel like a frustrated school teacher, and try hard not to sound like one. A couple of times I couldn’t contain myself and shot killer looks, raised my eyebrows and coughed loudly.

Back at the hotel and mission accomplished. They have been fed and watered, suitably exposed to mind-blowing technology and innovation, seen, heard, and prayed. Dr S is still looking daggers and I feel the need to quietly apologise for my bluntness. He grunts in response but nothing changes in his demeanour.

Typically, I am trying to make things OK with this one person. I am uncomfortable to the point of sleeplessness, over yesterday’s gaffe. However, my apology does not have the desired effect of

regaining equilibrium, and his non-acknowledgement of my apology leaves me feeling even more powerless than before. *[There's that whole needing to make it all OK thing again and giving away my power as a result].*

Over dinner they explain to me that they cannot possibly sleep in the rooms, as they have double beds not separate beds. The first night we had had a massive issue because they had been asked to share rooms. I explained again that the funding is coming from the Dutch Government and they have rules about how much money we can spend. If they like to we can put them in a cheaper place but if they want to enjoy 4 or 5-star luxury on the beach then this really is the only option. All the hotels are fully booked moving at this stage is really not an option. They tell me it is a cultural issue but my two interpreters tell me this is not the case. "They are complaining about everything" they tell me. They are angry that they are having to work so hard. They want to go shopping.

There seems to be a power play going on, and I am in conflict between trying to make them happy and doing my job properly. Luckily I have the support of Bangladeshi translators, who reassure me that no serious cross-cultural transgression has been committed. Working with Islamic countries, I am hyper sensitive to 'getting it wrong' and perhaps this is being exploited unfairly against me.

We hastily shuffle around the rooms. My two female assistants can share my room and the male Bangladeshi interpreters agree to share. Long discussions follow. "They want to know which floor the rooms are on" my interpreter says, "They don't feel secure on the ground floor"

I felt I was losing control, losing their engagement and losing their trust in me. I had inadvertently insulted their leader when he challenged me; my next actions were critical. *[I notice something going on here around agency. I have lost traction with the team, they are following their leader and not me].*

I went to bed angry and tired and slept badly. I went over and over the events of the last few days and tried to understand what had been going on and what I had been doing wrong. These are not bad people, I reminded myself, but their behaviour seemed bad to me. I had been judging them from my own paradigm perhaps, not appreciating the importance of giving 'face', respect acknowledgement. I realized that I had no clue how to move forward, and no clue how to regain their engagement and respect.

The following day I was due to conduct a one-day session on personal leadership. Without their trust and cooperation, it would be a disaster.

I decided to shift the activities. Spend the morning recapping the learning so far and give them the afternoon off to relax. This would give me time to think, time to shift the energy in the group and towards me, before we got into the self-reflective work.

I can't explain how I came to this decision, but I understand that it is useful to take a moment to try to reflect on what I did and perhaps what I typically do in such situations. I am writing this piece in freefall in an attempt to understand how I knew what to do in this situation and how I managed to turn things around.

There is a mind-set shift here and the inquirer is curious as to what just happened? I am observing myself and noticing my tendency towards negativity and self-recrimination, nipping it in the bud and opening myself up to creative inputs.

[I am noticing an example of mind-set shift that I learned from my inquiry into voice and voiceless-ness. In the inquiry I began to notice a pattern of extreme behaviour which rendered me either blindingly brilliant or blindly stupid. It almost feels like a toggle switch that requires a certain counterbalance of factors to tip the seesaw from negative to positive; blunt to sharp; fog to crystal clear].

I replay events of the evening in my head over and over. I am disappointed with myself for not handling things better and I notice that it is easy for me to fall into the trap of self-recrimination, a familiar territory. This is not helpful. I need to be positive and draw on my creative resources. I can't do this from a state of self-flagellation.

I adopt a positive mind-set, tell myself I can do this and start to see things differently. I need to acknowledge and appreciate that the groups is tired; pay homage to their physical and emotional need to be heard. At the same time, I need to present a solid framework of what 'we need to achieve' out of this, 'what is in it for them' and to remind them of 'our promise to the Dutch Government'. The key words here being 'we', 'I' and 'our' as opposed to 'you', 'they' and 'your'.

I recognize the importance of showing them the value of what they have so far learned and experienced; to make it their own. I decide to start with a session on 'what struck me?', 'what is useful to me?' and 'how does this serve my goals?' I quickly write down the ideas so that I don't forget the specific wording of the questions. I have difficulty remembering the names of the individuals in the group; they are difficult and foreign. I instinctively feel this is part of the problem. I check the University website, copy and paste the photographs and names into a word document and challenge myself to remember at least four new names.

[Once a few ideas start to come, I experience a flood of more ideas. This is something I noticed before in the inquiry into voice; once the neurons start firing and making associations I find myself in a highly generative mind space].

I notice that I have to shift my physical state. Rather than collapsing into bed, which is exactly what I feel like doing, I put on some comfortable clothes, a dab of perfume and face the music. I sit in the hotel dining room paste the biggest and most confident smile on my face and greet each of the team members by name.

[This is an interesting addition. I intuitively feel that changing my physical state will help me to change my emotional state. It would have been much easier and more comfortable for me to hide away in my room. But instead I chose to join the group for dinner and I add the detail of memorizing all their names. This is important, because I have neglected to commit to memory their names, even after working together for almost three years. This is not helping me right now and I intuitively know that I need to show them they matter and build a connection if I am to gain greater agency in this situation].

I wake up early with last night's confrontation my first conscious waking thought. I feel strongly that the way I handle this morning's session, the first few minutes even, will be critical in regaining their trust and respect. I have to act with calm confident authority, as if the whole thing had been planned this way, and that even their last night's rebellion was part of some process that I had facilitated as part of their learning path.

I choose my clothes carefully, a black business skirt and white blouse with a soft black jacket. I top it off with a green/blue silk scarf; conservative and business-like with a flash of colour to lighten the seriousness. I tie my long hair back in a severe governess bun and tease loose a couple of strands for softness.

[I notice my attention to appearance – this is perhaps another strategy for gaining agency, looking the part is very important in more formal Bangladeshi culture. I add the small splash of colour and soft strands of loose hair to contrast an otherwise serious business image. I am remembering the association between beauty, voice and power, discussed in Chapter Six, in relation to the acid survivors. In that case, the loss of beauty was equated to a loss of voice. I wonder if the attention to appearance in this experience is also about re-enforcing voice].

The conference room is completely unsuitable; I know it before I open the heavy wooden doors. It is dark and foreboding with no natural light. I struggle to comprehend the logic of the design of this soulless cubicle. I imagined the disappointment of the delegates lured to Sri Lanka on a promise of sparkly-blue ocean, white palm-lined beaches, to be shut away in this tomb during the daylight hours.

Escaping, if they are fortunate, in time to glimpse the final glow of a once glorious sunset. Like arriving at the party after the guests have all gone home. I breathe out heavily in despair.

I am highly sensitive to the energy of a physical environment, and its impact on the people working in the space. I have learned through experience that there is a natural sympathetic resonance engendered in the space by virtue of the colours, light, materials and the choice and positioning of items of furniture. This space speaks to me of a dark night club rather than an inspiring and innovative work space. [Does voice need a conducive physical space?]

Flashes of thought, neurons firing, I go from a state of hopelessness to a cunning plan in less than a second. To attempt to understand this I am attempting to replay this in slow motion. I am feeling anxious and excited but not negative, this is a creative state.

I enter the conference room, and look around. I see dark, no windows, solid walls, no natural light. This is not going to work; you must have something else! The F&B Manager looks puzzled. What is she talking about? I am shaking my head and then I start to realise that I am not behaving in the way he expects. My adrenaline is pumping and my mind is sharp and agile; I am in my element.

I have recognized this altered state and am observing myself acting with creative excitement. [I recognise this state from phenomenological inquiry in Chapter Six, where I describe it in similar language ‘flashes of thought’ and the sensation of neural connections being made that simultaneously evoke remembered images. I also noted before how once this process starts there is a cascade of creative ideas that follows.]

My mind has already jumped ahead to visualize two possible scenarios. Briefly I imagine myself attempting to conduct my personal leadership training in this ‘God-forsaken’ box; it’s not a good picture. Why? Because people need to breathe, to sense, to feel space and light and nature. Their minds will be happy with a space they are familiar with, but their senses will shut down.

My other image is of an open space with visual access to the beach and the ocean beyond, it has natural light and is embraced by nature. I smile to myself and recognize contrasting imagery has potential as a metaphor for positive changes happening within the University and within the lives of the faculty members.

Once I have formulated a verbal and mental image of what I want, it feels as if the problem is 90% resolved. I now need to just locate the space that matches my mental image.

We find the perfect place in the next door sister hotel. It has two glass walls with sea and beach views, a wall of mirrors behind the bar and one solid wall. The tables are café style and the atmosphere relaxed. It takes some fast talking to a fortuitously amenable manager. The deal is done and I feel hyped and once more in command of the situation.

Something tells me that this is what I do. I have a very strong sense of how it should be, and have no qualms about challenging the status quo to put in place what feels right. My staff in the office often see me shifting cupboards and tables, rushing out to buy flowers or a brightly coloured painting. When I have an idea in my head, I am like someone possessed, I like to do what is not expected and I am impatient to create a change I feel is needed. I feel actual physical discomfort when a picture is crooked or a table misplaced. I will stop the most important task to re-align things, to create my idea of harmony. [I notice that I am highly sensitive to visual and spatial harmony. I ‘feel’ the vibrations from different colours, and associate that feeling with an emotion. There is a certain shade of pink that always makes me smile. During a recent visit to the Keukenhof Tulip Gardens in Holland, I was so struck by a particular swathe of colour that I heard Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony burst forth in my head. It ‘felt’ to me as if the colour and the music were on the same vibrational wave-length.

“I notice that the flowers seem to give off a vibration. the reds and yellow combinations. I sit on the grass in front of a sea of red, yellow and orange, a thousand tulips, heads open and full. I feel my body trembling like a caffeine high, but nicer. I bathe in the feeling, I soak it up, like a solar panel soaks up the sun. I feel myself recharging. After a while I move on, stopping occasionally to bathe in the resonance of a particular bed of flowers. I notice that the colours give off different vibrations and I am drawn towards the bright yellows and deep reds. The white and purple flowers vibrate less intensely; there is a gentleness about them and softest of all the pinks. At one point I turn the corner and feel a jolt of complete and unbounded joy. A swathe of striking orange tulips tease me. With the sunlight behind them they are luminous, pulsating. I hear Beethoven’s ninth Symphony ‘Ode to Joy’ in perfect consonance and am stuck dumb. It is several minutes before I can tear myself away.” (Keukenhof, Lisse, Netherlands, 2016)

I no longer question my intuition when it comes to spatial arrangements, light and colour of a learning space. I ‘know’ intuitively what works from many years of experience, delivering training sessions in wildly different spaces. I ‘know’ that it is going to be much harder work to engage a group and keep their attention when the room is gloomy and warm, rather than light and airy. It affects my demeanour, energy levels and state of mind too, and that will also have an impact on the group. When presented with little choice, as is often the case, I have to create the energy myself, in the way I move, the way I speak and kind of activities I choose. This is nothing special in my view, it is a fundamental skill of being

an effective trainer/facilitator, but perhaps one that is overlooked or under-rated as ‘feminine intuition’. I reflected on feminine epistemology (Fletcher, 2001 et al) in more detail in Chapter Five.

‘Let’s start the training in the conference room’, I tell my assistant trainers, ‘and we’ll move them here after the first activity.’ I want to use this symbolism of ‘moving them out of their comfort zones to a better place’ - get them to connect this to the change journey they are on and to both appreciate the reason for, and move forward from their complaining’. I notice the ease with which I seize an opportunity to create a metaphor out of the emerging situation.

I notice two things happening here, firstly I am using metaphor to raise an issue that has emotional associations (moving them out of their comfort zones), yet does it in a non-threatening way. Secondly I am using an embodied learning technique. By asking them to physically move from one space to another, I am giving them a physical experience, i.e. one that engages multiple senses and I am associating the experience with the ‘constructed’ concept of ‘change for the better’ by leading them to a much nicer environment. This has the impact of changing their mental state.

The openness of the new learning space evokes a more open-minded mentality. Once open, I am able to play with the metaphor of the journey from the dark room into the lighter space and encourage them to associate this experience with their own journey into a better future.

I became more confident in my use of metaphor after reading Bateson, (1999). ‘The point is that the first hunch from analogy is wild, and then, the moment I begin to work out the analogy, I am brought up against the rigid formulations which have been devised in the field from which I borrow the analogy’’. (Bateson, 1999). Bateson explores the use of analogy in sense-making. I notice that I use what I call metaphors which are basically the same idea; i.e. taking an unrelated concept or paradigm to attempt to make sense of another. I use a lot of metaphors and analogies in my training practice to explain difficult concepts such as consciousness, in ways that others can make sense of. In my example of the Bangladeshi delegates, I am using the concept of moving from one spatial environment to another as an analogy for moving from one work situation to another. Taking Bateson more literally, I should now be able to expose this analogy to the ‘formulations which have been devised in the field from which I borrow the analogy’ in order to see what further value or depth might be added to the experience.

If I put my attention to the spaces, I notice that it is important not to overplay the unpleasantness of the first space. I don’t want to alienate anyone by suggesting that where they are currently (in their change process) is a dark unlit, (unenlightened?) place. I make sure it is sufficiently comfortable to be considered a ‘normal’ conference environment. In the second space, I decide that it should be friendly and inviting. It shouldn’t be too unfamiliar as to make them anxious, but sufficiently different to create

a wow factor, when they move into the space. Even the detail of the bar stool rather than podium sends a message of informality.

The journey between the two spaces takes them along the beach, in the morning sun. This will be mildly uncomfortable, especially for those wearing more traditional clothing. They may have to remove their shoes. Further they will be walking past holiday makers wearing western beach attire. This being an entirely Muslim party, they will be mildly to highly uncomfortable culturally with this journey. My Bangladeshi translators assure me that this is fine.

Finally, I ask them to put their trust in me.

It works well. The group is disorientated by being moved and by physically having to walk down to the beach in the blazing sun, past the bikini-clad holiday-makers and surfing dudes and into the new space. Some resisted. I could hear this by the tone of their voices, even though I didn't understand the words. But to the last they were intrigued, curious.

I select a bar stool and position myself slightly above them at the front of the new space, fingers loosely clasped, rotating my ankles, and an air of quiet confidence. I sit in silence as they enter the room and bustle about taking their places. Eventually a hush falls over the room and I start to speak. Now I have their attention.

I want to make them aware of the analogy, but not to take it too literally. I ask them about the move and to share their thoughts, reservations and emotions with others on the table. We talk about change and about challenge. I lightly touch on the issue of resistance and discomfort but leave it to them to make sense of it at a personal level and to absorb the analogy at a subconscious and embodied level.

I put up pin boards and ask them to write about anything that struck them from what they had experienced in Sri Lanka. I deliberately kept the questions open and avoided giving space for them to put energy into negativity. It was a really productive and positive discussion.

I surprised them with an 'afternoon of whatever you want to do'.

By the second day, the group were more relaxed and a little curious about what might happen next. I set the scene by saying today is all about you. We did various exercises in self-reflection and ended up with them drawing a personal vision which they shared with one another. I was really surprised at how engaged they were. All participated and barely anyone interrupted or distracted themselves on their mobile phone.

What I see

I think this emphasized how important ‘the way I show up’, is for the group and for the energy in the room. Definitely I feel that the physical act of moving and different sensory experiences of the two spaces played a role in shifting both their states and mine. I had to go there first and when I did, getting them to follow was easy. Self-doubt and negative self-talk was blocking my creativity. I made physical changes such as changing my clothes and my self-talk about my body which fed into my mental state. There was a seesaw of emotional and rational inputs which I became increasingly conscious of and intentional with.

“As I see it, advances in scientific thought come from a combination of loose and strict thinking, and this combination is the most precious tool of science.” (Bateson 1999, p86).

Much of the analogy work was instinctive and at first quite wild and unstructured. By writing this down, I am throwing a light onto a process that is largely unconscious. By understanding the importance of the wild in my practice, I can already start to see ways in which my embodied, (gut feel) actions form a solid basis for rational analysis.

“And if you ask me for a recipe for speeding up this process, (of scientific advances), I would say first that we ought to accept and enjoy this dual nature of scientific thought (the wild and the rigid) and be willing to value the way in which the two processes work together to give us advances in understanding of the world.”(Bateson 1999, p86).

Chapter nine – practice account #2: A gendered exchange

This is me messing up a leadership training, learning from the experience and adapting my approach – I am learning a lot about gendered epistemologies

Practice Account #2: A Gendered Exchange

I have been contracted by a local bank to conduct a two-day Leadership Development workshop for ten branch managers. It is the first time I am working with this client in more than ten years. It is a last minute assignment, in that they have money in their training budget and need to spend it before the end of the year. I have successfully delivered this same workshop, a combination of personal effectiveness and people management skills, more than twenty times in the last year, so I am very confident and my preparation is minimal.

“You might beat me, but you are going to have to bleed to do so.”

These words fill the frame over a black and white photo of a black athlete crouched down, sweat dripping from his temples as he looks into the eyes of his coach. This picture is on the wall in the corridor just opposite my bedroom door at the offsite residential training facility an hour outside of Colombo. It is the second day of a leadership development programme I have been conducting together with my female colleague for fifteen male bank managers. I joked with her, ‘they look like they just came in off the rugby field’, broad shouldered and with a confident swagger, I was curious how this was going to go.

On day one we spoke about self-belief, ego and vulnerability. They experienced themselves fifteen or twenty years older using a visualization technique, and created powerful personal vision statements. I thought it had gone rather well considering the levels of testosterone in the room, and one man confided that he was having problems at home and he hoped that these insights would help him.

In the evening over dinner, the new Vice President turned up unannounced. He immediately formed a huddle with the men and pulled out a bottle of old arrack, the locally produced coconut whiskey, and poured a drop into the plastic cups he had brought with him for the purpose. The conversation was in Sinhala but I could tell by the laughter it was bawdy ‘boys stuff’. We were conspicuously ignored, so my colleague and I quietly left. The magic of the day, the quiet thoughtfulness necessary to process the work we had done, was lost.

The following morning the class was restless and belligerent. We pushed them to experiment with different communication postures and attitudes but a door had closed. I can only imagine, the rhetoric after a few glasses, that had diminished and disappeared our work and with it our credibility.

At the end of the session when all was finished and the certificates had been awarded, one man, the self-appointed leader of the group stood up and addressed us, not meeting our gaze but instead addressing his comments to the room. “I have to tell you; this was a big waste of time. You obviously

don't have any clue how our organisation operates". I was blindsided, I hadn't seen this coming. There was an awkward silence in the room. I was thrown for a moment and then with a steady gaze and a confident smile I didn't feel, I said something along the lines of "Well that is always a possibility, however you have given us two days of your time, and your company have paid us well. We have shared with you a lot of practical skills and knowledge, where you take from here is up to each of you."

I was shaking as I left the room.

I was in shock for several days. Reflecting back on it now, I can see how incredibly naive I had been and possibly a little arrogant. I had failed to do the proper ground work. It was coming to the end of the budget year for the client as well as for us and it was a last minute assignment. I had made assumptions about the group and their motivations and was proved dramatically and memorably wrong.

I notice myself moving between the voice of the subject and the voice of the narrator. I remember feeling anxious from the start. There was something about the energy in the room that told me all was not well. As in the earlier example of the Directors' Meeting, I sensed people were distracted. I searched their faces for smiles and nods of understanding but heads were lowered and people were engaged on their phones, save for a couple who sat back with their arms folded unsmiling. I had delivered this same performance multiple times in front of diverse audiences. This was my first all-male audience and I missed a sense of connection and empathy that was easier to engender with a female or mixed audience. I felt a little judged, misunderstood and under-valued.

I remember self-consciously adjusting my body position to appear confident and relaxed. I put a broad smile on my face and tried to draw energy into the room. As I mentioned earlier in the story of the Bangladeshi delegates, when the energy in the room is absent, I tend to over-compensate in a kind of 'holiday camp animator' sense; attempting a little humour, making steady eye contact and encouraging the smallest acts of engagement. It was hard work and at the end of the first day I was physically and emotionally exhausted.

This experience was really traumatic. I had completely misjudged my audience; I hadn't paid enough attention to make sure that what I was sharing has resonated. What had worked before in the garment industry was not landing well with this group of bankers. This is also about agency. Similar to the earlier story about the delegation from Bangladesh, the bankers were operating from a strong masculine culture in which effectiveness is based on individualism and competition. They were conditioned to accept this competitive reality and reject all else. I had no chance of agency.

The language of the relational model and feminine version of effectiveness violated their sense of appropriateness. Feminine equates to private realm and is not appropriate in the workplace. The visit of the very macho VP, reminded them of the masculine values model and as a community, either unconsciously or consciously they rejected and ridiculed the relational content and embodied methodology as too feminine.

Having been very obviously side-lined by the VP, it was very hard for my female colleague and I to regain our authority over the group and we had little choice but to continue with the agenda that we had planned, ignorant of the seeds of doubt that had been sown by this higher authority figure.

In her book 'Disappearing Acts; Gender, Power and Relational Practice at Work', (2001), Joyce Fletcher explores the idea that there is a feminist model of effectiveness that is quite different and at times in opposition to the masculine model of effectiveness, which is often taken as the only one that matters. She explains the significance of relational work that traditionally is taken up by women at work, that builds, preserves and maintains equilibrium in the team. She also explains how this work is under-valued and 'disappeared' from workplace dialogue.

'When behaviour motivated by a relational belief system [...] was brought into this organisational discourse it got disappeared as work because it violated many of norms [of a masculine work paradigm]. In other words, when behaviour motivated by a feminine logic of effectiveness was brought into this discourse, it got disappeared as work because it violated the masculine logic of effectiveness that was in operation.' (Fletcher 2001, p91).

I explore Fletcher's work in more detail in Chapter 5.

These days the relational approach to leadership, also known as 'servant leadership' approach recognizes that flexibility and empathy are necessary for adaptability and creativity needed for businesses to survive in turbulent times. organizations are learning what the military have pioneered, that leadership requires a balance of structured and flexible thinking. They are recognizing that traditional (masculine) command and control structures are not conducive to innovation and problem solving in volatile times. In 2017, based on my work with the Bangladesh garment industry, I published a paper on this topic, which I was invited to present at the International Apparel Conference in Sri Lanka.

In the paper I examine the influence of mid-level managers on the productivity and motivation of lower-level staff, the need for flexibility and creativity; traditionally more relational attributes than the traditional directive leadership approach. I had wrongly assumed that managers in the banking sector would recognise and appreciate the same rationale. Instead, I succeeded in alienating them by

proposing a leadership approach that embraced behaviours symptomatic of a relational model of growth. Relational theory supports [the view] that individuals that feel understood and accepted are more likely to be accepting of others leading to a kind of group life characterized [by] a zest for interaction and connection. (Fletcher, 2001, p76).

“The organizational discourse on work privileges a model of growth and development based on individuation, autonomy and separation. When faced with behaviours symptomatic of a relational model of growth, the system tended to understand it as the devalued side of its own model, i.e. the devalued side of the public/private split. This understanding required an explanation of what might motivate someone to engage in activity that was inherently less valuable and therefore devalued the people who do it.” (Fletcher, 2001, p108).

I see myself effectively silenced by an overwhelming rejection of a relational paradigm of leadership that was seen as ‘inherently less valuable’ and potentially threatening to a team of people subscribing to a masculine model of effectiveness; perhaps by inference that these were ‘private sphere’ (i.e. feminine) behaviours that were being brought inappropriately into (male dominated) public sphere of the workplace. (Fletcher, 2001).

Up to the point of the VP’s arrival, we had had meaningful engagement with the participants on an individual basis, to the point where they were confiding in us. Fletcher also notes that women at work are often the carriers of the relational burden and their male colleagues are more likely to confide in them than in one another. However, the actions of the VP and his summary dismissal of the female trainers, made it difficult for the managers to show support for this relational approach in front of one another. Hence we became the scapegoats for their discomfort and the service we had earnestly provided was completely de-valued.

This was an important lesson. I had failed to engage the participants from ‘where they are’ and had instead assumed that ‘I am right’ and they disagree, therefore they are wrong. I immediately see the hypocrisy of privileging relational practice and demonizing traditional masculine performance paradigms because they are different. I am guilty of applying the feminist argument against men, to my own practice.

I reflected deeply together with my colleague; what should we have done differently? I believe it comes back to something I shared at the beginning of Chapter Seven, the significance of pre-reflective understanding of the relationship or ‘mood’ how something registers with the subject. Heidegger

explains it as '[M]ood is intimate to understanding', (Todres, 2011, p 11). I had failed to do my homework and had assumed authority in a very arrogant manner.

The following month, I was asked to deliver the same workshop, but this time to one hundred Afghan Managers in Kabul. Fortunately, my experience with the bankers humbled me. I had lengthy discussions with the management of the agency and with a few of the participants, prior to the workshop.

I devised a programme that privileged the organisation's values, something that I came to understand as of high cultural significance to the group. On the basis of Organisational Values such as Integrity, Service-Oriented, Self-Reliance, I was able to create linkages to the desirable relational behaviours and attitudes of the leadership and soft skills programme I was delivering.

In the first example, with the Bank Managers, I was imparting knowledge, but I failed to link that knowledge to their own specific lived experience. I am reminded by Merleau-Ponty (1945) of the necessity to connect thoughts and ideas with remembered experiences: 'I can never completely coincide with the pure thought that constitutes even a simple idea; my clear and distinct thought always makes use of thoughts previously formed by myself or by others, and relies upon my memory, that is the nature of my mind or upon the memory of the community of thinkers, that is, upon objective spirit' (Landes, 2014, p42). 'Prior to any contribution by memory, that which is seen must currently be organised in such a way as to offer me a scene in which I can recognise my previous experiences.' (Landes, 2014, p44).

I am reminded how important it is to pay equal attention to all three legs of the stool of understanding/engagement: to the propositional knowledge component, the specific personalised subjective memory component and the embodied-sensed component. Traditional learning mechanisms privilege propositional (rote) knowing, contemporary adult learning approaches recognise the importance of experiential and situational (applicability) of knowledge, (Kolb et al). However, in my experience, few organisations give equal privilege to the three aspects of learning and apply it universally to everything they do (communicating, understanding, performing, etc.), and instead refer the Adult Learning Cycle (Kolb et al) only in relation to training design. We also fail to take into consideration the gendered-orientation of the organisational culture that pre-disposes it to privilege one form of knowing over another.

Chapter nine – practice account #3: Merlin's magic

This is me working with my horse, Merlin in a coaching session with a client

Practice Account #4: Horse-Assisted Transformation

In 2016 I became interested to work with my horses to help people suffering from trauma. I notice that people gain a huge amount of emotional support by being around them. Over the last two years, we engaged many volunteers at Ceylon Riding Club through a scheme called 'Workaway', where we attract overseas volunteers to help in the stables in exchange for food and lodgings. I noticed that a high percentage of these young people were experiencing emotional distress of one kind or another, including eating disorders, a history of self-harm, burnout and childhood sexual abuse. We had long chats during their time at the stables and all reported that they had gained huge benefit and relief from being around the horses.

I hadn't connected horses and leadership development at first. I was exploring hippo-therapy, which relates more to work with special needs people and children with learning challenges such as autism. Then I was introduced to British psychologist Paul Hunting, by my good friend and former riding instructor, Gina Porter. Paul had developed a technique he called Horse-Assisted Transformation (HAT) described in his book 'Why talk to a Guru when you can whisper to a horse? The Art of Natural Leadership', (2006). I met Paul in early 2016 when he and his wife, came to Sri Lanka to work with me and my horses. I later flew to the UK to study under him and learn his techniques.

I learned that horses have a uniquely sophisticated social intelligence that allows them to determine very quickly who can be trusted and who is in control. Whilst this conditioning assures survival in the wild, it works equally well with domesticated horses in their relationship with humans. The reason this is so significant to my inquiry, is that a horse 'feels' your presence and quickly reads it, to determine if you are safe to be around, i.e. you are consistent in your body language, and your underlying demeanour. You cannot fool a horse. They can tell when you are afraid and pretending not to be. Secondly the horse determines who is in charge. It asks 'are you the boss or am I?' It doesn't much care, as long as the answer to this question is clear and unequivocal. The way that the horse determines this is very similar to what we sense when we meet a person for the first time. The difference with humans is that we put up a pretence to protect our fragile ego, and we are often fooled by unconscious fears and coping mechanisms. Genuine, authentic authority is what the horse responds to – In other words 'Agency'.

I know this from a life time working with horses, and the last eight years of sharing my home with 15 horses and ponies at the riding club I run in Sri Lanka, where I have daily contact with them. After following the processes designed by Paul, I have started to see incredibly powerful transformations in people, largely as a result of their ability to instil and manifest authentic authority over people and

situations that have been holding them back. "Horses, just like people really, when they trust and respect us as a leader and understand what we want, will give us their hearts and even die to give us what we ask. It is very humbling." (Hunting, 2006, p175).

In the Practice Account below, I am coaching a client who is having some challenges at work. In the process of working with my horse, Merlin, she reveals a much deeper issue that has been holding her back. It ends up being a life-changing experience for the both of us.

PRACTICE ACCOUNT: MERLIN AND HELEN

Merlin stepped forwards and nudged his huge head into my chest. He is a 17 hands high bay-coloured ex-racehorse with a wide white blaze down his face. He had come to me a year earlier as a bag of bones. I wasn't looking to buy a boy horse, and certainly not such a huge one, but he connected with me, mused up my hair with his big soft lips and I fell in love with this over-sized puppy dog of a horse and called him Merlin.

Helen stepped forward nervously, and Merlin bent his huge neck in a big arch to sniff at her hand and softly brush her fingers I instinctively tightened my hand around his rope collar just in case he decided to take a playful nip. I looked across at Helen and she had a huge smile across her face.

We had been discussing some problems she had been facing at work, and in the exercise, the horse was meant to be a proxy for a work colleague she was having an issue with.

I showed her how to ask the horse to move aside and she stepped forward to try for herself. She was a bit afraid of him at first, and despite her best efforts Merlin ignored her and stepped forwards as if she wasn't there, narrowly missing crushing her toes.

She looked a bit shocked. "How do you feel?" I asked, "Does this feeling remind you of anything?" I looked at Helen but her eyes were glazed and filled with tears. Concerned that I had done something wrong, I asked if she wanted to stop. "... I was abused as a child" she suddenly said. "I have never told anyone before. Even my parents didn't believe me".

I was shocked and tried not to show it. I was apprehensive that I might be out of my depth, but I carried on with the process as if all of this was perfectly normal, aware that what I did next could be pivotal for her.

I took a big breath and continued the twelve step HAT process. Working through each element step by step, I pose a number of questions such as 'Who are you afraid you are?', 'Who do you pretend to be?', 'How does that appear to help you?', 'What is it costing you?' and finally 'Who are you really?' I am summarizing a process that is very intense over three or four hours working one on one and with the horse.

When we got to the final question 'Who are you really?' she let out a huge breath as if she had been holding it inside for some time, and said; 'I am strong and I am good'. This became her 'mantra' and I showed her how to anchor the mantra and the associated feelings of power so that she could manifest them when needed. She turned back towards Merlin who was looking at her curiously.

'Ask him to move' I said. 'And this time use your affirmation'. She walked straight up to him, with an intense look on her face. She placed her hand on his side and put the slightest of pressure on her fingertips. He moved easily and willingly, swishing his tail from side to side. 'Oh my God' she said out loud, 'what just happened?' I didn't want to lose the energy, 'do you feel ready to confront him?' (meaning the abuser).

She stepped forwards this time with an intense and serious expression. Merlin obligingly stepped aside. Helen turned, tears in her eyes, and the biggest smile across her face.

Her life changed. I was privileged to see this young woman stand up to her abuser and to those who had silenced her; more than that she became an advocate for other abused children. Three years later, Helen is now the Country Director of a non-government organisation that supports women who were abused as children and have remained incarcerated for their own protection. Her organisation empowers them to lead independent lives once they leave the institution at the age of eighteen. I am so proud of her, and all that she has achieved. I smile to myself when I think of the role that Merlin played in helping her to move on.

In this example, my horse Merlin is representative of an authority figure, in this case it is Helen's abuser. Merlin is a big horse standing more than 17 hands high and weighing around 550kg. He has natural authority and agency by virtue of his size. If he were to decide to trample us, there would be little we could do to prevent him. Helen finds her voice and stands up to her abuser using agency.

Although she is acting it out with Merlin, she was actually able to confront the issue with her family and the abuser's family for the first time. She had been silenced for all these years. Told by her family that she was a liar and believed herself to be 'bad' or 'wrong' in some way. For Helen, finding her voice and practicing agency, changed her image of herself, increased her self-confidence massively – her whole sense of identity shifted.

A functional relationship with a horse like Merlin, is one built on trust and mutual respect. Due to his size, Merlin presents an imminent danger, were he to become aggressive or frightened. It is my job to assure him that he is safe and this means asserting my authority over him, so that he doesn't have to worry. Merlin doesn't care what my business card says or how much money I have in my bank account. He doesn't care what car I drive or which school I attended. He only cares to know if I am supposed to be the leader or he is. This requires me to be authentic. I can't fake it; which perhaps is why Helen found

herself revealing this deeply buried secret. Perhaps it was preventing her from being authentic and she recognized that Merlin would have sensed something incongruent in her behaviour and would not have accepted her leadership.

I have facilitated around fifty of these HAT sessions now and notice that it can take some time, before the delegate is able to let go of their fears and pretences. The moment the horse decides to trust me and move away from light pressure of my fingertips, it is an unbelievably powerful experience.

What I see

There is a lot to unpack in this experience which engages different levels of consciousness, and is an example of embodied learning. I became enthralled with this way of knowing, learning and teaching, which requires only the minimum of language. In the piece on voice, I explained that my attraction to embodied learning also came through a fear of spoken language, of 'getting it wrong'. With embodied knowing there is no 'wrong'. The body validates its own sense-making. As Les Todres explains in his 2011 book 'Embodied Enquiry; phenomenological touchstones for research, psychotherapy and spirituality', [...] 'sense-making' is not just a personal cognitive process, but requires participation of the 'lived body' as an authenticating or validating procedure. [...] Such lived body participation is always 'more than words can say', and experience of 'sense-making' involves an engagement with a kind of language that is bodily and sensorily involved" (p31). In Chapter4, I go into more detail about embodied knowing and my experimentation with it as part of this inquiry.

Coming to voice from voiceless-ness, is exemplified through Helen's journey. Through this embodied experience, she was finally able to confront her fears and no longer be identified or silenced by them.

Reflecting on voice, agency and identity in the practice accounts

I see common themes emerging from the practice accounts; the challenging power dynamic between the trainer and the learners, by virtue of culture and gender. It is interesting to notice in each of these experiences, a different challenge and a different 'mood' to the experience. In all cases the power dynamic between the trainer and the group is highlighted.

In the first practice account, the tension is largely cultural, and the resolution requires an imaginative and 'out-of-the-box' solution that propels the group into a different mind-set. In many South Asian cultures, respect is afforded to seniors, regardless of their job role and title. When the person in question is also a male professor, he is considered of very high socio-professional status. This is

especially true of those working in an academic setting such as a University. In showing him disrespect, I relinquished the respect afforded me as a foreigner, and as project manager and host; hence the need to re-assert myself quickly and without the confrontation that would have further weakened my position. This I did, in a number of subtle and instinctive ways. Firstly, I apologized unreservedly and publicly. Secondly, I memorized all the names of the group so that I could speak to them individually and by name. I am not sure why this helped, but it felt instinctively the right thing to do. Perhaps it is another subtle way of gaining influence; by inferring a hierarchical relationship such as parent-child or teacher-pupil. My dress is important; even the 'dab of perfume' at dinner and especially the carefully chosen business suit; all signals that I am in control.

It is interesting to me now, that I see myself balancing a masculine and feminine persona; the black business suit with the green scarf, the pulled back hair and the small strands of hair pulled out to appear feminine. I cannot allow myself to appear too much of either, so I skillfully and unconsciously balance the two.

I wonder if I had continued to deliver the training in a conventional way within a conference setting, if the prevailing mood of disengagement and resentment would have continued. It was a kind of 'shock tactic' that I applied, which seemed to work in this instance. Perhaps it was because the delegates were already out of their comfort zones, that they were trying to take back control of the situation. It was a battle of wills. I was able to leverage this in my favour by virtue of the fact that they were on my turf, and I am not of their culture.

The scenario with the bankers is a little different. I am directing with matriarchal force and being rejected by a group of men whose identity is founded in masculine competitiveness and brotherhood. They come from a 'hero' culture where the leader is a physically strong and virile man. Sri Lanka also has a strong matriarchal history, but my experience has shown that this is often hidden from public view. In this scenario there is a cultural as well as gendered component to it. Unlike the Bangladeshi delegates, this group was on their own turf and the strongly masculine orientation of the organisation was re-enforced by the appearance of the Vice President, who embodied the strong macho values of individualization and separation that are in direct opposition with the relational practices promoted in our training.

In the third example, there is an existing relationship which is more like mother-daughter than employer-employee. There is an established trust between us, which supports Helen in making herself vulnerable. In this scenario, I am coaching her to experience an inner shift which allows her natural agency to emerge. She experiences this in relation to Merlin, and then re-experiences (through

imagery), with her abuser. The experience is so profound that it shifts her beliefs about her own power and identity. She no longer identifies with the victim, and can draw on an actual embodied experience of standing up for herself, in front of the man she had been afraid of. After experiencing this virtually (and multi-sensually), her primitive brain accepted this as 'true' and ceased to bombard her with messages of self-preservation, flight or fight responses, to perceived threats.



Figure 8 – Merlin assisting in a Horse Assisted Transformation Exercise with Paul Hunting

Chapter eleven – arts-based practice

This is the part where I articulate my contribution to arts-based practice

The Field

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right-doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense.*

*The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.*

*People are going back and forth across the doorsill
Where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.*

Jalal ad-Din Mohammad Rumi (1207 – 1273)

Introduction to arts-based practice

I am a visual reader. I scan the text and form images that help me to locate text within a meaningful metaphor. When the text is thick with extended abstraction, I lose the thread and am easily distracted. To overcome this, I make copious notes on fluorescent post-it stickers and in margins. I use a highlighter pen or underlining to make parts of text more visually prominent as a way of claiming knowledge. When the text became too dense I draw a picture....

Drawing a picture is what I do when I need to make sense of something. I have sketchbooks full of annotated sketches and half-written poetry, the 'bio-graffiti' or scatterings that fill and silt up my living inquiries as both a rich resource and a burden. It is on these over-stuffed notebooks and scraps of squared paper, that I have wrestled with an idea, or a hint of an idea, illustrating, articulating, evoking and enriching, (Seeley, 2006, et al). When the experience is embodied, I am often compelled to write prose or poetry to achieve gratification.

It is a burden; an itch that always needs scratching; an urge to satisfy a craving for clarity. The act of putting pen to paper is generative and impulsive. In the absence of any suitable materials, I write on paper napkins, on the back of till receipts, on anything that allows me to make tangible the whirlpool of ideas that are forming in my head. If circumstances prevent me from doing so, (for example, when I am held captive in someone-else's dialogue – or during the take-off and landing on a plane journey), I can become quite agitated. My painting - "The Field" is my largest work of art to date; an articulation of a deeply personal inner journey that made explicit my epistemology and an ontology that often feels in deep conflict with the world around me. This was a big itch, that I had been scratching at for most of my life. Which perhaps explains my sense of completion beyond the physical achievement, now that it is done.

In this chapter I am exploring my arts-based practice including the exercise of painting 'The Field' and exploring my use of metaphor and imagery as a first person inquiry. I have already shared a great deal in earlier chapters about my experiences around embodied knowing, and in many ways this is an extension of that same journey. Arts-based practices are part of my epistemology and woven into my practice as a trainer and consultant. In this chapter, I am to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of arts-based approaches to my own sense-making, in order to work with art more deliberately and with more knowledge, when I use it with others.

I want to take a moment here to summarise the qualitative criteria for arts-based approaches that I have gleaned from relevant literature. In Chapter 4, I shared the challenges of providing metrics for

qualitative approaches, including the politics around whose criteria count and ultimately whose voices get heard. My conclusion is that qualitative assessment of qualitative inquiry, as in any qualitative assessment is dependent on (1) The ultimate purpose of the assessment, (2) The abiding political landscape and agenda, (3) The over-arching implicit expectation of (for example) a process that advances humankind and nurtures the planet. What this means in practical terms is that I first need to clearly articulate my intention (in using an arts-based approach), who is it for? why am I choosing this approach? What do I hope to gain, or others to gain? and am I being honest with myself about this?

Secondly, I must ask about the politics of voice and inclusion; am I assuring that all voices are heard equally? Is the arts-based approach leaving certain voices out and if so, how do I address this? How will the output from the arts-based approach be used and by whom? How will I assure a duty of care to protect the vulnerabilities of those who have participated?

Thirdly, I must ask myself about the over-arching expectation, that may be unconscious or implicit, that this process will contribute toward a greater goal. Do all participants understand the need for to further lofty goals of human flourishing? Are there other over-arching objectives or expectations that are not being articulated and is our definition of human flourishing afflicted by neo-colonialism or Western arrogance? Do we share the same vision or are we/am I, projecting my worldview and excluding others?

Painting as epistemology: a first person reflexive inquiry

It was on the advice of my doctoral supervisory group, that I plunged into painting, with the same primal sense of purpose as I felt diving into much of my ethnographic inquiry; 'paint it out' they had suggested. I had been given the gift of two large canvasses from a dear friend after his artist wife had died; they had sat behind the cupboard gathering dust. It was with trepidation tinged with excitement that I mounted one atop the timber easel and was staring into its whiteness, wondering what secrets were held in that amorphous layer just above the surface, waiting to be revealed.

I bought acrylic paints from the art shop, brushes in a range of sizes and a large plastic palette the size of a dinner plate. I still had no idea what I was going to paint, something around nature, a journey through a jungle. I Googled 'mythical landscapes' and downloaded images that resonated; ones that excited me or somehow felt right until I had a patchwork of ideas.

The painting represents two worlds divided by an abyss. On the left side of the painting behind a padlocked iron gate is the world of language and construction. Representative of my time spent in Hong Kong and a city that never sleeps, the skyscrapers remind me of my work at that time, as a computer



Figure 9a – Easel set up in my living room

graphics specialist - creating digital buildings such as these, repetitious, soulless monuments, each floor an exact replica of the one beneath. Lights are blazing throughout the building, even though the day is dawning. Around the base, floodlights and neon signs remind me of the endless shopping opportunities, day and night – wandering through that artificial daylight, centrally air-conditioned cathedral, arms laden, plastic bags cutting into my palms; numbing the pain of loneliness.

Mirroring the cityscape on the opposite side of the abyss, we find a mountain scene, majestic and inaccessible to man. On the lower slopes, the mountain trails

are ones I climbed on expeditions to find the nepenthes (pitcher plant) in the Philippines, Mount Apo in particular. Each mountain has a different ‘feel’ almost like a soul or a spirit and Mount Apo in Southern Mindanao has a very special energy. I feel it draw me in and upwards to the misty montane forests and ultimately to the volcanic crater lake at the summit. This land on the right of the abyss is one of embodied experience and of reciprocity with the natural world. The Celtic stone in the foreground hints that civilisation once inhabited this world and the trail is one made by ancient man. The symbol of the Triskelion is tattooed on my lower arm and is in memory of my beloved horse Merlin. The Triskelion is an ancient Celtic symbol for magic. Equally I have found it to be symbolic of the holy Trinity and of life, death and rebirth.

The Process

The process by which embodied and unconscious knowing becomes manifest through words, (or in this case through images), is deeply significant to my inquiry and central to my dissertation. Knowing this, I tried to hold the idea lightly, so as not to crush the spontaneity of my process, and allow it to be an embodied one. Often, I paint in the early morning while I am still in a semi dream-state and this helps me to avoid over thinking. Most of the time I am painting I am 'experiencing' the subject of the painting more than the process. I feel the feathers of the kingfisher and transfer this feeling into brush strokes, until I am satisfied that the image and the felt experience are congruent. In particular, I



Figure 9b- The landscape starts to take shape

relish the field with its rich dewy greenness, and the mist rising up from the waterfall, I feel its coolness.

I hold my ethnographic inquiry loosely, and consistently in my consciousness, and allow ideas to flow directly from their subconscious associations, through the brush, to express themselves on the canvas. I use photographic images that I find on the internet to guide my painting and keep it life-like, and I follow my instincts with regards to composition, colour and light.

The landscape reveals itself to me and I am drawn into it. What I mean by that is - as I am painting the memories of previous lived experiences flow through me, and seem to express themselves in the colours and gesture of the brush. For example, as I begin to paint the mountains, I remember the lower scrubby slopes with rocks and low trees and the deeper darker forests with their jagged rocks near the summit. I am feeling the coolness, and the sharp textures; the process of painting is one of remembering. I surprise myself with the level of detail in my sensual memory; including smells, tastes and sensations.



Figure 9c – Putting the texture and detail evokes an increasingly sensual experience

I dream about the landscape. At night, half awake, half asleep, I wander its pathways and swim in the pool by the waterfall. I climb the rocky path up into the primary rainforest. I become one with the painting; it holds me, embraces me. I am both inside and outside of its gaze.

The content and composition

The characters in the painting are both real and metaphorical. The horse, Firefly, my first horse, is peering at me from behind the tree. She suffered from a neurological condition, and would stand like this outside my office, watching me for hours at a time while I worked at my desk. She is watching me watching her. I am also depicted in the picture, riding my horse Merlin; I am the subject and the object, the observer and the observed. This stepping in and out of experience mirrors the heuristic inquiry described in Chapter 3 on methodology.

In the dark at the bottom right hand corner of the picture a cobra is poised ready to strike. The snake is sensual, dark and threatening and represents my own sensuality and sexuality; something, I felt queasy to represent, yet needed expression.

I was conscious of selecting a kingfisher to represent my mother; it was her favourite bird. Mum wore blue a great deal, often immaculate, matching head to toe. She had an eccentric collection of kingfisher memorabilia around the house which proliferated after my father's death. The house had a nameplate "Kingfisher", and a brass kingfisher door knocker we found in an antique shop in Nepal.

The heron is my father – tall, slightly awkward and aloof. They are looking in different directions and not at me. There was something about the image that spoke to me when I selected it from the many bird images in front of me. When I painted it, I was not aware that it would become my father – only later on reflection could I see his majestic height and slight ungainliness reflected in the bird I had painted.

I knew that I would paint an abyss, a cavern to represent my unconscious. Romanshyn's metaphorical abyss had caught my attention and imagination early in my inquiry process and resonated with me as a gap between what is and can be said and that which remains unsaid or unsayable. "The epiphanies of soul exceed the words that psychology gives to them, that there is always a gap, and perhaps even an abyss, between what psychology says of soul and what soul wants to be spoken" (Romanshyn, 2007, p29).

I think perhaps the abyss in my painting represents my idea of a collective non-verbal consciousness; a flowing stream that is universal and infinite. There is music in the abyss, music that has been a big part of my life, not least for its capacity to transport me into a rich, sensual experience that requires no language. Birds fly in a huge swarm under the bridge and up into the sky. They represent the people, the souls that have touched my life and moved on. They follow one another, a flock of birds, largely unconscious and unaware of the natural world. As they ride up, some have transcended and transformed themselves. These are the spirits of people passing into another realm. They have turned into birds with long sweeping tails, something between a paradise flycatcher and a phoenix.



Figure 9d – Mia the cat watches over me

In the tree sits my cat Mia, wise and ever watchful like the Cheshire cat of Alice in Wonderland; like Firefly, I sense her vulnerability and expectation. She watches me constantly. I feel the weight of responsibility for her and fear I will fail her in some way, as I did, my horse Firefly; who suffered a fractured spine and died tragically.

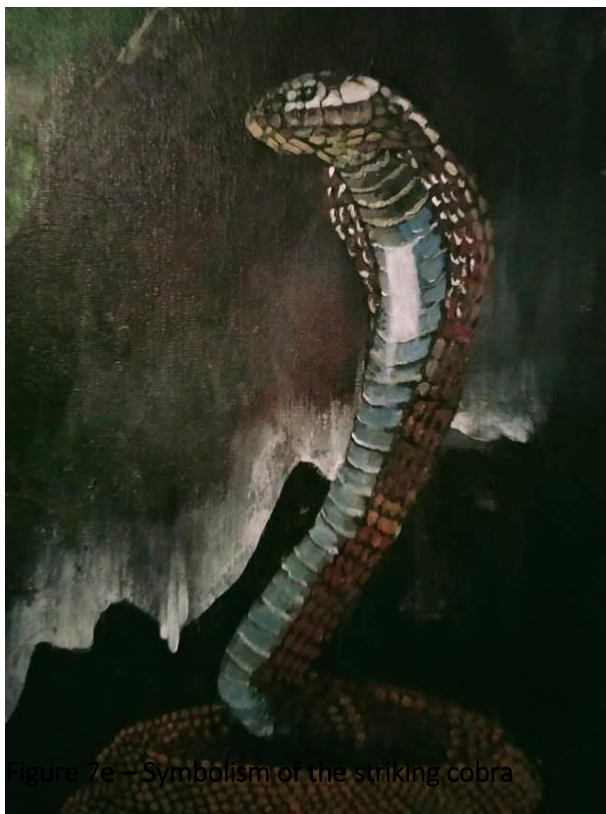


Figure 7e – Symbolism of the striking cobra

The griffin is half eagle-half lion and reminds me of British folk legend and heraldry. It lends a fantastical quality to the image. I am reminded that the embodied world is not perceived to be a real thing, it's a fantasy, a story, an imagined or extinct mythical creature and the "Real World" is beyond the padlocked cemetery gate.

The symbolism of a deadly snake (a cobra poised to strike). Is one that I initially interpreted as indicative of a dark sensual, possibly sexual side to my world. Later in this chapter, (pages 216-220) the image of a snake presents itself in relation to unconscious fear-driven behaviours (from childhood), that are shame-filled and oppressive.

Figure 9e – Symbolism of the snake is a recurring one



Figure 9f– Close up of the bridge over the abyss between the two worlds

Quality and Validation against my own criteria

This painting had a very clear purpose. I set out with an intention to illustrate and enrich my thesis with a clear intent to provide a resource for Doctoral Viva, resolve questions that remained, (such as how does this all come together?) and gain clarity and confidence in my conclusions. From that perspective it has been a successful process and outcome, which made a significant difference to my levels of confidence and lucidity at my Viva voce; it strengthened my voice and empowered me to deliver my specific subjective truth with authority.

With regards to the political landscape in which the quality of my art work will be evaluated, I am aware that arts-based approaches can be viewed as ‘un-scholarly’ or as Seeley puts it, ‘[...] it is still not ‘normal’ to do ‘arty’ things which can end up in the realm of ‘alternative’ or ‘other’ ways to know, (Seeley, 2006, p84). This was a calculated risk. I had heard stories of others who had failed their viva by ‘distracting the examiners’ with work that was not relevant or of low quality. In other cases, I learned of candidates who had rescued a weak thesis with an outstanding viva. I hoped that this would be the case for me, and set about the task with an attitude, of ‘what do I have to lose?’ As an artefact of first-person inquiry, the issue of ‘whose voices have been excluded?’ can be replaced by the question ‘have I excluded any voices within myself?’ Am I privileging certain voices in order to make it look good? Am I being authentic? Am I presenting the whole picture?

In consideration of the third quality aspect, I am governed by the Action Research approach which clearly articulates that ‘AR is a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.’ (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). I ask myself what contribution I am making with this art, to this overarching purpose of Action Research.

This quality consideration is validated by the positive dialogue that the work evokes, and the quality and frequency of conversations that I have had with friends, family members and visitors to the riding club, that would not have taken place had they had the opportunity to experience the painting physically or by following my process on social media. The following is an excerpt from my journal at the time.

I posted updates of my work daily on social media. I was taken by surprise by the sincerity of reaction from so many people, some of whom I had rarely connected with since childhood and certainly not in any meaningful way. Others seem to recognise their own experiences in my journey, or perhaps their

own part in mine. Some friends and family members would make suggestions – ‘where is the music?’ one asked. I tried to visualise a stream of music, an auditory sense in a world expressed visually. It had to be in the water, I instinctively felt – linked to my unconscious abyss, that place where pure primal experience dwells. I had to locate my old music books to remember how to draw a musical score and immediately I was transported to a place where I am practicing solos and arpeggios from Wright and Rounds “Soloist Companion” at my parent’s house, I am fourteen years old. The notes are old friends and no time has passed at all.

I was time travelling. For the entire three weeks I was held in a space where past and future cohabited. Everything seemed to fit – the act of recreating the past within a canvas meant that I could step back and examine it and understand its relevance in a way that this inquiry had prepared me to do.

It was an act of appreciation, of forgiveness and of acceptance; of my own life and of the significant others that are part of it. It brought us closer as we recognised a common experience, joyful memories of long-forgotten friendships.

In particular, it honoured and emboldened my love affair with the natural world. The painting is most of all a celebration of a life lived in close communion with the non-human world. I feel great joy and am uplifted each time I gaze on it. ‘[...] artful inquiry becomes a call for full-bodied engagement, and we learn from our more-than-intellectual selves and the more-than-human world in ways which are essential if we are to positively respond to our planet. (Seeley, 2011, p85).

The use of metaphor and symbolism

The art is an illustration of a journey that is mapped out spatially rather than temporally, so that I can connect and relate my experience of home, parents, city and work life in the same canvas as my horses, plants and a deeply personal experience of the natural world. The scenes within the journey depict different aspects of my life experience, each character symbolic of a particular cluster of remembered experiences. Overall, the image is positive, with light streaming in from behind the clouds, indicating perhaps that despite the difficulties, better times are ahead.

The padlocked gate represents feelings of exclusion which go back to early childhood – of not fitting in, not being part of the club. It also reflects my feeling excluded from the ‘masculine’ world of words and constructions. As if in mockery, there are descriptive words – “Joy”, “Sister”, “Girl”; they evoke memories. I am reminded that they are but a poor substitute for the lived, sensed experience they claim to represent; yet I persist in taming and owning words in written form through my poems and prose as a kind of silent rebellion; this artwork too feels like a rebellion of sorts a reclaiming of personal truth.

Seeley proposes that as action researchers we consider ourselves to be ‘Artists of the invisible’ (Kaplan, 2002), working to create spaces which are potentially transformative for ourselves, those we work with, and the systems of which we are an intrinsic part’, (Seeley, 2011, p96). I wonder about the extent to which the act of painting has been transformational.

After the painting was complete, I found myself gazing at it, remembering and re-experiencing the action of painting as well as the painting as a whole a whole work that drew me in and in which I could dwell and feel safe, feel loved and feel at peace; a kind of *experience-demanding metaphor* where the symbolism demands that I meet it with my whole body. I wonder if the act of art-making is also an act of curating my story and (re)presenting it in ways that are joyful and empowering. Does the painting hold the power to transform my embodied experience of the memories it holds? Around this time, I came across the poem by Rumi entitled ‘The Field’ (reproduced on page 207), which strangely connected with an idea I had around the image of ‘The Field Where Horses Graze’, which I explain on pages 232 and 233, as a place of freedom and vulnerability.

An example of Arts-based Practice as Inquiry

It is one of those ‘what just happened?’ moments. My hands are shaking and I am on the verge of tears. I struggle to keep my voice steady as I force myself to calm down; to ignore the adrenaline pumping through my veins that is telling me to shout, to hit out and run away.

My friend’s husband, ‘Gerald’, is giving me advice on my new project. This project is something I have been living and breathing for the last six months, I have a great deal at stake and secretly I am scared that I am out of my depth. I recognise Gerald as a separated knower, he tends to disagree with me (and others) as a first reflex. He says ‘I am just playing devil’s advocate’, but his criticisms are blunt, deeply pessimistic and largely inaccurate. As I begin to explain, to defend my case, he starts to ridicule me; ‘you’re crazy’, ‘it’s impossible’, ‘I would never put my money into something like this’.

I recognise, based on my new understanding, that we are operating from different epistemological paradigms. Despite knowing this, I am caught up in an emotional response to something that feels like a personal attack; I can’t seem to control what is happening in my body. I push myself out of the experience; I take a big breath, smile, and try to regain self-control. I apologize, and try to explain calmly. He interrupts again, speaking over me, and with an angry face. I steeple my fingers in front of me on the table and try to just sit and listen. I can see my finger-tips trembling. I tell myself to focus on his voice, rather than the content, and allow him to say what he feels without interruption. I feel powerless, like a little girl who has been chastised unfairly, and I feel angry at him and at myself. I can feel my face reddening. ‘You can’t get emotional like this in front of an investor’, he adds, ‘it is so

unprofessional'. I am ten-years old, the feeling is a familiar one, and one that I associate with mother and with several past relationships. My heart is thumping as if I am fighting for my life.

I am trying to understand what just happened. I try to step back into the experience and recreate the subtle nuances of triggers and bodily response. I have written several paragraphs of a 'he said, she said' nature, but all it seems to do is rationalise my response, rather than help me to grow beyond it. I am deleting everything I have written and sitting back in my chair; I am unsure what to do next.

Rationally, and through my inquiry, I have come to know that Gerald is operating from a different epistemological and gendered paradigm; but knowing this doesn't seem to help me control my response. I sense that the really important battle is the one going on inside.

I know this battle, it is the rejected, misunderstood and angry child that is fighting to be loved and understood. Despite seven years of study, of self-reflection and knowledge-building, at these times, the child is still in control of my body.

I have decided to try to 'paint it out'. I walked to the store and bought coloured pencils, acrylic paints, watercolour paints and a set of paint brushes. As an afterthought, I see myself pick up a small packet of children's bright-coloured modelling clay. It takes me several hours to clear a mental and physical space for the exercise. I notice I am searching for a suitable metaphor, something that resonates in sympathy with the 'Gerald experience'. This involves stepping back into uncomfortable feelings of shame, of frustration and of barely repressed anger. At one point, I imagine I am being squeezed by a giant snake. The feelings of being over-powered and controlled by a devouring and malevolent (emotional) force, lead me to explore images available on the internet; of artworks involving snakes. I am reminded of the snake in the corner of my painting 'The Field' and wonder if this snake is symbolic of my deepest, darkest childhood fears - Deep because they are unconscious, dark because they are shame-filled and repressed.

I am asking myself if I am constructing images to justify my feelings, or even manufacturing feelings to justify the symbolism. I sense I am over-thinking. Instinctively, I pick up the child's modelling clay. I allow the clay to form shapes between my fingers and I try not to focus on the outcome. It feels good.



OPPO A53
 Figure 10a. Clay model of snake/tree figure

What emerged was crude, like something made by a small child. A roughly shaped figure, in orange and yellow, with a bright red underbelly, has a large pink and blue snake wrapped around it (her?). I remember thinking of 'gender' as I picked up the blue and pink and rolled it into a sausage-shape for the snake. What remained, were two sticks of bright green clay. I fashioned these into leaves and tendrils and covered the top of the figure and around the back, until it resembled a tree stump covered in ivy.

I could spend an entire chapter drawing analogies from the figure that emerged. To me it was self-evident and echoed themes articulated in 'The Field'; tension with the constructed (and constricted) man-made world, where gender is differentiated and politicised, symbolised by the snake. The figure, which now resembles a tree, or a tree-stump, is covered by the nurturing forces of nature. The red spiked tongue of the snake reminds me that it lives and threatens me still.



I was dissatisfied that this was an authentic representation of the Gerald experience. However, it drew my attention back to 'The Field'; and to ask where this experience might be represented there.

I recognised the feeling of powerlessness and silence in the 'abyss' that, in my painting, stands between the natural world and the world of words. I focused in on the part of the painting that represents this tension between unconscious, intuited experience, and the external expression of that experience, needed to enter the (masculine) world of objectivity.

I began a new artwork using the coloured pencils. It features the bridge leading up to the cemetery gates into

Figure 10b. Pencil Sketch of the floating bridge over the abyss

the 'real' world of objectivity. The bridge was made up of suspended turfs of grass, there are gaps between them, the traps I can fall into when I lose focus. I recognise that the abyss has an appeal, and I am being drawn into it. The cemetery gate has adopted the appearance of a malevolent face. Beyond, at the foot of the castles, children have formed a ring and are holding hands. The children are depicted as paper cuts, featureless and stereo-typed. It reminds me now of the feeling of 'being left out from the party', of being outcast from the playground games at school. There is a childlike quality to the landscape beyond the gate, which contrasts the detailed grass in the foreground. I am not sure why this is.

The artwork speaks to me on many levels, but not explicitly to the Gerald experience. I feel dissatisfied by the exercise, leave the drawing unfinished, and go for a walk to clear my head.

Something is brewing; I can feel it. A seed of an insight glimpsed, like a moving shadow, out of the corner of my eye. I re-read what I have written and sit for a while in front of a copy of my painting.

"I sense that the really important battle is the one going on inside." My own words from the text above, reminds me that all of this 'stuff' I am dealing with, is happening internally. 'The Field' is as much my internal landscape as it is a representation of my experience of the outside world.

This realisation sparks off a feeling of creativity. It is the child in me that is taking control at those moments of stress and impotence and it is the child that will find the creative solution. I understand, perhaps for the first time, that it is the feelings of shame and embarrassment, that are my oppressors, not Gerald. He is simply a trigger, like my male work colleagues and my mother.

The snake belongs to me, it is part of me and I need to make peace with it, to tame it; give it a name perhaps. I am wondering about the relationship between the snake and the abyss. Is the snake a manifestation of the abyss? If instead of experiencing the snake as a negative and threatening oppressor, I could begin to imagine it as a water fountain. In my visualisations (Chapter 7, pages 166-170) where I am applying the Feldenkrais method to my horse-riding, I imagine a water fountain rising up through my body. I am curious to explore if this same positive imagery could support me at those times when childhood fears and embodied responses seem to hijack my rational and conscious intent. I decide to create a third artwork using water colour.

This is the result. The fountain is in an ocean and the body is ethereal with an indication of angel-like wings. The head of the body is the setting sun and there is an overall feeling of peaceful and expansive energy.

This exercise was helpful in putting art-based practice into a practical realm for me. I was trying to manifest and make sense of the phenomenon of feeling powerless and feeling crushed and oppressed.

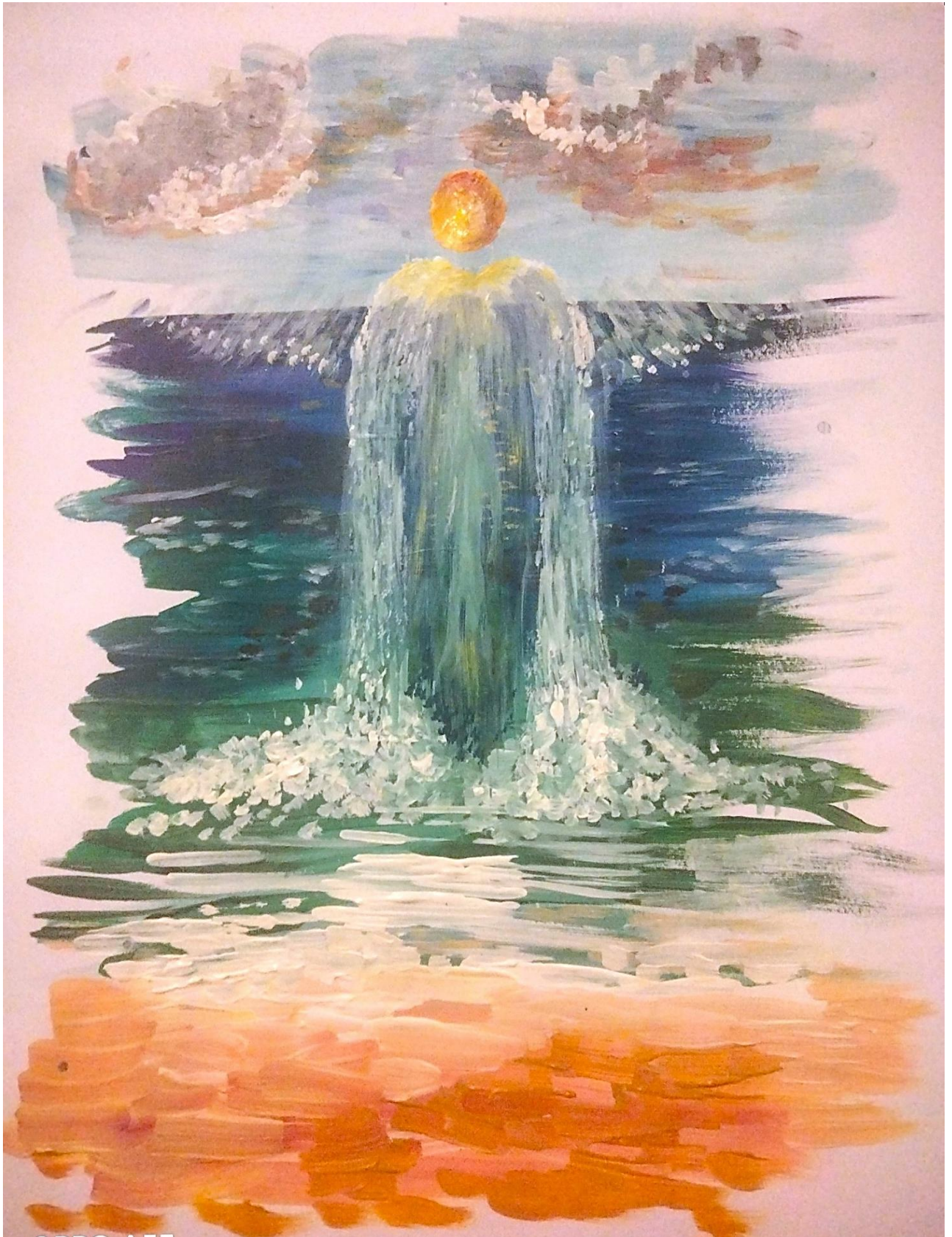


Figure 10c. Watercolour painting of the water fountain

Manifesting the feeling through clay, was helpful when visual imagery eluded me. I noticed that I trusted my kinaesthetic sense to step in where my logical brain was ‘stuck’ in over-thinking. I was then able to explore the metaphorical representation further by relating it to my earlier artwork of the ‘Field’ and allowing my subconscious to choose the associations that fitted best with my experience. Whilst I was drawing the second artwork, I was already getting a sense that ‘this was not it’; whatever I was looking for, clarity, resolution, this felt forced and constructed. Nevertheless, the process was useful, as it helped me to recognise that I had externalised the conflict; the ‘me’ versus the ‘other’; the ‘right’ from ‘wrong’, the objective from the relational.

I am reminded of earlier reading around Heidegger and authenticity, which I explore in more detail on pages 117-118, where he describes the conflict between authentic self, and its inauthentic counterpart.

The opposite of authenticity, according to Heidegger, is ‘being-with’ which he describes as a state of averageness—a “Being-lost in the public-ness of the ‘they’” (Being and Time 1927, p38: 220). Hence we might call the authentic self the ‘mine-self’, and the inauthentic self the ‘they-self’, latter term also serving to emphasize the point that fallen-ness is a mode of the self, not of others, (APDG, 2013).

I had relegated the world beyond the abyss as one that was ‘other’ and external to me; outside of my control; someone else’s fault. This exercise, helped me to remember, that both the ‘mine-self’ and the ‘they-self’ are an integral part of my internal world and I begin to understand that I need to own both worlds, and make peace with them in order to overcome this fear and tame the snake.

In the final painting, I am working with intent and purpose. I have in mind, the feeling I experienced when experimenting with Feldenkrais imagery (Chapter 7, pages 166-170). My idea is to tap into the positive energy that I experienced while riding my horse and to use this as a resource when confronted and feeling fearful. I feel peaceful and energized while painting this and it connects me with positive childhood imagery that I explain in Chapter 7.

REFLECTIONS

In pursuit of expansion of academia’s own epistemological capacity, towards more equitable ways of knowing, arts-based practices require different paradigms of validation, not just in terms of other’s voices and opinions, but allows for what Heron terms ‘post-linguistic propositional knowing’... where we respond to the gesture of the thing (1992, p177). I propose that in the interests of art as transformative epistemology, a place where epistemology meets ontology and art becomes life; we need to consider the value in this process of ‘pre-linguistic propositional knowing’, where instinct is a valid form of self-expression and self-knowing and space is provided, alongside other more traditional

forms of epistemology, to explore and experience oneself, and declare knowledge, without the constant need to seek justification within someone else's language game and in relation to someone else's criteria. (Seeley, 2011, p94). Let me be clear, the purpose of this is not to replace knowledge validated by traditional means, but to open the field to other ways of individual knowing that are not constrained by language and the judgment of others. This to enrich the knowledge base, rather than to substitute this for academically verified knowledge.

In terms of my own practice, this means creating safe, non-judgmental spaces, where self-expression, self-reflection and potentially transformation can occur through arts-based learning activities, where all candidates are artists and art is not a specific skill, but a legitimate way to express, to illustrate, to evoke and to transform. The artist is given license to re-envision their life story and re(presents) it in ways that are empowering and positively transformational; 'Mak[ing] spaces for the kinds of flourishing essential for our lives' (p96).

If we are to expand our consciousness beyond our intellectual judging and 'rationality' [...] and if we are to embrace broader ways to know and make decisions, then the enrichment we are seeking comes from broadening our notion of what we might currently call 'the arts'. – a route to a better quality, deeper more satisfying and influential action research.' (Seeley, 2011, p96).

Chapter twelve – synthesis

This is the part where I synthesize all the insights and attempt to share new knowledge

I have asked myself continuously, is this work relevant? This week I found my answer.

On the grass in front of the old Parliament buildings, now the Finance Ministry, ten thousand people are gathered on a daily basis to demand, from the tented encampment known as ‘Gota Go Gama’ that the President, Gotaba Rajapakse, his brother the Prime Minister and the rest of his corrupt family ‘Go Home’. On the May Day holiday, the numbers swelled to over a million. The protest is remarkable in many ways; by the representation across all ethnic, political and religious divides, by the unity of purpose, the non-violence and the representation by the youth and the professional classes who have traditionally shied away from sharing their political opinions or raising their voices. (May 9th 2022)

Just moments after writing this piece above and below, the streets are filled with special forces in riot gear. There are water cannons and tear gas, and gangs of thugs are smashing and burning down the protest site and beating up the protestors. My friends are sending me text messages “Get out of there NOW!”

I escape in a tuk-tuk. It takes me four hours and around USD50, equivalent to get home safely. For most of the journey home, we are passing through crowds of angry people carrying iron bars. I don’t know who they are, and who they are angry at, but I have heard stories from the past, that tell me this can turn ugly at any moment. An angry man shakes his fist in my face and demands I put away my phone camera. This is not a role play, and I am no longer a passive spectator. My white skin makes me noticeable, so I draw back inside the motorcycle rickshaw and keep my white privilege to myself.

After 30 years of civil war, a devastating tsunami, terrorist bomb attacks and two years affected by the global pandemic, Sri Lanka is finally positioned to take up the strategic global position it deserves, as a hub and economic engine for the region; but instead, due to decades, if not centuries, of institutionalized corruption, it is suffering a catastrophic economic meltdown.

The people blame the government and the opposition and everyone around them that has seemingly profited at the expense of the country's foreign exchange. The result has been ten-hour power cuts, fuel and food shortages that have devastated industry and impoverished all but the wealthiest Colombo elite.

On the Galle Face Green, the large ocean-facing public park across the road from Sri Lanka's most luxurious hotels, a gathering of ten -thousand people have set up a tent-village and have been occupying it for the last thirty days. Billed on global social media as 'the most peaceful protest ever'.

I am witness to a profound transformation and am emboldened and inspired in equal measure. I have a lump in my throat and my eyes are itchy as I listen to the young voices united in a harmonious chorus, 'Do you hear the people sing', from Les Miserables.

The youth of Sri Lanka are raising their voices; through words, through music, through poetry, through drama and through art. They are speaking loudly and the message is clear "You have messed with the wrong generation' the placards read.

'They are not scared', I hear myself saying, 'unlike their parents who grew up during the ethnic conflict; this generation are emboldened and they are connected like never before, through the internet, through education, as a result of the pandemic; they are united and they are angry – they want change and are not afraid to raise their voices.'

How do I know this? - Because I know these people; they are my friend's children and grandchildren, they are the older brothers and sisters and the young parents of the children that ride at my riding school. I have heard their stories over cups of coffee, in casual conversations, and through my work as a consultant for small businesses.

The next day, they were back, they rebuilt the camp and millions of Sri Lankans took to the streets to protect their rights to peaceful protest. Elderly catholic nuns in their white habits, sit on plastic chairs between the protestors and the riot police. Lawyers in full regalia stand arms folded, side-by-side across the street just in front of the religious leaders. I have a tear in my eye as I'm writing this. History is being made, heroes and heroines are stepping forward, one person at a time.

Relevance of this inquiry

I see a correlation with my personal experience of being silenced through fear; not fear for my life, but fear of rejection, of being outcast. Finally, through this inquiry, I feel free from fear for the first time in sixty years, and I am raising my voice with more confidence and asking for what I need, without shame and without fear of scorn.

This is the relevance of my work and my inquiry, right here on the streets of Colombo, where artists, artisans, men, women and children from all ethnicities, raise their different voices in their own unique and equally important way, after generations of oppression through fear. There are actors, singers, leaders from the corporate world, sportsmen and women, people from the legal profession, students and all manner of Sri Lankan folk, who have decided to overcome their fear and raise their voices regardless. I can see my role as their trainer, facilitator and coach, and by leading through example.



Figure 11. The make-shift Art Gallery and street sculptures at the protest site in Colombo

In this final chapter of my offering to the world, I will attempt to synthesize these moments of clarity; where something new has revealed itself to me and enhanced my knowledge and practice in the world.

I am ending as I started, walking through an exhibition of paintings, each one representing an insight from this inquiry. If time and pages were unlimited, I would create artworks and hold a physical exhibition. Perhaps that is something for the future. Instead, I will describe the big bold shapes, the light and the dark, and draw out what is unique and has been revealed to me at each stage.

At the close of this chapter, I am planning one final artwork, a kind of resolution to the conundrum of the field and one that moves the inquiry out of the personal and into the public realm. It is a work in progress, it will be unfinished, possibly still in sketch form and the draft for a bigger canvas. It will likely be the last piece of work to be included in this chapter.

Insights

In chapter 1, I declare that this is a first-person action research inquiry into feminine epistemological development, voice and voiceless-ness; working with art-based approaches, with metaphor and with embodied ways of knowing. If this chapter were an artwork it would be a vignette; cloudy at the outer rim and becoming clearer and clearer towards the centre. At the centre, an honest reflection of myself, older, worn out but with a spirited spark in my eye. I have come on a long journey and am finally able to see the journey for the magic, rather than the tragic, and am looking off towards the horizon with hope and renewed confidence. I share the struggle to articulate my inquiry, and the struggle I have had generally with language. I set an expectation of rich multi-sensual metaphors which have been a balm and a retreat from daily life, which at times has been harsh.

The first key insight from completing this chapter has been the realisation that an authentic inquiry is more important than a perfect process. After several years of trying to 'get it right', I was stuck. I asked for and was granted an extension and gave myself permission to just dive in, head first. Without the pressure of meeting anyone's expectations but my own. I gave myself permission to use unorthodox methodologies, such as embodied inquiry and writing that evokes mental imagery, starting with the 'Pictures at an Exhibition' metaphor and freed myself up to really explore, experience and come to understand.

The second insight was the role of non-verbal, natural experiences as a nurturing mechanism. I explain how I use journaling as a tool to distance myself from the experiences I am having, and to relate to them from a third person perspective. I become increasingly aware of the need to protect a fragile ego from depression and disillusionment, during protracted periods of financial hardship. This coping

mechanism was at times, part of the fog. I explain how nature and my relationship with my horses, feeds me and allows me to be more vulnerable and authentic during these times.

In Chapter 2, on ethics I finally I begin to understand from my reading, the relevance of colonialism in the modern world, in particular in development assistance, I recognised the complexity of behaving ethically, in a context where ‘everyday life in Sri Lanka is imbued with nuanced colonial influence, which has become normalised to the point of invisibility.’ (page 17). In the re-writing of this chapter, with a focus on the discussion around colonialism, I began to recognise the relevance of my inquiry, and its contribution towards my practice as a learning practitioner and strategic consultant, operating in the ‘Contact Zone’ (Pratt 1991). I gained deeper insight into the institutionalised privileging and disenfranchising of the International Development Community, through their use of excluding language and insistence on objectively-verifiable indicators for ‘performance’ and ‘success’ that are based on first-world definitions which are predominantly white and male. I came to recognise the assumptions that I had been making in the course of my work, that had demonized voices that disagreed with my world-view and subjugated their contribution to learning and decision-making. This is evident in the Practice Accounts #1 and #2, (Chapters eight and nine), where I am struggling to gain engagement from a culturally and epistemologically opposed group.

At the same time, I am much more sensitized to the relevance of my non-conformist learning practices, such as embodied and art-based practices, and am emboldened to use these approaches with greater certainty and legitimacy as one of a range of inclusive facilitation approaches.

If chapter 3 on methodology were an artwork, it would be a collage of art, words, fabrics, stories and graffiti. It would include pressed flowers and seashells of memories, gritty, dripping and sensual.

The many iterations of this chapter, mirrored an increasing ability to step into each moment of growth, and articulate what is happening, cognitively and phenomenologically. It was only completed once I needed to submit my thesis and I was forced to stop asking questions around ‘what just happened’?

As I developed fluency in this new language, I became more confident to express myself in words and symbols, and to compare what emerged against the norms described in the ‘Sage Handbook of Action Research’, (Second Edition, Reason & Bradbury, 2013).

It was a tedious and at times frustrating process of back and forth between the text and the experiences, trying to squeeze, one to fit into the other. The final chapter is evident of this imperfect process. At first, my driving need to ‘get it right’ and to win the approval of my supervisor, Kate, led me to question if I have what it takes, when the approval I sought was not immediately forthcoming. I fell

for a time, into a pit of self-doubt and self-pity and this was debilitating. It was only after I let go of this need, which took several years, (as I explained in the synopsis of chapter one, above), was I able to cast aside fear and inquire into myself authentically.

A key milestone on this journey was the untangling the difference between knowing as a way of acting, knowing a state of being, and knowledge as both an internal, embodied experience and an externalized, shared, mitigated and qualified set of data. For the first several years, I was confused by the overlapping use of the term, in many of the texts, and put my lack of understanding down to my own stupidity.

Eventually, I began to distinguish in my use of the terms 'knowledge' and 'knowing' by applying a capital letter to Knowledge that is formally accepted and acknowledged, and that which remained internal and subjective.

In Chapter 4, I unpack the ideas I have gleaned through literature, and in Chapters 5 to 10, I inquire into my first-hand experiences. The feminist literature provided an understanding of the historical positioning of 'his' story and the disenfranchising of 'her' story in the developed world. I have felt supported and validated in my own experiences of discrimination and have recognised that this is an institutionalised bias. Furthermore, I have found support in my belief that the way forwards and to greater inclusion is through a radical shift in the way that society in general, academia and the corporate world in particular, include different ways of knowing, different ways of experiencing and different ways of measuring contribution.

The bodies of literature are like a canvas; against which I am reviewing these life stories. The feminist literature, in particular was difficult to process at first, but ultimately gave me the bridge I was seeking, between epistemological privilege, disenfranchisement and power. Though the literature focused on feminine epistemologies, I was already connecting the dots, and relating what I was reading to disenfranchisement of marginalised communities through the use of language, discussed in the chapter on Ethics and Colonialism (pages 16-20).

[I]n any society there are privileged epistemologies - the socially valued ways for establishing and evaluating truth claims. (Goldberger, N. et al, 1996, p8). As the world shrinks, differences among us are becoming magnified and too often perceived as threats. [...] In a pluralistic world, can individuals and communities justly set criteria for what is right, what is true, and what is good without demonizing strangers? (ibid, p7). It is essential that we examine the silencing of women of colour and economically disadvantaged women by 'institutional blackouts.' Researchers who limit their study of women to geographically and ethnically homogenous communities risk perpetuating discrimination and tacitly

engaging in methods of oppression. [...] We must therefore call for truly radical paradigm shifts, as well as a thorough re-examination of traditional research strategies (Goldberger, N. et al, 1996, p193).

There it is. The linkage I have been seeking that **promotes radical epistemologies ‘a thorough examination of traditional research strategies’, in order to overcome the discrimination and ‘tacit oppression’ of ethnically diverse groups.**

I see this inquiry as one that grounds embodied and artful knowing as radical epistemologies that are absolutely essential, if we are to move beyond imperialist mind-sets and out-dated ‘rules’ of engagement, that leave many out in the cold. A wider field of play is necessary, not just for research, but for all contact zones, where diverse sets of people come together to co-create knowledge and truth. Artful and Embodied practices are ambiguous, situational, relational and inter-subjective, requiring a certain disposition and worldview that is associated with more feminine than masculine epistemological positions.

Historically, men’s ways of seeing the world, have been taken as the norm. This leaves artful and embodied knowing as ‘different’ and potentially ‘less worthy’ than traditional empirical scientific methods. This is the conflict that brought me into this inquiry, and it remains a massive challenge.

In Chapter 11, at the suggestion of my examiners, I explored through a first-person embodied inquiry, the act of painting and the relevance of drawing and sketching to my epistemology and to my practice. At the conclusion of this chapter, you will have seen me take a recent, experience where I felt disempowered and emotional and tried to unpack it and synergize the experience through art-based practice. I learned, the dangers of over-thinking and the importance of just doing it – even taking a crude piece of children’s modelling clay and making shapes without expectation, or fear of judgment is helpful when I am stuck. I don’t need to be a skilled artist to benefit from arts-based practice, but I need to be willing to take a chance.

My extensive experience, across three decades and many continents has proven to me that all people can benefit from artful and embodied ways of knowing that are forms of direct expression, free from the politics of language and voice; if we can overcome the ‘disappearing’ of these more relational and feminine epistemologies by the ‘rule-makers’. There is an important contribution to be made to international development assistance, and other ‘contact zones’ such as boardrooms, classrooms and universities, where the employment of non-verbal practices, if properly mediated, can assure much greater participation and engagement in the co-creation of knowledge.

Freedom Wound and the call for Vulnerability

With an ambition to raise the profile of non-verbal and artful ways of knowing, I am challenged to overcome resistance of (mostly male) participants, who feel threatened or otherwise compelled unwillingly to let down their guard. This challenges me. After the experience with the Bankers (Practice Account #2, Chapter Nine), I have spent many sleepless nights before a training, searching for the key that unlocks the closed mind of a rules-based knower, who calls it 'that voodoo' and repels and rejects attempts at real engagement.

I don't have an answer yet; but am encouraged and emboldened by Les Todres (2011) use of the term 'freedom-wound' as evocative of what he refers to as the 'soulful space' of being human - how we are grounded in both great freedom and great vulnerability (p110). The freedom he is referring to comes from an opening up to wounds and vulnerabilities. He explains that there are psychological wounds and vulnerabilities that can be healed and others, that are part of the human condition.

'That there are freedoms that can be given, fought for or taken away and others that he refers to as a 'Great Freedom'; that cannot. It is acceptance or the 'settling down' into these dimensions as they come up in life; belonging to this freedom-wound state which he refers to as 'soulful-space between sky and earth' and embracing ambiguity, that is the Great Freedom, (Todres 2011, p111).

I have begun to talk about vulnerability as a great strength. The experiential work that I do with my horses and managers, shows great promise; for you cannot approach a horse, with anything other than honesty and humility, if you want him to respect your authority.

I see a path forward that incorporates embodied knowing as foundational to all knowing, and given the respect and validation it deserves, not as a replacement for empirical or scientific truth, but the subjective ground into which all knowing is rooted. This requires us to see the power of embracing ambiguity; of 'opening of the mind and the heart to view all knowledge as contextual, where there is equal value given to subjective as well as objective strategies.' (Khine & Hayes, 2010, p105-116).

For Todres, he equates this ultimate destination as a place where freedom and vulnerability co-exist. He describes it thus: 'Phenomenologists, (Les Todres quotes Martin Heidegger and Medard Boss) seem to be telling us that vulnerability is necessary for authenticity; without vulnerability there can be no authenticity. Freedom, he says, can be 'given, fought for or taken away'; but the freedom that comes from vulnerability and the acceptance of that vulnerability is a 'Great Freedom'.

THE FIELD WHERE HORSES GRAZE

Burdened by thought, I sit at the bottom of the field on a wooden structure we use for mounting horses. I try to stop the voices in my head from second guessing what might happen next. Within minutes I am surrounded by three huge beasts. Up to six-foot high and more than half a ton in weight, my horses come close to me. They want to touch me, connect with me, which they do by nudging and licking my feet. I sit quietly. One mistake on their part, one aggressive move and I could be missing a toe, crushed or at least badly bitten. I decide to let go. I give them my trust. It is a wonderful moment and I am rewarded by an intimate connection. Merlin, the largest of the herd, nudges me gently, then grazes quietly at my feet. I am reminded that this is not my universe; that it belongs to all life. I am as much a part of their universe as they are part of mine

The field where horses graze is both a physical and a virtual space, and what happens in the field is unscripted, chaotic, emergent and authentic. The Field is a place where I need to show up authentically and with, vulnerability, with honesty and in reciprocity with the natural world. The fences are notional and moveable. It is what happens within this magical space that is important; perhaps only here the 'Great Freedom' alluded to by Todres (2011), is a real possibility.

In 2017 four women in their fifties, all horsewomen, set up a Whatsapp group called 'The Field'. One lived in Kenya, two in England and one in Sri Lanka. It became a place of refuge and unquestioning support during very difficult days of bombs, riots, economic hardships, grieving and joy. The 'Field Where Horses Graze' is a Contact Zone, where people from different epistemologies, ethnicities, political, economic and cultural backgrounds can meet authentically to listen, to be heard and to co-create Knowledge and truth for the betterment of society as a whole.

The Rainbow Bridge

This artwork is a resolution, a proposition of how the world is at times, and how it can be. The rainbow across the abyss, reflects the diversity of cultures, beliefs and epistemologies, each with its own unique qualities and each with a different role to play. On the other side of the abyss is the field where horses graze. It is a perfect contact zone where I can show up authentically and be accepted, fit in, because of my diversity, rather than in spite of it. GohomeGota and the GotagoGama (The village of the Gota go Home protest on Galle Face Green), is an example. It is filled with hope, possibility and potential, and history will tell the story of its success or otherwise, but the role I can play in supporting an inclusive movement for positive transformation in Sri Lanka, is crystal clear.

I had decided to conclude this thesis with a piece of art. Yet when I had completed the painting, I was dissatisfied; it felt contrived and inauthentic. After working on the painting, which was a reproduction of an image that struck me from the internet, I felt it lacked authenticity and felt somehow contrived. I decided instead, to play with colours and shapes, and create three tableaus, holding the idea of 'The Language of the Abyss' but not too tightly.

Rather than remove it from the piece, it felt more honest to include it as evidence of the struggle, which continues on a daily basis, to be open, to listen to the deeper logos, and to be vulnerable to getting it wrong and being imperfectly human.

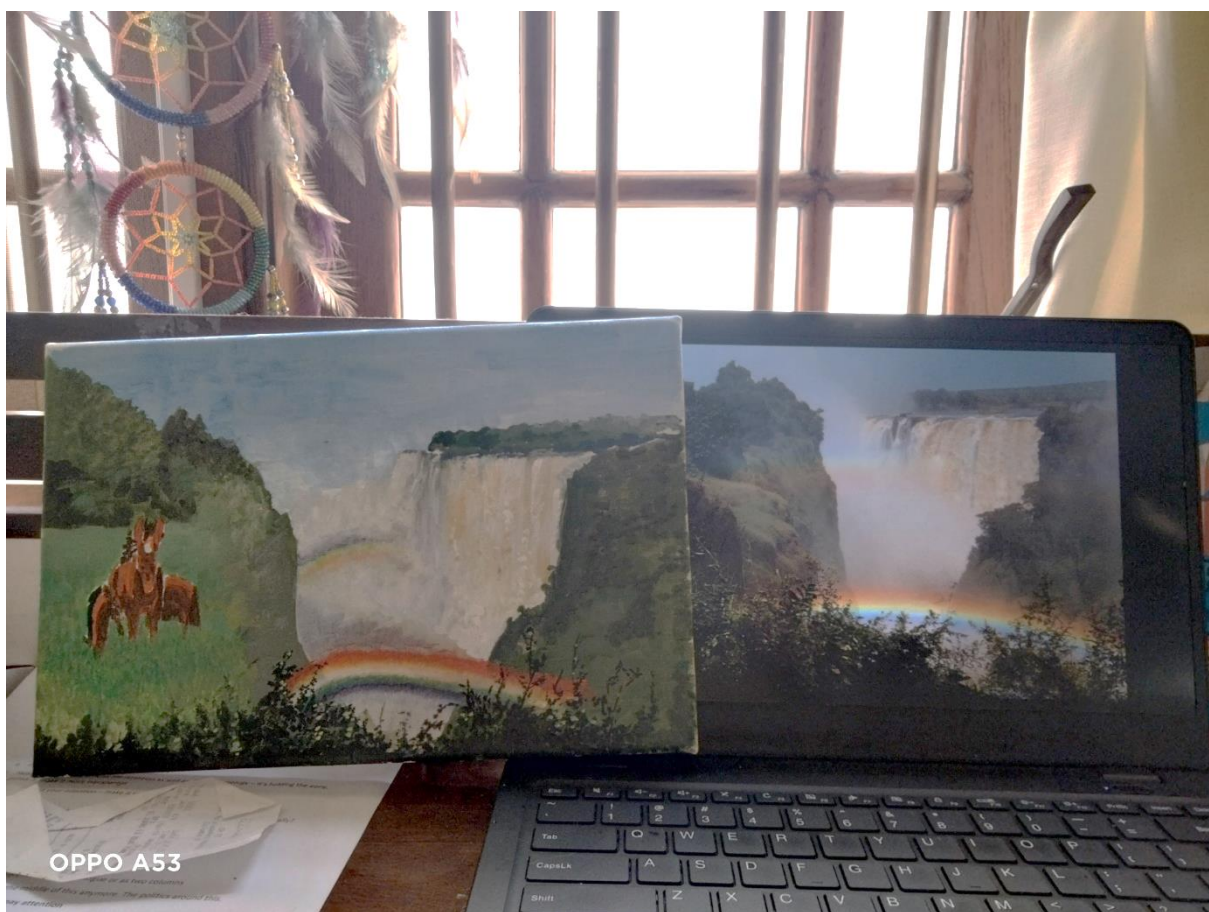


Figure 12a. Painting The Rainbow Bridge

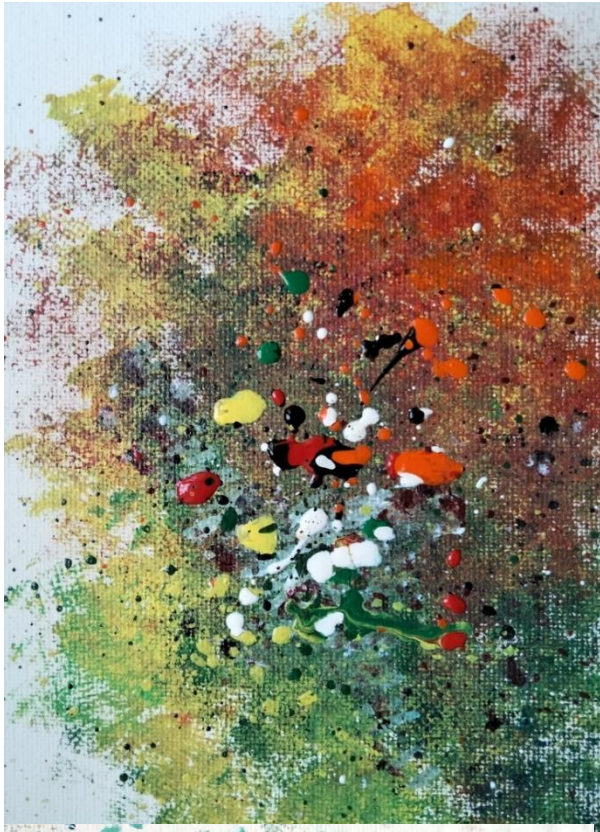
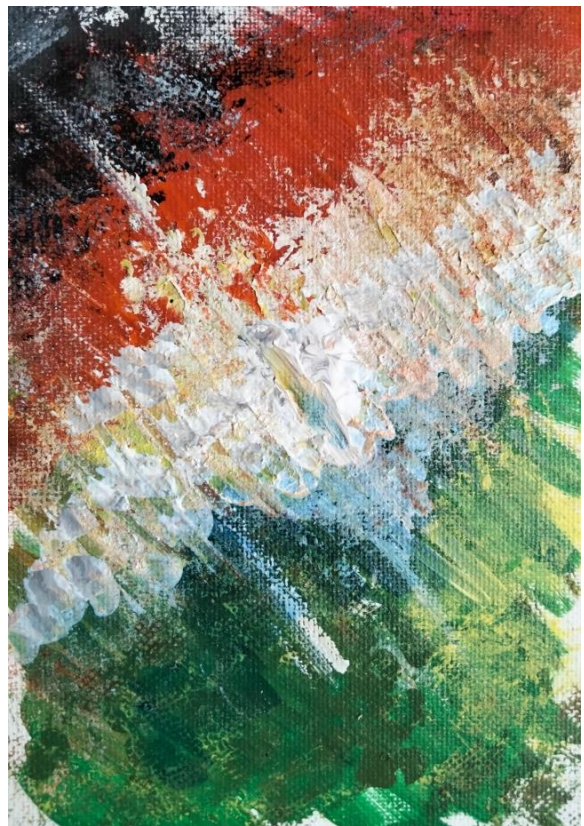


Figure 12b. Art: The Language of the Abyss
Painted in acrylic by Ineke Pitts, June 2022

- (1) Left: The Contact Zone
- (2) Below Left: Worlds Apart
- (3) Below Right: The Struggle



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