

**EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This is a collection of texts that speak of experiences of the education of one woman, me. I have learned more of who I am. This autoethnography seeks to ground personal experiences in social and cultural contexts. I seek to tell truthfully and deeply of personal experiences. I draw upon others' voices to legitimate mine. The words of others facilitate my own. I come to realise that I do belong in this work; the work takes form and from this I take form. I find a home in this work. This work is an educational experience.

Stories of emotions founder education. Reflective and reflexive journal writing have been stimuli. Educative experiences are communicated in both content and forms of mystories. I believe meanings are always in process. Process affects the stories told, story-tellers and those listening. Meanings are not inherent but produced and reproduced challenged by the communities in which they are practised and their languages. The meanings I attribute to the person I am, my personal experiences, are those I construct from the groups to which I do and do not belong. My emotions drive the meanings I experience, particularly in relation to experiences of education.

*With my memories of Betty and Ken's generosity ...*

*It's a script rich in alternatives.*

*Each reading reveals something new,*

*So I perform variously – not falsehoods,*

*Just the interpretations I can manage.*

*Satyamurti, in Darling and Fuller, 2005, p 22*

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Aims*

I have wanted to write about emotions and feelings. Emotions may involve a level of cognition feelings do not. Feelings may be considered as primitive responses of the senses to physical stimuli.

The work questions my 'gut' reactions and responses to experiences and my responses upon reflections, my reflexes also my responses that manifest over longer periods often once I have thought back upon what I have experienced. These phenomena are privileged because to be sentient, to feel and to show emotions, to be moved to act by feelings is considered in this work to be human. This work is a most limited exploration of what it is to be human and what a person experiences in giving voices to their articulations of their humanness.

„Voice“ within the work is a complex notion. Many attributes remain unspoken. Yet in brief attributes of its complexity stem from „voice“ as spoken and written. The spoken voice is characterised by fragments of sentences, phrases, words only, the characteristics of communication that may be associated with someone speaking. Thoughts are not necessarily ordered against time/chronologically. There is spontaneity. The written voice of the text is more ordered, more considered. Perhaps. Efforts have been made to communicate grammatically and to adhere to conventions of punctuation. Voice is also demarked by diction and by detail. Choice of words on occasions suggests ambiguity with a purpose; meanings of the text may be nebulous and are for a reader's decision.



Diction and detail endeavour to communicate character attributes in a sufficiently consistent fashion such that personality, personal traits, is evident.

Emotions and feelings can and do shape the choices people make in their lives. How emotions and feelings have affected the choices that I have made in my life. The broad remit of this work has remained with me since the time in the autumn of 2004 when I first set down some ideas of what I might write about. The finer detail – a far more changed and changing picture and a picture that is and has been most difficult to complete. This is also a gathering of writings. Imagine an audience has gathered over considerable time to listen, to hear.

My writings have been gathered here in an effort they speak of each other and together in ways that allow me to explore significant ideas in writing (this) qualitative research.

Bracketed words, or parts of words in this thesis might as easily be included, written in, as not. Slashed forms of words may appear to represent a binary only; an instruction to a reader to read either „this“ or „that“. The slashed form is also indicative of a presence between the two forms neither this/nor that.

This thesis's form, its stylistic devices, are intended to speak out the muteness of some words, or parts of words whilst showing that some words or parts of words may not have been expressed explicitly; left unspoken. Substantive context ideas: my narrative/identity as a feminist, an autoethnographer, a depressive, a bulimic and the complicit emotions,

feelings of these ways of being/behaviours when set down on pages of text might suggest to me.

The work is my story. It is about developing preferences for personal uncovering, undressing assumptions. It is an embodied and personal offering as educational research (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000; Lather, 1991). The „embodiment“ or form of the text is to establish, reinforce, the sense of the text. The shape, the physique of the text emulates its values, its descriptions. It is endeavouring to illustrate the experiences of education but also share an experience. It is as much my reader’s privilege to read a particular meaning into the text as it is my privilege or responsibility to communicate a particular reading. Formative/constitutive voices of my work are offered throughout; both those of experiential and theoretical bias, although there may be claims that all voices are of experience (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992; Fonow and Cook, 1991). It is questionable whether or otherwise theory resides beyond experience. Elizabeth St. Pierre notes, „not only do people produce theory, but theory produces people,“ (in Weiler, 2004, p 142). This is a questioning, partial questioning, of the ways in which the languages of texts themselves structure/give meaning/provide impressions. Experiences delivered are those of the text. They neither exist before nor after. They are not beyond the text. In this way the writings’ substances are textual creation and thus fictional.

I seek also to question what forms legitimate/d educational research. Am I seeking legitimacy? Am I questioning what is legitimate? It is to question my activities I am claiming as educational research, (these are uncovering emotions and feelings in

experiences of education/al settings), and understandings/insights, inspiring my activities, including activities of representation, in engaging in activities of educational research.

This work is about Education, for example experiences of a lecturer's work in a college of further education, and is education. I am articulated in producing the work. It is legitimate educational research if it is legitimated as such by readers: me; another. This is to align the work to Patti Lather's praxis (1991).

(P)raxis is the self-creative activity through which we make the world; it is, in my favorite part of the exegesis, the central concept of a philosophy that did not want to remain a philosophy, philosophy becoming practical .... The requirements of praxis are theory, both relevant to the world and nurtured by actions in it, and an action component in its own theorizing process that grows out of practical political grounding ....

Lather, 1991, pp 11-12

In addition Wilfred Carr illustrates my sentiments.

Thus, as education was itself transformed from a morally informed species of *praxis* into a state-controlled system of schooling, so educational inquiry was transformed from a form of inquiry in which questions about the role of education in creating the good society could be adequately expressed, into a form of research that was constrained by the liberal and utilitarian assumptions on which

the state system of schooling had been erected and confined to the version of the good society that the state officially endorsed.

Carr, in Sikes, Nixon and Carr, 2003, p 14

These writing endeavours are an effort for me to discover something more of the person I am, the emotional person, and the experiences I have grown from. I am seeking to understand some of my past experiences of schooling and later medical schooling, and how I never did become a medic. How I worked in social support and then as a lecturer in Further Education, led a team of staff. And now work a few hours a week caring for those demented and in the winters of their lives such that they do not recognise themselves in the mirror and pull their shit soiled hands across their faces to wipe away tears of frustration. I am also drawn to personal stories and documents of those stories: diaries, journals, writing for oneself and to oneself, letters and the like. Such documents are intimate and immediate where a person's emotional life might be known a little more deeply. It is into my own journals I have delved in order to find the narratives in this work. My work is of my stories and is „mystory“ (Denzin, 1997). The stories I choose to tell to recognise the living I am doing now and have done.

I am also interested here in women's lives, one woman's life particularly, and how feminist perspectives can be worked to tell of women's lives, as a woman – my life. Womens lives might be suggested to be at the margins of some groups in some of the societies I have known. Most importantly for me, feminism is an articulation of the

assumptions, the unspoken, of the persons from whom social relations and relationships are shaped, the motivations from, the emotions that drive the ways in which I have made senses of my worlds, particularly worlds of educations. Alison Assiter, a declared feminist, posits a failure to heed embedded and embodied qualities of livedness in building knowledges as discriminatory (Assiter, 2000, pp 329-246). The knower and the known are not only positioned in geo-spatial ways but in the ways they are fleshed out. She also speaks to the need for reflexivity in assuming epistemic responsible attitudes, listening to others, through dialogic processes. She calls for plurality in knowledge: knowledges. She notes how knowledges are shaped by a constitutive society, showing, „a commitment to emancipatory values,“ (Assiter, 2000, p 339). Assiter calls for an empowered challenge to patriarchy's oppression so that the transgressions of the vulnerable, the marginalised, the victim, the „small voices'; those softly spoken shall be heard. People are of greater awareness. They are critical of privileges that benefit some and are detrimental to others. Those pocketing power, maintaining powerful differences is the favour of a few.

So loudly I hear my own voice and Alison Assiter's (2000, pp 329-346). However our voices are not unaccompanied. I attune to the background, volumes of writers that have been formative in my project. Fields of a vagrant feminist imagination speak a disciplinary eclecticism. Methodological debates (Lather, 1994; Ribbens and Edwards, 1994; Fonow and Cook, 1991; Lather, 1991). Critique of patriarchy's Science (Harding, 1991). Standpoint (Harding, 2004). Poststructuralist undoings (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000; Weedon, 1997). Embodied politics (Moi, 2005; Diprose, 1994; Haraway 1991).

Gendering of language inscribing bodies subordinate (Irigaray 1994; Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1953). Wandering all over everywhere. The undergarments are enticing and challenging. This thesis challenges narratives assumed of women. It illustrates a woman's disordered relationship to herself and to her worlds. It questions particular and peculiar shapes of one woman and may be women should this work speak truthfully of and to others. The narrative personae are disbanded and a dismembered presence engaged. Undone.

Uncovered, undressed bodies are those speaking roughly, emotively and forcefully. My feminist's imagination is shaped from the words of many women and men. It is from these people I have taken a way of knowing myself and the worlds I have lived in. The thesis aims to offer a vivid portrait of one woman's truths. To my ,many women and men" I'll endeavour to attend in contextualising content and form of mystory/ies here.

This work is a collection of writings of times, emotional times set against particular experiences of education, that have been important to me and I believe have shaped the ways I see the world at the time I am pushing this narrative into the keys of the laptop. One aim of the writing is to excavate meaning from human experiences. Words are descriptors and inscriptors. In describing my relationship to myself as 'disordered' I may have accurately described a pre-existing state however I have also given myself a particular burden - a stigmatising cumbersome burden. Socio-cultural assumptions of both writer and reader contribute to the load of the burden.

Emotion may be formed in the expressions a person holds (Bentall, 2004). For example I am concerned to understand emotions and to show this understanding yet furthermore the ways that I am endeavouring to learn of emotions and the ways I am endeavouring to show this understanding. It is also what such perception about emotions can reveal to me, you, in experiences of education.

When I first studied for a Master of Arts (MA) in Education I learned that it was others' stories, experiences I should be interested in. This is not to say that I was taught this notion, rather this is what I came to learn, believed I should be doing, shaped through my thinking upon the sessions that I attended of the MA courses. Yet I wanted to find me, my stories, to know more of the person I was. It took me a long while to understand this; to be able to say that I needed to be able to find ways by which I could tell of events in my life. Speaking out did not come easily.

Reading the work of a variety of writers has helped me to tell my story. Words from key figures of philosophy have been helpful. Gaining language might be believed as a process of dressing. Putting upon the clothes that others have recommended to me, and I have chosen from their wardrobes, in order to present myself to others. Food and clothing are important metaphorical landscapes to the ways I see myself as a woman, educationally a failure with a long history of disordered relationships. Appearance is important to how women should see themselves. At least it is important to how I see myself.

I had aimed through a series of vignettes, reflective and reflexive narratives to explore what David Hume speaks of as the emotional encumbrances upon the soul's passions (Hume, 1985/1739, pp 327-328). What weighs me down? Tethers me in the person I am? Peter Goldie refers to emotions as „perceptions ... dispositions“ (Goldie, 2002).

This work is about allowing something of the messiness of my living to come into the messiness of the text upon the page; a series of sections that work to represent the grit which excoriates and is difficult to remove. The grit that it is to be me, a person engaged with surfacing the detritus that particular ways of knowing the world effect. In tension with allowing something of the messiness of the living to affect a messy text there is also a need to conform. It is necessary to bring acceptable form within my writing so that I can make sense, and communicate these practices of making sense that will not only be appealing to those who will examine the work as a doctoral thesis, but also to me, reading and re-reading the work as it comes onto the pages here.

I used to write of existence. I didn't see that I was living. Life to me seemed to be an arena of choice. Existence in comparison with this is the basic physiological functioning of a person, for example their heart beating, their breath moving into and out of their lungs. But I believe I am living here. I am making a choice to explore the person I have been and the person I am and to endeavour to make senses of the feelings that being that person engenders. Reading this paragraph helps me to feel that this work is significantly valuable to me.



*Philosophy underpinning form*

I used to be concerned to challenge structures, to question the form of say a doctoral thesis. Now I want a form, and see it my work to find a form, to the work that will benefit its content: stories, my stories. It is that the stories of the work have been achieved deeply and truthfully. That is my work; to tell and to illustrate deeply and truthfully my experiences.

This is a project that looks upon and into the faces, the bodies, the presences and the pretences of my livednesses during particular periods of my life, specific educations. It is to tell of times I was drawn out. This is what I mean by education and what led me to be drawn out in the ways I was, the emotions that drove me: pushed and pulled at me. It is to work through a text. Yet the text must ultimately speak; become. Thus in one way it is not until I have written this project that I'll discover the person I was and have become. Furthermore if, „meaning is produced within language rather than reflected by language, and that individual signs do not have intrinsic meaning but acquire meaning through the language chain and their difference from within it from other signs,“ (Weedon, 1987, p 23). I, the person of this text, can only exist in this text and through this text. I come from the text and yet I have preceded the text, the text came from me. This is a complex relationship. This project dresses a reciprocating relationship between content and form. This is dialogic work.

The common-sense assumption that language is a transparent medium expressing already existing facts implies that changes does not come about in language.

Language is assumed always to reflect changes which occur prior to it. While language in the form of different competing discourses does indeed give meaning to events retrospectively, this meaning is not the reflection of an already fixed reality but a version of meaning.

Weedon, 1987, p 78

I have wanted to offer life experiences in the exacting ways they were experienced. This would entail for example sentences without capital letters, and fragments of words, challenging the conventions of grammar and syntax, the accepted and acceptable form. And although I do believe that this would do well to communicate the messiness of life on the page, it is difficult to read. Grammatical conventions in writing promote clarity of communications. I wanted to notice the smudges, the broken, the loss, and how those blemishes and weaknesses manifest life, but also to show how shattered life is in shattered and shattering text. When a person tells the stories of their life they create an order to their life, their life experiences. The tales that people tell of their lives may be one of the basic human experiences. Telling a story/tale allows me to relate albeit in a particular way, to myself and to others. Storytelling is prized for its relational quality. Meaning depends upon and contributes to the worlds" of its expression. This phrase does infer meanings as in pre-existence but also meanings depend upon the relations between

words, between words and their writer and their audience. Story-telling requires an ordering of words. Ordered words then become an additional resource by which a person may know themselves and others may come to know them.

Life is not ordered but it is the stories that are told of lives that order it so. Some have told of this tension as a crisis in representation (Denzin, 1997). I undress to embrace qualitative research espousing experiences, portraying the messinesses of living, a textual staging in order to bring meaning, perhaps, to the messinesses (Lather, 1991). I wanted a text that spoke for itself, gave me emotional subjectivities, and yet I identified with that woman who I undressed. Deeply my writing contributes to my understanding of who „I“ am and how I feel about the „I“ being me involves.

Now I compromise. Most recently I have been able to accept compromise more readily. I have for example accepted I cannot shop for a loaf of bread without eating it in its entirety in one sitting and feeling guilt afterwards, a guilt that must be purged. I cannot have biscuits at home. There, in the cupboard, they remind me, how hungry I am and how eating them, all of them, will do nothing to satiate my hunger and everything to contribute to the guilt I am already feeling having gorged and purged the loaf of bread. I have and do experience disordered eating, that at times has greater and lesser presences in my life, and depending upon the orderliness of my eating, shapes the stories I can and do tell of my living. There are some who have suggested that a disordered relationship to food speaks of the struggle a person has with voicing their feelings, their emotions, their desire to challenge the forms, the ordinary of their lives.

Now I am compromised. I seek to tell my stories in their most simple dress at the time they are being clothed. I seek to finish this work and to finish it in a way that is acceptable to those who will read it, examine it. Because that which is acceptable to me I am unsure of? And so as I no longer buy loaves of bread or packets of biscuits, and purchase small quantities of groceries at any one time because that is how I can sustain an ordered relationship with food, the form of these stories are not necessarily challenging of form. They are of a form I hope will be reasonably pleasing to the work's examiners. Scraps of writing are stitched together. Sentences begun and ended, odd threads – I have endeavoured to tie in.

Yet there is also a need to show the transience of living. Such is the patched together nature of this work. How it is gathered from all manner of writings. I am caught now in a three-way knot: setting down a work that will be my truth/s as disconcerting as it might be. Producing a work that will be acceptable to others – seen as of sufficient academic scholarship to merit award of a doctorate – even though I can never deeply and truthfully know what that might be, given I do believe that I can only know my experiences deeply and truthfully. And producing a narrative that sits somewhere near the time I am in now, a hybrid of compromise. Writing my truths yet telling of them in ways that conform to another's expectations. This work requires privileging the richness of experiences, privileging my experiences and a readership to privilege me my voice.

This work might be read as an autobiographical novel. Novel suggests my dictionary, „... (is) of a new kind; felt to be new; ... fictitious prose narrative of tale presenting a picture of real life, especially of the emotional crises in the life-history of the men and women portrayed,” (Chambers, 2000, p 1109). Autobiography: this is about portraying my life. Gyorgy Konrad’s paradox regarding the writing of self resonates.

„...everything in the autobiographical novel is true. The other ... nothing is true in an autobiographical novel because all narrative is fictional by nature: just a story, made that way to satisfy the demands of style and literary quality. We expect it to be credible on a human level to reflect our own selves, to seduce our memories. Such is its truth.”

Konrad, 2005, p 514

Konrad’s short writing is a reliquary of phrases that speak of the truth I am caught in trying to sort out. It is catchy. Is it to me he writes – a personal address? „... (Y)ou don’t pick up an autobiographical novel for its unalloyed truth anyway,” (Konrad, 2005, p 515). He tells me it is the tale itself that draws me. He recommends, „(t)here is no instrument for measuring the truth of a writer’s autobiography, other than our own sensitivity as readers,” (Konrad, 2005, p 515). Konrad talks of the „quality” of writing as always being true (Konrad, 2005, p 515). „(I)t has the person – the author – standing behind it. He steps through it to stand before our eyes,” (Konrad, 2005, p 515). Konrad tells me that no matter the content of what a tale holds, including perhaps what some

might see as utter falsehood, it is not the content where the truths of text lie. Rather it is from the realisation that a person's truth is the way they are choosing to narrate their life, their world at the time of their narrative. It is a reader's recognition of the teller's need to falsify, or corroborate that does the work of telling their truth.

The writer of a good text might be a lying fiend in civilian life, but his powers of evocation move me to accept what he says as true. Not just any rogue scoundrel can take me in – but if the bastard manages to do it; well, all right then, let's raise our glasses together.

Konrad, 2005, p 515

There are many contingent ideas that might be drawn upon from the contextualisation of truth in autobiography. The work can only be contextualised by those writings I have read, and I have chosen to draw upon to help me to sketch the landscapes of this tale, at the time I am writing/authoring this tale. A reader may see that there are significant works/writings I might have drawn into my tales, but I have not. The reading/literature/writing that has been drawn into my tales and the ways I have endeavoured to respond to it here, will, if you allow it, tell of the person who is writing. Truth shifts. I am not only questioning how I shall manage the veracity of the account, but also that it is read for what it does contain and not what it neither does nor endeavours to do. This past sentence is a genuine hope of my readers, not an endeavour to disclaim responsibility for writing my truth.

... I am not confessing to telling any lies about the people of events in my studies/stories. I have told the truth. The proof is in the things I have made – how they look to your mind’s eye, whether they satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship, whether you believe them, and whether they appeal to your heart.”

Konrad, 2005, p 515

To work at an autobiographical novel in educational settings/contexts is to show how my, „language (here) glances *off* objects just as it „glances off” experience,” (Clough, 2002, p 16). Examples of those objects/experiences are of learning, of being a lecturer in a college of Further Education, of learning scripts of disordered eating, developing my own voice. „Glances” I read here as allowing the unexpected to speak. This work is not about adhering to method and explaining when exceptions follow because the steps could be followed. This work is about allowing a text to grow out, allowing a method to grow out, because my feelings, experiences are suggesting so; to grow out of their constraints, to out grow the instruction. I am out grown. I am tall, awkward, and extremely unsure of a future, my writing’s content and form is likewise.

We can relativize the truth of autobiography *ad infinitum*. Because if there is such a thing as the truth of my life, then it changes constantly, just as I do. Even if I approve of what I wrote last year, today I would still write it differently.

Konrad's most telling question for me, „... the point of all this scrutiny?“ Moreover the value of producing such dubious work in undressing emotions in particular experiences of education?

I remember seeking the writing of Gyorgy Konrad, at a time when I was employed as a Curriculum Team Leader, doing very little writing, or reading of my choice. Looking for guidance as to whether to write my resignation and pursue my truth; my need to find time to work at this tale, or to become a better Curriculum Team Leader. „Better“? One focused upon her task team leadership of the General Education and later the Teacher Training of others. One who gave herself to others yet failed herself.

This thesis is valid only in as much as it sets down my truths in ways most truthful to me. But this can not be because I am setting down my truths in ways that a reader, examining the work for its calibre as a doctoral thesis will allow me my voice, read of my work sensitively and with empathy so that my voice is allowed to be heard.

Patti Lather is exciting, „to anticipate a generative methodology that registers a possibility and marks a provisional space in which a different science might take form,“ (1993, p 673).



I endeavour to find my truths in the first instances and then to tell of them in truthful ways? This work privileges experience. It also privileges the means by which the depth and the quality of experience might be recorded and thus known. It is about an endeavour to capture in narrative what my eyes saw and how they did their seeing, what my ears heard, and listened for, what my tongue tasted and didn't, what my fingers felt and how it felt, what my nose smelt. It is about calling out experiences. Valuing experiences, and it is hard to value experiences that are of pain, and difficult to understand. Enticing them to the surface such that they then become the narrative pushed into the keyboard of the laptop I work on, such that they then become worded – nailed down. It is to capture experiences, so that they might be glimpsed yet so much of them that shall be missed. It is difficult to tell emotions' stories.

My education has and does invoke turmoil: regret. I continue to struggle to negotiate acceptance of the opportunities I have lost, and regret losing. An academic lens in excavating narratives of experiences may support me in finding a greater, more tangible sense of acceptance.

How others see me, see this work does worry me. I am anxious I'll be discounted. I'll not fit. How I appear to others is important. Several months ago during a particularly disordered phase of eating and time of despair, before I threw away all the photographs I had, I looked into my albums wondering if I might find the small child I once was, might be able to feel from the photographs of times when I was happy, the ingredients of a happiness feast. I did not find her. The children I saw were bemused often; children not

sure how to hold themselves, be themselves. Their faces versed the difficulties they were already having with life. Already I was multiple individuals. Unable then to know how I should be with those photographs, how I should fit the story I was telling then of my life, with the lives of the children in those photographs I threw them away and packed their albums to go for charitable donation. Today I no longer see myself in photographs, and mirrors can always be turned in upon themselves. But what of the mirror I am creating in writing this work? On this occasion, in the first instance, I am creating the mirror. I am the photographer, the creator of the images; an endeavour to control? That is, until, another person reads my words and creates images of my writing for themselves.

The method of the work is the activity of writing, pushing out personal confessions on to the laptop and then contextualising these confessions so that they might seem a little less and a little more than they are. A little less painful, incoherent, and a little more real when I find others' stories to locate mine against and find others' words do resonate the timbre of my offerings.

How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength or the interests they represent.

Weedon, 1987, p 26

*Origins*

The thesis has come from a desire to want to understand the person I am and some of the cultural, social and historical influences upon that person. It has also come from a response to reading encouraging work. Most significantly it comes from my wish that a reader, readers, namely those who will examine the thesis will understand the sentiments that I see the work speaking; a desire to be understood.

Many who have listened to one or more of the stories in these essays have professed gratitude, relief and excitement, obviously encouraged by the fact that someone could suffer setbacks yet persevere and triumph. After hearing such responses, I have thought the most helpful thing I can do for young or aspiring academicians is to share with them stories of my failures and difficulties so they will not feel as alone as I felt for many years – but mainly so they won't give up.

Bell, 2003, p 2

The latter stages of this work particularly are concerned with seeing text as image and seeking insights into what such images might suggest of the realities that brought images forth: ekphrasis. My considerations here return towards Cate Watson's, „pictorial turn (or return perhaps),“ (Watson, 2009, p 529). Such bias/interest speaks to notions of „intermediality“ (Watson, 2009, p 529). This suggests Watson, is a key consideration in the study of signs, signals, symptoms, symbols of language and communication

particularly; semiotics. „Intermediality“ in Watson’s work is, „juxtaposition/synthesis of different media forms,“ (Watson, 2009, p 529). I am also in mind of the work of Kress and Leeuwen (2000) who explore multiple modes in discourse. Modes for Kress and Leeuwen involve the communication of feelings, experiences and meanings. The intrigue of words as images also resonates deeply with the work of Rene Magritte and Paul Nogue, Belgian surrealists working in the first decades of the twentieth century.

If ekphrasis centres insight/representation articulated, often verbally, in response to an image/visual representation, reverse ekphrasis, „goes beyond the illustration of the analysis of text, generating a rereading through the interplay of the visual and the verbal and so resisting the tendency to reification in the reading of the text,“ (Watson, 2009, p 530).

Ekphrasis and reverse ekphrasis remind me that whether a person, an artist, makes sense of their worlds in visual representation, or whether a person, a writer, makes sense of their worlds in textual representation, both textual and visual representations are flimsy in interpretive exercise/practice. Interpretations of representations: art and/or story may manifest as analyses, explanations. Norman Denzin notes how some academics promote representations to be „tuned into“ analyses (Denzin, 1997, p 232). Yet the analyses themselves reproduce the historical and cultural discourse that guides analyses“ in the first instances (Denzin, 1997). This raises important considerations for the relations between presentation and representation. In presenting an entity, have I then created a new entity besides the initial entity I sought to communicate? „Turn“ suggests that one

product has now become another product. Synthesis however, of feelings, meanings, understanding shows a producer's cognisance, appreciation of their own bias in offering their work. This is the strength of Cate Watson's intermediality for this thesis.

She finished her work, which was the writing of a short piece to introduce a supplement of the Review (of Applied Ethics) devoted to self-knowledge. It had not been easy; for some reasons she had felt that the piece had become too subjective, as if she were describing her own search for self-knowledge. She printed out what she had written and read it through. She had relied on Alasdair McIntyre as a starting point. He had suggested that the unity of the self be based on the unity of a narrative that started with birth and ended with our death. In other words, we made for ourselves a coherent life story, and that life story – that narrative – enabled us to understand ourselves. But was coherence a goal in itself? One might pursue bad goals consistently; one might be consistently self-interested, but would that make for a form of self-knowledge that had any value at all? Isabel thought not. Self-knowledge required more than an understanding of how things work as narrative; it required an understanding of character traits that lead to the narrative being what it is. And for this, she concluded, we might attempt to mould our character in the future. I can be better, she thought, if I knew what's wrong with me now.

McCall Smith, 2007, pp 199-200

History and education encompass everything we do. History, as I read it, is about temporality, the dimension in which all learning and living take place;

EDUCATION (PEDAGOGY) is about learning, or that space in which history takes form and shape. Our lives open to time in an endless educational process.

Education is like water moving in snakelike fashion through the geography of existence, cutting out deeper and deeper riverbeds, opening always to new life, opening into the sifting deltas and into the great seas – the oceans of existence, time and space. There is no end to this process, nor is there a beginning.

Learning and history thus meet everywhere as interwoven fabrics. Is it simply an accident that so many civilizations arose around rivers, whose waters became so entwined with the fabric of life?

Berggren, in Martusewicz and Reynolds, 1994, p 22

I see how a river may resource a civilisation. In its water animals and plants experience potential for nourishment, there is potential of transport in shipping, the potential of exchange and barter. Education too is of this potentiality. Education may provide opportunities for a person to change, to broaden their thoughts. Shifts in a person's thinking can result in physical and metaphysical change although this is not necessarily so given social and cultural barriers may prevent ultimate change. Education may nourish, allow a person to develop self-belief in their own integrity and ability to make good decisions for themselves given the resources at their disposal at the time they are making their choice. Education may promote a person's confidence in the ways a person

defines themselves. Education may offer hope of enrichment and dignity. My dignity is to lift myself from perceptions of self-denigration and shame to awareness and courage to tell mystory in my ways and to offer mystory to others.

The thesis anticipates potential. Feminists' work provides an opportunity to realise potential, to become angry and to be angry. Not to eat, excessively, until feelings of anger are so pushed down, and drenched, that they'll emerge only in the vomitus of a closeted anger but to trigger change, to be set down, to be owned. „Feminism insists on a world where women's agency, emotions, and desires get taken into enough account to widen our opportunities and enhance our reward," (Rogers and Garrett, 2002, p 19). It is about working with my frustrations. Me writing in frustrated manner. Tapping furiously trying to find words to express my anger, my desire to tell mystory, to understand the worlds I seem to find myself in. „Seem to find?" I question my narrative as I move inner feelings into a narrative form – this text.

“Agency” implies a person's resourcefulness, individuality, and impact in the world. Agency means being a subject, not mere object of the pressures and constraints people put on us. Unlike, “autonomy,” it means recognizing the interdependence of self and other, individuality and community, biography and history. Agency means making a difference against the odds and seeing how culture enables as well as constrains us. Making room for female agency in feminist thinking means all of this plus problematizing the concept of victim.

“Victim” centres attention on the power of society, while “agent” centers attention on the power of individuals.

Rogers and Garrett, 2003, p 21

Rogers and Garrett’s work is exciting but then I read of agency’s weakness according to postmodernist views. Reality is created over and over. Rogers and Garrett speak of postmodernists’ emphasis of reality’s instability, ambiguity and indetermination (Rogers and Garrett, 2003, p 21); strength is fractured. For Rogers and Garrett (2003) this is a purposeful undoing, for me it is worth considering carefully. Linda Bell is insightful.

Feminists are concerned with systems of domination and with what Jean-Paul Sartre calls, “over-determinations,” the ill-fitting essences or, “natures” that, for example, anti-Semitic societies, anti-black societies, and misogynist societies construct for Jews, blacks and women respectively, often in overlapping ways.

Bell, 2002, p 179

I am reminded of the time when I discovered a Rogerian self and the kindred notions of self-actualisation (Rogers, 1980; 1951). During my brief foray into a theory of counselling and psychotherapy I grasped hungrily at a way of understanding people that respected their unique position. I believed this was a level of respect such that Medicine’s paternalism seemed to work to negate.



During communication studies as a medical student, I learned of patient compliance. „Patient“ suggests someone waiting, as a model, to receive their remedy, right their wrongs, to be done unto. Compliance – agreeable, doing as bid, as an owner bid their slaves in ancient times. And then there was a way that gave me permission to respect my wrong voice. I, the essential me had infinite potential, could change self-destructive behaviours, there was a core that needed to be allowed to surface, allowed a voice; a voice that would determine for me a better way of relating to others, to food. For Carl Rogers (1980; 1951), this required providing a person in the counselling/therapeutic relationship with nourishing conditions: empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence.

Bodies heal, but growth is required. No one explanation is sufficient. As much as Rogers and Garrett are persuasive in their construction of agency I also recognise it is their reading, their creation.

A woman clear about her own values can better negotiate her close bonds with other people and is thus likelier to make sustainable commitments. Agency is crucial. Without it intimacy gets compromised. Our desires are often a cartography of such compromises.... Agency unleashes our desires, promoting exhilaration and equanimity as well as grounds for full mutuality.

Rogers and Garrett, 2002, p 23

How enticing? Their words rally me but how can I be „clear“? Why should I want „sustainable commitments“? Perhaps the fleeting is on occasions okay. I have never known „intimacy“. And should I seek „equanimity“? Would that not fail to recognise difference? It is unsettling to find such negative critique in my voice. But what Rogers and Garrett’s writing does is give me my anger. Recognise my biography, appreciate how culture enables and constrains. Recognise? I read on and later I do find words that tell me more of Rogers and Garrett (2002, p 84) on postmodern benefits.

Without a postmodernist sensibility we are hard pressed to undo either/or formulations. Difference, in other terms, cannot be put in its place without the sort of consciousness associated with postmodernism.

Among feminists, “difference” has to do with the diversity among us, on the one hand, and with how we are contrasted with men, on the other hand. In practice terms these two measures of difference translate into issues of inclusiveness and identity. Our diversity raises questions about how inclusive our theories and politics are; our dissimilarities to men raise questions about whether our gender rests on innate or cultural grounds.

Rogers and Garrett, 2002, p 84

Linda Bell recommends:

Valuing a sense of agency in individuals, their recognitions that they are not just victims and that there is something alien and objectionable about the ways they are seen and treated within oppressive systems. Contrary to those who seem to think agency and responsibility are all-or-nothing affairs, to recognize agency is not to blame individuals for their own oppression. It means only that individuals are agents to the extent they can act in any way and not merely be acted upon regardless of how circumscribed the range of actions available to them.

Bell, 2002, pp 179-180

Recently my mother told me I was such an angry individual; so angry with those around me, and so angry with me. When would I stop blaming others, blaming her, for my lost opportunities? I denied her claims. Today I do recognise I am angry but not with vituperative ire, but anger of self hatred. This anger is mine, born of my actions, given the range of actions available to me, those I could recognise. Yet my mother might have wanted to condition, control, contain. „(W)omen mostly control themselves and whatever children, if any, are their charges,“ (Rogers and Garrett, 2002, p 27). As a young woman anger was another failing that was tangible yet unspoken of between my mother and me. My list of failings now include too tall, too heavy, too tired, too alone, underachieving and too angry. How well my mother has demonstrated, „cultural constructions (making me) fearful of or anxious about (my) anger,“ (Rogers and Garrett, 2002, p 27)? Now

though it is about, „narrowing the gap between what (I) am and what (I) can become,“ (Rogers and Garrett, 2002, p 36).

How much these past paragraphs take me to the words of Michel Foucault on truth. I wrote about this once believing that Foucault's genius lay in his wording of the constitutive nature of speech. In speaking I formed myself. How power was a relational quality not an absolute entity to be handed down or across. You are powerful if I shall speak of you as powerful and me as weak. „Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint,“ (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, pp 72-73). How my truths are of my cultural, social and historical inheritance, against which I create an identity over and over, each day, moment by moment – but that I do have a hand in the narrative of that identification process. And my hands come by recognition and language; a language of recognition; education. Yet it is also about recognising constraints against which I am acquiring this language.

I wrote once: I am deeply concerned to tell truths; to work out the castigating effects narratives/stories of emotional dispositions exact and have exacted upon experiences of education. I wanted to peel back, unfold the discourse of those narratives to reveal truths, challenge assumptions, know how I was reproducing weakness in my writing. I wanted to loosen the chains of my ignorance. It was about entering my crisis in the ways I saw I was seen by others. Yet I could and couldn't offer myself up in ways that spoke authentically. Ignorance is and was significant, as was fear. I wanted to achieve a qualification from an institution that had rules about what that achievement had to look

like had to appear like. I understand now how, „the general functioning of an apparatus of truth,“ (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, p 73) was at work, and would never stop being at work, always at work. Every breath and it was at work. I was of it and I was it. It was and would be (a) true story/ies of my lived experiences particularly experiences of education; emotional engagements; how I would take heed of my own role in knowledge production and the qualities incumbent upon those processes. Yet only if I was allowed to do this, if the person reading that which I wrote respected my arguments endeavoured to understand my world from my perspective and gave of themselves to my project.

When an assignment of mine for a research methods training programme was marked as failed I could and couldn't understand why. It failed because it did not conform to the marker's expectations of a passable assignment. As a research student I believed I was encouraged to challenge, to inspect. My writing on truth in educational research was a strong idea; to offer my ideas about truth in a challenging style of writing was a strong idea. What I failed to understand at the time was the necessity to unfold the truth, the constraints of the world in which the assignment would be read for its worth, and that was failure. I failed to show clearly the aim of my work, key elements of my understanding upon truth in educational research. I was and continue to be embarrassed by this work. Embarrassment adds to my shame in failing.

Reading my work again reminds me of the reading the words of Virginie Despentes on pornography, „what exactly (is) the problem with pornography, what is it that gives the world of X-rated films such blasphemous power,“ (Despentes, 2006, p 77). All of what I

wrote in that assignment was significant for me, it embodied me. My feelings of having failed had and have such powerful repercussions on my writing, this writing? I had exposed myself. Desportes speaks of the how pornography reveals aspects we would rather not admit to, „Whatever arouses us, or fails to, comes from dark, uncontrollable places in ourselves, and rarely fits who we would consciously like to be,” (Desportes, 2006, p 80). I didn’t want to have to own my failed writing. Desportes continues to tell me though that the very attraction of, „letting go into the unknown,” is also its threat (Desportes, 2006, p 80). And yet I had chosen to submit the writing, to let it go into an unknown because I did not acquaint myself sufficiently well with the criteria by which its value would be awarded.

We want to be respectable women. We suppress any fantasies that seem dirty, disturbing or contemptible. We are perfect little girls, domestic goddesses, good mothers, created for the wellbeing of others rather than to probe our own depths. We are programmed to avoid contact with our own wildness.

Desportes, 2006, p 92

I wanted to deliver an intimate piece of work. Divulge the fantasies I held about writing in the spheres of educational research; writing that was personal and intimate, writing that challenged. Writing that showed a hunger to achieve originality. But mine was a naïve response to the task.

There is on the one hand healthy desire – approved by society, encouraged, looked on with benevolence and understanding – and on the other a necessarily grotesque, monstrous, laughable appetite which must be suppressed.

Desportes, 2006, p 93

At the risk of an accusation that I have answered an „invitation for unbridled relativism,“ (Raemaekers, 2006, p 256) such that Stefan Raemaekers fears educational research that seeks to embrace Stanley Cavell’s quest for work in education that expounds postmodernism’s offer of „(an) understanding of educational research and our thinking and philosophising about education into a region which shows us that human relation to the worlds and others in it is closer, or more intimate, than the ideas of believing and knowing are made to convey,“ (Raemaekers, 2006, p 249) I should qualify my allegorical/metaphorical wandering around framing value in pornography so that I might frame value in my educational failure and the fear I have attached to such failure. Cavell sought to know that of which people are intimate, make agreements, negotiate, question, become of their moral and ethical selves.

I find Stuart Parker’s recommendation on writing, reading and the postmodern attractive. He speaks of a commitment to, „self-chosen, self-created value and realities,“ (Parker, 1997, p 150).

The postmodern person is one who lives the deconstructive manoeuvres which enable her to see no *truth* as necessary, *no truth* as necessary, all truth created, contingent and transiently enshrined in the role of permanence within some currently fashionable text-style. She sees no set of value as fixed or intrinsically desirable but some values as contingently assertable.

Parker, 1997, p 150

Admitting to failure is revealing, such as an interest in pornography may be revealing. But the state of undress does not come from having failed, or from the negativity attached to pornography, it comes from owning my admission, my failure as part of my experiences, holding on to it in a coherent narrative so that others can read of it, give my writing a value. This is the risk that any person embarked upon a programme of education takes. They are most likely to be called to own at least some if not all of what their learning reveals about them. I do wonder how this writing will undress me.

When I began as a research student I wanted to understand the emotional work that being a lecturer in a college of Further Education involved; that would be the focus of the thesis I would write. I did not imagine the specific structure of this thesis. In time as so many of the ideas I have had regarding this work, dissipated to nothing, and my residue was scraps of text, narratives, that I clung to in hope that they might become something of significance later. In my beginning I had begun a taught Doctorate in Education focused upon Educational Disadvantage and Special Educational Needs. I started with



enthusiasm, ready to call out about those disadvantaged. In the first term of that doctoral study I wrote an assignment, the basis of which forms „Disabling Women“ here. In time however too few words committed to assignments, and those I did commit were recommended as „fail“. I failed in my pursuit of achieving that degree.

When it was recommended I consider writing for a Doctor of Philosophy in place of the Doctor of Education, that would be my option to save my place as a research student at the University of Birmingham, I readily accepted the offer. I quickly proposed a thesis from the writings that I had managed previously – for the taught doctorate. Rather as one might transfer the contents of one bag to another. So pleased I had been offered another bag to replace the one I’d „run out of room in“. The contents: a preface, an introduction, a chapter on being a feminist, something about returning to narratives of times past, then the narratives of „Disabling Women“ and „Transgressing Women“. Then I would link, in some way to notions of othering and how labels, such as the label of „attention deficit disorder“. I would follow these items with Kafkaesque portraits depicting myself as a lecturer on trial, found guilty of her humanity and expelled. Ultimately I would end knowingly, I would realise the person who the thesis told of. But again I put very few words down. The isolated narratives would stand well ultimately if taken sufficient care of. They were strong ideas but they did not belong together. They did not say anything to each other particularly, their links were tenuous, they did not contribute to the stories that were truly and deeply of me. I have realised that I needed to choose my stories I told with greater care. Carrying everything I had written previously in the hope of use, and the fear I would have no other words to express needed amendment. I needed to attend to

the depth of the work. I needed to believe I was capable of caring sufficiently for the narratives of the person who would become dressed in the pages of the work. So that she was dressed in such a way that benefited a co-ordinated coherent outfit. It is not so much that has changed from this plan, the ideas, to undo emotions in experiences of education, to write emotions in personal narratives and claim this is pedagogic. It is the practice itself that has changed; the practice of writing as I am now.

I sit with a series of notes, instructions, about the vague directions in which the stories I am concerned to tell shall progress, but whilst I am giving them their words, they begin to appear to me in a host of different ways. The list from which I began after some time of writing I discover I have covered so very little of. It is rather as one might roll out pastry. Push down too hard in one particular direction, or on one end of the rolling pin, and the pastry is pushed out of shape. And when the deformed is laid over the pie dish, such as the expected form of the work, the amount that needs to be trimmed away will need to be allocated to another time or the pie dish changed to some other container. Metaphors of food abound in my writing. My bulimic is concerned with food.

Now I piece together stories of and from notes I have salvaged, and in the beginning of this craft I am wondering if I shall have stories to tell. It comes to me to question how shall I endeavour to find my deepest truths? Between January 2001 and January 2008 I attended psychotherapy. Since the end of December 2009 I have re-engaged with therapy sporadically in an effort to order my relationship with myself and to tell stories that are of my truth. I want you, my reader, to come to know me. I want to show a contextualised,

an embodied voice, with her fleshy, heart-breaking presence as I find my truths in this writing (Richardson, 1990).

In writing this work, in my ways, I am creating a particular space, a space that affords me my voice – a marginal voice, one of Bulimia, one of sadnesses/hopelessness, one of not belonging and belonging, one of not fitting and endeavouring to fit. Spaces and alternative spaces need to be imagined, accommodated by both writer and reader. Memories of a time when I was twelve years tell of the importance of imagining a variety of kinds of spaces.

I am aboard a coach. Beyond the tinted glass of the coach central Paris hums springtime fervour. It is warm beyond the windows, but I am in cool conditioned air. The coach has its fill of tourists talking, talking, talking ... There is a jaunty rhythm to the charabanc until the closing door is hammered open and Lois, whom we are about to leave behind hollers her request

„You got any space folks?“

„Heh honey,“ comes her respondent, „We“ve got all kinds of space!“

And that is just it. The world does have all kinds of spaces. However it has to be imagined to have all kinds of spaces for all kinds of stories. This is a narrative and a

series of narratives of my own hammering on closing doors in hope of anticipating them open to allow me my story.

Every story here comes from small beginnings. Those beginnings have been gathered and a product formed. Although the sections of writing here might be read as discrete entities; the totality of their substantive content and their form is the weight of the emotional burden of the work – writing this work. The whole work is ultimately what is under question. The ways the sections of writing articulate. How one segues to another. It is the relation of one piece of writing to another that is also most important. Is there an unspoken need for the first piece of writing to come first? Would the, objects/experiences of which the stories/narrative speak be different, changed, if their place in the thesis were exchanged?

Narrative might be suggested to be the emplotment of events over time. A story grows out and out grows yet its growth is ultimately determined. Although I sought to allow growth of the work here its own voice I have also ordered and thus patterned my work. The work here begins in the writings of „Disabling Women“ and continues with, „Transgressing Women“. These small beginnings have been in place a long time – the autumn of 2004 and spring of 2005 respectively. The subsequent sections of writing have been added at a much later time. These underpinnings however, essentially, are of how I have come to recognise and celebrate my alternative forms and the emotions evoked when alternative forms of embodiment are both accepted and rejected by others; reflections upon learning to be in a body and of a body that is rejected – such as

„Disabling Women“ begins to speak to. It suggests how failing to inscribe societal norms prescriptive of society“’s beauty myths, reveals repulsion and repugnance and then allure and attraction. These developments of these emotions have been installed, placed in the project purposely to show the work“’s germination. Such ordering of writing, comes from inspiration of installation projects, such as Carsten Holler“’s slide in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, between October 2006 – April 2007; to place in a particular situation. This is not only about placing specific parts of this narrative in particular situations but placing anticipated effects such that their placement delivers the reader into a particular situation. The readers“’/reader“’s response to the situation they find themselves in will speak the value of the constructed work.

Carsten Holler (2006) recommends the artworks and artefacts that have informed his project. He writes in his preface of a need to show the sources of his intrigue in creating the slide – its form, and the, „condition of the person sliding,“ (Holler, 2006, p 5). He talks of such sources as companions in the past as effecting new light in this context. How these phrases resonate my own intrigues here. Yet Holler was not only concerned to explain his work and the feelings that a person might experience in sliding, he was also concerned to challenge acceptable modes/ways transportation (Holler, 2006, p 6). Holler frames his challenge against Raymond Callois“’s invitation to create that which, „momentarily destroy(s) the stability of perception and (inflicts) a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind,“ (Holler, 2006, pp 5-6). And besides the economic and logistical arguments for slides“’ benefits to society, there is also the delight of childhood play. Such as the work of my public undress might be seen as, „(an)

expression of overcoming fear ... or (a) deadly flirtation with self-destruction,” (Holler, 2006, p 6).

There is no reason why slides should only be found in children’s playgrounds and as emergency chutes. The installation in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern is a public experiment designed as an investigation into the way that slides are received and what effect they have on users and viewers – a Test Site, a feasibility study using volunteers in a museum space. Under scrutiny is people’s response to the slides, their behaviour when they are using the slides, the level of danger, mood-changing effects, the potential for more radical change –and what it really means to slide. The tests are conducted by the user, there is no, „objective“ authority taking measurements. If the test results are favourable the slide should start to proliferate across the city; it should find its way into existing buildings and into architectural plans still on the drawing board. But the site of the test is not only the Turbine Hall; it is also that little part in the user and viewer that is stimulated by the slide: a site within.

Holler, 2006, p 7

I refer to Carsten Holler. I seek inspiration from him and not because I find an inspired text. Rather his work is suggestive to me of a writer casting wildly in pursuit of support to a childish game. It is precisely a childish game I am playing. Ian Stronach and Maggie MacLure in the context of educational research that holds a hand out for a

postmodernist's arms remind me, „... nothing is more serious in deconstruction than play. Play, in the sense of looseness between mechanisms or meanings, is the condition of and for meaning. Deconstructive play is never kidding,“ (Stronach and MacLure, 1997, p 140). In a most similar way to Carsten Holler's installation a purposeful placement of specific parts, as well as a dislodging/disrupting of a structure's assumptions, in order to construct a whole that both spoke of ingenuity and critique. My deconstructive play here is a purposeful placement, and dislodging, of specific parts, in order to construct a whole – this thesis, that will speak both recommendation for and critically of the person I am: personally and as an academic.

In the first two narratives a woman, initially undone by abuse, is later disabused. The second partnership writes of some of the psychological consequences of particular physiological constraints and then loosens those chains. The third partnership voices the muted, and once chains of slavery are loosened, my voice breaks this silence/regime. The three pairs of writing construct a voice – a speaking out. It moves from victim to vanquisher. The alliteration speaks here to an aggression, reclamation of rights, excitement. Yet lest I be seen as a woman in fury bellowing overly simplistic statements, beneath the excited phrases there should come a more careful consideration of the difficulties extremes of emotions invisit upon these endeavours – to realise stories of complexity of experience. It is also important to show the growth of an individual's voice, a realisation of self. The placement of sections of writing is to show a voice that demonstrates the complexity of its development; a voice that grows up, and continues to mature; a voice from radicalism such that realisation of victim status and the anger of

such status once realised moves towards subtlety and questioning. Feminism has developed from its angry beginnings (Weiler, 2001). My feminism is more adept, more embracing. It is increasingly fluid today. It is about engaging in critical debate, not dismissing rapidly for easy reason. As I have grown into my years, I realise that I can own my voice, I live in a time when I can have a significantly more sonorous voice than many women of times past. This project is to install a woman, a feminist who has grown up in her feminism.

The spaces I write in are important to me and to this work. At times I have been homeless. I have not felt safe. During these times I have been most productive in public spaces: coffee shops, public libraries. The chatter of others partially occupying me, telling me I am not of my total isolation, reminding me of the promise of the touch of another. My writing project and its places take on a significance of „home“. A place where I feel I can belong, I can touch others. It is important to be at home in the ways of my writing too. So that not only do I own the script, the narrative but also that I can belong to this writing. I can feel that I am of this writing. It has contributed to the person I am becoming. The place of this work has particular kinds of spaces. Those spaces afforded by feminism and then poststructuralism. Such ways of questioning and knowing worlds that disturb - poststructuralism, and in doing so, privilege the margins, and their voices. Feminism is to listen for, to hear lives struggling to communicate their presence.

The writing here is also about appreciation of the wide-variety of experiences that have touched me, and my fortune – mis-fortune but also good fortune. And the more I listen,



the wider and more subtlety of sounds I hear; sounds that will contextualise my life. A similar sentence might be shaped for any of my senses. The more I look, the more I see, and so the more my vision enables me in my life; enables me to tell my story and to appreciate telling my story. It is about learning to be hopeful.

A while ago I bought a video. I watched a few moments and turned off. I could appreciate horror only. Life extinguished. I could not articulate how the film evoked my sense of hopelessness, how I was failing to understand my own struggle. My attitude spoke of a person giving herself to giving up, and in this way she turned off the television/video. Later I learn of the tenacity of spirit that kept Viktor Frankl alive during his experiences of the camps of Hitler's Holocaust. Gordon Allport's preface to Frankl's seminal work speaks of, „(weaving) ... slender threads of a broken life into a firm pattern of meaning and responsibility,“ (Frankl, 2004/1992, p 7). Later I am able to watch the film not because I have any greater sense of my own struggle, and meaning in my life, but because I recognise that which is beyond me. I come to believe that I might never weave a sufficiently firm pattern of meaning and responsibility of and for my life, but not to try is to fail to listen, and to keep listening, to fail to look, and to keep looking, for those struggling to communicate their presence – including my own presence. This work is not only about my story, but it is about humility. I do have a voice, and it is a voice I am finding as I write here and so I'll speak. This is the value of autoethnography.

*Ethical considerations*

I have never undressed in such a way as I am writing here, before. In response to my research proposal (Spring 2007), I was asked the value of my work here beyond personal catharsis. Writing is a curious cathartic act for me. It is an opportunity to let go – get rid of yet also it requires hanging onto engaging with creativity – bringing memories to life, breathing life into them, dressing them and providing them in context – to undress them in this thesis.

I offered an explanation of endeavouring to invite others to tell their personal stories too in the way I had been invited by Linda Bell to tell this story (1993). I also argued for its contribution to the debates of how qualitative research should not only represent lives yet also question the ways lives spoken of were offered. How alternative forms of work were needed not only to tell of alternative experiences and lives but also to awaken stories in readers. Language and discourse does not convey meaning but creates meaning. This then is a series of stories weaving tissues of truths. It comes from memories and reflections. Making memories and crafting reflections are themselves constitutive acts.

Questioning the worth of this thesis a month ago (January/February 2009), I wrote in my journal that its value was to show that story is the most powerful conduit of the human condition. And then I read „Burn this Book“ (Morrison, 2009) and I recognised a host of further reasons for writing anything at all. Powerful words „(writing) can disturb the social oppression,“ (Morrison, 2009, p 1); „We must write where we stand; wherever we do stand, there is life; and an imitation of life we know, however narrow, is our only

ground,” (Updike, in Morrison, 2009, p 10). Writing was about moving us, „(making) us laugh ... us weep,” writing was personal (Updike, in Morrison, 2009, p 10). It was political. And, „(because) as a species, we have always depended upon our storytellers to tell us what it means to be human. To be ourselves,” (Banks, in Morrison, 2009, p 58). Nadine Gordimer’s contribution to the volume centres writing’s purpose as bearing witness (in Morrison, 2009, pp 97-113). This thesis bears witness to some of my life-experiences.

Yet truthfully, this work’s worth is only that which a reader is willing to bestow upon it. My purpose, I request a reader as witness, whether another reader, beyond myself becomes mystery’s witness is a reader’s privilege. At times, when I am particularly disordered in my relationship to food for instance, I see the educational experiences and achievements I have as worth nothing. When I started to pursue postgraduate study I believed I would become „better”, a „better” lecturer/teacher. I would become „better” read, more informed. I could „better” understand the classrooms I worked in and the students I worked with and alongside. I believed I would become „better” able to find employment, to be employed. I would become better paid. But now I am no longer a lecturer, I no longer work in education, I no longer work. I question the material worth of the work. So „value” or „worth” of any research is only relational and my relation to this work changes and at the time I am writing and committed to undressing through this text I am reading a little more of what it is to be me drawn out and locating – nothing.

More fundamental than the „value“ of mystory, is whether or not I have told a story of significance, in the first instance for me, and thereafter for another reader. Furthermore I am concerned not only to tell mystory as one of significance but to show, in its forms, its appearances, its significance.

„Significance“ arises from the effects of decisions I have made regarding the form and the content of the thesis, notably whether another supports the decisions made as contributions in pursuit of firstly the claims of the thesis and secondly the claims of the thesis as a doctoral thesis. For example selections of others“ work in which to locate my own arguments, lend me credence, my story“s credence. Significance also arises in my pursuit of clarity. Have I achieved a thesis that is clear in its purposes and in its telling? Such clarity can only come if decisions I have made, I uphold, and decisions I have made and uphold shall limit the story and give it its truths. For example I have chosen to pursue mystory here knowing that the „literature“, the contextualising work I draw upon is that I have to hand. I am working from the books and the articles I have carried with me for the past years since the beginnings of my desire to tell of emotions and their affects upon choices I had made in my life/lives. The thesis is of its time, it has a significant historicity. „Significance“ akin to „truth“ is relational. The significance any one reader/ing of the work will be relative to the power dynamics in that reading. „Truth“ is as a multivalent concept, one that combines and then arises from numerous dependencies. „Truth/s“ of a research text/this thesis speaks to the power a reading provides the writing. Who is allowed to tell their story? Considerations of reflexivity are important in questioning voices in and of research texts.

How can reflexivity be known? As an enhanced awareness of the position from which the understandings, the knowledge claims arose, „a dynamic process of interaction within and between ourselves and our participants and the data that informs decisions, actions and interpretations,“ (Etherington, 2004, p 47). It recommends the researched and the researcher their own agendas. Here this may be posited as the researcher and her reader/s. Reflexivity recognises the inscription of particular and peculiar ideologies, cultures and politics within research texts. It is here there may be surfaced the assumptions, both those of ontological and epistemological biases that informed the narrative/research text. It is to heed in quiet, or perhaps loud voices, the power that is inherent within all research contexts, and texts and for this reason to lay open the tensions ethical considerations effected in shaping the research, the research text. It goes some way to proffering greater clarity upon the question, how is known, what is being claimed for. It is a conduit between the subjective and the objective. Positions I believe no persona shall ever reach but shall like the myth of Sisyphus (Camus, 2000/1975) be forever engaged in carrying for as long as they allow their imagination to take them into the spheres of paradigm debates. Content and process are in dialogue, there is limited effrontery in cleaning up the research acts for textualisation purposes. „Reflexivity adds validity and rigour in research by providing information about the contexts in which data are located,“ (Etherington, 2004, p 47).

Those seeing accord in postmodern moments, perhaps poststructuralists would suggest reflexivity as contributing to research rigour/robustness, particularly those embarked

upon projects seeking to hear the voices of margins, surface the positions from which the research has been produced, prize the words that modernism(s), may silence, leave unspoken of in their accounts. However critiques suggests Kim Etherington, are likely to speak of reflexivity as „self-indulgence“ (Etherington, 2004, p 47), narcissistic, showy wrapping with little gift. Yet this notion of „little gift,“ is built upon a sense, in one way, of knowledge as a commodity, versing economic worth. Knowledge given with a text allows a reader to buy into understanding. Should the understanding bought be prized, it is reciprocated or given to another directly. Yet knowledge as „little gift“ is not accepted with such prized possession. This philosophy of „gift“ is one of giving in expectation of direct movement of goods. Yet if giving is performed without expectation of subsequent recompense, the philosophy of the articulation within which the gift giving was performed is changed. There is alterity of philosophy of giving in play. It is from this alternative Helene Cixous (in Schiff, 2001, p 117) speaks. It is from this referent, Cixous“ gift comes to me and from where I give of myself: (de-proprietation) without self-interest (Cixous, in Schiff, 2001, p 117). Feminine economy is one of deference of direct profit. Gifts are given so that giving is perpetuated, so that another at sometime will be able to give (Schiff, 2001, pp 117-118).

This work is education. This is about understanding experiences, feelings, I have voiced, voiced here, and perhaps some I have not had the courage to set down. It has been and is troubling to write this work, such troubling comes largely because the work is personal and revealing – such as the title of the work speaks to: it is to undress. Yet in the dressing room is one of an audience I am not altogether sure of. And then there are the

difficulties I have had in starting again, and again. My first re-start, shifting from a Doctor of Education to a Doctor of Philosophy, and then having allowed this opportunity to lapse through insufficient narrative committed to its pages. It does come to me that perhaps this work is just too uncomfortable. This work is uncertain. I am unsure how it will be received. I am risking a great deal; undressing, but truth is the greatest cost. And at the moment, I am committing my narrative to its pages and I shall pay its costs.

Reflexive work requires emotional robustness, sufficient self-knowing (Etherington, 2004, p 47). Reflexive work, research texts speaking of to and from the researcher's „heart“ barter personal privacy (Pelias, 2004). This, that authorial death facilitates, is delivered into public spaces. There too is the risk, that should writing be embarked upon as a means of inquiry (Richardson, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) the self excavated is not pleasing. This further obfuscates the project: self effacement in a question to value the „me“ in all that I am including the messinesses that seem to speak „me“ increasingly. Reflexivity here asks I jettison certainty and accept possibilities, the familiar, the habitual is challenged.

This collection of writing has become over a long period of time. Truthfully I am not sure of its significance, value for others. I am sure of its value to me, an endeavour to complete a doctoral level study, a study that shall contribute to me, allow me my voice. This work is to tell of significant stories/narratives in my life over the past years. It is also to weave into those sections of significant stories, debates of methodological significance, to explore selected theme(s) of particular resonance with that section's

stories. In weaving writing on methodology amongst narrative I want to show how form's organisation is artifice. It is someone's prescription, as these stories/narratives are mine so are the views underpinning the form of this work, and they belong within the work to which they come and where they have held sway. I invite a reader along with me, in the form my education here takes.

### *Sections of the thesis*

„Disabling Women“ is a critical exploration of the emotive toil of my experiences of verbal abuse as a lecturer in a college of Further Education. It explores how language mutilates women, women's bodies; a critique of the damaging, the disabling effects of patriarchy's discourses upon the female form. This narrative is about exploring hegemonic representations of women and how language constitutes such representation and privileges particular bodies. This writing seeks to speak of the emotional burden narratives of gender bear. And it is within this writing I endeavour to show my understanding of emotion and the contexts, the readings, which have shaped my thinking about emotion; how words become embodied. How felt responses become physical presences.

Richard Bentall tells me, „... psychology ... (observes) that emotions have affective (feeling), cognitive (thoughts and beliefs) and behavioural components, which should alert us to the possibility that the ordinary language word „emotion“ does not refer to a single process,” (2004, p 207). Bentall goes on to explain that „emotion“ also involves an, „evaluation or appraisal of events,” (2004, p 207). Such as my appraisal of inner



emptiness that heralds a need to fill it up: binge-eat, or an anorex/tic's appraisal of her life overflowing, out of control such that a desire to restrict, control, contain her food, or exercise to contain the unwieldy flesh becomes uppermost in her identity. In addition Bentall claims, „behavioural manifestations (of emotions) have a long evolutionary history, and serve an important function in our lives,“ (Bentall, 2004, p 208). For example the physiological response in fear, enables a person to run better.

Richard Bentall suggests that research into emotion has two distinctive threads. One: emotions are communicated by facial expression. Sally Planalp's (1999) work also has been particularly significant for me here. She focuses upon the ways in which people's displays of emotions allow them to connect or otherwise to themselves and others, she seeks explanation in a variety of disciplines: psychology, communication studies, sociology and philosophy. Two, the work most notably of clinical psychologists who focus upon, „subjectively experienced emotions as revealed by first-person reports such as ... I feel ashamed,“ (Bentall, 2004, p 209). Roberts (2003) psychology notes emotions' effects upon judgement and choices, exploring how emotions might be considered to be so significant the ways people define themselves, offer their identities.

Psychiatrists might speak of the affective disorders or neuroses in relation to disorders of emotions/emotional content. A diagnosis of such would rest in the first instance upon reportage of symptoms. Bruce Charlton, a psychiatrist writes to show the „endemic“ proportion of „psychiatric symptoms“ (Charlton, 2000, p 2). To be human is to be

vulnerable to the „disordering“ of „psychiatric symptoms“. „Mental health and well-being are so rare as to be remarkable,“ (Charlton, 2000, p 2).

There is a great deal of literature produced upon emotion. I make reference to those few volumes that have appealed to me, because I have felt they have divested something of personal insight. A partisan means of identifying a literature base from which to resource a doctoral thesis. But this is personal story, and this is a story of its time. And the exclusions of it are as much significant in its composition as are its inclusions. Alongside those texts seeking to explain emotion through theory/abstraction I also draw upon others“ personal accounts. Generic texts on emotion have not drawn me particularly, although I have needed to gain a most simple understanding of emotion/s. I have been drawn to those writings that might have allowed/might allow me to explain why I may be feeling the way I do. What in my reading I recognise as of my reality. I am drawn to writing that has and does show me something of myself. As a person may be drawn to others“ whose behaviours, attitudes reflect, speak to their own.

I am interested in feminist literature. I should qualify feminist literature. Those works that seek to explore women“s lives, marginal lives, lives of those in minorities, those mute, personal stories, stories that are provocative, that are explicit and challenge. I give feminist literature a more expansive shape than women-only stories. For this writing most feminist literature consulted here has been written by women, about women, for women. Autoethnographic feminist writers excavate their own struggling. Within these volumes I have found the greatest resonance for my feelings (of shame). Betty Friedan

(1963) might suggest I am seeking to establish new identity, one that allows me a greater voice. To write here is to lay a claim to my, „problem of identity – a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique,“ (Friedan, 1963, p 68). This work is also about rallying to my reading and writing for me. Trying out ways of understanding that might just be more satisfying than consuming vast numbers of biscuits in the hope they“ll keep down my feelings, only to resort to the need to bring it all up later.

It is my thesis that as the Victorian culture did not permit women to accept or gratify their basic sexual needs, our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings, a need which is not solely defined by their sexual role.

Friedan, 1963, p 68

de Beauvoir wrote sometime previously (1953) of woman“s biological function being her identity; a woman“s feminine attraction – her body, her „beautiful“physique. Germaine Greer tells me, „Every woman knows that, regardless of her other achievements, she is a failure if she is not beautiful,“ (Greer, 1999, p 19). Greer“s piquant narrative is radical, it is aggressive, it is alluring and I rally to it.

A woman“s body is the battlefield where she fights of liberation. It is through her body that oppression works, reifying her, sexualizing her, victimizing her,

disabling her. Her physicality is a medium for others to work; her job is to act as their viceroy, presenting her body for their ministrations, and applying to her body the treatments that have been ordained. If she fails to present herself, if she refuses to accept the treatments, she is behaving badly.

Greer, 1999, p 106

And how badly I do behave, a doctoral thesis about me, that struggles in its conformity to other's ideas ... but there are Germaine's words – how allied I see myself, a first name address! I am encouraged to continue.

Intellectual feminists have written millions of words on the ways in which men have colonized and controlled women but still the process rolls on, aided by better techniques for exploration and analysis and storage of data. All the time women have been agitating for freedom and self-determination they have been coming more and more under a kind of control that they cannot even protest against.

Greer, 1999, p 106

Disabling Women was a narrative initiated in a particular reading, „The Myth of Bodily Perfection,“ (Stone, 1995, pp 413-423) and experiences of verbal abuse as a lecturer in a FE (Further Education) college in the preceding months.

„You ain’t no business being in the Ladies! Dirty F...”

I experienced abuse on account of being tall, over six feet, at the time thin, underweight on account of consuming a significantly restricted diet and running for at least an hour each evening. I would dress in baggy trousers and shirt always to cover my „hideousness”. It was my appearance that heralded the young women’s remarks. I was not the lecturer of the young women. Moreover it would be different young women each time wielding abuse. On one occasion another member of staff „kindly” asked me if I was in/using the correct bathroom?

I was rendered disabled by young women’s perpetuation of patriarchy’s discursive regimes, regimes that subsumed and consumed. The young women were speaking, „the markings ... to establish specific codes of cultural coherence,” (Butler, 1990, p 166). These young women’s words worked to edify the artifice a patriarchal argument had set up, „the boundaries of the body ... instating and naturalizing certain taboos regarding appropriate limits, postures, and modes of exchange,” (Butler, 1990, p 166) I was „interfering” and I was „dirty”. Mine was a body, an appearance breaking the silences perpetuation of their discourses invoked. Mine was a body breaking and broken: disabled.

„(T)he inner truth of gender is a fabrication ...,” (Butler, 1990, p 174). My gender was being told to me in language that dis/abled through institutionalisation, through the sculpting effects of the young women, my discursive artisans. Such artisans were skilled

in their dexterities required to sculpt their own appearance/physiques, such physiques that legitimated patriarchy's argument of beautiful „woman“, physiques working also to „other“. Yet also their learned unquestioning of the abuse they spat at me. Such words might be perceived as rendering them their privileged bodies, their privileges of „beautiful“. They had delivered their lines and they had purchased reward. Such craft!

Feminist ideas and narratives from other women resonated. They allowed me a way to understand my dis/abling body; a means of negotiating. Voicing a response, articulating my learning helped me to feel less vulnerable. Time passing did not assuage my pains. In time I did and have continued to find a voice. As the winter of 2004/05 drew on and the days lengthened, Easter times' symbols of cracking open, young hatching, I was being pushed to look into the ways I could celebrate who I was. Celebrate alternative bodies of „other“ women. A body that previously sourced shame and unhappiness, embarrassment and „victim“ had provided a stimulus to greater articulation, to a critical lens upon every day's grit so that the grit although continuing to excoriate my skin, was acknowledged as grit – it could be spoken of.

„Transgressing Women“ explores representations of women who have sought to challenge „subversion,“ (Butler, 1990). It is celebrating plurality. A beautiful woman is not of one man's ideal, not of one woman's ideal. „Transgressing Women“ explores discourses of beauty and how particular truths of the beautiful woman can be spoken of. My concern is to show alternative experiences of embodiments of beauty, multiple narratives shaping beauty of and in women's lives – my life. It is a challenge to the

physique of patriarchy's tongue, assuming that „beautiful woman“ is of patriarchy's tongue. It is also about showing how language constitutes the hideous; all that is not beautiful is hideous and spoken of in a language of derision. It is also about challenging the uniform beautiful woman. Plurality of truth is explored in a limited way.

I started to write „Transgressing Women“ following a module of study „Learning Transformations“. „Learning Transformations“ provided an opportunity for me to compose a positive response to my narrative of abuse previously. I explored feminist contributions to education, my understandings of what it might mean to be educated, drawn out, becoming increasingly articulate. I particularly wanted to show how feminist arguments against particular hegemonic discourses, those of patriarchal tongues specifically, could cut into and across prejudices and discriminatory behaviours and effect change. A change that saw women's bodies, women's voices, of all kinds at least heard if not welcomed. I wanted to show how understanding, my own learning had allowed me to move from a position of victim and frailty to one of voice and empowerment; that I could challenge those ways I was being cast by my abusers. Reading the work of feminist writers enabled me to appreciate not only the bodies of women who might be castigated as other than beautiful but also to understand the person I might be and know myself to be.

„Dieting Women“ looks at food and how food is offered, how diet is a powerful tool of control; how experiences of disordered eating can be viewed as metaphors for a person's disordered relationship with those people around them; their environments. I explored

how food came to play a most important role in my adult life. It is also an excavation of the inherent links/relations between food and emotions. It is also how proscriptions of diet are reproduced in the kinds of relationships that women have, for example the relationship between mother and daughter. It is also here I introduce a critique of the doctoral thesis diet. How control does manifest in the types of work that students are encouraged to broach; the types of food women are encouraged to consume. I lay the foundations of Bulimia.

Writing her stories – Bulimia's, is to effect a gift of loving. That is to care, to be responsible for, to respect and to know of (Fromm, 1995/1957, p 21). As a researcher, this writer comes to love that which she explores – holds in some esteem; believes that in the significance of behaviours which whilst neither admirable nor enviable do not necessarily need to be hated but held so they can be realised for the stories of self they might suggest and speak to. Bulimia is experiences of consuming vastly and purging. Her behaviours are of human contagion. Vomitus might infect. Though her narrative is something less threatening her narrative is sparse, lacking articulacy, explanation; difficult to understand.

It is difficult to own a label - Bulimia. To say that it is accurate of and for me. The last sentences of the former paragraph are thus abstruse. That word: Bulimia, represents behaviours of mine. There is a choice to speak of the descriptor, or not. Difficult. And part of that difficulty is making a choice to either accept a/the descriptor/sign and reproduce it here, in this/these story/ies of emotions, or not to speak of this, perhaps



allude to certain defining behaviours only. So I cast her of those defining behaviours, outside of me and provide her with a third person. What does the person of my narrative suggest of the relationship I have with her stories of the narrative, raised awareness of the troubling relation of writing? Stories, narratives, are of their own person and time. They are of their own being. Writing is a craft, a process of creation, bringing forth. Richard Sennett's (2008) words help.

The stranger, remarks the sociologist Georg Simmel, learns the art of adaptation more searchingly, if more painfully, than people who feel entitled to belong, at peace with their surrounding. In Simmel's view, the foreigner also holds up a mirror to the society into which he or she enters, since the foreigner cannot take for granted ways of life that seem to natives just natural. So great are the changes required to alter humankind's dealings with the physical world that only his sense of self-displacement and estrangement can drive the actual practices of change and reducing our consuming desires; the dream of dwelling in equilibrium and at peace with the world risks, in my view, leading us to seek escape in idealized Nature, rather than confronting the self-destructive territory we have actually made.

Sennett, 2008, p 13

It is important to appreciate Richard Sennett is commenting upon the relationship between man and his material world, that from which he crafts. Sennett's philosophical

position is one of declared, „American pragmatism ... philosophical issues embedded in everyday life,“ (Sennett, 2008, p 14). I also recognise it is a man’s world of which Sennett speaks, somewhat in apposition to the feminist ideas to which I allied myself earlier. Yet this tension can be illustrative. It is the work that feminist writing and thought does for me and has done to engage potentiality, marginality, the unspoken that is my concern, not the gender of the pronoun of a person’s prose. I do find Sennett’s words far-reaching. It is about welcoming contributions to my reading and my thinking from a host of writers, those who can speak in ways both congruent and challenging to both the content and the form of this thesis. Bulimia is my „stranger“ and companion and without her voice my narrative can not sustain, it would not be of me, an emotional person. So this work is about becoming and welcoming a stranger into my own life, allowing emotions, Bulimia, to have voice.

This is also about exploring the tension between being nourished, being fed and choosing what is nourishing. Such as a research methods training programme may feed its recipients a particular diet of research. Particular methods are privileged, to be accepted, to be chosen, if suitable, but particular methods have been chosen as the diet in the first instance.

„Nourishing Women“ excavates challenges to the starvation of my „woman“ and proscriptions of diet. It is also here I look to say something of what Norman Denzin has referred to as a „crisis in representation“, a quest for alternative ways of working within qualitative research (Denzin, 1997).

„Ostracism“ looks at being cast out, how women’s voices are cast out/silenced. My voice is of an outcast. It is also about feelings of not belonging. Within this section I am also concerned to show the limits of the work I am endeavouring to produce.

„A Voice of My Own“ shows how writing, journals, diaries, letters and story-telling has allowed me my voice and other women their voice. It seeks to explore what such voices might sound like and have to say. This section of work is about showing my need to tackle postgraduate work, to learn of a language, words, which would legitimate my own narratives, to find a means to challenge a discourse of Medicine, a discourse of caring that centred paternalism and disempowerment. It is here I endeavour to tell of how I come to write autoethnography and how I come to realise that this is what I am trying to do – heed contextualising stories.

At one time I wrote, „if I was to tell you a story, deeply and truthfully, it would begin, I wish I had never come to be. I have not led a difficult life. There have not been any catastrophic events, which might suggest of my desire never to have been born – just an insidious malignant growth of self-hatred such that now I’d rather not be.“ And then that’s it. There are no further words. Emptiness. And that really is the essence of where and from whom this work has come, a person with spaces inside of her of such self-loathing.

A short time after I had professed to my desire no longer to be alive and I had survived my wish, I opined again with the words, „I am taking responsibility for my feelings of emptiness.“ And this ultimately is all that I have achieved here. Owned the opportunity I may have to tell my story and tell of my feelings in ways resonating truth for me now. This is a work to understand my hatred/self-hatred. It is to present a realisation of a story-telling potential, such as everyone has, to tell their story. And that is what education does it allows people to tell their stories.

When a sad day becomes me I read „The Red Tree,“ (Tan, 2002) and I feel myself come in from despair and I hope I shall be able to find resonance in the words of others, so that I feel less alone in my worlds of shame. „The Red Tree“ is two stories. One of Tan's small girl, who is lost amongst leaves of a winter in a world where she is alien, and a second of my mother's. My mother's own wish that I didn't see it as my body that Juan Munoz's had hung in the gallery of Tate Modern, the gallery we had seen together on the afternoon that she gave to me „The Red Tree.“ Words and pictures are so telling. Story-telling is not the privilege of particular form, but is of and for everyone, should they be afforded it. My mother has afforded me my stories, in the first instances, feminist writings in others.

Morwenna Griffiths (1995) speaks to the question, to whom are the others I listen for and to in exploring dilemmas of experiences, whose experiences shall bear greatest resonance as I seek to find my own voice and tell my story? Feminist work, such as the writing of

Patricia Elliot (in Roman and Eyre, 1997, pp 143-58) encourages me to confront selective realities of narrations of lived experiences that until now I have allowed to jape silently. I am encouraged to risk disclosure. Risk a personal confessional in a public forum.

I feel that when I have lost so much and I've little more to lose, there is a numbing of the sensitivities that once debarred my entry into the debates incumbent upon laying myself open upon these pages. Public confessional shall have its time. The poignant personal experiences, which once brought sensibility/ies deeply, can not punish further. But it is not so much Elliot's, „a different way of being, ... self-knowledge ..., affirmation of experience ..., self-empowerment ...“ (in Roman and Eyre, 1997, p 154), rather it is articulating the dailiness that Rosalind Ribbens and Jane Edwards report upon (1994, p 11), as a method for bringing the subtle, the grit of daily rituals, the habitual nature of my day, into the voice that enters the public confessional. The hideous masks of the jesters are removed. And now my experiences and reflections upon those experiences are just other stories in the life that got lost.

Such unmasking/undressing is to take risks. There is not only the risk of public shaming, but also the risk I can not own the stories I create here with sufficient loving such that I hold the narratives I reveal/write here in unconditional positive regard so that the work itself is not bringing me more shame. This is about learning to tell a series of stories such that the exposed wounds although painful are not painful afresh, their pain is of their time and that time in one way has past. Pain is circumscribed, contained.

In my journals I experience such self-loathing. There are so few narratives of self-acceptance. Yet feminist values suggest, „(a)ccepting our embedded and embodied nature; accepting that our identities are tied up with, „constitutive communities“ in which we find ourselves; accepting that our values (are informative) ...,” (Assiter, 2000, p 334). If „I“ am as another, I posit myself to be known, to be understood and to be valued for who she is, no matter who she is. Not to extend my welcome to her is to subject her to discrimination, to abuse. I am not committed to valuing her, as feminists“ values say I might (Assiter, 2000, pp 329-346).

This introduction has endeavoured to touch on themes key to the content and form of the forthcoming writing. It has been important not only to tell a reader of what they might read, but highlight that the form of the work offered is significant to the kinds of understanding the content demands/asks from its reader. It is a most limited work. Its contexts are limited. It is limited to the stories I believe I wanted to tell and have told of here. It is personal. But these limits shape the work“s truths. They are the truths of the resources of this doctoral thesis. This is a compromise, a testimony of growth and hope towards ending.

## **DISABLING WOMEN**

To be nobody-but-yourself  
in a world which is doing its best night and day,  
to make you everybody else  
means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop

cummings, 2006, p 1

I produced the body of this narrative in the early autumn of 2006. The work was the small beginnings of the thesis. Much has changed, and hasn't, in the time that has past since I first set ideas down.

Patriarchy privileges particular women. Simone de Beauvoir (1953) raged upon this in her narrative „The Second Sex“ sardonically suggesting that woman was her reproductive capabilities only. My challenge here is to deconstruct constructions of the female body. This I have attempted to achieve as telling of my experiences of being disabled by the talk of young women students and a lecturer in a college of Further Education where I taught between January 2003 and August 2006 and to support my narrative through resonating arguments of others (Stone, 1995; Erevelles,1996; Watson, 2002).

I have seen myself as monstrous. To speak as such I present an excerpt of „Frankenstein“ (Shelley, 1831). If assumptions pervading narratives about disability are to be

challenged, the language of hegemony needs to be revolutionised to embrace physiques that are other than the standardised forms to and of which hegemonic discourses speak. Disabled bodies are continually being punished by the disciplining language through which they are constructed. Models of disability are limited by the language in which they are (re)produced. Luce Irigaray's request for revolution (1994), a revisioning of the ways rights and responsibilities are spoken of is yet to occur significantly in my worlds.

I began this narrative in December 2004/January 2005. Such slippage of time may seem detractive to a narrative but in equal measure additive. I feel it is important I continue to tell my stories upon the issues I first began. The issues remain prescient to me.

Laurel Richardson suggests she, „wrote because (she) needed to read it,“ (Richardson, 1990, p 7).

The question is not whether we well write the lives of people – as social scientists that is what we do – but how and for whom. We choose how we write, and the choices we make do make a difference to ourselves, to social science, and to the people we write about. Writing matters – theoretically and practically.

Richardson, 1990, p 9

I keep her beat and I drum on. I need to re-read and re-write again and again to set my life from my chaos.



Although a life is not a narrative, people make sense of their lives and the lives of others through narrative constructions. ... We do not simply chronicle “what happened next,” but place the, “next” in a meaningful context. By doing so, we craft narratives; we write lives.

Richardson, 1990, p 10

This narrative is my reality. It is testimony of the ways I have chosen to make sense of my lived experiences of many months.

Language is not simply “transparent,” reflecting a social reality that is objectively out there. Rather, language is a constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality.

Richardson, 1990, p 10

Deconstruction of discourses of disability, those patriarchy-rich, may reveal women as disabled. The narratives of patriarchy construct „woman“ in disabling ways. Simone de Beauvoir inveighed this disabling, the seconding of her sex. One thrust of de Beauvoir’s (1953) is the disabling, subordinating power that a woman’s reproductive capability visits upon women. Moreover the practices, the medical practices, associated with women’s (re)productivity have become and continue to be claims of patriarchy. The strength of de

Beauvoir's attack: her use of metaphor, „woman as ovary“(1953, p 35); her use of allegory.

Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a woman, an ovary; she is female – this word is sufficient to define her. ... The term „female“ is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman's animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex ...

de Beauvoir, 1953, p 53

Men seem to fear women. Fear, according to de Beauvoir, manifests through ire, „... he wishes to find in biology a justification for this sentiment. The word female brings up in his mind a saraband of imagery - ... Females appear sluggish, eager, artful, stupid, callous, lustful, ferocious abased – man projects them all at once upon woman. And the fact is that she is a female,”(de Beauvoir, 1953, p 53).

„Female“ constructed through patriarchy's tongue is to be of marginal positionality. The consequence: advantaging of the „male“ – the able body – disadvantaging the female – disabling her bodily. I am suggesting the languages, the discourses, bound up with disability and its study can be used to describe subjectivities that are „othered“ in society. Deconstruction of narratives concerning disability yields insights into „othering“ processes. Nirmala Erevelles is illustrative.

In liberal and post structuralist (re)theorisations of disability, the focus on disability has centred mostly on explaining how it has been constituted in everyday life. Such descriptions prove to be useful in that they have been able to produce for disabled people a reference point that offers a critique of stigmatisation.

Erevelles, 1996, p 524

Yet it is the material ramifications, the political value in everyday lives of textual critiques that lowers the temperature of Erevelles' embrace of post structuralism. Post-structuralism prizes, „the discursive – the space where language ideologies signify material reality,“ (Erevelles, 1996, p 523). Post-structuralism's strength has lain and lies in, „empowering possibilities,“ (Erevelles, 1996, p 523). However its efforts, „to dissolve through the sheer inventiveness the means by which difference is controlled, „its values in making visible the rhetorical devices modernism perpetuates have had little material effect but to embed further, „the most oppressive and pernicious practices that uphold the interest of global capitalism,“ (Erevelles, 1996, p 524).

Stone (1995), Erevelles (1996) and Watson (2002) prompted me to consider how narratives of my everyday highlight the ways discourses of domination render bodies disabled.

My narrative is of metaphors. I read avidly for the metaphorical values for me of Stone (1995), Erevelles (1996) and Watson (2002). Laurel Richardson (1990) is informative.

Metaphor is the backbone of social science writing and like a true spine, it bears weight, permits movement, links parts together into a functional, coherent whole – and is not immediately visible. Without metaphor writing is spineless. But, due to the strength of the logico-empiricist beliefs about writing, we often do not recognize metaphor's role in social science analysis.

“The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing on king of thing in terms of another” ... more relevant to conventional social science writing, the metaphor can be carried implicitly in everyday plain language.

Richardson, 1990, p 18

I assumed meanings of texts are incumbent upon them being read in. Meanings made of texts are readers' and not authors' privileges. I later draw on the writing of Luce Irigaray (1994), which prizes the lived experiences of women and the language of those experiences. Her lenses of critique are various, particularly psychanalytic and cultural, but particularly she questions the values of the text. I am interested here in her narratives of the praxes of poststructuralism(s).

It is also important to me to question the authority of a text. Textual (re)presentation is human endeavour, thus, my writing too is partial and limited. It is views of worlds that have been and are being experienced. It is a person's story – my story, with references made to the narratives of others; narratives that have engaged me, stimulated my story's

telling. I have sought to question the ways I am being constructed as „disabled“ – on account of assumptions of gender. I hope to challenge the ways I am being positioned, determined as a female by Western culture, but also in the ways I have experienced and experience Western culture as a disabled female. My Western culture is framed socially, geographically and temporally. I have lived and worked in the East of London for some years. For the past three and a half I have been a lecturer in Further Education (FE). This is a personal story of embodied identities – disabled and disabling during my years as a lecturer in FE. My story is dependent upon its historicities to be made meaningful and meaningless.

Physical dis/ability might be seen as the work of hegemony in order to perpetuate the privileging of bodily perfection, physical perfection. Sharon Dale Stone in, „The Myth of Bodily Perfection,“ presents cogent suggestions/arguments that society/ies see/s, „visible disabilities“; disability is not experienced uniformly, but is/are blind to the, „sexism, which intervenes in women’s lives to qualitatively transform the experience of oppression,“ (1995, p 413). It is a woman’s work to sustain bodily perfection but that work is not to be given a voice. Hegemony is a dialect/ic, it is an active process, produced and productive of sets of discursive practices, it is nourished through deficit discourses, that maintain, „oppressive consequences, not just for those who are unproblematically labelled as people with disabilities, but ultimately for every human being,“ (Stone, 1995, p 413). „(W)e need to critically examine our cultural obsession with the myth that bodies can and should be perfect,“ (Stone, 1995, p 413).

Stone charts her myth of bodily perfection from Ancient Greeks' construction of Olympic Gods who she suggests were the acme of bodily perfection. I am interested in Stone's Aphrodite, who rescues Hephaestus - born lame. Caring has long been a woman's work. Discourses of care and their significances shape a woman's embodiment. Bodily perfection is a woman's responsibility. Moreover it is not only the body of another/others she is to care for but her own physique that is to be perfection.

I suggest significance in Stone's reading of man in God's image/likeness as perfect yet woman the imperfect and exhorted to atone. However I see Stone's words limited by parsimonious explanation of her reading of conventional interpretation. I assume woman's imperfection is resultant since woman is of man led into sin and thus man's behaviour affects partial imperfection. However for woman of man who committed sin, she is sinful/full of sin. „Woman“ is sin that is played out bodily. It might seem there is futility in woman's atonement since in the beginning her ontogeny is structured and maintained through Western man's patriarchal discourses as imperfect, imperfections (re)produced bodily in flesh. Stone locates her ontology, „Christianity is a belief system constructed by human beings“. Irigaray's (1994, p xvi) reading of the discursive structuring of religious beliefs is as man's work. Moreover man as civil, man as „authority“, man as „legitimate“ thus rendering woman a category of illegitimacy through a privileging of his language. Man in order to distinguish himself from „other“ - „woman“ sets up an opposition, illegitimate woman. A discourse of binary oppositions plays out: man/woman, perfect/imperfect. The play enables man and disables woman.

Stone moves her discussion towards delineation of disability. In contrast to, „a biomedical conception of disability,” a sociological/social model Stone transfers, „the “problem” of disability, „away from the individual into „society and social organisation,” (Stone, 1995, p 415). Stone’s discourse although aiming to embrace disability is limited; Stone refers to disability as a problem. The category, the label „disability” is problematic. „Disability” is a deficit discourse of hegemony. It is a totalising term based upon an assumption of universality. It is myopic. It fails in its recognition of the individual nature of lived experiences. It is sinister. It is oppressive. It achieves oppression through ostracising those who are different; those not, „located squarely within society and social organisation,” (Oliver, in Stone, 1995, p 415).

It may seem through an embrace of the sociological/social model of „disability”, „... it becomes possible for those who define themselves as disabled to take pride in their identity ... to fight against their common oppression,” (Stone, 1995, p 415). Yet I do question: Do disabled people see and define themselves as disabled? „Disabled” has become a label by which the abled may know themselves through their language of exclusion. Knowledge privileges control. Hegemonic discourses require the silencing of voices of those who are „other than”. „Disabled” to privileges voices of hegemony controlling in silence.

Stone’s suggestion that dominant cultures, for example those of patriarchy, voiced loudly perpetuates „an obsession with bodily perfection” resonates. I turn later to the work of Kim Chernin (1985; 1983) and Susan Bordo (1993). Both women mine the rhetoric of

patriarchy – hegemonic discourse/s – taking critical stances towards bodily perfection reasoning their critiques from philosophical, psychoanalytic and societal perspectives.

I have been excited by Stone's narrative mining societal constructions of the perfect body. I have felt embraced by her words, „oppressive consequences ... for every human being," (Stone, 1995, p 413). I have felt a response to her request, „we need to critically examine our cultural obsession with the myth that bodies can and should be perfect," (Stone, 1995, p 413).

Binary oppositions are at work within hegemonic discourses. Narrative of disabilities disable, the normal are the able, the abnormal are the disabled. Narratives of patriarchy disable women as „woman" is inscribed culturally yet silently with the onus of ameliorating her bodily imperfections. A woman, not normal, she is disabled. The category „woman" is further imbued with pejorative connotations of non-conformity and deviancy. Moreover she is immoral. Stone aligns, „the popular perception of disability an indication of moral failure." „Moral laxity," she says is synonymous with, a defeatist attitude, „giving in" ... we are supposed to control our bodies ..., or at least give the appearance of controlling our bodies," (Stone, 1995, p 417).

### *Bodily perfection a woman's work*

I debate women and their relations to and with hungers, specifically hungers for food, „the problems of being female," (Chernin, 1985, p ix). Kim Chernin (1985) begins her



exploration of women's relations to their perception of and responses to hunger through a discourse constructing a notion of identity as cultural and societal. Chernin writes:

(It) is a book about women's entry into culture and society. As such it could have been written about the contemporary struggle for a new, female identity without mentioning the current epidemic of eating disorders among women. But this is also about women and food, for a troubled relation to food is one of the principal ways the problems of female being come to expression in women's lives.

Chernin, 1985, p ix

Chernin offers me a convincing account of women's troubled relations with food. „Convincing“ – her narrative resonates deeply with me. She begins her exploration of identity through Betty Friedan's work of the nineteen sixties. Chernin suggests that identity struggles stem from, „not knowing who or what one is or might wish to become,“ (1985, p 16). „Feelings of emptiness and incompleteness“ manifest as, „a problem of identity – a stunting or evasion of growth that is perpetuated by the feminine mystique,“ (Chernin, 1985, p 16). „Stunting“, „evasion of growth“, Chernin's narrative suggests disabling of the feminine psyche manifests through embodiment – emaciation – in the case of *Anorexia nervosa*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I use such terms not to privilege a bio-medical models but because I have no better way of signalling such symptoms and signs of a way of being and likewise her sister *Bulimia nervosa*.

Chernin questions why women perpetuate the silencing of patriarchy's discourses when, „the lives of women are larger, ... than we have been told,“ (1985, p 18). Kim Chernin is concerned not only in „The Hungry Self, ...“ (1985) but also in „Womansize, the tyranny of slenderness,“ (1983) to expose women's „disordered“ eating, through feminist values, the physical manifestations of male dominion within Western cultures.

Women suffering from eating disorders are telling us, in the only way they know how, that something is going seriously wrong in their lives as they take on the rights and prerogatives of male society

Chernin, 1985, p 28

Chernin's explanation of women's diminished sense of identity, moreover their abdication of the possibilities of their identities segue from the disabling effects of patriarchy's deficit discourse of „woman“. A disabled psyche effects as disabled physique.

An eating disorder is, in fact an extremely effective way to stop movement into the world ... measuring waist and ankles and thighs, frantically running or taking long joyless walks

Chernin, 1985, p 21

Full, abled, identities of her own, are debarred women. „We are invited to take for granted entry into medical school, the ability to climb Annapurna, the possibility of climbing the corporate ladder along with men, wearing pants, just like theirs ...,” (Chernin, 1985, p 33). Yet it is the, „just like theirs,” that is the proviso. Women are permitted entry to the, „prerogatives of male society,” (Chernin, 1985, p 19). Women are expected to become men. Chernin constructed the masculinised female, her metaphor for women, „(w)e strip our bodies of flesh,” (Chernin, 1985, p 33).

... the new immigrants crossing the border from an old world. And meanwhile, as we make ourselves into men, we are busily stripping ourselves of everything that we have traditionally been as women ...

Chernin, 1985, p 33

Female flesh is sculpted to assume a fitting identity, an identity befitted and befitting male norms. Disabling the feminine psyche, disabling the female body – patriarchy’s deficit discourse of „woman” perpetuates its ideologies of the female form, women’s identities. Deficit discourses reinforce women as not only the „second sex,” (de Beauvoir, 1953) but the „disabled sex” – a construction of acculturation. Susan Bordo (1993) reminds me to consider the historicities of narratives.

(W)hether agoraphobia, or anorexia, we find the body of the sufferer deeply inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity emblematic of the period

in question. The construction, of course, is always homogenizing and normalizing, erasing racial, class and other difference and insisting that all women aspire to a coercive, standardized ideal.

Bordo, 1993, pp 168-9

*Frankenstein's monstrous is allegorical for my 'woman'*

The monstrous of Frankenstein squats in a cottage and reflects upon the gains alighted upon during one evening's forage from the neighbouring wood.

As I read ( Paradise Lost, a volume of Plutarch's Lives and The Sorrows of Werther), however I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition, found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read, and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathised with and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none. ... My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?

I read of men concerned in public affairs, governing or massacring their species. I felt the greatest ardour for virtue rise within me, and abhorrence for vice, as far as I understood the signification of those terms, relative as they were, I applied them, to pleasure and pain alone.

But Paradise Lost excited different and far deeper emotions. I read it, as I had read the other volumes, which had fallen into my hand, as a true history. It moved every feeling of wonder and awe, that the picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures was capable of exciting. I often referred, the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature but I was wretched, helpless and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me.

Shelley, 1831, pp 131-2

*Disciplined/ing bodies and subordinating subjectivities*

My narrative has not only been stimulated through reading of an academic literature within, „Disability and Society“ and „Frankenstein“ but also a catharsis of the angers, the emotions, I have experienced and experience in response to remarks upon my physical qualifications as a „woman“/ „female“.

During my years in a college of Further and Higher Education in North East London I have walked on many occasions into designated female bathrooms either to be greeted by their young women informing me, „this is the ladies?“ „You are not!“ I am in the wrong place. I am misplaced. Their words misplace me. I am not woman enough. I wonder what their woman is? Not me – a person? A cyborgian pretence?

Supposedly ideas of the female body today are those of the diminished sylph (Chernin, 1985; Bordo, 1993). The „woman“ today is without. Today’s, woman is of the male imagination, is androgynous – physically impoverished; „stripped of flesh“ (Chernin, 1985).

The male imagination may be cunning. It has indoctrinated the minds of women so deeply. Historically it perpetuates on account of its marginalising behaviours being carried out by the marginalised, the greatest level of disciplining is born of self-surveillance. The young women „othering“ me are themselves sylphs, of small stature, they are androgyny’s muses. The canvas of their faces masks through careful application of Revlon® and Estee Lauder®. On the occasions my „misplacement“, my maskless presence, contradicts, it disrupts the young women performing self-surveillance, with one effect I, through their language, become „other than“.

It could be argued that in writing about the young women as I do I am positioning them as ignorant dupes of patriarchy. Consider how the position they are putting me in and my

responses to them are in effect doing the work of patriarchy too, that is we are „othering“ each other.

Luce Irigaray examines the langued nature of sexism, (Irigaray, 1994). The essays produced in support of a series of lectures delivered between 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1986 and June 1989 examine a number of social institutions whereby the male/female binary is played out to the detriment of woman and advantaging of man. Irigaray shows how women are „othered“ through patriarchy’s discourses. She notes languages“ disabling of women; the social conditioning of patriarchal normalisation, „If language does not give both sexes equivalent opportunities to speak and increase their self-esteem, it functions as means of enabling one sex to subjugate the other,“ (Irigaray, 1994, p xv).

Irigaray’s stark feminist values offer me a lens of scrutiny upon my experiences, personal and theoretical upon the „othering“ that speaks me. Her essays (Irigaray, 1994, pp vii – xvii) mining how the „female subject is constituted,“ proffer me insight. „A Change to Live,“ concludes a need for a departure from the life woman is afforded by the tongue of man, pushing for a celebration of the difference that defines each woman from man and indeed woman from women. It is not for male-female/man-woman/men-women equality that Irigaray is arguing, not for the neutering of patriarchy’s linguistic domination, that seems to be revered, and even more so by a culture of „political correction,“ but a language dictating the approbation of difference; a language that speak of each person’s unique becoming.

„How Do We Become Civil Women?“ questions for a redefinition of rights – a woman’s rights to the embrace of her unique becoming.

(T)hrough the highlighting of some of the negative effects of the current organization of our Romance languages ... on how the female is constituted, whether it is a question of the possible existence or an identity for each woman, or of increasing the standing of working women, of through occupation titles, or the (sex specific) gender of subjects or acquired property.

Irigaray, 1994, p xv

Women, suggests Irigaray, indeed each woman, have/s a right to her own, „specific culture,“ (Irigaray, 1994, p xvi). However acknowledgement of each woman’s „specific culture“ is incumbent upon recognition of what Irigaray terms, „the (creation) of a politics of sexual difference,“ (Irigaray, 1994, p xvi).

Changing not only the rules of speech and language that give preference to the so-called neuter masculine (the human generic called, „man“, the use of the masculine plural when speaking of both sexes, etc.) but also the habitual use of images that tend to portray men as respectable citizens, as civil and religious authority figures, and consider women to be sexual property at the disposal of men.



Irigaray, 1994, p xvi

For as long as androgyny's muses haunt the young women labelling me as „other than“ not only through material presences: the application fo Revlon® and Estee Lauder® but also through langued being, „Irigaray“s quest of a politics celebrating sexual difference shall be ever the disabled presence by which abled patriarchy subjugates those deviant and different.

### *Closure*

The male-normative view of the world, feminists argued had obscured its own biases through its fictions of unity (History, Reasons, Culture, Tradition ...).

Each of those unities was shown to have a repressed shadow, an “other” whose material history values, and perspective had yet to be written.

Bordo, 1995, p 216

Perhaps this narrative's purpose has been to write of my repressed shadow, to draw my monstrous from umbrage whence she pared away her flesh in order to succumb and perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and, „(avoided) confronting the fact that all of us live in bodies that do not always function in the way we wish they would,“ (Stone, 1995, p 422).

### *Reflections two years on*

Narratives have their own time. Sometimes their growth is over many months, years; sometimes hours, days only are needed. My writing has grown over time. It has taken me some time to address openly and sufficiently coherently my difficulties; to see the value of expressing my difficulties in a public way – a forum where others will perhaps engage to consider their own stories.

I have shied away from writing this narrative for overly long. I am fearful to be known more fully. I am being asked to share what I can believe at times as Kathleen Jamie's „warm secret(s),“ (2005, p 46). I hope my reflections communicate my felt responses and my emotional disposition. Kathleen Jamie's diction is dulcet and illustrates well, „I grew to appreciate the company of people who listen to the world,“ (Jamie, 2005, p 54). This is Jamie's „gut-thrashing“ and „soul replenishing“ (Jamie, 2005, p 73).

I am interested in individuals' stories. I am interested in how people make sense of their lives through story; narrative knowing. I am interested in how emotions and emotional frailties temper lives experiences particularly experiences of education and learning and the ramifications of such tempering for identities. I have attempted to explore my responses to my own experiences of a Further Education college in North East London and the languages and dialects of those within this institution. I have explored narratives of lives marginalised through disability; exploring my life; exploring my attitude to disability, exploring my attitude to otherness and exploring my perception of others attitude to me, in my otherness. I examine how in society and its discourse appears to me

to construct the dis/abled body. Representations of disability may themselves disadvantage.

Roberts (2003) notes how emotions provide the scaffolding for so much of what my/our lives are. Emotions are deeply affecting. Roberts pays particular attention to the emotions in morality/ies suggesting that it is our moral identities, characters and personalities that are shaped irrevocably by our emotional dispositions. For Roberts emotions are not just causes or actions; they may determine the identity of our actions, (Roberts, 2003, p 2). Roberts has aimed to add, „to our understanding of moral personality conceived in the broad sense of moral with a particular focus on the place of emotions and emotional formation in that personality,“ (Roberts, 2003, p 2).

For Peter Goldie emotions are complex phenomena of feeling, imagination, interpretation, actions inspired by emotions in the first place and expressions of emotions, moods and traits of character (Goldie, 2002). Emotions are personal yet they are often cited against a normative: I „ought“ to be feeling .... There are considerable differences in how people come to express, take and make meaning in their emotions and as such differences are often culturally driven. Character differences also effect variation in emotions. Emotions are feelings, however unlike feelings emotions are intentional, „intentional“ in the sense that they are structured. Often emotions are recounted as events against time and this gives them a narrative identity.

Emotions, for me, are feelings, states of being, ways of becoming that in many instances are reflexes, are reflexive responses made without prior thought. They are how I – a person becomes in absence of cognitive intervention. Kathleen Jamie encourages me to value my emotions. She describes her own emotions in seeing a peregrine – an unusual sight for her.

Sometimes we have to hush the frantic inner voice that says, „Don“t be stupid,“ and learn to look, to listen. You can do the organising and redrafting, the diagnosing and identifying later, but right now, just be open to it, see how it“s tilting nervously into the wind, try to see the colour, the unchancy shape – hold it in your head, bring it home intact.

Jamie, 2005, p 42

Much of Jamie“s narrative resonates deeply. In one plane of resonance: she seemed to be suggesting to me I learn to love being and being in the moment. I value my reading. Reading, my sight, my sense, .... I am celebrating the ableness/facility/ability of my body.

Recently I read an account of Motor Neurone Disease (MND) (Simmons, 2005). The account claimed the disease benefited a richer life. When younger, I had asked my father“s view upon euthanasia. The simplicity of his response surprised me and stayed with me. On reflection he was not only telling me of his answer to my question but his

request of me for his latter years: an individual's life is their own and theirs to do with as only they can see. He was telling me a truth. Philip Simmons suggested, „... when we do speak, we must speak the truth,“ (Simmons, 2000, p 105). In paradox there is consensual truth however. For Simmons (2005) no matter how bleak his life had and would become it was worth embracing for all it offered, including the severe and painfully disabling experiences that MND would bring. Both Simmons (2005) and my father are suggesting to me respect a person's truths and celebrate them boldly yet knowingly. To remain silent meant to die. Speak. Speak out and claim life, all that life might be.

This writing was a truthful response to my emotions, my dispositions at a time in my life some years ago now. Yet I continue to learn from my experiences. The writing was a response of/to my attitudes, and my perceptions of others' attitudes to my embodied identities. Although my diction is on occasions opaque the punctuation, unusual, my voice overly loud depending upon who is listening I do believe in the truth of the tale I have chosen to write. This has been exercising my moral disposition (Roberts, 2003). Moreover it seems that over time my tale becomes more truth-filled, poignant too, since now I am no longer a monstrous lecturer of the form shaped in this writing. I am no longer a lecturer at all. I am no/thing. My identity has been stripped rawly. I am to do as Simmons wrote, attempting to, „control how much energy, compassion, and integrity we bring to our journey,“ (2000, p 137). I tell myself, „Make passionate responses, give them bravely and hope!“ I tell myself I am making sense of my own falling and my failing.

If we work always in words, sometimes we need to recuperate in a place where language doesn't join up, where we are thrown back on a few elementary nouns.

Jamie, 2005, p 164

Currently I continue to feel alien and elementary. Frankenstein's monstrous was and is how I see myself: monstrous. Furthermore I believe it is how others see me. Shelley's gothic tale seemed to provide me with words I was scared to, fearful to write of, „me“. Once I had written them I was them. I had inscribed myself upon the page. Moreover I was asking others to assist in my self-debasement. I was allowing meaning to be read in through the work of another. I had cloaked my monstrous shape within the tale of another. But now it seems time to live my feelings, and to write of my listening and my feeling. I continue as Jamie continued in September 2001, „to keep making sense of the world in language, to keep the negotiation going,“ (Jamie, 2005, p 177). I tell my gothic tale of horrors to see who I am.

I want to please others so that I may be less alien to others. In endeavouring to reduce myself, through strictly monitored food intake and exercise I had wanted to please patriarchy's request that woman be, of man: hips no more, breasts empty pockets of potentiality only, no loss of blood monthly ever more – androgynous. And yet in this way I became subject to horrific verbal abuse; an endeavour to please that granted only hatred. How much is this writing an endeavour to please that will grant only hatred; self-

hatred? I still question how personally fulfilling I find the enterprise of undressing upon these pages. This writing is emotive. Through this section of writing and the following I have endeavoured to explore feelings, emotions. The foremost effort of this thesis, with regards exploring emotions, is to demonstrate emotive writing, effect emotional response from the writing's reader(s).

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## **TRANSGRESSING WOMEN**

This is a celebration of and for the transgressions of the norms dictating, proscribing and predicating the conditions of „the beautiful woman“. It posits pluralities. It questions embodied beauty in women's lived experiences, lives, my lived experiences. It is staged in texts of my experiences of education, particularly environs of learning to appreciate inscriptions of beautiful women as people, whole, with or without truncated limbs, fleshy.

I experience education as creative endeavour. Engaged in such creative exploits – I am transformed. I gain personal insight and understanding. This writing is itself an education. The transformation education requires is not without risk and pain. It may barter a loss of self. Resources nourishing the self, be they myopia and ignorance have been sustaining for me. To abdicate known sustenance in favour of the qualities of unknown alternatives is grievous in process. It is with such processes of struggle I am engaged and to be transformed (Roman and Eyre, 1997). I am struggling here in both my commitment to self-effacement and the denuding effects inherent in making sense of the transformations that experiences of educational endeavours have effected for and in me.

This is a patchworking of genres, styles of writing: discourse. Gunther Kress and Leo Van Leeuwen suggest discourse is, „socially constructed knowledge,“ (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, p 24). I value their meaning here. There is also poetic form in this section. Such phrases are intended to be spoken aloud, often phrases only are offered. There may be some attention given to the rhythm of the phrases, although in the case of free verse this is not necessarily so. Discourse is thus multimodal. This is to say, „...

discourses appear in very many modes. Or ... differently, all the semiotic modes which are available as a means of realisation in a particular culture are drawn on in that culture as a means of articulation of discourses," (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, p 24).

Although Kress and Van Leeuwen primarily are concerned to present an argument for those forms of communication that are not textual, for example the use of images such as photographs to communicate feelings, meanings and experiences, their definition is far reaching and useful in delineating differences between the ways of text themselves.

This work espouses a polymodal way of communicating (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). Simply polymodal can mean a variety of ways of expression, setting down feelings, meanings and experiences. A mode is defined when there are points of commonality between the ways of expression, the ways feelings set down, meaning made and recorded and experiences documented. Modes arise when society determines points of restriction between ways of expression, setting down feelings, meanings and experiences (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001).

Polymodal communication is a strategy to experiment; to see what is brought about by chance. In the autumn of 2006 I began a poetry course. The course was to encourage me to find meaning in words and phrases that were generated in serendipitous fashion. The course espoused the Dada movement of the early twentieth century. The emancipatory ideals that Dadaists worked towards are inspirational to my ways of working here. Set down feelings, meanings and experiences in ways that are of those feelings, meanings

and experiences. It is also to prize the ordinary as the extraordinary and not to exclude on account of incredulity. Robert Hughes is instructive.

It is essential to grasp that Dada was never an art style, as Cubism was nor did it begin with a pugnacious socio-political programme, ... It stood for a wholly eclectic freedom to experiment; it enshrined play as the highest human activity, and its main tool was chance.

Hughes, 2000, p 61

In the early years of the twentieth century the world experienced great loss. Art, indeed many forms of expression, poetry included, looked for a means to believe in the „light“ of the human condition. Language, if man could be allowed to speak freely, would deliver changed socio-cultural conditions. It was about spontaneity, and this for the Dadaists, meant the play of childhood and taking chance/s. It was about challenging the sinister machinations of the political apparatus from which no one was free (Hughes, 2000, p 61). Jean Arp, famous or infamous Dadaist depending upon how his art is valued would, says Robert Hughes, „(tear) our scraps of paper (their edges “drew themselves,” without conscious intervention, by being torn) and let them drop on a sheet, fixing them where they fell, thus achieving collages made wholly in accordance with the laws of chance (Hughes, 2000, p 61). This is to capture occurrence and I see this as valuable sentiment. Another example of *per chance* art comes from the work of Kurt Schwitters, a

Hanoverian who produced his art from street pickings. Van Gogh too embraced reclamation art:

This morning I visited the place where streetcleaners dump the rubbish. My God, it was beautiful!

Tomorrow they are bringing a couple of interesting pieces from that garbage pile, including some broken street lamps, for me to admire or, if you wish, to use as models ... [from] places that are a real paradise for the artist, however unsightly they may be.

Gogh, in Hughes, 2000, p 63

It is/was the Dadaists endeavour to capture gritty reality, the chanciness of life's opportunities that entices me. Educational research can espouse such ways of working. It is the sentiment of the modes of Dadaism in the context of educational research, this research, I am drawn to. I seek to try to capture such in the textual offerings I produce here. Patti Lather, a feminist, an educationalist and concerned to trouble the blind spots of modernist knowledge, invites researchers to question the singular truth which many research texts in the social sciences have sought to establish.

Lather (1991) explores the constitutive power of a research text and its data. „Data“ according to Lather, „might be better conceived as the material for telling a story where the challenge becomes to generate a polyvalent data base that is used to *vivify*

interpretation as opposed to, “support” or “prove”,” (Lather, 1991, p 91). For Lather the work of a research text is not to offer definitive explanation but rather to probe a reader’s conscience, inspire their intrigue so that questions of the work’s potentiality and possibilities are raised. Lather is concerned that the reader is expected to do a great deal more than passively take in an account, unquestioning of the ways in which the feelings, meaning and experiences of which it speaks have been captured in the first instances.

Turning the text into a display and interaction among perspectives and presenting material rich enough to bear re-analysis in different ways bring the reader into the analysis via a discursive impulse which fragments univocal authority. Such writing works against the tendency to become the locus of authority; it is writing that probes the blind spots of the interpreters’ own conceptualizations and attends to its own constitutive elements.

Lather, 1991, p 91

The thrust of this work is not to offer a description or interpretation of my feelings, meanings or experiences but to see them set down in a variety of ways that evoke their reality as their reality seems at the time I am setting them down. The authority of the work is the work’s strength in taking a reader to the heart-felt places I seem to believe I may have once been when I first began to appreciate women who were other than of patriarchy’s edict. This is about a real woman becoming real upon these pages, her

textual staging of her knowing yet what and who impacts upon me as I become real?

Lather explains, „(t)he social relations of the research act,“(1991, p 91).

Social relations mediate the construction of knowledge; who speaks for whom becomes a central question. Such a question de-centers what Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) term the, “Great Interpreter” and Foucault calls the “masters of truth and justice” ... whose self appointed task is to uphold reason and reveal truth to those unable to see or speak it.

Lather, 1991, p 91

Lather goes on to invite her reader to a „collaborative analysis“ where meaning is a joint enterprise, there is no one account that might trump another of, „privileged position of theoretical presuppositions,“ (Lather, 1991, p 92). In this way this section of work might be seen as contributing to Lather’s quest for work that interrupts, „social relations of dominance,“ (Lather, 1991, p 92). I do acknowledge however it is about my own feelings, meanings and experiences I am writing. Questions of voice in the research text would be even more significant were I to be recording experiences of others. For example Lather and Smithies (1997) sought to work out a negotiated text where women who recorded as HIV positive wrote their accounts around transcriptions of the interviews Lather and Smithies had conducted. „Negotiated text“ is a term by which I anticipate several accounts are presented to readers and it is the readers’ work to disabuse

the values of their reading for themselves. Meanings offered and the meanings a reader may make are collaborative affairs, always under construction.

Carsten Holler (2006) used a slide to move people along, in their thinking and their quest to translocate. In like vein I use a variety of modes to move my thinking along to find a way of working out mystory/ies. Autoethnography is fitting.

(Autoethnography records) the world for a specific, perspectival, and limited vantage point, ...creating space for dialogue, .. (questing) social change, ... a personal text, ... (moving) writers and readers, subjects and objects, tellers and listeners into this space of dialogue, debate, ... (proffering) more than one voice, ... for more than personal release and discovery, ... for more than the pleasures of the text, ... for public display, ... an ensemble piece, ... (reading) it with other texts, in other contexts, ... (she) asks for performance. ... a performance that asks how our personal accounts count.

Jones, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005

Before I first wanted to tell mystory I had to read „mystory“ (Denzin, 1997). The authoethnography of Carolyn Ellis (2004; 1995) has been highly influential. Ellis (2004) proposed the following words to a group of her students. Her words have given me my voice in a multitude of ways.

“Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness,” I read from my notes. “Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experiences; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition.

Usually written in first-person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. They showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness. These features appear as relational and institutional stories affected by history and social structure, which themselves are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts, and language.

Ellis, 2004, pp 37-38

My writing is heart-felt. It is mine. It is of my ways such as the women who have inspired me to break with the bleak, narrow physique I have believed I should sculpt. Do I loosen my control?



### *Lists*

Lists give me a sense of control. When I have achieved I can tick off the said item from its list. I sense moving through tasks to be achieved, a sense of an ending that I need to get to. Lists do not require explanation – necessarily. Lists can be functional. I like „functional“. I wanted to function as a doctor before I started on this list of activities that charts my journey to this writing. Born: Australia, early schooling: Papua New Guinea, later schooling the UK, university first: St. Bartholomew's and the Royal London School of Medicine and Dentistry and so my lists continue.

Lists offer me a way out; a means of providing a partial account. This has attracted me to write in lists. In coming to autoethnographic work I listed down significant voices in mystory. Lists can be disembodied items.

Life can be listed down. For example my curriculum vitae lists. My birth certificate may be read as a list. The date of the day of my birth followed by another „fact“ and then another. My passport can be seen as a list of the places I entered and left. Certificates of achievement are lists of facts: what subject was achieved, when it was achieved, where it was achieved, the quality of the achievement. They are authenticating statements of my functions. Clinical. Controlled. Curtailed.

Narrative is not dissimilar to a list. A series of events over time, ordered. Its quality may be judged by its orderliness. A narrative gives me a sense of allocating an event a place, which I might enter and then leave. If the narration is of a beginning, it is as of a

delivery, a birthing. Following delivery, a journey is taken, it might be short or long, and then it ends when the textual inscription, the narrative, ends. I wonder of all that did not become in the story of narrative, the list; the characters, the places, the feelings, meanings and experiences that did not make it. A most significant part of writing this work has been to let go of my lists and to play with alternatives as the pages of my lists breathe.

*An alternative occasion*

On occasions,  
I lie and gaze  
upwards in the hope,  
of some reason to be offered  
to me from somewhere,  
for something  
I am

On occasions,  
I come to realise  
importance in writing this work,  
is to form a story,  
risk an unsatisfactory gaze of  
guardians" of the gates of academic scholarship  
in endeavour to form a story of the pains my truths laid me low with.

In the first verse, the lines of the word are restrained. There is limited growth of the lines, before the final two lines are once more tucking back in. In the second verse I risk the rhythm of the verse and enter a compromised state. The lines escape and I wander in them to a place where I am not sure others will receive me in welcome embrace.

In the spring time of 2007, when I was shaping a narrative that would recommend a possible Ph D thesis, I had tried to write an explanation of what learning meant to me.

I look upon the crepuscular light of the evening and in my endeavour to find words to speak of learning, the moon-sun luminary speaks where I have failed to find previously adequate definition. The moon-sun invites me.

Learning becomes about the courage to explore, humility to fail and spirit to forgive. Mostly it asks I imagine and I dream of other possibilities besides those I have lost.

Learning is a transformative experience. Through learning I realise I shall move, be moved, removed and removing. It involves change. I need not necessarily give up in order to take on new ideas, but I must be open to imagine how much joy and sadness I shall find in experiencing all that I can dream when I am entertaining possibilities anew. Learning is a passionate affair. It is filled by emotion. It is to love.

Mine is an interpretivist view on learning. I privilege experiences, quest circumstances that will change me, move me, remove me. Privileging experience is a feminist's ideal. Learning is knowledge's lover. Learning is an insatiable desire to reformation, to find a person I may be.

I used to want to be important to another person. Then I wanted to be important to myself. Now I learn not to want. Yet that too is no thing to aspire to. Anthony Storr is informative, „If the individual regards the external world merely as something to which he has to adapt, rather as something in which his subjectivity can find fulfilment, his individuality disappears and his life becomes meaningless or futile,“ (Storr, 1997, p 72). There has been a need to find a satisfying account, a plausible explanation. On occasions I do find myself in the words of others and at the very least find words to which I could adapt in accordance, re-invent myself. This is about finding my words, celebrating the person I am.

### *Beauty*

There is no one beautiful woman, but there are beautiful women. I am suggesting beauty is a heterogeneous construction (Moi, 1994). There is no one body beautiful. Driving for physical uniformity as the foundation of beauty is enslaving.

A model, Elle Macpherson, has been described in much popular press as „The Body,“ an eponym for female beauty came to be formed (SHE magazine, June 2005, pp 30-31). „I had dark eyes and short hair like a boy, and I was skinny and tall.” Nicknamed The Body

– for obvious reasons the mother of two is still deserving of the title,” (SHE magazine, June 2005, pp 30-31). Androgynous form would come to benefit Elle Macpherson in time.

Cultural traditions, customary pursuits of times past and I suggest times to come too, prescribing physical beauty have shifted. Women’s bodies have long been sites of cultural contention. Curvaceous women of the sixties were considered beautiful, later emaciated forms prescribed beauty. The discursive work of cultural media, the mores they influenced, „the female form“ is performative and is a fabrication of culture in order to suit the day’s hegemonic privileged. Embodiments of femininity are patriarchal prescriptions. Images of cat walk women today (2010) appear to me androgynous. Today’s woman, if she is to be termed beautiful has the physique of a prepubescent girl yet a young boy’s body so similar. The female form is (fe)male.

Extremes of ranges are not welcomed. The acceptable range of womanly/feminine physical characteristics is ever changing, yet consistently intolerant of the extraordinary. Hegemony subverts a language by which edges can be appreciated, the boundaries by which the range could be conceived in the first instance. Miscarriage.

The words used to speak of physical characteristics themselves perform those characteristics. I use the word „performativity“ to speak of the performative functions of words spoken – the notion that in making utterances there is symbolic work being achieved alongside and within the descriptive act.

Lyotard is most illustrative, „... language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist,“ (1984, p 15). For Lyotard social bonds are the effects of the language in which they are voiced (Lyotard, 1984, p 15). Culture then may discipline its bodies by exacting regulations of judgement and comparison. For Lyotard performativity is not so much about the symbolism of discursive work as about the coercion utterances contribute to regimes of truth and social coherency, and as such depend upon terrorised and disciplined bodies (Lyotard, 1984, p 46).

Lyotard’s understanding is profound because not only does he offer me a way of exploring social relations significant in the formulation of women and their „othering“ regarding their physical characteristics but he also speaks to the argument of how knowledge itself is transmitted.

(P)erformativity increases the ability to produce proof, it also increases the ability to be right: the technical criterion, introduced on a massive scale into scientific knowledge, cannot fail to influence the truth criterion, ...

It should be easy to describe how the other facet of knowledge – its transmission, or education – is affected by the predominance of the performativity criterion.

If we accept the notion that there is an established body of knowledge, the question of its transmission, from a pragmatic point of view, can be subdivided

into a series of questions: Who transmits learning? What is transmitted? To whom? Through what medium? In what form? With what effect?

Lyotard, 1984, pp 46-48

This work, particularly this section of work, is not only about how alternative physiques of women are spoken of, but also about the strength of my feelings in response to being formed in a body that was consistently marginalised, if not muted. It is about how I come to understand, and convey my understanding of my feelings, meanings and experiences of my physique. It is about how the narrative I set out in order to communicate my understandings of feelings, meanings, experiences is itself of a form that challenges, „established bodies of knowledge,“ (Lyotard, 1984, p 48). This is to perform an embodiment of education.

Hermione Lee (2005) provides examples of ways in which consideration of specific details of writers' lives may inform a reader of the „body“ of their work. Lee reports the words of Woolf's very physical reaction to reading.

What a vast fertility of pleasure books hold for me! I went in (and) found the table laden with books. I looked in (and) sniffed them all. ...

Sometimes I think heaven must be one continuous unexhausted reading. It's a disembodied trance-like intense rapture that used to seize me as a girl, and comes back now and again down here ... with a violence that lays me low.

Woolf, in Lee, 2005, p 45

Reading suggests Lee, is a „pleasure ... embodied both in a physical experience and a particular setting,“ (Lee, 2005, p 46). I find it physically remarkable how books offer Woolf „fertility“ such a laden table whose goods are to be „sniffed“. This suggests of Woolf's reproductive capabilities on account of her reading. Reading offers an impregnating engagement. Lee questions how, „women writers transform or translate, make use of, their childhood place of reading in their adult writing life,“ (Lee, 2005, p 46). For me how reading, consumption of external signs and symbols, impregnates.

The work of women such as Virginia Woolf has been most influential in the ways I have come to develop my own voice. My story of transgressive women is an endeavour not only to tell of experiences of my body/ies that challenge/s but also to show those challenges, the stains on my own textual living.

Seemingly performativity can be about particular discourses mediating the boundless authority to which selves become subjected and are subjects, the boundaries of flesh. Performativity becomes that discursive event that inculcates the narratives in and by which women are subjects of strict self-surveillance. Women's fleshiness becomes



symbolic. Symbolism creates myths. Women learn to shape themselves by the myths of their societies, their cultures for example denial of their hunger for food (Woolf, 1991, pp 179-217). Successful refutation of an appetite for food, together with successful accordance with dieting regimes shall afford women „good“ selves. Women learn to be good through control, subjecting themselves to and becoming subjects of surveillance attitudes. Attitudes infused in language, the discourses by which societal relations are negotiated (Weedon, 1994, p 108). One means of negotiation is the consumption of women's magazines and the images such publications carry. These images speak „the body“, „beautiful woman“. For example the exposé of Elle Macpherson and its voices aiming to reproduce the objectives of which it speaks. Women learn to educate themselves in the subjects of their bodies so that they may quest a particular beauty.

Women are expected to undergo rigorous self-surveillance. This surveillance requires women to evaluate, to explore their physicality, their embodied presences. Self monitoring requires measuring arms and bust, hips and thighs. Weighing in. Researching the popularised dietary regime. Last month this plan, this month another. Following excesses, „Detox!“ How much adrift is the midrift? Comedic responses belie the realities of the tyrannising discourses that speak beautiful women, those words to which I am subjected and subject of. Comedy to displace an otherwise overwhelming sadness. A sadness felt deeply for a long time. Kim Chernin speaks of women's projects questing the beautiful body as obsessions (Chernin, 1981, p 1). She also adds these „obsessions“ are „aged pursuits“ (Chernin, 1981, p 57). It is no oddity that I produce this

work at a time when I allow myself to be in all the fleshiness that I am. I allow myself to be and to be seen as different, to be other than of man's beauty.

*Differences to be heard*

Lapper is to be in Trafalgar Square, London, later this year, (Garratt, in Telegraph Magazine, 2005, pp 22-27). I am sitting at the breakfast table in my mother's kitchen. It is midsummer, 2005. I am absent from my work as a college lecturer/tutor. In fact I am absent in many accounts, those accounts of my mother's „proper teacher“. I work, used to work in the post-compulsory sector of education and training apparently. At least that is what the words on my Postgraduate Certificate in Education read. A „proper teacher“ would be of my mother's employment, a primary teacher, a woman at work in nourishing the young, a „proper teacher“. My comparison with my mother effects shame in me, and then some. I realise I am in my mother's kitchen, not only an impromptu performance but a parasite, an improper presence. I am grossly bulimic and this time absent from work is supposedly to get well. Get well means gain weight to return to work.

It is approaching mid-day. Many eat at lunch. I starve. I am an improper presence in my mother's kitchen. I can not eat. I do not allow myself to eat. I take to reading my mother's news: Telegraph Magazine (2005, pp 22-27). I read of Lapper's marked and remarkable journeys. I experience Sheryl Garratt's (in Telegraph Magazine, 2005, pp 22-27) concern for a life, lived experiences, that are of a woman of a body „other than“. „Other than?“ Different. Then I am seeing a narrative that is showing me, depicting a representation of a woman's body that speaks of multiple possibilities, not least of which,

a suggestion of a spirit of pugnacity, fight, speaking out. Here I am seeing embodiment of a narrative legitimating my own physique that is „other than“.

When Marc Quinn’s sculpture of Alison Lapper is to go aloft in Trafalgar Square later in 2005, a specific story will be told out loud. Such a saga might unfold.

I

In Pietrasanta, outside his workshop,

You are of white marble and

saving temporary shelter

You’ve no cover

Torso only

pregnant, of thirty eight weeks, your form

You are beautiful!

In Trafalgar Square, a plinth awaits

twenty fifth day of this September

You Counter-balance to conquering

no less courage than male-military

Why are you „no less“?

II

Phocomelia proscribed your limbs

You, expected to

be shrouded in secrecy

Your mutant form: Transgression

III

You are of Marc Quinn,

in thought the form of a goddess,

Venus di Milo: A world's woman beautiful,

You, are different

Why are you different?

IV

You are spoken of as:

A welcome touch of femininity;

A pregnancy bringing notions of life;

In a space celebrating dead men of the past.

But there is no past, only present

Why are you only present?

Western, white incubus speaking

A biological function

Dis/missed, or just missed in space?

I no longer need to speak aloud, so poetic form is given up. The opening address has been made. It is consideration of its consequences that must be voiced. Alison Lapper's sculpted form represents a visibly different woman, of a markedly different physique. I question whether a body less markedly different from Lapper's would have been chosen for the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. Would a representation of a less markedly disabled body indeed an invisibly disabled body have won the competition that will bring Lapper atop a plinth in the space of dead white men? I doubt? Is that my trouble at present I am visibly disabled yet to put on weight the psychological burden destroying me, will for a while not be quite so obnoxious. I shall lose my means of communication.

I am sceptical of Lapper's presence on the fourth plinth. Her presence will offer a particular celebration of a particular difference, a different body, but one that is mute for diversity. A discourse of difference came by chance. Recognition of difference was achieved through a sculptor winning a competition. I question whether the trophy of the competition was decided on account of Marc Quinn's skills or otherwise. It is convenient Quinn's subject is visibly physically disabled, and that that visibly physically disabled body is female and pregnant. The judging panel got a triple whammy when Quinn decided to put forward his Lapper for their competition.

A year later and I am sitting with mother, watching a river make its journey. Our talking is of the watering river journeying. There is sadness welling and I miss my mother before she has left me, for her journey without me. It comes to me how with my mother I have endeavoured to make sense of being an alternative woman, fleshy woman. I experience a most difficult relationship. It is difficult on account of its complexities, the feelings, meanings and experiences it engenders. I am taken back to the day when we went to Marc Quinn's Lapper in Trafalgar Square. During this day I learned not only of what Quinn's Lapper, on one day, at a few moments could mean, but I learned of how I might make sense of being an alternative woman to my mother's. Without contrast the stark differences of relief would not become apparent.

I am running late. I am late. I am running looking ahead trying to find my mother's presence in the crowds of the station concourse. As my steps are too late, my vision is too restricted.

I am very late. I wait. It is now easier to stand and to be taken in to the pulsating throng of Waterloo's concourse, to give myself to the oppression rather than consider the dilemma. I have failed my mother.

„Claire!“

She reaches out to me, her outstretched arms seeking embrace. My guilt – my lateness – makes me nervous and I hold myself in my shame and at distance from my mother in her

embracing. I become increasingly guilty, not only am I very late but I can not hold her closely.

She is hungry. We go to Embankment Gardens and I am served my lunch. More guilt. Lunch is of my mother's preparation: boxed salads, especially for our day together, today.

My tongue loosens and the afternoon warmth relaxes the spasticity of our relationship. My mother found me and we have consumed Mother's salads, fitting nourishment. Could there be levelling.

My mother decides to shop. Tension returns. More guilt. I can not join her in this pursuit. I have no income for this. I did not return to a role as Lecturer, deemed not suitably fit. The weight gain ultimately did no thing to recommend a healed person. It is not only my income that is awry. Once again I am turning inwards. Scratching and gouging at a flesh that does no thing to hold my mother's attention. Sustain her. Nourish. She wishes to shop, to move on from the gardens.

„She Active!“ Sportswear. Salad and sportswear are fitting.

I see her from behind at first. She is small. Her buttocks – negligent protuberances. She is streaked grey, the shit of life's bucket (Nooteboom, 2003, p 38), alternatively read

pigeons“ crap soiling most present in Trafalgar Square. She is ageing too though. Today it is eighteen months since her arrival on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2005.

As „The David“ my mother says. I do not know and I do not say. „Let“s go down into the square, take a „proper“ look.“ I follow my mother“s imperative. We talk the sculpture into meanings. „Dignity. Her head speaks of dignity in the face of every adversity.“ I do not know what her gnathic pride speaks of. I do not know and I do not say. „Vulnerability – the late term pregnancy makes her vulnerable.“

The protruding belly. The ripe breasts full and pendulous, the nipple of her left resting upon the fundus of a heavily gravid uterus. Encumbered form. This is a symbol of life lived intimately and life to come. Eminent delivery. Possibility. A future of multiple lives, opportunities. My own solitary childless state gapes. I take to embittered response. Critical and piqued. Choosing to speaking of those lived experiences for whom she seems to be no symbol: for the infertile, the non-gravid, skins not white, the invisibly disabled. My bitterness is now anger.

She“s on the fourth plinth. See who“s on the first, the second and third. Clothed, stood, upright doyens towering in the garb of sophistication, scrolls of letters in hand, men professing a Nation“s wisdom facing out from Fancy“s Dominion. Lapper is placed to look after them. Eight months of pregnancy. Phocomelia. Diseased. Arse on show. Tokenism. Voluptuous voyeurism. Cultural tourism. Whose hell am I in?



I am wishing I had a camera. I want to take hold. I want to hold on. I want to understand my anger and my confusion.

„Will an internet download later not do?“

„No, no, no ... No, No, NO! You do not understand. You are not hearing the clamour of patriarchy’s regime. Your regime. The internet is not my hold, my perspective, my camera. It is another’s view, a view that does not include me, what my eyes see.“

I bite. I paw. I scratch. As some animal devoid of plan, raw in emotion. A desperate endeavour to resolves a day’s tensions.

Bleeding. Wounded. I stand away from my mother. I stand and look in desperate hope. In hope I have not severed a life’s main artery – my relationship with my mother. It is about this moment. It is about now. It is about the muddiness of my feelings, experiences, emotions and the meanings and understandings I do not seem to be able to find. I am blurred in my outlook. Yet I gradually make out a mother, my mother, desperate in her loving and a daughter desperate to feel her love, yet feeling only anger and guilt.

The temperate April day. The warmth soothes. The petrol and diesel fumes drug. Trafalgar’s fountain is for drowning in. Anger is cooled. Assuaged pain. A watering river journey in my tears of regret. My own limbs of aggression becoming weightless,

matter less. Less and less. My sense saturated in waters“ calming. We leave the square. Sore. Wanting.

Sometime later, when I had grown sufficiently to be able to placate. I feel desperately sorry I am not the daughter I have felt I should be for my mother. A woman, lithe, small of stature, wed, with others – a husband and children, at work. Although Alison Lapper’s presence has made a significant contribution to speak of those who are often marginalised in groups predominated by patriarchy’s discourses: women, physically disabled, it can have only become a significant contribution for those reading this of their view. For my mother she Lapper appeared „dignified“ yet „vulnerable“ – these traits were apparent to her, made apparent to her by her reading of Lapper’s representation. And that should have been enough – most obvious, would those contributions not suffice for me too? She had asked would a download, a customised image, of the woman not do as a reminder of the woman seen? „No!“ I had wanted to capture my own reading, to be afforded my own reading. Not only was I angered that my mother was not able to afford me my desire/s but I was angry Lapper had been reduced to her biological functioning by Marc Quinn in the first place. Alison Lapper was a woman offered up: naked, heavily pregnant and severely physically disabled in order to communicate her individuality.

Later I read of an account of Alison Lapper’s life-story (Lapper, 2005). I learned of her desires to represent and present disability in her own ways, her art, her photographs.

Working with Quinn had indeed raised the profile of Alison Lapper.

(Marc Quinn) said that when disability is documented in art or science it's always presented as a kind of show of extreme imperfection, somehow always shown as grotesque or ugly. He wanted to do something different – to create something that was beautiful, something that would show that the disabled form is beautiful.

I had already been exploring this for many years in my own work. So I didn't feel that he was doing the statues for the wrong reasons. ...

Lapper, 2005, p 235

I think most of the people who object to the statue do so because it's brought up their prejudices – the fact that they're not comfortable with nudity, pregnancy and disability. Maybe, over time, as they get used to it, the statue will help people become more comfortable with their own bodies because, I can tell you, it's a great feeling.

Lapper, 2005, p 245

When the two sculptures that Marc did of me were at the Liverpool Tate, they asked me to go up and talk about them, which I did. I also had an opportunity to talk about my own work. The audience largely consisted of disabled people and I welcomed them, but I still yearned to talk to a broader range of people than that. Once again, it made me question the whole concept of the debate in society about

disability. I have the impression that the able-bodied majority just can't be bothered with it. They aren't interested in exploring the issues of seeing the aesthetic beauty that may lie in the depiction of impaired forms.

Lapper, 2005, pp 245-6

Once more in reading Alison Lapper's words I come to realise that society seems in some ways to be concerned to work at an ever constricting range of languages by which differences can be spoken of. If language is viewed, such as sculpture, as an art of representation, with symbolic functionalities, then the preferences people vote for in their purchase of polished products such as the glossy magazines, is also a vote for a corseting language. Women's forms are continually manufactured by the restrictive apparatus of a society that would have them held in. Women's concerns then become with the pain of their corsets.

In further thoughts upon my encounter with Quinn's Lapper and my engagement with my mother on the afternoon we were in Trafalgar Square I came to learn of my anger in an alternative way. It was not that my mother could not read my understanding, meanings I saw in the Lapper sculpture but rather that I was expecting her to. In such expectation I had failed to accept that my view was that, and that only – mine. My mother had tried to offer a solution to my dilemma of wishing to photograph the sculpture, there had been an endeavour to acknowledge my need. I had felt it a lame offer yet it was offered.

I realise today my desire for this work has shifted. When I first became a doctoral student, and indeed when I wrote on truth sometime after my first days, I had expected that another would be able to appreciate my view – the markers of my assignment on truth in educational research had not and the writing had failed assessment. I had failed to be recognised in the ways I was seeking. My anticipation was to be recognised for the ideas I was trying to offer. Furthermore I wanted embracing recognition, wanting others to see me. One of my desires for this work is to struggle it out so that I might consider what I have produced, and to forgive those circumstances that inscribe my truths. This work is of me and in the first instance for me and on account of this will be limited by those circumstances that effect the limitations of my experiences. Reporting upon experiences does not stand alone from the experience; it is of the experience and of all that the experience is/was.

I continue to struggle to understand, offer an account that at this time seems pleasing to me, of engagements of times past, such as my encounter with the form of Alison Lapper. Perhaps ultimately that may be all I speak for: a heeding, a drawing in, a listening for those narratives that are otherwise mute. I have sought to employ the silenced voices in my experiences in an endeavour to understand something of what I may learn from them. Embracing all of my experiences, including those that fail to be recognised in the ways I would wish from others. The work is not necessarily a critique of power dynamics: imbalance notably, of remedying, of man's medicinal regime. Nor is it to create pitiable portraiture of a society's margins. I do not seek to blame. I seek to consider the person I

am and the experiences, the feelings, and meanings that are generated in response to such consideration.

My ambition here is to claim a sense of freedom from the flagellation I do insist on exacting upon myself. It is not another's consensus I am seeking. In the foremost place it is in my imagination that that the woman I am: disabled, transgressive, dieting, seeking nourishment, experiencing ostracism and establishing a voice of her own lives.

„Failing to recognise a person's material, embodied nature is an extreme form of discrimination against a person,“ (Assiter, 2000, p 336). Knowledge and the challenge to oppression are connected (Assiter, 2000, p 339). Assiter's disquisition of feminist epistemology and values asks that knowledges are formed from positions that value all people. „The gaining of knowledge will be a process of constant dialogue, involving listening both to what the other is saying and to what is revealed about that other's values,“ (Assiter, 2000, p 339). My work does ask that knowledge might be formed from positions that value all people. However it also asks that knowledge is formed from positions that are able to value all people. This moves the premise of the creation of knowledge from one of discrimination to one of ability; enabling other voices.

„Disabling Women“ sought to expound the discrimination patriarchal discourses speak of. „Transgressing Women“ seeks to explore the lacuna from which alternative voices might be heard. Robin Usher and Richard Edwards work from Gadamer's position questioning the apparatus by which Science lays down truth (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p 36). In

much educational research, as in the research in many other social sciences methods, of the natural sciences were/are believed to be the means to uncover true knowledge (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p 33). The difficulty for me, here, is not the natural sciences paradigms of knowledge and researchers' claims to true knowledge but rather that the natural sciences' methods are definitive. The methods of the natural sciences are for me: indefinite and therefore the former sentence might more accurately read, „methods of the natural sciences were/are believed to be a means to uncover true knowledge.“ Science, say Usher and Edwards, requires examination, „as a social practice and as a historical and cultural product,“ (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p 36).

I have suggested that language did not reflect reality but played a significant role in creating the reality/ies of which it spoke. This text does not reflect a reality but refracts it. It takes references to experiences and offers them again, turning their meanings slightly in the process, so that there is a new series of realities to be conjured with. This I suggest is most threatening.

Knowledge therefore becomes a mastery, the elimination of difference.

Relativism is feared precisely because in claiming that there is no uniquely privileged position from which to know but a number of different positions each with their own standards, the very possibility of an authorising centre is apparently destroyed. It implies that difference and heterogeneity cannot be eliminated and knowledge and truth cannot be possessed and mastered.

In „Disabling Women“ there was an endeavour to capture the deficit discourses by which I was formed. „Transgressing Women“ there is an endeavour to re-enter examples of social practice that affect the kinds of deficit discourses by which I was formed and to explore these through alternative representations – textual transgressions.

In previous work, for example the thesis I produced for a Doctor of Education at the University of Sheffield and in many ways this work too is solipsistic. It is of soliloquy, one of self-flagellation. I might have been said to have been empowered since I had a greater knowledge of the behaviours, the experiences, the person I was telling of. But I failed, in many ways, to recognise the regulative apparatus I reproduced in such self-flagellation. „The technologies of the self are designed precisely to empower through self-control. In a sense, we position and regulate ourselves more effectively through a, „subjectifying“ discourse such as humanistic psychology,” (Usher and Edwards, 1994, pp 50-51). However, the consequences of this are an overly and on occasions misplaced sense of responsibility, whilst sequestering an ever increasing sense of isolation. I turn to consider my isolation „Ostracism.“ This thesis, particularly its later sections are an attempt to engage a more subtle appreciation of the constraints by which my story’s truths have been played out.



*She does not fit*

Feminist have also raised a concern with the postmodern tendency to portray the body as so fragmented, mobile, and boundary-less that it invites a confusion over how the body is actually engendered and positioned within concrete configurations of power and forms of material oppression.

Giroux, 1992, p 70

The following colloquy is a dialogue that develops a questioning of the regimes of truth by which other female bodies may negotiate recognition.

„Look at this!“

„Look at what?“

„This woman does not fit.“

„Why does she not fit? Does she not measure up?“

„She transgresses the norms. She embodies another form, one underwriting hegemony’s regimes. Her body is of the borderlands. Her embodiment of a critical pedagogy

(Giroux, 1992, pp 61-83), a body of cultural politics and educational effects,” (Giroux, 1992, pp 61-83).

„Oh yes! Well now look, the woman ...“

„I am looking, though I am not seeing.“

„What is to be done?“

„Adjustment?“

„Adjust her? The form is made now, the scriptures have been written, there is no  
adjusting to be done.“

„No not the proscription, for has that not been set for all time?“

„Well which parts of her are to be adjusted?“

„I shall start with her footings.“

„That will not make a difference.“

„I shall bend her at the knees then.“

„No. Still closure shall not be recommended, she shall not fit.“

„What if I bend her at the knees and turn her sideways?“

„No. Her hips will pop out. Not good enough.“

„Well that just leaves her head.“

„What can you do about that?“

„I’ll have to remove it.“

„You sure?“

„Her head would have been the site of the troubling in the first instance. By removal of the head the flesh should be freed to the proscription with ease. By losing her head we’ll no longer be troubled by her voice. And if you look closely you’ll see she has marked herself up for use. She placed the noose about her own neck. I am supposing she understood she wasn’t going to fit after all?“

„No longer shall she be known for who she is; limbs and torso – unidentifiable.“

„Not a problem, who is going to need to know her? No one needs to know her. No one needs to know she was ever here. Hers is body that is definitely limitropic and past expiry.“

„Did she ever inspire?“

„No.“

„Did she not mean anything to anyone?“

„It is doubtful.“

„How do you know?“

„Well I don't. But is that not the presumption one makes?“

„She didn't want to mean anything to anyone?“

„Fearful of how she would be heard.“

„So, she decided not to speak?“

„Well, I would not say she didn’t speak, but she has yet to be heard.“

This colloquy is a means of penetrating and illustrating the gaps between the poles of the binary of voices above; to surface that which is unspoken between, and perhaps around the interlocutors.

Women’s bodies are situations of violence. They are subjects of overpowering mastery. But it is not the overt, the explicit exacting violence that is my prime concern, although the proposed dismembering of the corpse of those voices of the above dialogue provide is graphic and worrying on account of its gratuity. Greatest concern is for the circumstances of the violent end that brought the corpse to the attention of the above voices in the first instance: suicide by hanging, „She placed the noose about her own neck“. It is the violence women exact upon themselves, the self-control. Exacting violence comes in the resultant of the predominating power enacted in the abusive relationship many women have with themselves. Such vehement malificence is achieved through penetrating self-surveillance. The most powerful agent, the powerful presence of maleficio against a person is that person.

For society, suicide is more terrible than a death at the hands of another person because there are no means by which the perpetrator can be held to account for their actions. The individual has (re)claimed their agency in the most final way possible. The disciplining regimes by which truth shall be exhorted are disrupted, the disciplining of docile bodies challenged irrevocably and the ordering, in the quest for social control, undone.

*Reflections*

This is a dialogue about learning. It is about a series of socio-cultural contexts and effects in which I have begun to understand an experiential philosophy of learning. Learning, to me, is about demonstrable change. It is also about the conditions, the contexts, the frames of references within and through which change(s) may or may not take place. Questioning the effects of possible changes.

My education here then has been to engage with possibilities of learning, the conditions in which learning takes place. The act of drawing out this particular and peculiar discourse has been an acknowledgement of a series of testimonies, regarding experiences. When I have endeavoured to explore such with regards to their transience, their fleeting nature, their inconsequentiality, I believe I have revealed significant sites of social conditioning and loci for possible change, or at least suggestive of change/symbolic of change. This writing is my story of learning as transformation and transformative. Learning has involved heightening my awareness of being in a world that I am limited in, flawed in and by, as I engage with the subjectivities through which my own and others embodied presences are shaped.

This section of work not only mines discourses of female subjectivities but also challenges conceptions of what education is, what education does and what education is for. I am hoping I am telling and have told a story about meanings of the words, education and learning and the holds they have in relation to each other. Two discourses

particularly and peculiarly distinct, yet complementary. „Education“ involves acts of drawing out, bringing forth, such as this work is an education: an exegesis, perhaps, of my story. „Learning“ is the transformation that such drawing out effects. The learning potential of the story has lain and lies in the peculiarities of doing autoethnographic work. Presenting and representing stories, truths, heightening sensitivities to being in my worlds, being in my realities as they seem to me at the moment I am endeavouring to capture them upon these pages. This assumes realities as, „a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having being independent of our own volition ...“

(Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p 13). Heeding the exteriorities that are contributive to the shaping of stories identities, the contextualizing of which are pivotal in autoethnographic work (Stacy, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). I am learning in telling my stories (Denzin, 1997, pp 140-141). In a text where I am vulnerable, I realise my emotions that have been effected by actions, my agency, my choices, by the realities in which I am acting, I come to learn of specific truths of my choices; contingencies of my experiences. It has been my learning in becoming more adept at managing the emotional toil of negotiating my surroundings. It has been an endeavour to make sense of the contextual and environmental, contributions made to biographical trajectory that is within all stories existences.

The transformative potentialities of education and my assumptions of learning – the undergoing of demonstrable change, what previously was unspoken has now been spoken of and I hope speak to the philosophical underpinning of the thesis as a whole. There are possibilities in understanding relations/relationships I may or may not now recognise as

of „me“, „mine“ – „self“. All the time I am involved in examining the person I am experiencing in hermeneutic reflection (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p 36). I am creating, structuring, not only a particular series of experiences - storied, but a past particular series of experiences. I am continually turning back. This work is ultimately to explore rather than to sink into feelings. Virginia Olsen notes how, „the lived body is integral to the continual transformation of self in situated contexts where self reflects upon self,” (Olsen, in Ellis and Flaherty, 1992, p 205). I suggest the strength of this work is about drawing others into my „lived“ body. Olsen notes how exploring context, „may well facilitate our understanding of that transformation,” (Olsen, in Ellis and Flaherty, 1992, p 205).

I step from a place of control in surfacing insight from those occasions when I did sink into feelings/experiences of tremendous emotion. I hold, value, such painful feelings/experiences. In this respect, for me education is rather more growth from which insightful choice can be harnessed than transformation. To transform suggests to me I have moved across, and in moving across have moved out of – a unidirectional movement. The possibility of regression is not held. It fails to acknowledge that I may make a choice to indulge a particular series of responses to exterior stimuli that are indeed ignorant, harmful to me. Growth though speaks of my increased ability to mediate my responses to felt experiences, exterior stimuli, such that I have a choice of greater insight hermeneutic reflection has afforded. My choice although ultimately deleterious is informed and allows me to tell my story.



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## DIETING WOMEN

### *Introduction*

This text begins to explore how I managed and manage my emotional distress through my relationship with food – my use/abuse of food to attempt to assuage feelings I believe were and are of emptiness. I ate to fill emptiness. Yet this was a flawed remedy. I believe that experiences of school particularly schooling of a Girls' Public Day School Trust school, between the ages of fourteen and eighteen years were formative in a later identity: Bulimic<sup>2</sup>.

I suggest my disordered relationship with food was of insidious development. At worst: chronic disability; at best: a reminder of my humanity – flawed and failing nature that it is to be human. My disordered relationship with/to food surfaced during times of significant schooling experiences – those of later teenaged years for example first formal public examinations, the next steps following my school career, the expectations I would attend university.

As a teenager/young adult the food I ate drew me attention. Such comments from my father: „Do not eat all of that!“ A volume upon how to eat less pushed in my direction one morning by my mother. I felt and continue to feel ashamed and guilty in response to my disordered relationship with food, with eating. I have wasted significant quantities of food. I have wasted significant opportunities of my life. I question my disordered eating.

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<sup>2</sup> Bulimic of Bulimia nervosa: (B)ulimia precisely and explicitly expresses the extreme development of the hunger for unrestrained consumption, (Bordo, 1993, p 201).

Eating was my way of communicating my need for attention from my parents. I felt starved of their attention and for want of a more healthful way to draw them to me, a better way to gain their focus. I ate and ate and then ate more. Eating and my relation to food had become the way I sought to gain my parents' attention. Yet I gained neither my parents' attentions nor developed a healthy relationship to food and to eating.

During my childhood and teenaged years food was a means to reward, to remedy, to control. Food was a solution to every occasion whether the occasion was of celebration or of commiseration. My mother was an important figure in the learning of my childhood and teenaged years. I learned that life was eating food. I metered my life in eating. In addition to my growing disordered relationship with food, with disordered eating I came to view my height as disabling too. In time I learned to lose weight. I felt that weight loss would change how tall I appeared to others. More significantly however, weight loss changed how I related to my sense of my height. Independence too was marked in one way when I was able to control my weight. I could control my body. Controlling my weight, my height, communicated my need to control myself to others particularly the relationship I had with my mother.

During my childhood and teenage years academic achievements in the first instance and latterly sporting achievements were my communication conduit with my father. I never had a close relationship with my father. This is no different today. My father is concerned to hear I am well and my life is good. I am not in need of anything from him. I am careful to send cards of celebration on his birthday on occasions such as at Easter

time and Christmas. I continue to do what I believe will help him to think well of me; will help him to think I am good daughter. My mother: a most similar narrative/story although she is concerned to hear from me more regularly.

I question how the simple recount and explanation I provide here I am finding unsatisfactory. Retelling of memories is itself constitutive but also I am unsure of the details I would prefer I could recall. I am unsure of my stance towards my intentions to remember. An account overly constructed and reconstructed as my writing progresses through its drafts and becomes a forced tale. I need a narrative for my story here. Has this become a tale to be more convincing for me/my reader(s)? Is it therapeutic to consider again childhood and young adult life experiences, and then reconsider my memories? Time moves on, unstoppably, my perspective upon ramifications, feelings move on unstoppably. On and on.

I remain hungry. I find the accounting, the telling, the narrating and the remembering partially satisfies. Rather as diets followed as prescribed may be partially nourishing. The diet I have allowed myself does not satisfy me. The diet leaves me wandering. I pick at one idea, one item, leave it. It seems at odds – I do not know why, just not right. Prescribed diets are restrictive and restricting for me. Writing my story as a doctoral thesis is restrictive and restricting, yet it is self-imposed. I have chosen the doctoral thesis as the way by which I shall understand the tales I believe I have to tell; as a dieter chooses to subscribe and then to follow the diet's instructions. Yet there is a significant voice suggesting I shall always be wanting more. More freedom? To eat more? More

time to? Greater acuity of memory. Always unsatisfied. I become irritated by my account. Its partiality and lack of finish. I leave it be. I continue upon another line of thought.

I am unsure how to best explain my disordered eating, where I might attend to find meanings that are fitting of my experiences. Explanations seemed to be inter-related. Yet narrative requires I emplot linearity: sequence my events one by one. This account seems dissatisfying on account of its simplicity: description of experiences of disordered eating. I have failed, I believe, in sufficiently heeding Susan Bordo's writing request, to interrogate disordered eating along a variety of axes and in ways that pursue explanation through, „a series of cultural interconnections and intersection,“ (Bordo, 1993, p 138). Explanations of experiences of disordered and distressed relationships with food have been sought in a plethora of fields: psychology, sociology, cultural studies. As such I am unsure where I should focus my attentions, where does my voice find accord and discord. Where might I find a most nourishing account of understanding, an account by which I am satisfied? How may I satiate my need to understand my voice as a bulimic woman? Ultimately it is a nexus of theories that seem to satisfy. I have understood the most satisfying diet is one with all a person desires but in moderation. Furthermore as in eating I recognise I shall always want more? Yet attending to parameters, limitations is most important.

Bias in theories of disordered eating affects their limitations. Yet it is only in acknowledging limitations that depth, detail may enter here. However given the patched

nature of this work I have offered narratives that seem most fitting at the time of writing the narratives. Rather as I choose my diet. I have consumed what has been available. What I have seen as available. Yet this too has consequences. Encouraged by another feminist voice, „But, of course, we do not always get what we want or we expect,“ (Hughes, 2002, p 1). This writing is also about accepting the responses I give are not necessarily those I would have like to have provided, but have held onto in belief that they are likely to be of the best I might manage given the time and places I am in at present. This past sentence speaks of a person on the cusp of compromise. A person who evaluates and re-evaluates, always voicing and re-voicing.

Diet eaten is a powerful metaphor of identity/ies. How do I identify as a researcher, significant in the education of this writing, formed by the diet of my researcher education. Formative schooling and learning experiences, embodiment and effects of embodiment, the formative contribution to my identities as a researcher interested in qualitative research that challenges assumptions regarding the nature of knowledges are not only of schooling. „The body might appear to set the boundaries of the self and create the specific site at which identity is formed. The body presents the unique location for the development of the self and for notions of continuity,“ (Woodward, 2002, p 2).

A reader might realise meaning in the work they are being offered as they do in consumption. Rather as taste is a latent phenomenon.

To build a secure basis for knowledge, Husserl decided to start with the problem of how objects and events appeared to consciousness since nothing could even be spoken about or witnessed if it did not come through someone's consciousness.

Giorgi and Giorgi, in Smith, 2003, p 25

In general, phenomenological psychological research aims to clarify situations lived through by persons in everyday life. Rather than attempt to reduce a phenomenon to a convenient number of identifiable variables and control the context in which the phenomenon will be studied, phenomenology aims to remain as faithful as possible to the phenomenon and to the context in which it appears in the world.

Giorgi and Giorgi, in Smith, 2003, pp 26-27

Throughout the thesis I endeavour to attend to the contexts of my sensory experiences; my appetites. „Dieting Women“ is to show an awakening awareness of the person I am, my needs, to admit to my biography. It is about owning my realities and telling of them as well I might, this section of writing is a confrontation, an owning up. I claim my diet of my young adult life. I have needed to tell of biographical details and whilst doing so speak of what is happening within me. I acknowledge that writing with little censorship in order to protect, to protect identities and protect from pain raises ethical considerations.

For example I will face consequences of my unmasked honesty; not least my own exposed feelings. However I remain with my purpose to tell my story deeply.

„Dieting Women“ is to appreciate the women whose lives I am. It is cognisant of multitudes of experiences that are of me. They are mine. And no matter how I may to seek to explain them, or leave them as unacknowledged they are powerful and most prescient in the ways I story the person I am, the decisions I make today, in my present.

I have strong desires to become acceptable to others, to meet others' expectations. However I fail often to meet others' expectations. At least those expectations I perceive others hold for me. Alongside accounts that mostly reside in the realms of academic literature I consume volumes of popular writing upon *Anorexia nervosa* and *Bulimia nervosa*. I qualify „academic literature.“ Academic literature I suggest shows an explicit endeavour to show not only of experiences of disordered relationships in eating but to explore how disorder, and intimate personal details might be revealed and legitimated in accredited research accounts. Furthermore perhaps writers of academic work quest a more sophisticated prose, a style that takes pains to acknowledge the origins of ideas and to do more than describe. Academia is keen to progress a synthesis of arguments constituting their account as original yet pleasing to others – academic peers? If I adopt the behaviours, the languages of others, I shall be more likely meet others' expectations thus I learn to become pleasing identities. „Dieting Women“ is to speak of the restrictive experiences I perceive in my worlds, realities. I learn to restrict my own voice in favour



of another, of others seemingly more real, more valuable than my own. I learn to speak the language of a „good girl“ for my parents, the language of an academic literature.

*A new school*

Mrs. Watson has asked me why my homework is so poor. Why the calibre of my Latin to English translation is not of my classwork. My homework, all my homework is mediocre. I spend my evenings eating. When I was fourteen, the September before my fifteenth, birthday, the year before I took any GCSE<sup>3</sup> examinations – although some of my year at school did take GCSE examinations in the year before I did, I moved to the school where I became as knotted as this past sentence, as cumbersome as this paragraph.

As a child I was strongly encouraged to engage in academic endeavour. I would go for days out with my mother, a trip to a museum, an exhibition, a gallery. These days were of an educative inspiration. My mother sought to ensure her daughter benefited from the new embrace of girls“ education, „girls“ relative academic success ...“ (Paechter, 1998, p 1). At fourteen, I was proffered a choice to attend a Girls“ school. It was never a possibility I would not attend. Yet there was a tension between my mother“s actions of supporting her daughter“s academic achievement and her strong sensibility that women were also to be educated in supporting their families, at the side of a husband, caring for children. And although I remember early on my mother telling me that in marriage to my father, she did not and would not „obey“ him. Her vows, in the absence of her commitment to subservience, did however sufficiently promise her duty to him and to the

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<sup>3</sup> GCSE, General Certificate of Secondary Education.

hegemonic discourse of the time, which ultimately for my mother included bearing and raising her child as a „good woman“ (Steedman, 1986). Whilst I tried to be a „good girl“, I had no hope of becoming a „good woman“. I retain a strong sense that I have failed my mother. I have never had a significant partner. I am not married. I have no children. Academic achievements my mother could have a strong hand in influencing. She could promote a strong work ethic. Yet rhetoric of a „good“ girl who became a „good woman“ coercion towards finding a lover, a husband, a family, my mother had more difficulty reconciling. My mother has never explicitly expressed an opinion that I have failed her in lacking a lover, a husband, children. I wonder how though I come to believe such a strong sense of my mother's pity that her daughter lacks such social accoutrements as a lover, a husband and children.

Repeatedly I offer these credentials „a lover, a husband, children,“ so marked are their absences not only from my life, but from my aspirations. Earlier, in my twenties I erroneously hoped that „a lover, a husband, children“ would come to me, if I were good enough, for example, slim enough. This too was contributory to my momentary fascination with starvation and lasting enthrall to Bulimia. Starved, words stuffed down, I hope to become sufficiently mute in my opinions upon the freedoms of women. In my thirties, now, I question my desires for my mother's lover, a husband and children. My questioning has long been significant to me, yet I have failed myself in my lack of courage to voice my questions.

I used to go to a school that was twenty minutes away. I left that school in July 1992 for a school that offered me a great deal. I experienced opportunities to study Latin and Ancient Greek, to play in a school orchestra, a string group, to play several team-games dependent upon season, to take public examinations in Maths and French earlier than most of my age. The education to show the individual as academically enabled. This girls' school was prized. Academic achievement was privileged. Yet I feel none of this was mine. I failed to own the opportunities in ways I felt and feel were mine.

Transition from a small co-educational school, where my school reports had described a „strong“ mathematician, a „good“ linguist, „keen“ scientist, marked the beginnings of my disordered relationship to food, to my appearance, notably my weight and height.

Previously at school I felt successful. I liked myself in small ways. I recognised my achievements. Music lessons were after school bonuses. Musical achievements were important yet provided a sense of enjoyment in their endeavours. Later when music became the school orchestra and string group I lost my sense of enjoyment. I lost the person who knew herself as successful and was able on some occasions to feel satisfied.

I became unable to know the person I was. I became lost in tiredness, a lack of others' recognition. I had relied and continued to rely on the attentions of others, including their words of encouragement, which although were often well meant seemed to accentuate my unhappiness. Others' attentions now had become concern for my lack of academic achievement, my loss of discipline.

Mrs. Watson enquired after my well-being. She was concerned for the standards of my academic work. Her words served to inscribe a person who was not only failing to achieve the high standards she and the school had set for her in the subjects of her study, her discipline. They also inscribed a person who was failing to negotiate schooling processes, the school's communities, relationships with peers – others girls, the school day, the journeys to and from school. I recall loneliness. Often being late for school on account of the difficult journey that would frequently take in excess of an hour, being laden with equipment, a violin and sports kit for which there was little room on public transport. Most notably I felt that I had lost my mother. I wanted more from my parents. I had lost a sense of how to care for the person I was. Furthermore I did not know how to recognise the person I was. I had lost my ability to relate to those who might care for me. I ate more.

Food was an extremely important means of my family negotiating its relationships. For example most Saturday afternoons, members of my mother's extended family would visit. An elaborate tea would be served. It was often rich in those foods that I find easy to eat in great quantities. Gateaux, cakes, homebaking topped with cream – clotted and serving cream, pots of tea made up with full-cream milk and spoonfuls of sugar. The afternoon was sweetness, honeyed occasions, marked by sweetening cream-teas. Food which in retrospect I realised contained few nutrients, yet nourished a sense of appropriate etiquette.

In Papua New Guinea and later in the UK food, meals, for my family, were group affairs.

If I did not eat with my family, I ate with someone who cared I was nourished.

Nourishment was some meat or fish, rice or potatoes and fruit. Eating, food, in my new country (the UK) was not about sustenance. It was about culture, interactions with others, notably family members/ships and customs both familial and of wider social groups (Conner and Armitage, 2002). My mother would negotiate her family's ability to act appropriately – my ability to act appropriately through food. Serving food to others would be an effective means by which she could introduce her family to this new country of theirs. I came to learn that in eating, I was occupied. Whilst eating I did not consider my lost childhood of the Pacific. Moreover I could eat well, consume all that I was given, ask for second helpings and be complimented on being of good appetite, not wasteful – a good child, child who my mother might be pleased with, praise openly, reward. „Another helping?“ In eating I did not need to talk. A filled mouth, I did not need to engage in talking, in an activity that proffered greater likelihood of rejection. In eating all I was given and looking for more I was grew quickly into a „good girl“. Most powerfully I remember momentary senses of pleasure, the smoothness of the cream, the icecream, the sweetness, the sticky loveliness. In cold winters – a time of the year I was unaccustomed to, Papua New Guinea is a tropical country. I was warmed by food, my eating. Food, the actions of eating assuage feelings of not belonging. Feelings I did not know of, failed to recognise but realised as present in my unappeasable hunger, a hungriness to belong, to be a „good girl“.

„Home“ becomes synonymous with sweet biscuits and toast, television and tea. Later, tired, more so since my stomach is bloated with its carbohydrate fill I attempt some study but I soon give up the endeavour to sleep. My mother awakens me and I move to the table and to eat again. At least now I am allowed to postpone study, the family meal has preference.

The paragraph preceding is trite. It is offered in the present. It is uncomfortable. I seem to want my teenaged years couched in ridicule, monstrous ridicule. I associate a monstrous body growing from its overfeeding and a self, starving from its lack of nourishment.

Bingeing and purging at this time had not become ritualised as it would later in my twenties. Eating was an attempt to regain some energy so that I could at least search a little for the missing person. The missing person lost by the growing adult body. I did not eat in particular ways. I was not necessarily avoiding particular foods or eating in ways that I would later feel guilty for. Most simply I ate a lot. As I became a more proficient speaker of disordered eating both through theory/ies – I read all I could gather on the topics, and my experiences became more distressing, such disordered behaviours became a more important part of existence for me.

The summer of 1996 I leave school. This was significant relief in some respects. I was relieved of the burden of Girls“ Public Day School Trust expectations. August 1996, some teachers were surprised by the academic results I had scraped. Through the last

year of schooling I had been rejected by all medical schools I had applied to. My predicted A level grades did not support my application. Nevertheless strong in my belief that I was academically able and did desire a career as a doctor I pursued my decision to apply for a Medicine degree. Yet my confusion was tangible. I was committed to my desire, and stalwart in my belief that I could be and in many ways was academically able to achieve the career I anticipated for myself. Yet I failed markedly in my carrying out my commitment. Demure, and often accepting without questioning or voicing concern at my marginalisation, frequently too fearful to voice a need for help during class, and challenging, well-intentioned advice that I forego my applications for Medicine in place of alternative degree programmes, those for which I was more academically suited, I faltered towards the end of my schooling, and found relief in leaving the country for four months.

I travelled first to Fiji as a Gap Activity Project volunteer. I negotiated my fear of international travel alone, life beyond my family, my mother. Finally I visited my country of birth, my place. I remain unsure how I feel about being born outside of the UK. In preparing for my trip to the Pacific I learned I was of Australian citizenship. Just weeks before I was to depart I collected a new identity. I collected my Australian passport. I was a citizen of a country I had as yet no memories of. Does this, did this contribute my sense of not belonging in the UK, my sense of dislocation? How much does my diasporic identity constitute my unrest (Woodward, 2002, p 63)? The need I had to always start again, fill-in an unappeasable appetite. Yet each new beginning would always embed the same mistakes for me.

Following my return to the UK from the South Pacific, St. Bartholomew's and The Royal London School of Medicine accepted my application to read Medicine. The ensuing time until September 1997, when I was to start at medical school, I was employed as a Care Assistant in a local nursing home. This was to be my first significant experience of acting in a caring role. I gained important experience of work in social care and paid employment. I was released from my parents' concerns for: „How much?“ My results had been good enough to recommend me to a few medical schools. I had continued to believe I wanted to become a doctor. I wanted to help others. Such a career proffered significant academic challenge and requisite achievement and social standing: status. I wanted these accoutrements. In others' recognition I would be valuable, worthwhile, more likely to attract attention, particularly that of my parents. Singleheaded I had applied once more to read Medicine.

I am not sure if additional experiences I claimed such as those of my gap year, my brief periods as a care assistant, my music made me a more attractive prospect for medical school entry. Becoming an attractive prospect, academically and physically, was extremely important to me in my twenties. I believed that the attentions of others would be rewarding. I believed I need to create a person of others and for others. I would mimic behaviours of those I wanted to achieve, of those I wanted to emulate – „be“ in order to gain acceptance of others.



In the first three years I was at medical school I shared two houses and a flat with groups of other women. My final house-share I found a fraught experience. Exercise and diet had become increasingly important. Increasingly I was embarrassed by my height. Yet as I whittled away my weight my femininity became ever more questioned. When I entered my clinical years with saved money from two part-time jobs (Weekend Route Project Worker and a job summarising medical notes in a General Practice surgery) and money left to me from the death of a close relative I purchased my own studio flat. This would be a safe place where my femininity was not under scrutiny. It was a definitive statement of social isolation in order to make better my painful emptiness.

### *Bulimic identities*

Understanding Bulimia's presence in my life has been important to me, even before the time I was diagnosed, labelled. Personal accounts of experiences of disordered eating have provided instruction and comfort in considerable ways. Instruction: how to become a good disordered eater, and how to recover as a disordered eater. Comfort? I read of my own distress and feelings of isolation in the stories of others. Yet Bulimia is an awkward and ongoing presence.

Bulimia has exploded into my life once more. Good Friday (2010) and I binge and vomit, I am nervous. That is how I account for my need to comfort myself through bingeing and vomiting. Saturday, I have invited my parents and my mother's aunt to lunch, three courses, the first time in many years I have cooked for my family, prepared a substantial meal. The end of the day and the food remaining for the meal beckons me:

eat me, eat me, eat me. I start, stop. Eat me, eat me, another helping. Bingeing now. Unbearable pain, my stomach heavy, weighted with the leaden food, as shot. I vomit and feel resolution.

Sunday. I have been given chocolate from a colleague at work. Vulnerable. I take the chocolate cover off. I can not eat it. I mix flour, fruit, sugar, eggs, ... barely cooked cake mix I scrap into my mouth.

The owner of the care home I work for has bought each member of staff an Easter egg. At Christmas there was a gift from him of two bottles of wine and chocolates, yet at Christmas we did not have to sign to say we had taken our gift – we were invited to help ourselves. I duly thanked the manager and owner and left without wine and chocolates. Easter time and we are asked to sign for our egg which we then duly collect and take with us.

I question what Bulimia has meant and continues to mean to me and how it is I might set down experiences and theory of past times particularly but also those present. This is a difficult text to produce not only on account of the personal nature of the writing and the shame it evokes when I read the text back. It is also difficult to know how I might harness meanings in words from experiences both personal and theoretical now.

Previously a significant part of my struggle expressed in disordered eating had been my failure to produce a satisfying narrative of my life experiences. I failed and felt failed in my words. My understanding of my experiences lacked authenticity, depth, honesty. I

felt false, artificial, sugared. I could not tell my truth. Bulimia has provided a sense of release, a means of expressing self-hatred, of hatred I experience towards me. Bulimia is an expression of feelings of emptiness, of numbing pain I am failing to articulate in ways more healthful, more nourishing.

I tackled this section in the hope the writing produced is really of me. Really speaks of the restrictions and distresses that Bulimia has caused and in some ways continues to cause. I hope to speak sensitively and in a considered way. Until I was encouraged to confront the person I was though both psychotherapeutic experiences and academic work I had believed that self disclosure telling „I“, „me“ were not acceptable resources for academic writing. Previously I had gorged on personal accounts, in a fashion to gorging on food. It might be suggested this account of Bulimia is akin to her purging behaviours. The unsatisfactory culmination of a period of over-eating latterly expressed in a narrative that spatters the toilet bowl, offensive. At times there are gluts of words of others, lengthy quotations quotations, for some these shall be too lengthy, yet the cumbersome quantities are my reality. References to the words of others have provided insight and context for personal struggles, yet also expressed personal struggles where I may have failed. I have chosen words of others that I have held with me through the times I have struggled with Bulimia. The presentation of the text endeavours to represent my disturbing behaviours. My struggle for adequacy of truthful expression is illustrative of my struggle for adequacy of dietary intake.

I heed the influences of surrealists and surrealist ideals upon striving for a textual form of my understanding that is commensurate with the disturbing and secretive experiences of Bulimia, the brief account, the depth of feeling not to be displayed, communicated (Montagu, 2002, p 80). I am heartened by the words of John Berger (1972). The ways worlds are seen inspire the values a person may choose to acknowledge. A person's ontological position shapes their epistemological assumptions.

It is seeing that establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain the world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. ... The way we see things is affected by what we know of what we believe.

Berger, 1972, pp 7-8

I find it difficult to negotiate my lives with and without Bulimia. At times she surfaces most powerfully in my life. Yet „I“ am of my experiences and the resources, the times, of those experiences. I did not live before my experiences. I am my experiences and become my experiences. My experiences are of me and are mine perpetually.

Has „Dieting women“ illustrated my relation to food, my schooling, my relation to others and my textual capture of my experiences? I have a strong desire to become both acceptable to others – to sculpt a fitting form, yet also to satisfy my own identity. I seek

to maintain my integrity. A most limited section of writing. I continue to work hard to keep Bulimia a quiet voice.

## NOURISHING WOMEN

### *Telling lives' stories*

I am employed in a caring role. A frail lady, of unsteady gait, gently takes my elbow and begs me, „I just want to go home“. Joyce needs to return to a place in her life-story when she could identify with warmth and love of a home. Together we go to her room and from under her bed she draws photographs of her family in times past. She tells me stories of times when warmth and love of a home seemed so much closer. Joyce needed to tell a story of belonging and she needed a witness. She needed me, my heart and my compassion for her stories. There is a need to be understood, to take another into my world, for companionship. Failure to understand, and to be understood are isolating experiences.

... bricoleurs ascribe such importance to the critical and hermeneutic traditions and their concern with human questions. Drawing upon these traditions, combining them with forms of paradigmatic and textual analyses, bricoleurs struggle to connect the research act to the emotion and heart of lived human experience ...

Kincheloe and Berry, 2004, p 22

Norman Denzin's writing has been important in validating my work. This thesis works towards Denzin's suggestion that ethnographers, in a sixth moment of development, embrace messy texts (Denzin, 1997, p xvii). Examples of messy texts include:

experiments in autoethnography, ethnographic poetics, anthropological and sociological poetry, evocative and layered accounts, such as scrapbooking or work of collage, short stories, performance texts, ethnographic fictions, narratives of self. I would suggest that underpinning these developing genres of ethnographic writing, is to heed the personal, experiential, epiphanal moments, of a personal life/lives. The work of artists is embraced. Artists as viewed as producers of artefacts of the human conditions such as painting, sculpture, novels, all manner of experiences. The list of crafts and their produce is endless. Its expansiveness is contrary to Science's dictum for universal truth – one true account.

Science eases the difficulties and pain of living today. Yet it rapidly leaves rusted, antiquated ideas in its wake. The need to develop new descriptions, remedies, quickly, the quest for new machines, machinations has become urgent. Rapidly today's description, explanation, remedy is superseded by tomorrow's difficulties and pains. Science promotes dissatisfaction. There is always a quest for something new, some better achievement. Science promotes discontentment. I am not advocating complacency, no further advancement. Furthermore I would be foolish to suggest I do not embrace fully the benefits scientific discourses offer a host of disciplines, for example the development of fluoxetine. This is a drug I take daily. Moreover today I believe it helps me. But is that all? Acknowledging and bearing financial and emotional costs of counselling. I seek my own explanations.

Why now do I seem to have made it towards a draft of mystory? Why now does fluoxetine aid me, where previously it did not? Why when Easter comes and there is a holiday break in my counselling is there a concurrent resurgence in self-defeating behaviours. I question the broader contextualisation of these remedies in my life. I also question how my belief, and my commitment to remedy and my understanding, which segues from commitment and belief. A sense of well-being promotes my commitment to mystory, this thesis. It is in interrogating the restrictions of Science where I find my truth for mystory. I also question the privilege Science expects by its diction. This is a privileged claimed but not acknowledged. So quickly a remedy becomes, the remedy. How is it that my commitment to endeavour to find ways of negotiating living without turning daily to bingeing and purging behaviours is so overtly unspoken of by, „remedy“. Definitions of remedy suggest cure, redress, counteract, repair, (Chambers, 2000, p 1396). Remedy though can never be the fix, neither can it have fixed nor be administered; used to control, govern, manage, handle. If the subject of a verb performs the action the verb describes, positing that remedy, treatment is administered, belies and denies the person of their pathology. Remedy might support, nourish, but the active ingredient is the person; the interpretation of the remedial experience, their commitment to their project. My agency energises another discourse beyond Science“s pathology. Individuals“ interpretation of nourishment, in my case, my belief fluoxetine and re-engagement with talking therapy, is most likely to be supportive, so that I can continue to commit to mystory. Yet deeply, more than my belief, there is a change in practices. No longer do I practise as much self-defeating behaviours and no longer do I self-admonish,



if I do lapse into bingeing and purging. Practice brings different habits, a habit to live without. Practice brings my salve and yet requires my ongoing commitment.

I have learned to attend to feelings, to experiences and in doing so I am not self-obsession. Nor does attending to limits, my own truths, „depressed“ and „bulimic“ mean I become ill. Mystory of nourishment arises from a „period of intense reflection,“ (Denzin, 1997, p 115). I accept realities and acknowledge my needs.

Mystory here is a performance text. It posits work is done in its reading. It foresees its displacement, as of diaspora. It realises the risk it chances in being bastardized, pronounced and rendered illegitimate by those who may otherwise reassure me that it is a doctoral thesis. Part of its work is to „interrogate the realities (it) represents,“ (Denzin, 1997, p 115). One of its realities is personal risk. Yet I bid myself, „Tell your story. See if you have a story to tell. And once it is told, ask another if when they engage with your work, the story they develop from your work resonates with your aspirations. In parts it might, in parts it may not. However in the first instance your have fulfilled your desire, need, to story your experiences.“

In the stories I tell, I become the person I am. Failing to tell these stories, at least for and to myself in the first instance, is to deny myself my life story, no matter the others“ reception of the stories I am telling. Denial for me is pathological.

Norman Denzin recommends performance texts. His writing is persuasive, he proffers newness and novelty. These are qualities I seek. Yet perhaps I also fear them. In the way Science of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment intrigued its public?

(Performance texts work to) make the audience responsible for their own interpretations, foreground difference and not conflict, oppose dichotomies, and use multiple voices in their tellings. These texts resist the temptation to turn actors into objects of voyeuristic gaze, destabilizing common methods of establishing verisimilitude. Performance texts are messy productions, and they presume an evocative epistemology that performs rather than represent the world.

Denzin, 1997, p 115

I am excited by his encouragement. I am childlike. All of his words are powerful. I want them all. I have them all, I choose!

Denzin's words (1997, p 115) though on occasions are overbold for me. I am halted by his suggestion that overt criticism of any other, no matter, is aimed for. This is dissimilar to what I hoped I would aim for. I would work to challenge conventions, seek alternative methodologies and any methods generative of a text speaking fully and deeply of its protagonists stories. I consider an illustration. When I see a person heavily pierced and/or extensively tattooed. The pain I imagine that narrator risked. Yet far from rebuke I am allured by their commitment to their projects. I would not necessarily opt for such

decorative statements but I do admire those who do choose to. I turn increasingly to works of art, bodily or otherwise, to suggest means by which I might harness understanding.

Robert Hughes (1991) comments upon art of Western capitalist society in the twentieth century, noting that today, and I do believe in 2010, „today“ is of limited difference to make Hughes“ writing redundant, art is as witness and testimony of cultural and social narratives. „Many people think the modernist laboratory is now vacant. It has become less an arena for significant experiment and more like a period room in a museum,“ (Hughes, 1991, p 9).

I am reminded of how readily within discourses of the social sciences the term „postmodernism“ is used. For Maggie MacLure this might suggest something in the ways of „postmodern or textually oriented theory,“ (2003, p 106). Indeed research of postmodernism often heeds its „written-ness“ with the consequence the resounding vibes for sceptics become „anxiety or revulsion“ (2003, p 106). Yet in texts of social science research discourses, moreover methodologies of particular spheres of study, there is a blunting of affect of the cultural, social and political influences upon the arts, the artists. Perhaps we look back upon accounts yet do not see, hear, feel the lives of them. Hughes addresses the influences of cultural, social and political influences. How technological advancement effected great beneficence but resounding maleficence. Accounts of both world wars are the start of the twentieth century“s signifcant testimonies of Hughes“ claim (Hughes, 1991).

Reading Robert Hughes I am reminded of the importance of modern art and its theorisation. Modern art and its explanations proffer effective metaphor in my perusal of research methodology: to embrace the experimental, to reminisce, to set down and to move away from. I write to experiment, to tell life-stories yet to embrace cultures, traditions from beyond a disciplined imagination. I write to explore. I write to engage possibilities.

I reconsider my belief in my attraction to the work of for example Kim Jones – an artist of Robert Hughes’ modernist era. How I am inspired by such artists and their work not on account of their artistic intrigue/flamboyance but for their courage to engage ideas to question (Festa, 2010). I question the parameters by which I develop my understanding, my means of explanation of worlds, realities. This though is my hope for developmental progress.

Difference is not to be feared, but to be welcomed, it offers me a new insight into the ways I see my worlds, and craft in text in my realities. Cultural diversity, academic enlightenment is not so much breadth of work, ways of working, carrying out research, rather it is the ways in which differences within research communities are supported or dropped. How readily failure might be risked. How readily a person might risk the security they perceived in those things they could reason; to risk surety of knowledge, to entertain possibility would this be „rewriting modernity“ (Lyotard, 1984). I tackle Lyotard’s writing on observations regarding modernity and its moment, not least because

I sense I am likely to fail, but because I question the moments that are feint in my views of Denzin's postmodernist ethnography. Moments suggests starting again and again. Yet perhaps a person does not start again, but goes on and on, grasping at her desire to redress the fault-lines, the cracks, layering her work.

It is about fragmentary existence, transience, novelty and lack of finish. Some may lay a claim to working in postmodernity, however for Lyotard this presupposes a period of modernity and now, if in postmodernity, I/we are after this. „Modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity,“ (Lyotard, 1984, p 25). Lyotard reminds his reader that the present can never be grasped, forever gone and always possibly arriving. Perhaps, if I embrace Lyotard's recommendation, I am forever grasping at a past that only ever eludes me, it is gone before I have chances to know I had it, and a future that is forever arriving, but never arrives, always beyond my grasp. I am slipping around, making my belief in the most plausible version of events I can allow myself to find, given the times of the telling, „historical periodization belongs to an obsession that is characteristic of modernity,“ (Lyotard, 1984, p 25).

Periodization is a way of placing events in a diachrony, and diachrony is ruled by the principle of revolution. In the same way that modernity contains the promise of its overcoming, it is obliged to mark, to date, the end of one period and the beginning of the next. .... In Christianity, Cartesianism or Jacobinism, this same gesture designates a Year One, that of revelation and redemption in the one case,

of rebirth and renewal in the second, or again of revolution and reappropriation of liberties.

Lyotard, 1984, pp 24-25

Given an elusive past and a future of mirage-like quality I endeavour to produce an experimental text of details of my life-stories - experiences. Denzin, has noted how often experiential texts are fuelled by epiphanal moments. There is a person's erroneous, in the voice of Lyotard, belief that they might start over, recount from where it began.

„Rewriting can consist in the gesture I've just mentioned of starting the clock again from zero, wiping the slate clean, the gesture which inaugurates in one go the beginning of the new age and the new periodization," (Lyotard, 1984, p 26). I realise now I will, not shall, but most certainly be forever engaged in a process of self-correction, driven by, „(an) unconscious desire to be fulfilled organize.... (my) whole existence ... like a drama." A desire to remedy which I started out believing in writing, rewriting would address, make better, alleviate, but I read Lyotard and I realise that in, „writing (I am) always rewriting it," (Lyotard, 1984, p 28). „Modernity is written, inscribes itself on itself, in a perpetual rewriting," (Lyotard, 1984, p 28). I only write through again, and perhaps again, pain and crisis.

Lyotard's writing (1984) is significant in two ways. Firstly I am reminded that the stories of this work, although given times, dates could possibly never have happened and yet are most likely to have happened something like they are told and retold. Secondly a major

concern to learn of the person I am, which would suggest I am grasping at a present and of course I can never grab hold of her, is forever beyond me. As for the future, development as a result of this thesis, I do hold in some ways a belief that heightened self-knowledge, awareness shall bring more informed choices, particularly educational choices, such as I become a better scholar, a person who imagines returning to study Medicine, becoming a doctor. Most unlikely and likely! The most tangible evidence from this story, I have arrived at a story that allows my elusive past to become real, and a future to be engaged, for me to believe, myself as true. Being true to the person I might be.

Lyotard's chapter (1984, pp 24-35) carries far more than I have addressed, and used for insight, but in having decided to reach out for more nourishing ways to negotiate my worlds, acknowledge the stories of me. I choose to heed something of Lyotard's recommendation, „rewriting means resisting the writing of that supposed postmodernity,“ (Lyotard, 1984, p 35). I can never grasp the stories I am holding out for.

This is more than voyeuristic gaze, yet I ask whether I am sufficiently committed to my project to weather its stench, such as a work of Kim Jones might suggest I must? Real nourishment comes when I engage in this debate. I do not need, necessarily, to answer myself. Or do I? The work here is to engage in questioning, acknowledging my needs, my ways, including the limitations of those ways, those limitations are my infrastructure, as noted previously restrictions are my truth. It is not until challenged I realise the person I am. Who and what is challenged, my prejudices, by which I can make choices?

Lyotard heightens my awareness of not only the consequences of the choices I may make, might have made, but how I tell of my choice's timeliness, such that the choice made has a greater likelihood of being grasped for. These are questions of emplotment, ordering. I return to Denzin in consideration of „multicultural performances,“ (Denzin, 1997, p 115). In addition to questioning reality, such texts, such „writings“ (both written and spoken), offer significant performance potential (MacLure, 2003, p 106).

*A letter of application*

Nourished, I wrote a letter of application for a Master of Science in Group Psychotherapy. This letter is an item of intimacy, one that acknowledges my realities as I write. The paragraphs offered seem marked in their starkness. A reader might choose to disagree? Starkness is marked by short sentences. There is not an effort to conceal details of which I might suggest I continue to feel shamed. I aim for a simple account of times. All of mystory is mine and might be told its crises and pain recognised. I tell mystory here to achieve clarity. Clarity of expression, face events, although I am facing my memories only, I seek to own intimately my past.

I return to this letter. I question how I might present and represent its sense, its sentiments. Does inclusion of the entirety add to the thrust of this work? I remain unsure and continue with my initial plan: include all of the letter intended.

The undelivered letter was rather more than a letter of application, not least because of its length but also because of its proclamatory style. The letter, at least the sections of the



letter reproduced, explicitly shows heightened self-awareness, a person most familiar with their faults, at pains to profess their faults, their limits. The letter becomes an intimate portrait. There is no mention of her strengths, reasons why her presence on the course would make significant contribution to the M Sc. 2010-11 intake. There is no mention of her academic record, why she believes that it is most likely that she would make a success of her proposed postgraduate study. The letter speaks amply of guilt, of failure to make the most of given opportunities. The letter is one of apology, the writer's on going struggles with food.

The length of the letter suggests a person most keen to prove her valuable contributions to not only the M Sc selectors but also herself. She is keen to believe she shall make a success of an opportunity to be part of the course. There is this wide casting in order to tell of experiences that will make her a suitable applicant, future candidate for selection. The letter speaks of a person keen to be considered, keen not to be discounted on account she has failed to attend to experiences of her past that may compromise the strengthen her application. The letter's words are of a person who seeks to continue to belong to a community, a learning experience felt to be nourishing. The final paragraph is telling of the primary purpose of the writer's letter. She seeks the prospect for development, a journey begun in the „Introductory Course in Group Analysis“ – a journey she is not yet ready to end, the possibility of a future of belonging, being nourished and part of a structured experience that meets her chosen needs. This letter is a document of intimacy. It has been written to an envisaged recipient. The writer hopes they will be received, welcomed by another, heard in her request. The letter requests attention from not only its

reader(s) but from the protagonist, for example consideration of sections of explanation regarding past experiences.

Letters, such as diaries, journals, notecards, other documents of personal proclamation, are intimate. Letters invite me into a world of others that by the nature of their intimate style are alluring; alluring for a person who readily believes herself a mis-fit. Women's letters have become intriguing reading for me. I find volumes that I treasure, which have been formative in my affair with letters. As a teenaged reader looking greedily for words of others to legitimate my own voice that I was not sure of, volumes of letters and stories of those seeking self-learning through journal writing, I found companionship in those ciphers. I briefly consider Olive Schreiner's epistolarium - an example of another woman's prolific outpouring through letters. Once more the words of Virginia Woolf resonate.

She (Olive Schreiner) wrote carelessly, egotistically, of her health, of her sufferings, of her beliefs and desires, as if she were talking in the privacy of her room to a friend whom she trusted. ... Her private life, disclosed very openly ... thwarted and disappointed, ... unrest and dissatisfaction, .. a profound loneliness...

Woolf, 1979, pp 181-182

Woolf's reading of Schreiner's distress and her prolific outpouring resonates deeply, there is much in my experience that I am encouraged not to dismiss but to hold and to allow to reverberate so that meaning comes to me once again. Resonance brings about a sense of belonging for me of being welcomed. For me I wish to relate my lives to others. Documents of personal narratives, such as letters, are an effective means of achieving this desire. It is through relationships that greatest satisfaction is likely to come. I am unsure if this is solely a woman's privilege, I suspect not. Just as I suspect I have failed to edify and strengthen my writing's resolve with sufficient attention to other women's letters and their inspiration to this thesis. This past sentence plays out well with an illustration of Woolf on Schreiner's epistolarium. The following is an encapsulating quote prior to departure to my own letter.

Her obsessions and her egotism are perfectly obvious in her letters; but so, too, are her convictions, her ruthless sincerity, and the masterly sanity which so often contrasts on the same page with childish outbursts of unreason. Olive Schreiner was one half of a greater writer; a diamond marred by a flaw.

Woolf, 1979, pp 182-183

I offer sections of my own letter here as testimony of my realities of the letter's time, an endeavour to tell mystory as a coherent narrative. The letter continues from the time when I started clinical training as a student medic. Most of all I seek to be able to say, „Yes, that is mystory!“ The letter speaks of experiences of shame but equally they

contribute to strengths of personality, character, experiences I would not wish were written out. I do now have the courage to share my story, a story that was overly shaming in October 2009. The shame, the felt disgrace the letter speaks for me is demonstrated not least through transgressions of tenses.

I never delivered the letter and my application for the programme was halted prior to any further consideration given. During a preliminary discussion with one of the course leaders it was felt I did not have sufficient clinical experience in mental health settings, such as in the role of a psychiatrist, mental health nurse, counsellor, psychotherapist, social worker. Furthermore I did not have significant experiences of conducting and being a part of group, either in a role as a participant or conductor of a therapeutic group. Substantial experiences in the field of adult mental health and groupwork, notably psychoanalytic group psychotherapy were key ingredients for a successful application. Although it was acknowledged I would most likely academically not falter, experientially, developmentally, and emotionally, I would. I found this news difficult to receive. It was real and it was of service to me, yet I found the news hard to carry with me for the remainder of that December weekend.

Dear ...

I seek to pursue this Masters programme because I have a desire to be a part of groups. I wish to learn more of how groups come together, form and separate. How experiences of group and group-experiences may be therapeutic endeavours. How people come together

in a group and disband in groups. The programme offers a sense of development, a sense of a continuing journey in professional and personal development which I have only begun yet do not want to end. The Master of Science in Group Psychotherapy offers me the prospect of a future such that I desire, a place where I belong and where narratives aside from those of Bulimia's flourish. The programme, as the „Introductory Course“ has offered, does promise nourishment and structure. These are basic aspects of my needs, my physical needs as well as emotional needs.

December 2002, I left a study of Medicine (MBBS). I had begun as a student medic in September 1997 at St. Bartholomew's and The Royal London School of Medicine and Dentistry. I studied for an additional year (1999-2000) to complete an Intercalated B Sc in Physiology with Basic Medical Sciences (Upper Second Class Honours). I entered clinical training in September 2000. At the beginning of my second year of clinical study, having completed a Psychiatry rotation of eight weeks, I took a significant period of absence. An absence a diagnosis of „major depressive episode“ was proposed to account for. I found my experiences of the death of my maternal grandfather difficult. No matter my efforts I failed to comfort my mother as she lost and later grieved for her father, her remaining parent. I believed I had failed to support her adequately. My efforts neither brought relief to my mother nor assuaged the arguments that oozed from the rift opening between my parents. My father refused often to drive my mother where she wanted to go in order for her to serve her dying father. They argued, in an effort to provide a resource I would offer to drive for my mother. Intervention was inappropriate I became involved in their arguments. When I helped my mother, father proffered attack.

When I was unable to act as my mother's driver, she claimed I had sided with my father. Caught and unresolved in my own grief.

I chose social isolation. The scrutiny of others was overwhelming. I moved into a studio flat in Leyton, East London, to live alone. Added to the burden of death of a close family member I failed one of the papers, the practical examination at the end of my first clinical year. I found it difficult to accept my failure.

I became interested in scripts that challenged the rhetoric of Medicine. I had begun to see limits and tension, flaws and conflict in the discourses of Medicine. Yet I did not have the language to speak my thoughts. I could not negotiate my ideas of conflict in voices, including my own, with understanding. I could not understand myself in ways that seemed to make some sense. It became important I gain a language, a means by which I was able to express my troubling thoughts and ideas. I sought „talking therapy“ and academic achievement, formalised education and an education of self; the person I am.

October 2001, it may however have been November – I do not recall the month accurately, I have thrown away any documents reminding me of this time and my memory does not serve me well. I was referred to psychiatric services, mental health services in East London and North East London. Psychotherapy at Thorpe Coombe was a part of this support. I have remained grateful to my tutor at St Bartholomew's and The Royal London School of Medicine and Dentistry for her work in making this referral to

psychiatric services in East London for me. Psychiatric support became medication, visits from a Home Treatment team and a referral for psychotherapy.

Between January 2001 and January 2008 I attended individual psychotherapy at Thorpe Coombe hospital, North East London Mental Health Trust. I have believed this therapy to have been psychoanalytically oriented. My experiences of the therapy were significant in ways I have and continue to describe, inscribe and ascribe values to life, my life; perhaps though existences would be more fitting of my thoughts. I regret and have regretted for some time, I no longer see Dr. Soutter – the psychotherapist I worked with at Thorpe Coombe, and that my leaving therapy was abrupt. I made a hasty decision. I opted to take a job offer in Southampton. I left London, my home, my therapy at the beginning of 2008. On occasions I have written to Dr. Soutter. At the end of the final session he offered me to write to him on occasions. I have taken up his offer. Yet I remain unsettled by my actions.

Significant questions have remained for me regarding the spaces of my therapeutic experiences and the person who afforded me such spaces, where I found significant stories and narratives of meaning. I have felt and continue to feel my life in turmoil frequently and knowing that a space that once recommended I might find a sense of stability is settling. Therapy was my place. I was no longer isolated. I learned not to prefer isolation, such as I had opted for in 2000.

September 2002, I returned to my degree, (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery, MBBS) at St. Bartholomew's and The Royal London School of Medicine and Dentistry. I was asked to begin my clinical training again. There had been considerable curriculum changes since I had taken leave of absence from the programme. I could no longer be accommodated and my academic record at the School to date did not commend me any advantage. It was argued I would benefit from additional months, years, of study. I was unable to see this benefit. I could appreciate failure only.

I began again yet I soon recognised I was struggling. I had been unable to find my reasons in my actions of repeated study. I struggled to make supportive relationships with my peers. Increasingly I feel the weight of my labels: Mentally Ill; Failure. My senses of failure have long stayed with me. I failed to fight sufficiently. I passed on my opportunity to study Medicine.

Increasingly Medicine's rhetoric became questionable for me, particularly so during the leave of absence I had taken from Medicine since October/November 2001. I had interests in social support, alternative and additional ways of working helping relationships with people. In April 2001, I had begun paid work as a Weekend Route Project Worker at what was then „St. Martin-in-the-Fields Social Care Unit“, (in time the unit would be renamed). My time there underlined my desire to develop counselling skills. In September 2001 I started a Diploma in Professional and Personal Development with Counselling Skills so that I might begin to develop the skills I felt Medicine inadequately allowed me to attend to. I sought to heighten my sense of the person I



wanted and had wanted to become. In November 2001 I took leave of absence from this programme too. However, unlike Medicine, I did return to complete the programme successfully by September 2003. I had learned of my courage to continue, to persevere where previously I had experienced myself as failing only. For the next ten years I would try to reconcile my ache that I had left a Medicine, prematurely. I ached. I was unable to identify my loss with compassion.

February 2002, I had begun an Open University programme: starting with two modules of postgraduate study in the Social Sciences. These two modules, in time, would be left incomplete; another wreckage. Perfection was valued, and was my value. Academic achievement – namely perfection and acknowledgement of my „perfection“ were legacy of my late teenaged years and early twenties; residues of my Girls' Public Day School Trust education were virulent.

I see the burgeoning of malignant beliefs: only outstanding academic achievements, musicianship and a body of almost weightlessness. Failure to achieve perfection in every endeavour emptied me. I was to adopt a means of eating that would mimic these patterns in my beliefs. I binged and purged food alongside attempts to better myself academically particularly. A brief period of treatment saw the beginning of significant weight gain yet psychologically no thing had changed. Bulimia remained. Discharged I resumed my behaviours of self-improvement: Lose weight, Achieve perfection. I remain bulimic and this is a significant concern for me as I make my application for this programme.

In February 2003 with an incipient role as a Lecturer at Waltham Forest College I commenced a Master of Arts in Education. I recall writing at the time of my application that I wanted to be able to understand the learning and the learning groups I was responsible for. At the beginning of 2003 I also began a Masters in the field of the Social Sciences by Independent Study at the University of East London. My student identity had come to mean a great deal to me. It gave me sense of well-being, being a person whom I could respect, was engaged in behaviours that I could value. I also believed I saw an opportunity to complete study in the Social Sciences such as I had given up on in the previous academic year with The Open University. Alas, in February 2005 I agreed my poor attendance and lack of written work towards my dissertation left me no choice but to withdraw from the MA. My student identity was costly. I became ill. I had significant periods of time off work as a lecturer. I left the Social Care Unit where I worked until February 2005. August 2006 I was pushed to resignation at Waltham Forest College. The college claimed that unless I resigned freely my departure would be pursued through „capability“ questions. I resigned. I felt failure once more.

I continued to binge and purge. Increasingly unhappy and unable to sustain payment against debts of pursuing qualifications, flat-purchase (creating my own home), gym membership and ill health I needed full-time work that would fund my appetites in the ways I sought to feed them. With weight that I continued to struggle to carry and a body that was telling me it was recovering, I persuaded myself that I was well. I was robust and that the additional weight that psychologically was intolerable was physically insulating and protective. At the beginning of 2008 I moved to Southampton to take a

post as Curriculum Team Leader for General Education at Southampton City College.

Education and experiences of learning in and teaching groups are significant in my reasons for seeking to pursue training in group psychotherapy.

In time I was unable to sustain my employment at Southampton City College. I continued to believe that I could be and do everything asked by all people, including those tasks, and achievements I asked of myself. I took on additional roles: Curriculum Team Leader for Teacher Training, alongside General Education; college nominee for the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review for Higher Education, student of a Diploma in Management and Leadership. Increasingly though I believed I was unable to cope, yet failed to find the voice to ask for the resources that might support me to cope.

On reflection I realise although I was a good college lecturer and Curriculum Team Leader, I was not the person I wished I could be. I became unable to cope. With a flat in London that I did not have the energy to go to, a crumbling relationship with my parents, I once again saw myself as a burdensome teenager inscribing failure. I became ill, broken down. Unable to articulate feelings, with no therapeutic support, I returned to my beliefs that significant weight loss would speak out, would unravel the stories, the narratives of the difficult feelings and thoughts I held deeply within me. Bulimia was now more than a vivid presence.

Towards the end of 2008, periods of my absence from work at Southampton City College increased. I believed my absences resulted in disservice to my students, those members

of staff I had line management responsibility for; the reputation of the college. The alarming experiences of my years at Waltham Forest College were shaking me again. On this occasion I knew to leave. I resigned my position at Southampton City College and left on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2009.

I have returned to the house of my teenaged years. My parents are willing for me to stay in their house. I wonder if it ever was my home. Today (2010) as a thirty two year old woman, meeting her past and endeavouring to negotiate its vagaries I feel the house of my teenage years has become my home. I wanted to return to it after a journey away. I belong to the feelings the house conjures for me; my sense of loss. The house has become my witness and my comforter.

I had first hoped to pursue a training in Group Analysis as a student medic, this was the time when I had first seen the Institute for Group Analysis advertise the course on a noticeboard at Goodmayes Hospital, East London, some nine/ten s previously. It is no coincidence that I have sought to re-create opportunities for experiences that surrounded and described the time of my studies as a student medic. I continue to struggle to negotiate my thoughts upon applying to read Medicine once again.

I believe I have done a great deal „to sort“ troubling feelings and thoughts. Bulimia however remains a powerful character in my life. For most days bingeing and purging is my work. It is as though my life fits around my bingeing and purging.

I do long to feel there is a significant person to whom I might matter a great deal. For whom I would matter as their friend, as their lover, as a significant person. There has never been another in these ways. Perhaps on account I can not matter significantly to myself as my friend, my lover, my significant person. Loneliness is significant for me. I am lonely because I can not fully accompany me, in all that I am upon my journeys through my worlds.

I live alone, and alone I fail to live. I am absent from all of the person I am. I can't love her for all she is. I am fearful of her and of others. Perhaps I am most fearful of the people I may become. This fear grew early on, yet early on I failed to realise the growing malignancies of my imagination. During teenaged years I ate to fill in the emptiness. I stood myself outside of groups. I continue to choose to live alone. This past sentence seems strange from a person who initially wanted to work closely with people as a doctor, and later as a college lecturer. I do question whether I have chosen to work in caring roles, on account I want to become the person who would care for me.

I realise that I am fearful of being known, and yet I want deeply to belong to another –a significant other and to belong to a significant group; my family, my parents . My family, my parents particularly, have given me much yet I learned I was not good enough in return. It has taken me many years to articulate these feelings, these thoughts. It has taken me even more years to suggest that I shall never be good enough no matter how I try to fit and to fill the lacking aspects, the gaps and the emptinesses. I can never

expunge the flaws. Limited and flawed is all of who I am, although perhaps not all the time. To be the person I am continues to be difficult.

Food remains difficult. The experiences of the „Introductory Course“ the hospitality and meals provided; meals cooked for me, for me to choose from, to dine with others, at a table, with metal cutlery, napkins, water jugs and glasses, talk of others about their experiences during the morning, the day. Food has become meals, a social experience, I am being socialised. Meals are provided in routine ways. Not only is their timing planned, but the tables set ready for diners. For a few days eating can be a controlled experience that does not overpower me. Bulimia is beside me, not me, of me, accompanying me as she will possibly always but she is a shadow and at the times I spend at Turvey her silhouette is less apparent, to me and to others, to others who may cast me out, expel me. Experiences of Bulimia are secrecy, gorging and purging in hiding, anxieties hidden. Yet during the time I study at Turvey Bulimia's edicts are less. I, all of the person I am, including Bulimia, can be held. I am supported to negotiate Bulimia in ways that I choose, ways that are less destructive and more productive, more towards my hopes, my goals. My goal primarily to accept the person I have come from and the person I become and am becoming and to hope for my life that might become. To desire a future, to want to go on, knowing the difficulties going on will entail.

This past paragraph may be of little importance to non-bulimics yet is of premier importance to me, a bulimic, a person who has and does shape existence/s and

experiences of existence/s around her relationship with her physique and with food. I apply with honesty and alacrity.

Yours ...

### *Reflections*

The letter speaks not only of a person desperate to profess of herself, but one unsure of the primary motives for pursuing the programme for which she has applied. The letter suggests of a person desperate to account for herself, to explain herself, to apologise for her presence, the messiness of her presence.

This text has been painful to (re)produce and to reflect on. Something of this pain is about re-living the mediocrity of which my biography speaks. There is a significant voice that continues to pursue perfection. I start and stop, frequently. Now I no longer endeavour to start again, but go on. I question how I might have accepted previous trauma sufficiently rather than write it again and again. Acknowledge it and position it, yet be in many ways without it. Trauma is significant yet it is not all. I am only ever grasping at something of it, and hoping for a future of times different, but I can never become in those times. I used to hope to recover from Bulimia. Yet she shall be always with me, I, though choose to acknowledge her presence, and work through – rewrite her. Yet in rewriting her, I realise I am rewriting, reconfiguring her presence.

I endeavour to own my reality. I feared lack of success and sought opportunities in more than one place. Educational opportunities are important to me. Opportunities are important to me. Previously I had believed they may give me a sense of worth – self-worth. However self worth can only come from me, valuing the person, the fallibility I am, and all that I am; my desire, a need to be set down fully and truthfully, deeply and congruently, a need to recognise the person I was and I am.

I come to know how I needed to be drawn out, educated long before I abandoned a future as a doctor to become a lecturer. Medicine was supposedly a knowing of Sciences and yet I found I wanted to know people, how people thought of themselves and negotiated their presences within their lives.

This is a palette of existences” colours, ...and that in one is all that it is.

Sutton, 2008, pp 172-173

Such authenticity and permeability comes at great cost emotionally. I experienced research methods and methodology questioning the constitutive contamination of conformity to representational protocols. Questioning was nourishing, satisfying. Nourished I found a facility to proffer accounts, versions, endeavours to grasp realities of my worlds, to celebrate the chaotic of my life textually. What does the style of the writing contribute to the messages, meanings of the stories of my worlds?



As I move towards the final partnership of the thesis I realise that I no longer wish to see myself in the mirror before which I stand. I acknowledge inwardly only: I stand. Later I consider how I might develop a compromised text. In opining a compromised text, for this text for others, for examination, to meet adequately regulation requirements, how do my own processes of senescence, my increasing inability to adapt, on this occasion remedy a greater acceptance on my part to compromise? In working towards compromised texts am I ceasing my fight against myself, against others – simply against? I hold my voice more closely to me, I hope. I believe there are significant moments when I withdraw further from others’ gaze. These moments I hold in a close embrace; closed in and protected. Feeling safe, such as the feelings a mother might seek in relation to her newborn, to keep her, newborn, infant and child safe. I no longer need to appear to and for others quite so much. I am becoming increasingly able to attend to my own nourishment, to recognise my needs and desires and to response in ways that feel mine.

I invited Bulimia to come live with me. She never moved out. Sometimes I tuck her deep in my closet, behind forgotten dress and old shoes. Then one day, I’ll come across her – as if by accident – and experience genuine surprise that she remains with me. Other times, for a few days or perhaps a week or month, she’ll emerge from that closet to sleep at my side, closer than a sister or lover would.

Tillmann-Healy, in Ellis and Bochner, 1996, p 76

At times Bulimia arises powerfully and forcefully. Last night Bulimia arose from my side. I gorge and purged and felt wretched, this morning as I write I am yet to understand, to voice a word acknowledging her presence. The words of another close to me, Tillmann-Healy, support and at the time of this writing are preferential. Sometime later I'll seek to find her, to get to know her, my Bulimia, and ask her who and why she was invited into my life last night. Not only do I come to compromised texts from a narrative that is linear and proffers hope. Such essentially belies the chaos my text may speak. I come to compromised texts from living compromise. Bulimia, and her reappearance, if she ever disappeared, is about living compromise and this life, if the life that is written of, about and from, is acknowledged. Nourishment comes from repeated performance practices, those practices I hold closely, and I am committed to believing in. Beliefs may change, okay, but my truth is to continue in my commitment to my values, acknowledge my needs, my desires remains. I am satisfied.

## OSTRACISM

### *Introduction*

This section explores experiences of a person expelled from their society/ies; also a person expelling themselves from social groups/ings. It is about forces of expulsion notably the discursive apparatus of expulsion, noting how expulsion is so much more than exclusion. Exclusion suggests a person wanting to return to their society/ies, social groups/ings, seeking to be a part of a whole. Expulsion suggests an explosive exit of coercion. Furthermore an expelled individual is unlikely to seek to return. It explores how a person maintains that expulsion, the exacting attitudes she shows to herself.

This section of writing is to demonstrate depth of feelings, emotions in textual representation. It is a text that demonstrates an appreciation of the force of a person, and their perceptions of being expelled from their social groups/ings. The work of the writing is to value feelings, emotions a person associates with expulsion and to show personal significances of such.

I have wanted to create a text that raises a reader's awareness of the ways in which writing convention, blind adherence to writing convention<sup>4</sup> – chains, maintains a certain privileging of knowledge. Texts reproducing such privileging are recognised, furthermore recommended by academic practices of legitimation. Recommended texts effect powerful dynamics between people. „Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an

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<sup>4</sup> The use of the singular noun here emphasises my belief conventional writing privileges one acceptable form, no other means will be accepted or acceptable.

arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up,” (Foucault, 1977, p 202). Michel Foucault’s words segue from his comments upon, „The Panopticon,” (Foucault, 1977, p 201). I want to illustrate how panopticism is not only a structural ordering, an edifice necessarily but here is of mystory’s ideation. I return to the thesis’ ideation, particularly its suicidal ideation, later.

I hope for a text that challenges a reader’s senses of convention and convention’s effects. In this section the greatest work of the writing is to incite a reader’s responses, emotional responses. In an effort to achieve this aim the writing is jagged and shattered. „Jagged” in that it proposes words alone, unkempt sentences – those failing to begin with a capital letter, not ending in a full-stop, phrases. Potentially hazardous are offered. „Potentially hazardous” because they are, and have been painful to produce. They are also harmful. A reader may choose to reject the proposed texts, the ideas behind their sourcing, their conception – just as the person expelled is forcibly rejected. Equally though a reader may hold and value the harmful texts and feel harmed, yet ally their response to the writer’s/my proposals in an endeavour to show empathic response. This too however will be uncomfortable outcome; reading. „Shattered” text shatters a reader’s senses of access to meanings the texts may seek to communicate. They debar ease of access to meaning. As a person expelled is debarred meanings of nourishment from their social groups/ings. „Shattered” texts disrupt a reader’s sense of their abilities to make meanings easily from that which they read/consume. A reader’s capability is called to question. Yet is it the writer’s capability to tell their story or the reader’s capability to hear the story they are being told? That question remains unanswered but the text does endeavour to evoke the

chasm between a person expelled, failed to be valued, understood, held and nourished and the (empowered) nourishing social groups/ings.

„Allow yourself to be disturbed by the text!“ The force of this imperative, this direct address is the force of „Ostracism“’s expulsive potentiality. I invite you to accompany me in the pain of a text of a period in my life when I was unemployed and desperate for hope. I seek for you, my reader, to be insulted, cut into by the obnoxious state of the text. It might seem best to disregard the work if that is what your reading draws out, but hold carefully to those feelings. Become angry at the work’s impudence. Such feelings too are of the emotions suggestive of being expelled. You too are now a stranger in the unfamiliarity of this text’s idiosyncrasies.

Most of the shards of text of this section of work are inspired by and taken from journals/notebooks I kept between March 2008 and October 2009. The greatest focus is upon the period between December 2008 and May 2009. I choose to focus upon this period on account my journal entries are more detailed. They are more revealing. In this period I experienced significant mental illhealth. I choose to recognise the time within which that period of revealing journal entries, significant mental ill health comes on account periods of sparse journal entries are also powerful indicators of a person who may have not been able to capture their sentiments. For example a person did not have the time to commit to her journal owing to pressures of employment commitments, a person chose not to focus upon her feelings, hoping that the incipient doom growing insidiously would abate if not acknowledged.

It is important to realise that the work is a representation of my journals. On account of this claim, a sceptic might suggest this work of „fiction“ has limited credibility. Its strength however, I have accentuated and drawn more finely, the words of a person believing herself to be dispossessed, dislocated, empty, once estranged and divorced from their social groups/ings. Writing narrative constructing character/personality/self requires consideration of the crises that character is to be subject to. These details are the nuances that are drawn finely and carried across from my journals. Konrad (2005) suggested the purchase of autobiographical fiction is how believable the narrative is. This is an important premise. Is my narrative believable? Can I believe the person who comes to me from my text? Are the details resonant? This predicates expectations on the part of a reader.

Peter Clough (2002) is insightful.

But narrative and the expectations of narrative make a problem for those who seek to write „believable“ stories. For in making „plausible“ narrative I (we) are sometimes forced (tempted) into creating characters who deny the totality of human experience. „Believable“ characters are often dangerously insubstantial, bearing only a trace of the realities of life as *lived* by some realities. Fictional characters – if they are to be believed – are often *capable* of bearing only a certain portion of pain, of horrors. For harrowing experiences that seem disproportionate

to what is „reasonable“ to expect of any single human-being dis/locates our own construction of human experience as we *expect* it to be.

Clough, 2002, pp 64-5

The primary premise of this section of writing is to evoke feelings of being expelled. It is the „meta-work“ of the „fiction“ that is uppermost considering its value as a means to communicate feelings, experiences. John Beverley’s attention to the fine distinction between *testimonio* and autobiography is useful here. „Like autobiography, *testimonio* is an affirmation of the authority of personal experience, but unlike autobiography, it cannot affirm a self-identity that is separate from the subaltern group or class situation that it narrates,” (Beverley, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p 259). Later I am concerned to work at the boundary between mystory and the story of a group. „Mystory“ as a significant, or insignificant fragment of the social groups/ings stories, those larger stories from which my story arises. The story of one person’s suicidal ideation and bulimia and the suggestive work that such a story could do for anyone’s story of suicidal ideation and bulimia.

Thomas Joiner (2005) cites three conditions for an act of suicide: feelings of burdensomeness, not belonging and the capability/capacity to inflict fatal self-harm. The methodological premise of this section of writing is to show a person expelled and to manifest, in form if no thing else, a text that forms burdensomeness, not belonging and fatal self-harm. Ultimately the work is suicidal: committed to a premeditated act of fatal

self-harm. This is to allow my text to be presented, unformed, jagged and shattering. Such presentation works to recognise qualities that are to become the strength of this work as an academic script. Yet to accept, what I believe are strengths, may by some recommend only that the work be cast out. The work's claims for a particular academic award should be killed. Akin is the belief that for some suicide is a cowardly act, yet for others does seem to require a tremendous commitment to an ideal: the choice made to end a life is the best one that might have been made. David Hume speaks eloquently of each man's choice (between committing a criminal act and otherwise) in opting to end a life of „pain and misery“ (Hume, 2005, p 3). I find Hume's words absolve my guilt which endured from the times I have come so close to ending my life of „pain and misery“ (Hume, 2005, p 3). In this way I am comforted and regard my option not to choose a premature ending as fortuitous, but of no less a cowardly nature than if I should have committed a fatal act.

If Suicide be supposed a crime, it is only cowardice can impel us to it. If it be no crime, both prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence when it becomes a burden. It is the only way that we can then be useful to society, by setting an example, which, if imitated, would preserve to every one his chance for happiness in life, and would effectually free him from all danger or misery.

Hume, 2005, p 11



It is important to acknowledge the patriarchal bias of Hume's writing, yet it is not absolute feminism for the sake of purity *per se* I am concerned for, rather it is my strivance, as a feminist, to welcome a voice that is otherwise silenced, is of a death – my death. A writer's death ensures a story dislocated, as diaspora, without homes recognised, without places to belong to. I am reminded of the words of Michel Foucault.

... this relationship between writing and death is also manifested in the effacement of the writing subject's individual characteristics. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing.

Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, pp 101-102

Michel Foucault although some may read in his words, a negative critique of feminist values, does provide insights into the relationships between an author writing, their work and significances particular cultures have chosen to privilege (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, pp 101-120). For Foucault culture is very much Western European mores, particularly those of the twentieth century, born of the traditions of Ancient Civilisations, notably writers of Ancient Greece. Foucault notes, „a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationship with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyze the work through its

structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships,”  
(Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, p 102).

A feminist, Liz Stanley, who does recommend I read for the traces of an author’s presence in their work. She suggests a writer’s words, written or spoken, are significant auto/biographical indices yet remain unspoken on account of required censorship, if a writer’s work is to be accepted. Liz Stanley begins to explore the unspoken authorial presence that is only unspoken on account it is unprivileged in patriarchy’s discourses of literary criticism. This Stanley notes as, „(t)he analytic idea of „auto/biography,”  
(Stanley, in Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield, 2000, p 40).

I return to Michel Foucault’s questioning of authorial absences in his excavation of a writer’s work (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984). It is here that his words resonate in my claims for writing the „grit” of „dailiness” to be engaged (Ribbens and Edwards, 1994, p 11). I am adopting feminist language, yet this is fitting, I am a feminist welcoming ideas that may provide insight, suggest that my ways of being in the world are not mine alone, I can locate my ideas, find a place to belong. Reference to Michel Foucault’s words is not contrary to my feminism here

Even when an individual has been accepted as an author, we must still ask whether everything that he wrote, said, or left behind is part of his work. The problem is both theoretical and technical. When undertaking the publication of Nietzsche’s work, for example, where should one stop? Surely everything must

be published, but what is, “everything”? Everything that Nietzsche himself drafts for his works? Obviously. The plans for his aphorisms? Yes. The deleted passages and the notes at the bottom of the page? Yes. What if, within a workbook filled with aphorisms, one finds a reference, the notation of a meeting or of an address, or a laundry list: Is it work, or not? Why not? And so on, *ad infinitum*. How can one define a work amid the millions of traces left by someone after his death? A theory of the work does not exist, and the empirical task of those who naively undertake the editing of works often suffers in the absence of such a theory.

... Consequently, it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself. The word work and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author’s individuality.

Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, pp 103-4

Michel Foucault continues to explore the importance of „writing“ itself. Foucault considers the cultural significance, particularly the epistemological significance, of the absence of a writer, an author from their work. It is this sentiment that lends credence to my endeavour to bear the „grit“ my „dailiness“ within this thesis (Ribbens and Edwards, 1994, p 11). The emphasis is to explore what may result when I voice my views, and locate those views in the personal situations and the messinesses that bore them.

There seems to be an important dividing line between those who believe they can still locate today's discontinuities (*ruptures*) in the historico-transcendental tradition of the nineteenth century, and those who try to free themselves one and for all from that tradition.

It is not enough, however, to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. ... Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the authors' disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers.

Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, p 105

Michel Foucault's work has significant appeal for me. Not least because his ideas allow me to be within a social group/ing even though on occasions I believe I am expelled from those groups that are most closely around me, for example, my place of work, others in the café as I place my order, inhale the tangible airs around me. Michel Foucault has long been instrumental in the formulation of my sociological imagination. C. Wright Mills (2002/1959) encourages me to include his aside, make note of this biographical detail in my history and as I set down my story.

Only by conversations in which experienced thinkers exchange information about their actual ways of working can a useful sense of method and theory be imparted to the beginning student. I feel it useful here, therefore, to report in some detail

how I go about my craft. This is necessarily a personal statement, but it is written with the hope that others, especially those beginning independent work, will make it less personal by the facts of their own experiences.

Mills, 2002/1959, p 215

When I have chosen to explore my own sociological imagination, it might seem it has been necessary for me to expel myself as a self-enforced exile? For example both in prolonged absence from paid work between September 2006 and June 2007, following my resignation from Waltham Forest College, and then again following my resignation from Southampton City College, May 2009 – September 2009. A significant voice may argue that I was at work firstly in completing my Doctor of Education thesis and latterly drafting a Doctor of Philosophy – this thesis. Such work was not commensurate with an identity as a Lecturer and latterly as a Curriculum Team Leader. My „private“ self was overly compromised by a „public“ self, (Stanley, in Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield). In exile access to others“ of influences is limited, yet it is my choosing to be in this way I demonstrate an informed choice in contextualising my story; those works I have to hand at the time of this draft and its later „abandonment“ (Banville, 2005, p 41). „We finish things, while for the real worker, as the poet Valery, I believe it was pronounced, there was no finishing a work, only the abandoning of it,“ (Banville, 2005, p 41). In abandoning this draft I can claim yes I do have a story to tell. I have discovered meanings.

A brief exploration of those who have informed my choice to be „less than absent“ in my writing; I return to my suicidal ideation. Hume’s words allow me to conjure with the option that I am not as cowardly as I would previously have believed. To commit an act of fatal self-harm requires courage and belief, and if I have courage and belief to achieve this, perhaps I do have the courage and belief to continue and to find meanings through writing in the pain and misery that otherwise haunts me.

During the period between May and September of last year (2009), I was unemployed without psychiatric/psychological support and planning my demise. The shards of narrative offered below as journal entries, as taken from times within the period between May and September 2009. I sought to be weighted down, and yet the weight of my fleshiness was a burden I struggled desperately to understand, to negotiate.

„Unbearable being“ is a troubling text speaking to me of experiences of significant unrest. A person struggling desperately to be within herself, to listen to herself and to hear herself. An inner world almost detached from exterior realities that might have provided a sense of calm. A belief that a more empowering physique would yield a more nourishing inner calm. The disjointed narrative is one of a disjointed existence. A person moving from one excoriating experience to another, biting and scratching at a surface. Trying to purge feelings. I write this section of work moving between reproducing copy from my journals and these lines of analysis. I find it difficult to commit the copy of my journals to the screen. The shards of the script of self-hatred are difficult to for me to allow them to be once more. I am also aware of the very personal

and private world I am setting down, an inner world turned outwards. Yet that is one of the tenets of this thesis to show turmoil, not merely to tell of it, describe, but to allow it to disrupt the organisation of this text.

Let me tell you, „The Whale’s Song” (Sheldon, 1993). A young girl’s strong belief in the hope that one day, as her grandmother promised her, she would hear whales sing. One night in high anticipation Lilly believes so strongly she will be welcomed into the whales’ song she races to the jetty to witness a ceilidh of her whales. Quietly at first and then distinctly the whales’ song welcomes her in, welcomes her home.

Minutes passed, or maybe hours. Suddenly Lilly felt the breeze rustle her nightdress and the cold nip her toes. She shivered and rubbed her eyes. Then it seemed the ocean was still again and the night black and silent. Lilly thought she must have been dreaming. She stood up and turned for home. Then far, far away, on the breath of the wind she heard, „Lilly! Lilly!” The whales were calling her name.

Sheldon and Blythe, 1993, pp 23-24

Lily believes, as I might believe. I invite a reader, me, in the first instances to believe in the writing of this section so strongly that I shall hear my name in song. I shall discover, „Claire” in her writing, she will be called out and she’ll come to you. Further interpretations of the writings offered are a reader’s privilege. Meaning lies in the ways a

reader allows their heart to be opened and a voice exposed in their imagination. This is when a reader gives the words they are reading their weight, their place, they welcome them home into their own places. In making meaning, a writer's words now belong to another – a reader. And it is necessary the writer is laid to rest but her spirit calls out, „calling her name“.

*Unbearable being*

Monday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2009, just getting on. Accepting. Letting go. Letting my mistakes, flaws, limitations have their voices. Slowing down enough to hear them.

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2009, so frustrated. Home from „caring“ and ... less than five pages. Just emptiness. Fear I'll fail again to complete a reading of this month's Reading Group book: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (Kundera, 1984). So many gaps and my writing are falling into them.

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2009, bingeing and vomiting. Disappointed. Must keep busy. A training event this evening: how to care?

Variety pack of twenty five chocolate bars; Yoghurt; Twelve Weetabix; Two pints of whole milk; Two slices of wholemeal bread; Two hundred grams of Bernard Matthews Turkey Ham; Two mugs of soups; ... anything else?

Exhausted.



Managed forty pages of „The Unbearable Lightness of Being“ (Kundera, 1984). Feeling heavy. Feeling very fat. Feel out of control.

I screw up the leaflet advertising a coffee morning – Macmillan Cancer Support.

I screw up the recruitment pages of a local paper. Pages I kept in the hope I might apply for the job of Faculty Research Administrator (Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries, University of P.).

Feel flabby from last night. Binge.

Always wanting something more. Hoping for the possibility of better.

Get on with it, with what though?

Empty. Feel emptiness. Be empty. Because I am empty. Bingeing to fill in the emptiness – a cover up. As the baggy clothes cover the protective layers of fat. I return to jottings made over the past eighteen months. They speak of two years of wishing to loose weight – twenty five then thirty kilos, to run half marathons again, to beat the time I set two years ago – sub-eighty minute times, to look slim, to look gorgeous, desirable, be the eye of all, attention. I want another to attend to me. Because I can not attend to myself? And then I shift: learn to accept me.

My height, my weight, as I am ... now. The choices I have made. Holding them. Cradling them. Accepting changes and journeys are of many steps. Shop. Purchase. Possessions again. Inwardly how do these items speak to me? My attitude desiring items that will attract others. The project is no longer a body that will attract another's gaze, but items of the envy of others. How small the step, if noticeable at all. I leave my project of recognition. I read on another page of, „The Unbearable Lightness of Being“ (Kundera, 1984).

Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009, a busy day, that is what I seem to have promised myself. I start even earlier than I needed to, getting to work half an hour ahead of the time I was scheduled to start – a mistake on my part, a mistake for which I feel stupid. I manage lunch as a controlled affair – no mistakes. After two days of bingeing this feels significant although I realise that for most taking lunch is without a report bearing its significance. I pack for my trip to the Reading Group.

I am towards the Reading Group and I realise I have forgotten to cancel a gym membership and fees, taken as a standing order, a sum I could hardly have afforded at the time and can afford less so now. I should have cancelled the standing order. Worse off. I am reminded of those occasions of waste. The fees I spent on a year's tuition for an MA I failed to complete. Food I failed to keep within me – purged: a narrative of failure, failure from every pore as the stressors of debts mount.

... later I am calmer I am realising, is the qualification for which I am registered at, „Birmingham“ going to be another failure, another sum wasted in pursuit of an ideal that I do not allow myself the possibility of achieving. In thought I begin to shape an idea; to tell my story, not a new idea, getting to know the inside of me, by offering the inside of me. Are stories not only of the most powerful ways of realising the possibilities of the human condition? Who told me this and what is the human condition? Fuck! I do not know. I can not even locate an idea that seems to have become significant to me, and the ways I see my worlds. „Worlds“? At least I can recognise I hold with pluralities of knowing.

Yesterday Joyce accused me of knowing about her insides and yet she knew nothing of mine. Do I not know of my inner worlds?

Reading Group and I am recommended the writing of Michael Arditti – one who apparently pursues a „gay“ narrative – or so I am told. Am I suspected of being „gay“?

Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2009, a list of things to fill in. Post request for ... Pay Council Tax instalment. Pay monthly water bill. Hand in to gym a letter requesting refund for the sums of £25.00 taken over the past two months. (Relief. The bank were able to reclaim that payment the gym called for on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month.) Return to bank – check again I have really cancelled the standing order. Home. Lunch. Empty. The list of activities, ...

... bingeing and vomiting, ... more waste

Should I be at work on my writing projects? „Writing projects“! Sounds significant. But I want to be busy with menial, because that is my work, menial, manual. And perhaps I am scared of the person I might become if I were to be at work on writing for a doctoral thesis and completing a portfolio of evidence towards a Diploma in Management and Leadership. How fearful I am of potentiality, of disappointment?

I receive a telephone call asking me to work an extra shift. ... and then I am saying, „yes“ to another, „yes“ and „yes“ again ... and I am accommodating another’s request for a shift swap. I need to please others. I do not seem to be able to please me. I am fearful of others’ negative comments, judgements. Inferior. I feel inferior. How do I tell of myself, as just a carer. Will I always be empty so long as there is a powerful story of inferiority, of failure?

„Just a carer“ diminution of work role, diminution of the role of the work of a carer? Is such a disrespectful comment to my co-workers. I do not mean for it to be. „I“ am „just“. „I“ could be anything, and so I am nothing. Because the story comes of a person who has no substance, no thing besides failure to speak of? Did I give up my role too easily at Southampton City College? Have I given up too easily? Listening to and for others at times when they are extremely vulnerable. Not everyone can and does care for others. I can and I do? I think of how I might become a better carer – so that I am not just a carer, an M Sc in Dementia Studies. Qualifications shall qualify a better carer. I am

remembering „Bubba“ and the importance of Joyce“s inner world, the importance of understanding inner worlds. How I understand my own inner world.

Examine how I censor the stories I tell of me. Bulimia consumes. And reminds me of how I fail my ideals. Overwhelming weight gain to squash the emptiness that my sense of failure brings. My sense of failed mastery over my appetites, to lose weight. My failure to return to running. My failure to send articles in hope of their publication. My failure to be a doctor. My failure to control my eating, always. My failure to say, „No!“ I hide in Bulimia, she is easier than being me, confronting my failures.

Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2009, my lack of work, of writing towards my study at, „Birmingham“ is now really very worrying, I think how I have always been a student, „giving cause for concern“. I realise if I am to complete this work, this study, I“ll need to confront my failures. Was Bulimia an excuse for those hard times when I felt I was failing and allowed myself to slip further into failure on account that was a place I knew more about than the place of endeavour and confrontation? Was Bulimia an excuse for not developing my own voice? Was Bulimia an excuse for my failure to acknowledge my choices. My choice to say „no“when „I“ said „yes“. „Yes“ to the additional shifts, „yes“ to the extra portions of food. „Yes“ to the packets of biscuits, cakes, ... on offer at cut price. What price was I really paying? It has seemed better to run away. To move on, as a vagrant wanders in the hope of finding someplace better, finding a shelter and a witness for this story. As Joyce needed me to keep her home, hold her story and establish her sense of self, an identity that once belonged, a coherency to the story she was

endeavouring to tell through showing me her photographs. Hoping that I would then be a witness to her current home. My work was to believe in a story of her current home, as she was able to believe in the stories of her past homes when „Bubba“ was real and sang those songs that welcomed Joyce home.

The significance of song, of poetry, is not words, but the fact of its vociferous utterances, the reaching out of one person to another, speaking aloud so that another might hear. For Joyce she was asking me to listen to her song, to hear her as she returned home. Without speaking her words aloud she would have remained in silence and I would have remained alone our two worlds lacking the warmth contingency brings and the sense of home and belonging.

*Wandering, outer and inner worlds*

Prior to my current work as a Care Assistant I had been a Curriculum Team Leader responsible for the General Education curriculum and the Teacher Training provision/curriculum within a college of Further and Higher Education. I found my identity, as a young woman, a bulimic, with few years only of teaching/lecturing experience and a newly acquired doctorate effected great conflict. I could not hold the idea that I might potentiality be a strong employee, well positioned and well qualified to develop as an effective manager/leader of the teacher training curriculum of the college. I was a bulimic and that though was the story of greatest significance for me.

4<sup>th</sup> January 2009, I am asked the title of my doctoral thesis. How do I skim, skirt, belie the overly revealing title: *Further Education(s): Scrapbooking Existences; Remembering a Lecturer in Further Education, a Bulimic, a Daughter?* A volume that proclaims my Bulimia, neurotic disposition and supreme emptiness, a life devoid of nourishing, significant, intimate relationships, contact with others, fear of my humanness.

Fitful. Jumpiness. Wishing I wasn't. Nervous. Not sure what I want. I want the safety of my bedroom. The quietness. A book. Writing already written. Get through until 5<sup>o</sup>clock. I leave ultimately at ten past six.

5<sup>th</sup> January 2009, 12.20 – lunch: ham and tomato sandwich – reduced calories – I'm on a diet now. Always on a calorie restricted diet. I can't keep up. I can't let people down though. Was my teaching session before lunch. Did I let students down? Was it good enough? Inadequately planned? Tomorrow I must plan and prepare. I'll be undone. I can't do this.

It has become too painful to continue to recount events in first person narrative. I opt to engage with means of narrative therapy orientation: to place the story at the centre of my endeavours, ... the person can be understood as a living text inhabiting a storied world (McLeod, 1997, p 84).

One of the main therapeutic strategies employed by White and Epston (1990) is a process they describe as „externalising the problem“. They regard the

„problem“ that a client presents as a story that is collectively performed or lived out by that person and the other people (for example, family members) closely involved in his or her life. White and Epston argue that it is as though the person becomes his or her story, with his or her identity being defined through that particular narrative. In some cases the story will attribute innate, inherent, immutable characteristics to the person such as „schizophrenic“. It is in such circumstances that the therapist will strive to „open space for persons to re-author or constitute themselves, each other and their relationships, according to alternative stories of knowledges.

McLeod, 1997, p 87

*A vagrant's portrait*

„A vagrant“s portrait,“ is most difficult to write. I am struggling to write this in this narrative. I am experiencing distress my eating has become significantly disordered. I position the narrator outside of myself. I become a character. I am a third person, „she“. I write in the present tense to evoke immediacy.

The ensuing writing invites a reader to create meaning in the spaces they believe are being opened by the text that is unfolding my character“s existences. The names of establishments, institutions, are retained. Identity/confidentiality is not protected. This is akin to the risk-taking practices of the thesis *in toto*. I do not intend the narrative to disservice to any National Health Service facilities attended, places of my employment



and education in the past years. The fullness of my story is intended as a portrayal of my truth only, a truth which after consideration I am not willing to compromise at this time.

She spends Tuesday night (14<sup>th</sup> January 2009) in the Clinical Decision Unit of Southampton General Hospital having been admitted to the Accident and Emergency Department following a collapse. She is persuaded by the time and the kindness of the paramedics to accept their offer of help – to be taken to hospital and to recover.

Discharge support is arranged as an invitation to return to the Osborn clinic. Her previous appointment – she cancelled on account she had not planned to go on. She had planned her ending only. Deep inside of her though life does remain albeit soft stirrings. Little rustlings, she needs to find a focus, a goal, to harness the energy of those little rustlings. An ambition to survive might be good.

In a coffee shop, amongst others and yet so far from her life she starts and continues to write this journal entry and as she writes she begins to find herself. There is urgency about her commitments to the pages she produces. Writing. Writing. She tells her stories and in this way builds meanings for her life. She needs to keep trying to understand. She needs to listen, to keep listening. Life is a journey of comings and goings. Coming to the start of the next line and going to the end of that line. This is where life is on her pages of writing.

Empiricist babies about her are showing her to take in, to listen, to feel, to touch, to smell, to taste, to sample physically the worlds around them. Make meaning through sense data. Offer an interpretation. Provide a story so that when she reads her writing back she does have a life. There it is noted down in her writings. Why she must do and she does. Control. A meal that will diminish, will not sustain, but by which she takes in hope, false hope that she will be sustained and will be diminished.

„Small Americano please!“

„... and the egg sandwich?“

„Yes, please take for that too.“

Always being taken from if one is to be given to. She writes on: metalanguage and processes of education. How people articulate their changed condition as they learn to appreciate new stories, as they come by, come into, are created layer, upon layer from the sense data around them, and of those new people, there comes a new story. This world, this day, is one of new things. There is a new content, and as such a new language. New languages isolate. Only those with the new language can participate in the new world. In the sixteenth century there was a new world. A world that promised new things would come in times of grave dissatisfaction. When change is demanded? A new body, because the old was too, ... tall, weighed too much, felt too insecure, attracted too much attention, attracted inattention – the public function was in place of the private life.

She sits heavily and the price she pays: significant and intense depressive periods. Intense low mood. She ponders the meaninglessness of her life, not the meaning of her life. Meaning would come in the story that she anticipates writing, but that writing doesn't happen in the ways it might have been thought to and she fails to enter her new world. She ponders her meaninglessness. Deeply emotional, is that meaningless? No – in truth it is here meaning might resolve from the chasm of emptiness, the deeply emotional japing, if she can hold with those difficult feelings long enough to capture something of them.

Hunched she writes on. A recluse hidden behind the waste bin and her props: small Americano and egg sandwich. In a public place, such as the coffee shop, she can claim she belongs. She purchases a drink and food and she has become a welcomed customer, patron of the shop, member of its community. She has entitlement. She has an identity, a label: Customer. She listens to the music on the address system of the eatery and wonders why popular songs play out. Common language too? If she recognises the song does that further confirm her membership as a Customer. A Customer would recognise that the public address system is luring her towards a relaxing lunchtime.

She begins to thaw by the warm drink and the sandwich's calories. She finds her goal: writing, an action. The purpose of the action is not important. Fully employed – that is the goal. Occupied, as the babies about her are occupied in consuming their environment. She continues to write and establish herself within the coffee shop. Here

she has a hope that she'll leave a little less alone than when she entered some moments ago. Once she had hoped to have her writing published. She realises that as periods of depression and experiences of isolation are significant and are likely to continue to recur in her life, her writing provides meaning, provides activity, provides a purpose. She writes. An endeavour to capture sensations of unhappiness is itself a source of relief. It is not intrinsic meaning that is required but the act itself. Rather as one might talk to a neighbour, a friend, not necessarily because there is news to pass on, but because the act of engaging with another is comforting, reminds her of the importance of reaching out for others. Endeavouring to experience a meaningful encounter, „I have to keep trying,“ she promises herself as her new world bravery does seem after all to be not so far from her imagination. Meaningful existence is not a problem in her new world. Existing, doing, being these are her new world purchases.

She accepts that she may not reach the anticipated end points/products. Yet can she conceive of the process? Does the process proffer advancement? Does engagement in action mean that her emptiness is filled? Has writing now been shaped as a binge? Filling in, doing something, anything because she cannot bear her feelings. „I'll do the best I can,“ she promises. At least writing is less destructive and less costly than consuming and purging quantities of food that would serve a family, not only a single person. And then frustrations arise. This is not the anticipated product. Frustrations.

Now, she is doubtful, her new world is one where she fits. Is one of satisfaction? It might be filling, yet does it nourish? Does it welcome her, could she call herself at

home? She is failing to live her values. Another failing? And she is falling again. Self-deprecation, to speak of failing is to speak of self-debasement. To speak of trying one's best," even though it might have fallen short of the anticipated product – is that nourishment? There is a choice that speaks of no choice such as the brave new world offering insanity or lunacy.

She has lost her sense of footing. She has misplaced her turn, missed a place of her footings, her ground in social engagements. The possibility of social interaction is lost. She has lost her sense of how to be with the babies of the coffee shop.. It is always their turn. She sees her new world would have recommended action over substance, a figure of increased exercise, reduced calorific intake, bartering her desired anticipated product, is what she feels would welcome her, what she wants.

The words of yesterday's Home Treatment Team engagement.

„You look just fine to me.“

„It is not your opinion I need, but my own!“

Forty minutes and nothing! She does not want interaction of this kind. She wants to be heard. She wants it to be her turn, her story.

There is a little girl that is rarely heard. A voice that did not get welcomed into her world sufficiently. She now realises that the stories of her own daughters, those children she never had were to speak of a desire to care for a young child, to make sense of those tears of a baby/babies of her own. Mothering would have given a reason to eat in a more ordered fashion, sustain her employment, negotiate social interaction, or would they? „My ...“ What is hers? What belongs to her? Would belonging to another give her a sense of fulfilment? Momentarily? Questionable conclusion. She wants to belong to herself, to feel a sense of belonging to and within the feelings of despair that overwhelm, she seeks to be able to be with her feelings. Filling the chasm through action is to cope. Why does she need to cope? Who is asking her to cope? She no longer wants to cope. She wants to be as she is: frail in her vulnerability, weighty, tearful.

As a younger woman she believed she would come into a time when she would be able to make amends. She would achieve her anticipated product. Yet of course, she did not reach that time. She never reached success because she spoke always of herself as a failure. No matter her achievement it would never be her anticipated product because it came from a narrative of failure. Her fear of failure inhibited and continued to inhibit her movement onwards; her risk taking, her sense of achievement. Achievements were always inscribed in by their deficits. She gained her Doctor of Education from the University of Sheffield (September 2008) because she had completed the required course of study only. She was appointed by Southampton City College as a Curriculum Team Leader on account she was the only applicant for the position.

She wants to be held and to hold. To be loved deeply and for the person she is. Whoever that person is? She is not sure. She wants to believe that time does not make painful experiences change or past experiences become more fulfilling. Time provides perspective – and that is all. The greater the perspective, the smaller the misdemeanour appears. A view from afar and the figures at play are then smaller. Self-portraits however are frequently delivered in close proximity and the flaws of the face, the blemished canvas is recognised. There is however an intimacy of such portraits, self-portraits particularly. The viewer is held closely. The sitter's pain is tangible. It is in sight and it is central in the work of the viewer's recognition of those aspects of their own stories they see in the work before them.

„Bring it close,“ begs that portrait.

„Divest the breathy life!“

„Hear your stories in my flesh. Allow your hurts to develop as I am experiencing my pain. Deliver me my meaning, no matter how difficult it may be for you, be with me and allow me to be witnessed.“

The most powerful works, the most evocative, the most emotive works are those that allow the viewer into their own worlds, and time does not change that and should not change that. The most powerful ethnographic portraits are those that the sitter will read and say, „I recognise myself in your tale of blemishes.“

She presses her nose to the window life. She can't bring herself to break through her looking glass. Many do. They break in, as in moments of sexual intimacy – but she would know nothing of this. She realises it is time to deliver her child. Her work is to be, in all that she is, appreciate her present. Can she allow herself to recognise herself in this tale? Being broken into and breaking through to others. Exercising footing where she only ever footfaults.

Another day in her life and she finds herself sat at another table drinking another cup of coffee that has been taken for. She is yet to feel, make sense of this nourishment's gifts. Her stomach cramping around the chunks of banana she has also pushed down. She sits in a Christian bookshop that sells coffee, a seat next to the front window of the shop, looking out onto the streets where life is, perhaps. She looks out and sees people. She sees existence. She is unsure whether she sees life – lives perhaps. Unsettled; perhaps she should not have taken a seat in this bookshop. She doesn't belong to any of the groups Christianity speaks. She is alone she is sure of this.

She sheds her coat and breathes out. The snug of the café and her seat presses heavily on her and in her creating her isolation. She feels undressed though. Dishevelled. Undone. Unravelling as she had pondered the plurality of her worlds – lives – not life outside the window, and of such things she could not be sure.



She feels guilt, seeping to her surface, a self-hatred. She should be at work, supporting others, helping others – that is what educators do, don't they? She doesn't know.

Another occasion that she doesn't know about? She can't think beyond her own unsupported condition. Does she have a „condition“? Depressed? Suicidal?

Disordered? Are these conditions, or are these her realities? „Condition“ makes her think that in time she may change, move on, become someone else. Transform. „Reality“ is how it has been and is. This is her life, her existence at the very least. „Reality“ is immutable, is her truth, is her time, is forever of her. How long she has laboured with the idea, the belief that she could change given achievement of her anticipated end product.

Her parents were nice to her. Her mother made an effort now to support her. She called to her this morning – through her bedroom door, bidding her farewell, wishing her a good day. She stayed behind the door. She did not know how to respond. Such support rather is too late? Her father though has no respect for her privacy and pushed in through the door, telling her he was off to see about the wood burning stove that would be fitted in their new home, for when they moved. She shall not move to their new home. She has not arrived in this place, this home, yet. She has failed to respond to her parents, either one of her parent's information.

She is wary of her father. He is a threatening presence. Diminishing her. His prejudices speak loudly on occasions. And at this time she can't forgive such indiscretions. She does understand that he is threatened by her frailty, her vulnerability, yet today, so close, she chooses not to understand. To even try to understand?

She sees herself reflected back by the mirror created by the dark sides of a lorry stationary at the traffic lights of the street outside and the glass of her window. She sees herself. She is fearful of the image. She craves intimacy, at least she believes she does, if she were not lonely she would not, ... not what... she is so lonely, always has been. She does not know what she would be if she were not so lonely, a *non-sequitur*. She thinks of those who tell her that to be alone is satisfying. Yes, but to be alone is not lonely and alone and lonely is not satisfying.

She wishes her way out of her feelings. She fails to trust herself, she doesn't know how to phrase her thoughts. There is too much that she fails to follow. She can't be the person she believes she is, because, ... she doesn't know how to phrase her thoughts. She is lost, not only is she lonely, lacking an intimate relationship that she believes she craves but she is now lost too. It is unlikely that she would know how to ask in order to find her way towards companionship.

Some years ago she had believed that educational achievements would satisfy appetites, her own and her parents. Trust the person she was. A study of a Master of Arts in Education was a decision to identify and narrate identities of students she taught. She wanted to explore how identities were storied – told of; how students narrated their experiences and the contributions such narratives had for their concepts of identity. It seemed intrinsically wrong to profess that she wanted to tell her story of being a student, a „Master“'s“ student. She could however find propriety in telling of others lives.

She goes to the café again and orders what she now knows will nourish her.

„Small Americano please!“

„... and the egg sandwich?“

„Yes, please take for that too.“

Always being taken from if one is to be given to. She feels safe in a world that is of others and where she is none other – anonymous. Unknown here, excepting as the young woman who yesterday purchased a coffee and a sandwich about the same time as she has bought these items today. Anonymity provides a comforting silence. Her solitary place in this world of mothers with their children? Outside of this world as she was outside of her own childhood. At home she realises she has cost her parents greatly. It is easier to be in a place where she does not cost them. She costs herself only the price of a coffee and sandwich. Furthermore the exchange easy to achieve. Yet deep, deep sadness comes gratuitously.

She is drawn to edges, the edginess of the human conditions. The volatility of living; her vulnerability. This is her gentle rustling reminding her of ambition to live. She is very close now to those lives of the street dwellers she came to learn a little of during the years she worked as a Project Worker at a social care unit. This work was not so much about

providing, warm food and tea, lots of tea. It was about trying to understand, and show that effort to understand the life of another who was struggling desperately to be understood, given that long ago, for many, they had given up their struggle to understand themselves. The work was about listening and trying to hear the heart beats of those lives of London's streets. She sought to become a better listener, pursued a qualification in counselling skills and personal development, continued to attend her own personal therapy. Her own understanding of herself her education though remained an untold story.

In developing counselling skills she was told she showed empathic responses but her face said too much too often and her voice failed her too frequently. She didn't know whether she was seeking a qualification to understand others or to understand herself. Did she want to listen or be listened to? Would it have been possible that she was taking the qualification for both reasons? At this time she did not entertain such a dichotomy: a desire to care for others masked a deep seated desire to be cared for. In the first instance she left the inchoate counselling skills programme. Such as was typical of a series of projects she began and never completed over the following years. So many starts. Each time she started she felt she was sufficiently strong to be the person she was within the academic environment of her proposed programmes of study and yet a little way in each time she realised the person she was, was failing, couldn't bear to speak her truths. She had believed that academic achievements would bring the acceptance, the attention and the caring of others into her life. She would be recognised, acknowledged by her achievements. Her being would be a series of academic qualifications of high standard.

Every qualification was anticipated to be a rung on the ladder to her parents' acceptance. The ladder was faulty and the steps unsafe. Her footing slipped. Her sense of self so fragile and failing her. She thinks of her failed suicide, her ultimate intended achievement. But in action? She has failed this too.

She goes the library. There is a universe in a library she hopes. It has to be a better world that the realities she is within. She realises her time. Is this the time? She should be at work it is five minutes to eleven in the morning. Her Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector group might still be awaiting her arrival, cursing her lateness. She thinks how she is told what she'll do, the workshop she should have delivered during the staff conference event. The „this“ and „that“ which are .... She is empty. No one is interested in her, she is not interested in her, „this“ and „that“ which are interesting. She is empty. She is without a family, without the need to get home on time each evening following her work endeavours. Her life is one of convenience, she is there for others. Who is there for her?

The cracks have opened under pages of her notes and the chasms have revealed a wound from long ago that has never sufficiently healed; has only ever been tenuously drawn together. The ragged edges gape open again now and her vulnerability as tears slide down her cheeks. Her „intimacy“ is known as staining tears (the protagonist's truth of Hanif Kureishi (1999)). His is a world more welcoming than the reality of the café around her. She sees her own „truth“ in the loss that the young male philanderer of Kureishi's speaks of.

For most of my life, until tonight, I have been young. For most my life, there were people to look up to who seemed to know what was going on. Where are they? ... When necessary I can gather myself together and maintain some dignity. But tonight I am losing it.

Kureishi, 1999, p 136

This was a work of, „the education of a heart, slightly cracked, if not broken in places,” (Kureishi, 1999, p 156).

She looks on at the wrappings of her nourishment. „Small Americano“. Wrappings now empty. Her life is of wrappings empty. It was during such a postprandial moment yesterday when she realised the teleological necessity of living. She needed a goal, to be on a journey, towards a destination. Her ultimate goal had been suicide and yet without this ending, her journey was not.

She fears she could be losing herself. She realises her life of opening chapters and failing to write them, to risk her truth, her truth to be known. Her journey has begun and ended prematurely without having travelled anywhere. Rather as one has purchased a ticket that has been declared invalid. The journey of life, of achievements, of family and intimacy has been denied her, she failed to purchase a valid ticket, she'll go no where. Yet there is

no „no where“. For every conclusion she reaches there is an irksome challenge that her body throws up from the gentle rustlings that keep stirring within her.

She feels she is losing herself. Lost in a deep depression, characterised by self-pity.

Suddenly it is important to read. Read Dickens comes the command. Bury yourself in streets dirty and diseased, or short lives, wickedness and humour and detail, rich, rich detail. Filth defiling details. As a peep show, Dickensian peepshow. Take yourself back away for centuries. Does the detail she offers of her filth proffer a contemporary peep-show? Books. In books there are worlds she can draw herself into. She needs no invitation.

A bookshop purchase (Healy, 2008), she has chosen a work of a twentieth century's street dwelling. A story, an autobiography of one man's descent into abject alcoholism from which he recovers only on account of finding an obsession with the game of chess more appealing than alcohol. How an autobiography of self-hatred and addiction attracts her. It is in this work she finds herself. It is here she can be welcomed and can recognise an identity that she wishes to learn more of.

She realises in place of binge eating she is filling up on books. She is empty. Words of her own are failing her and she is seeking the words of another as a comfort. Books provide those words. It appears the more she engages, the more openings she makes the more likely she'll fail. Too many books to read.

She sees crumbs on her trousers. Dried eggs. Dishevelled. She recalls eating slowly and yet she did not eat carefully enough. Never enough, always undone. Scared to go home. Scared to be out. She is falling into cracks. Just lost now. She doesn't know where she has gone. She believed that in writing she'd find a companion in herself. She would read narrative that spoke of a person she could befriend – no. She hunches down and considers what she can do, to occupy her emptiness. Hoping hunched into something small she'll disappear.

In the blackness of her balled limbs and squashed flesh that remind her painfully how human she is she begins to make out her truth/s. They surface. Reflections are alive in her world of smallness. Gently she peels back the layers of necrotic life revealing wounds, scars that hunched she feels she can gaze upon. Marked, marked body. Repeatedly marked by perceptions of failure and guilt for such failings as her educational achievements/engagement speak to her of.

A mother and her child edge past her, hunched. She can't have her own children. They are part of a life she denies herself – intimacy with another. „I can't open up because I am scared,“ she cries! „I'm scared of the monsters within, of the messiness I have made and the messiness I am making.“ She supposes that she doesn't know what she looks like. Why should she? Desperate, she knows only of fear of herself. She can't be where her messinesses escape. She fails to hold them in. Was Bulimia messiness only of emptiness that no amount of eating ever filled. Or is this too simple a story?



She doesn't know how to talk about her feelings. What should she talk about? She eats to avoid. She reads to become alive, to appreciate life. She confuses her appetites. The more she eats and purges, practises her disordered behaviours, the more she inscribes and perpetuates unrest. Crushing her body is an attempt to hold in the messinesses that threaten escape; her distress that threatens to loosen her stomach some. She wanted a body she could be proud of. A body that gave her an identity by which she could be included. She wanted what she wasn't, because she wasn't that body. Hold still the image.

She's now numb. She needs to move. Her limbs ache as she unfolds from her ball. She risks vomiting, so tightly she has held herself. She gasps, and then she realises that she has tasks to do. Her feelings were her appetite. Now they have been satisfied by a coffee and a sandwich and these. There is so much for her to do. She makes a list and prepares to return to her parents' home.

At four o'clock the following morning she is busy.

At twenty minutes to two o'clock the morning after the previous she continues to be busy. Busy escaping messiness. She is worrying about her return to work the following day. She begins chewing on her lip, lips that have barely opened to utter words since her collapse.

„Never ask for things. You“ll not receive them.“ „Be grateful for those things you do receive.“ „Reduce.“ „Squash down feelings.“ She scolds.

Piles of books, notes, papers, lists of plans have mounted by her bed. Her breakfast rumbles through her stomach. She claims and believes she is consuming nourishment yet is consuming herself only.

She is becoming increasingly vulnerable. In the brief time she has been absent from work her clothes hang loosely on her. She notes her weight loss, her plans, she begins to feel that Monday and the return to her desk to her service of others is no thing to be feared and is the right decision, a decision that is commensurate with achieving her list.

She remembers the medication she is supposed to have taken. She swallows down a handful believing the missed doses should not be wasted. After all she“ll not be needing the tablets once Monday has come. Taking medication is not on her list.

She starts to feel breathless. She“s suffocating in her dreams. She lays down her head, her anticipated success. In her mind she is doing extremely well. She is achieving each planned item on her list. She is losing weight and others are complimenting her. She can see a young woman in control who is achieving control. Yet this is the person who has never achieved from her list previously.

Ghostly hatred visits her reminding her of previously. She is falling apart. She sees the opportunities of a Girls' Public Day School Trust's school, a school that offered an education in the Classics, music, a school orchestra to play in, a string group to be a part of. Academic competition. She began to fail, she failed to keep up. It was a move too far, an ambition too many and such a pattern would repeat through the remaining of her young years.

December 2001 she is broken, for the first time. Two months from her study at St. Bartholomew's School of Medicine and Dentistry. This is the second year of her clinical studies. She is so lost. Unaware of the damage that such time away is costing her likely success as a doctor. Her mind is busy though. Other voices clamour. She has started to question whether the patois of Medicine is the only means of relating to others in helping roles. In October she started the first year of a counselling training, such training focused upon hearing people's stories, their feelings. Akin to her study of Medicine she failed to sustain her work and has taken leave of absence from this too. She starts an Open University course, a postgraduate degree in the social sciences. This project also ends uncompleted. Trying to fill in the gaps in her life, where Medicine should be but isn't and she doesn't know other than she is not fit. She is not fit? Seemingly she is not fit for any of her projected achievements. She returns to her parents' home, lost, even more lost.

September 2002 she has returned to London, to Medicine and to her job as a Weekend Project Worker at a social care unit. This work inspired her to question the ways of

Medicine in the first instance. She has re-engaged with her counselling qualification and accepted that her endeavours to achieve a postgraduate qualification in the field of the social sciences is for another time. Has she accepted? Is it a „truth“ that she holds that she can profess to? Other truths she can not accept and can not believe in. She is asked to retake her clinical years. She will have to re-enter the programme in the first year of her clinical studies. Eighteen months of study mis-counted. She now believes that she will not succeed, she shall not succeed in becoming in the ways of Medicine. She begins to wonder if there are other ways of going on.

She is employed as a Lecturer at a college of Further and Higher Education in North London, close to her London flat. She believes she has made a choice that is fitting, for which she is fit. She is desperate again to gain her worth in academic achievements. Clumsily. She begins a Master of Arts programme in Education at the university where she is completing the first year of a counselling training. „Completing“ – can she succeed? But there is another lure of another qualification, at a nearby institution, one where she can shape her own study, as „Master of Arts in the field of the Social Sciences by Independent Study“. She knows her study, experiences of homelessness and mental health, the stories of those she is hearing during the weekends she is as a Weekend Route Project Worker. How worthy she“ll seem with such achievements. The reality though is far from alluring.

I am good at walking away. Rejection teaches you how to reject. I left my hometown, left my parents, left my life. I made a home and a life elsewhere, more than once. I stayed on the run. Why then, did the burden feel intolerable? What was it that I carried?

I realised now that the past does not dissolve like a mirage. I realise that the future, though invisible, has weight. We are in the gravitational pull of past and future. It takes huge energy – speed-of-light power – to break that gravitational pull.

How many of us ever get free of our orbit? We tease ourselves with fancy notions of free will and self-help courses that direct our lives. We believe we can be our own miracle, ...

The ancients believed in Fate because they recognised how hard it is for anyone to change anything. The pull of past and future is so strong that the present is crushed by it. We lie helpless in the force of patterns inherited and patterns re-enacted by our own behaviour. The burden is intolerable.

The more I did the more I carried. Books, houses, lovers, lives, all piled up my back, which has always been the strongest part of my body. I go to the gym. I can lift my own weight. I can lift my own weight. I can lift my own weight.

I want to tell the story again.

Winterson, 2006, pp 98-100

Ricocheting from one prospective achievement to another, from one fraught idea, always trying to repent to make good on previous failings. But those times, those failings can never be made good. She has come to realise that she can no longer change her past, make her future, she can only be in her present. A present that she had tried so very hard not to experience, always seeking to make good what was behind her and the lure of promises of the future, fanciful promises.

Books were there to keep me company, to make things bearable, sayable, shareable. Prison, illness, abuse, drugs, abandonment, deportation; all traumas have their literature.

Despentes, 2006, p 32

Reading the stories of others has been steady companionship, particularly the stories and the words of others that resonate deeply and tell her of her own stories. As a mother nourishes her child she is nourished by her reading.

January 2009 and a second breakdown and it comes to her how she needs to recover, hold her childhood, her young adult years, her adult years now. She bows her head and hopes to forgive: the shy, tall, overweight, fleshy, bleeding teenager; the failed Medic; the dieting, frail, young, attention seeking Lecturer; Bulimic; the eating disordered twenty

seven year old; the young woman who has rejected herself again. Crushed, bruised, aching to be of her achievements but stumbling in mistaken drunken stupor. She can not accept. She needs to be ... for a while. Writing and seeing who she is, on the pages of her note book.

She is overly emotional. Tears course her face. She is looking for answers, right answers. She wants the answers she could achieve in Maths lessons aged twelve years. She could work out the patterns then. She knew how to make the answers right. Her tenacity was rewarded. She got the answers right. And then she became tired because no matter how she held on the answers she produced aged fourteen years were no longer right. She could not get the answers right in the Maths of her new school. It was the start of things outside of her. Here was the start of being and places that she could not get right.

Later in adult years, she realises the residue of others' answers, her brother's bedroom where she now stays in her parents' home. Her own room has become a storage facility. Her mother's kitchen – her own cooking rejected. When alone, her father's chocolate. And that was the beginning. „Bugger it, I'm fat and I need to go on a diet, „(Oakes-Ash, 2000, p 65).

Bulimia's life is of many voices and none of them belongs to her. Her own, she has failed to find, akin to her failure to find, right answers. She reads herself in the words of others. „I paid a doctor in a white coat the equivalent of my private school fees to rid me

of my childhood fat. ... strawberries and rockmelon five times a day and measured my fat rolls with a pair of pliers," (Oakes-Ash, 2000, p 64). Cut back, means reduce calories. Bring forth, provide food and bring up the food. The diet fails. Back into the volume. Bring forth the words in which her answers are.

„Okay, I“ll start Monday, it“s the beginning of the week officially anyway. When I finally decided on a start date I would ship in the necessary supplies, carrots, celery, soup, crackers, fruit, never realising it was a diet that got me fat in the first place.

Oakes-Ash, 2000, p 65.

January 19<sup>th</sup> (2009), back to work. So tightly wound up. Nerves. Coffee.

„Small Americano please!“

Get through until lunchtime. But there are the voices of instructions.

„Your parents deserved better.'

'You“ll not see your way through.'

'Students would be better if you were not at work, from another person.'



'You can not be. We'll not let you. Get on.'

'You learn of your colleague's loss. Her husband is now dead. You are numb.

You are slowing down.'

A concerned member of staff, one for whom you are supposedly responsible asks, „When are you going home?’

'You want the end of your world. You'll not have it.'

'You must ache. You must. Your pain, dull aching is no thing to the woman who has lost her husband.'

'You are allowed home. Everyone else has left the building. You gaze from the window of the bus, numb, wondering, who you are, who were you, were you ever present?’

At home she goes to her room and lies upon her bed to close out the world and her instructors.

Her mother enters her room. Her mother understands, tells her of another story of a,  
„massive heart attack, totally unexpected.“

The voices loudly though.

„You are failing to support.“

„What is important? Others or you? You know the right answer: others.“

„I can’t change anything,“ she wails at the voices.

„Can I influence my life?“

„What has been and is important to me? How do I make me happy?“

Another day at work she speaks to a colleague – another concerned colleague who recommends time off, away from her roles: Curriculum Team Leader General Education, Curriculum Team Leader Teacher Training, College nominee for the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review. Sort herself, her London flat. Continuing without questioning is not always the most appropriate way to move on. „Explain your work load Claire, it is unreasonable. You are ill because of it and because of your illness the work-load is increasingly heavy. Go home and get well.“ Medication has dried out her tears. She feels no thing. The volume of the voices is turned down.

She has long struggled to find life's beauty. Life is of a person's imagination though. She does not exist. She wonders at the pain her death would cause. She loves her mother. She saw a mother's fear when she returned from hospital. How much more would she be asking of her mother to recover from her death? Too much? She can not be more than she is.

„Just be, Claire! Just be, Claire!“

She can not serve people in the ways she would like to. Can she survive this? She feels herself, going downwards, drowning. She wants death now. Her death would put an end to this, this being, the being that she can not „just be“. Going slowly now. Trying to do the best with who you are. Who are you? Shaped again.

Each experience cuts her a little deeper, shaving, peeling, picking away another layer of life. Soon there will be nothing of her life. She will have returned to no thing. Not long now. Why struggle on? Why struggle through living. She fails to find her lighter being. She does not deserve her parents, her past, her privileged past. She is who she is, she has done, what she has done, and she regrets. Shame is powerful. She wants to give too much. There is nothing for her, for her for herself. Emotionally bankrupt. Collapse brings relief.

One person who has tried desperately to find meaning. Reasons to keep going.  
Desperately hoping. Hoping from her worlds, meaningful phrases will form her anew,  
find her „right“ answers. But there are no answers, no right answers. There just isn't  
because there was never was.

Sleep.

Awake.

Can't. Can. Coffee, ... „Small Americano please!“

Can't. Can.

Overbearing.

Sleep.

Odd words only. Reasoned, formed narrative is for a later endeavour.

Tiredness seeps through her rot. Bulimia keeps her buoyant. Bingeing and vomiting.  
Provides her with reasons, and roles. Monday: chocolate, all you can eat. Goody!  
Tuesday: bread and cake, all you can eat. Yummy! Whoops up it comes! Wednesday:  
just push more food down, down and down some more. Clean up. Pushing down the

voices, the numbness, the self-hatred, the desire to be far away. This is just going on and on. Like life, on and on. On and on. No more, please, no more!

But on and on. She wants to hide. Hiding in layers of clothes. In shopping malls. Hiding from her father, her mother. Hiding from herself. If only she were thin, had the „right“ answers, perfect, she would be loved.

Would she? Panic. Does she want this, this love? So tired. So tired of fighting so hard, so, so hard, for what? To be loved. Is that all? It does not make sense. Any sense. It is ongoing messiness. Words and phrases that are meaningless. This is her life. Meaningless.

Her head aches. Everything swims. Fluid about her. Shame. Keep taking the punches. Really wanting the end. So tired. Tired of having to fight so hard. To fight so hard just to wake up. Always fighting alone.

Make a list. Where to start? At 1. ... ? What is 1.? „I“ How different are these symbols. There is so little between them. A tiny space. For some there are no differences: I, II, III, IV, ... I am, you are, he, she, it is, we are, here now, a person intent on undoing themselves. So many voices. Others outside of her now. Voices of a person who copes so far away. Voices of a person who mothers, who encourages, who goes to work and is embracing worlds of Further Education. Her voice is of a person spent bingeing and

purging. Drowning. Failing to swim. She is lost. In watery worlds, of tears, of her own vomit, of her own blood. Her wounds created her meanings. Her body rests alone.

### *Reflections*

„A vagrant“’s portrait“ speaks of multiple voices, across multiple times. In reading of my portrait I have a number of questions. What is the potency of this third person narrative? I might have reworked the third person pronouns, yet I choose to retain her. What does a third person pronoun do for my depiction of my pain? Most simply I gain sufficient distance from my pain in order to reflect. How does the present tense impact a sense of immediacy? I question the style of my writing. I ask of its contributions to my communication. Messages are communicated in both the content and the form of the portrait. There are multiple layers of constructive work. The first: the communication of distress. Memories of distress are remembered and this creates distress repeatedly. In addition I reflect and to encounter memories of experiences of distress.

The portrait is also concerned to show how a person does or does not differentiate their realities, those events that are seemingly exterior and those events that are of interior worlds. It might be suggested that the realities of the protagonist are undifferentiated, she is psychotic and delusional, unable to distinguish between her own views, her interior worlds and those for which tangible evidence exists outside of her imagination. For example cash register receipts remind me of the occasions she requested a „small Americano“.

Are inner and outer worlds distinguishable? If I assume they are, how might I distinguish between them? If I assume they are not, I have dissolved significant boundaries without due consideration on account I am suggesting there is no difference between inner and outer worlds. The words „inner“ and „outer“ are redundant. There is no need for them because there is no difference that they are needed to signify, delineate. Seemingly.

Yet I argue here that inner and outer worlds are distinguishable in my narrated realities and that noting the differences between the two are more nebulous affairs than at first might be suggested. Bipolar dichotomies, such as „inner/outer“ belie the complexity of the spectrum which I suggest exists between utter subjectivism, a person’s inner world and subjective objectivism, a person’s outer world. Although this work is beyond the scope of this thesis, I am touching upon how a person might access subjectivity. I find much of Dan Zahavi’s (2006) writing on subjectivity dense and demanding a great deal of background understanding of key twentieth century philosophers concerned with the struggles of phenomenology and existentialism. However his introduction to chapter four (2006, pp 73 - 98) is revealing and does much to support my notions of utter subjectivism, and subjective objectivism.

One of the decisive tasks facing a phenomenological investigation of subjectivity is to account for its givenness. How does subjectivity reveal or manifest itself?

Zahavi, 2006, p 73

My answer? This is a text that communicates a writer's emotions and their mourning for a past that is lost. She is resident in a present time that is lacking the qualities of times past. Times past she is remembering in a present time which, in comparison with times past, offer poor experiences. I am burdened. Weighted down as Winterson (2006) suggested she has been.

The temporal complexities of my narrative make it important for me to heed Denzin's recommendation.

To write visually is to produce a new form of the social text, a form that is itself part visual, part montage, and part cinematic. Such a text writes itself across its own subject matter, for example, mixing the printed text, which may be multi-columned, in multiple texts.

Denzin, in Ellis and Flaherty, 1992, p 25

It is as though I am watching a film of myself. I am played by another whom I come to know. A narrator tells my story in 'A vagrant's portrait' to indicate most powerfully inner and outer worlds. I am seeking to speak out, draw out a narrative. I have sought to exorcise an inner noxious content through an outer presence. Thus I anaesthetise the pain of my wound and the pains of the act of exorcism. I wonder if I have created an illusion sufficiently so that I believe my „inner“ and „outer“ segregation.



„Illusion“ suggests to me an inner world, experience, is presented as an outer reality. The deception at play is significant in the efficacy of the illusory effects tried for within „A vagrant“’s portrait“. Illusion or otherwise depends upon perspective and a person’s belief in possibilities. For me the possibilities of a narrator proffer a means to tell a story that otherwise is too painful, I can not commit to, I can not bear to tell again. I am interested by affairs of inner and outer worlds and how when distinguished, particularly within this text, their illusion contributes to textual efficacy or not. Inner and outer worlds are residues of organising practices, the organising practices by which „A vagrant“’s portrait,“ communicates its meanings, and experiences. Strong data of outer worlds regulate the portrayal of inner worlds/realities.

Considering inner and outer worlds/realities, whether or not they are distinguishable, and how a person might negotiate their inner and outer worlds/experiences, how narratives of such experiences might be drawn out, is significant in exploring influences upon a person’s education. My experiences of worlds around me, outwith me, impacted my inner worlds such that ultimately my inner worlds changed. The stories I would tell of myself and the ways I would tell them were shaped in order to fit the illusions I believed my outer worlds manifest for me. Outer worlds may be shaped as social impacts over time. Martusewicz and Reynolds (1994) are illustrative as they question, „the social foundations of education,“ (pp 2-3).

It is an invitation to look at education both socially and historically as well as practically, that is, from the inside (the complex processes, methods, and relations

that affect individuals in schools, for example) within the context of the outside (the larger social, economic, and political forces that have affected those processes over time).

Martusewicz and Reynolds, 1994, p 2

These writers are also concerned to work at the boundaries of what might define inner from/and outer worlds, to question those, „boundaries around certain practices in our lives,” (Martusewicz and Reynolds, 1994, p 3). Such boundaries inscribe and delineate the discourses, of the social conditions/environments, in which education/learning takes place. Martusewicz and Reynolds note the constitutive/manufacture of these boundaries and the effects of such boundaries practices.

We could say that these organizing practices, discourses, and institutions help us to decide or create what is inside and what is outside, what is true and what is false, what exists and what does not exist, what is good and what is bad, and on and on. There are boundaries, but only to the extent that we have created them as such, through our conversations, our arguments, our metaphors, our struggles, and thus to the extent that they are always in question, they are always subject to change. Thus the inside can quickly become the outside and vice versa because there is no essential foundation that exists outside our attempts to name the world, to read and to write about it, to define it.

„Boundaries“ and their effects emphasise how the thesis whole might be seen to sit at the boundaries of a particular education. Furthermore how my responses and readers“ responses to this work move from being within an accepted realm, within, cast into consideration for a particular award (Doctor of Philosophy in the field of Education), to an unacceptable exterior, cast out. The use of personal experiences of suicidal ideation and their testimonies are draw in and upon here, not so much for their flamboyant attraction, but because they are of appropriate depth of feeling. This metaphorical/allegorical work towards when a person, struggling desperately to make sense of their worlds is otherwise unable to demonstrate, speak of their need to be received by others. The focus of this work is not what the text itself holds but what and the ways a reader“s imagination is incited and excited. The story of planned suicide is secondary in this work, on this occasion.

The primacy of „A vagrant“s portrait“ is the stylistic devices to communicate a person expelled from both themselves and from those around them. „Ostracism“ may be experienced in two ways. The lack of belonging, along with burdensomeness and fatal self harm (contributing factors of suicide too) and the perceived rejection of the thesis, the vehicle in which the story is told, on account it fails to belong to realms of academia.

I hold David Silverman“s reminder that qualitative work of emotionalist models is an endeavour to harness perceptions, meanings and emotions, individual views/perspectives

upon their life's possibilities is prized (Silverman, 2011). Reminders of the methodological terrain I am endeavouring to travel my journey in are important to me and to my story. Not least because they demonstrate awareness of contextualising voices in my endeavour to carry out this thesis of qualitative values but also because I feel I can belong. I can belong to my story.

As I page through the work of Martusewicz and Reynolds compilation (1994) I realise my work resonates much in many of their chapters, yet the resounding encouragement for me in many chapters they offer is the struggle of achieving critical work (Martusewicz and Reynolds, 1994, pp 2-19).

Once, in the summer of 2007, I produced a poster of my proposed thesis/research for a conference of research students (the University of Birmingham, School of Education, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007). Part of my preparation for this poster included an attempt to articulate my reasons for the form of the poster I proposed to offer. I sought to explain the decisions I had made in choosing which materials my poster offered and which materials I had jettisoned in putting my poster together. What influences had shaped my criteria for inclusion and exclusion of material? I had arrived quickly at the poster's form. On individual slips of paper I wrote significant words, for example: validity of academic contributions. I then stuck these randomly on a larger background sheet. The background was a plastic sheet. The form of the poster I believed communicated well my ideas. Those ideas that were strong, powerful in my world, my inner worlds informed the choices I had made in selecting phrases and words and the ways these should be

represented as a poster. Yet when I first endeavoured to communicate my choices my worlds felt disorganised. The poster appeared on reflection as slips of paper in disarray, an offering of a person who had shown little concern for their work's appearance, the very antithesis of my hopes for the poster. I had wanted a representation to carry across the emotional turmoil that instigated and segued from my proposed thesis. The appearance of the work belied my desire to achieve a poster that sought to challenge conventional forms of work. My plastic backed apparition did not convince me it was sufficiently conversant in, „a new form of the social text,“ (Denzin, in Ellis and Flaherty, 1992, p 25).

I began a narrative of explanation. When the time came to show my poster, depicting aspects of my proposed research, the writing, which had never become more than a series of paragraphs seemed overly abstruse. I disposed of my work. Abandonment was preferable than risk an accusation of impoverished communications. At the time I believed my writing provided an excuse for ideas that would expel me. Therefore the less I claimed the better. Yet over the past years I have come to realise that although my truths may ultimately harm – harm my hope to achieve here, my truths are the only ways I can know my worlds, both inner and outer worlds, and to tell of them fully, and deeply and that is the most profound wish for this thesis.

In shaping this text of questioning and offering explanations and reflections of the writing within this section I help myself to belong to this thesis. I revisit the writing of my boundaries and borderlands. I endeavour to qualify, offer greater explanation so that

meanings may seem a little clearer. Yet I realise I need to compromise, to risk being seen and discounted for the values I hold, yet to offer my hand to a reader to help them into my world and ultimately to help myself to understand, to discover a sense of my own experiences and understandings.

I now question where my concerns are. How I recognise and represent my own boundary practices. Where am I encouraging a reader to search if there are to engage me, encounter me fully here? I argue for the values in shaping work that is of a struggle for critique of the nature of academic writing in the field of education. The opening three paragraphs of the subsequent sub-section are a direct address to boundaries, such as my ghoulish uncertainty may be called to greater clarity. „Boundary work“ in the coming section is concerned to note how I am bound by my narrative. How might I appreciate the text produced? How might I expect others to appreciate this text? I need to endeavour to understand the boundaries within and from which the text’s form is defined.

I realise that I have arrived at my limits, defined by spaces beyond. Such spaces define my position and the person I am and the academic credentials of this thesis. Asking how I recognise and realise my boundaries posits I turn back such practices of my boundaries. I have held up an unspoken mirror. Unspoken in that I tacitly assume there is some aspect of the work’s assumptions that posit I turn back, reflect so that I may explore my position, the criteria of my work, the means by which I am representing the work’s claims to knowledge as valid, as robust.

*Boundary work*

„How might I know you, recognise you, I ask? Recognition rewards validity of the thesis“ methods/ways in researching personal experiences and setting them down in the ways chosen. Are you where there are openings into liminalities, borders, other places, alternative spaces? Are you where inclusion comes from exclusion? Are you between exteriorities and interior forms?

You fashion the form and form the fashion by which you“ll be seen. You are a generative presence, a house and a home, insulation and inner being. You are at the juxtaposition between simulacra and sense data – the (re)presentation and the realities to which the (re)presentation speaks.

Without your presence(s) the sophistication of the (re)presentation should be lost. The (re)presentation would become just one more component of, task of, the realities of a research text, a doctoral thesis. You though are to suggest where and how readings are to begin. You are makeready – carry letterpress by which thinking shall be enabled. You profess nuances, offer the sophistication of the testimonies you hold. You ululate, the Furies whisper you in, ... „Vanguard! Of the gaps, where understanding shall follow. You delineate the horizontal and vertical forms for the page, of the portraiture (dis)tempered. This is how you might be recognised.“

Boundaries focus the viewer, direct viewings. They are strongly suggestive of the parameters of an author's concerns. They delineate one person's way of seeing and later knowing their experiences. I have made specific and measured choices in offering my narratives. I am asking a reader to consider the specific and measured choices they are making in reading my narratives. This is about directing gaze across the vista of a person's work.

It feels as though my life threads through so many textures of feelings/emotions. It is appropriate I endeavour to tell of my livedness/experiences in ways that offer up allow those multiple textures to speak. This text challenges. Yet it endeavours to propose means by which values of its ways offer the multiple and corrugated walks of livedness, more wholesomely, are more appreciable. This work advocates „bricolage“ (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004, p 24).

... bricoleurs work to avoid pronouncements of final truth. Because of the changing and impermanent nature of the world, bricoleurs propose compelling insights into their engagement with reality and the unresolved contradictions that characterize such interactions ...

Kincheloe and Berry, 2004, p 24

As bricoleurs plan their escape from the limitations of monological knowledge, they envision forms of research that transcend reductionism. In this context, they



understand that complexity sets the stage for the need for the bricolage, the necessity of new ways to understand the complications of social, cultural, psychological, and educational life.

Kincheloe and Berry, 2004, pp 24-5

Knowledge production for Kincheloe and Berry is complex, (2004, p 25). It requires a complexity of methods informed by, „diverse paradigms of interpretation,” (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004, p 25). For this work it is not only the, „richness and depth,” (Denzin and Lincoln, in Kincheloe and Berry, 2004, p 25) of experiences which must be held, it is also the conditions/environs in which such richness and depth are appreciated. It is necessary to explicate a „literacy of complexity” of this work (Kincheloe and Berry, 2004, p 25).

The force of this writing is my desire that „I” am recognised „I” claim my reader”s/s” attention. „The presence of the voice, which the reader is meant to experience as the voice of a real rather than a fictional person, is the mark of a desire not to be silenced or defeated, to impose oneself on an institution of power and privilege from the position of the excluded, the marginal, the subaltern, ...” (Beverley, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, pp 258-9).

Methodologically this work orients to interpretivist stances in knowledge production/research. The work is of ethnographic traditions specifically. „Ethnography is that form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the

ways of life of the writer and those written about,” (Denzin, 1997, p xi). The prime work of my interpretivist stance is to offer possible meanings to experiences, and to offer possibilities of meanings to experiences. „Possible“ meanings: the writing offers explicitly more than one reading. „Possibilities“ of meanings suggests that the writing might seem to offer more than one reading. In the latter instance meaning is the privilege of a reader and not necessarily a writer’s. This is to emulate the words of Norman Denzin with respect to providing insight into the work of writing in ethnographic practices.

A theory of writing is also a theory of interpretive (ethnographic) work. Theory, writing, and ethnography are inseparable material practices. Together they create the conditions that locate the social inside the text. Hence, those who write culture also write theory. Also, those who write theory write culture.

Denzin, 1997, p xii

### *Final words*

It is paradoxical that a section of writing concerned to show a person cast out and cutting off, is also concerned to develop a contextualisation – a fitting in – that demonstrates the aptness of the ways in which that person is „cast out“ and „cutting off“. However perhaps this is not so strange. Once an individual has committed suicide they are then drawn back into a society, into groups that seek to explain the circumstances of their death, for example the group of people who are concerned, at the very least, to certificate death.

This work though is an endeavour to explain circumstances of a life through an appreciation of the cultural circumscriptions of death practices. It is a challenge to the irony it takes a person's death for their life to be appreciated/recognised.

## **A VOICE OF MY OWN**

### *Starting from where I am*

Moving towards a place of appreciating the experiences I have had and those things I do have. Seeing my worlds for the places they are. Garner courage to write these narratives as they are. Accepting the possible outcome, the possibilities from offering emotive narratives that seem in many instances less than finished.

The thesis has been written in the first instance as a continuous text. It has been a process of collecting notes, scripts and texts I have stored since the time I first began as a postgraduate student at the University of Birmingham and I wrote of my desire to explore experiences of emotions in education.

It is mid-December 2009, I take a week's holiday from my job as Care Assistant and I am now looking up. I do believe I might celebrate the work I am involved in, find value in my work as a care assistant, my experiences. It may be possible for me to listen carefully and to hear my words, my voices within. I question. Am I starting to be „real“ – all, „rubbed“ off such as the Skin Horse (Williams, 1992)?

This work is to show the importance of acknowledging and exploring the past and in considering (possibilities of) a future. In 2007 I wrote in a journal of my desire to move on, to risk disclosure, to produce an endangering narrative; at the very least to appreciate the position from which I was starting from.

I look back through my journals. Self-loathing speaks loudly, punctuated by so few narratives of self-acceptance. „Accepting our embedded and embodied nature; accepting that our identities are tied up with the „constitutive communities“ ... in which we find ourselves; accepting that our values (are informative)...“ (Assiter, 2000, p 334). I question how my lack of accepting inscribes me.

I stand outside of myself, place myself as another, I experience myself as abusive and discriminatory. I am not committed to valuing her, Claire, as some feminists suggest is appropriate (Assiter, 2000, pp 329-346). Always berating Claire, for being too much and failing too greatly. Today though I beg of myself to consider the person she is with kindness and to accept her differences with humility. Commit to emancipatory values, work from and towards positions of self-acceptance. Commit to her as she would commit to others. She is not outside of the constitutive society that fathers the tongue of your self-debasement. Open your heart, open your eyes to yourself Claire!

Self-acceptance is a most knotted tongue. Deconstructive inquiry has benefited me an appreciation of the social and political circumstances and consequences of my knotted tongue's inquisition. If I am to hold securely with the alternatives from/of others, all others, I must hold with my own alternatives. Speak my own truths. Find my own voice for my own words.

In „Transforming Women“ I endeavoured to delineate what I see/saw as some of the main tenets of reflexivity given the writing that I have read. I seek to move these ideas on in

this section to practise a reflexivity of „discomfort“ (Pillow, 2003, p 188). Working with the limits and the flaws of this work, is not to profess such frailties as intended in order to show one person’s reality in their truthful ways, but to appreciate the limits as restrictive factors of the work. Wanda Pillow explores the work of writers who have endeavoured to interrupt reflexivity, „... – rending the knowing of their selves or their subjects as uncomfortable and uncontainable. These authors are engaging in what I would term uncomfortable reflexivity – a reflexivity that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous,” (Pillow, 2003, p 188). In one way this gives the work strength. Its limits are acknowledged, however in another way this provides a reader with a ready-made arsenal not only to discredit the work but also to discredit the person who has produced the work. Furthermore on account this work is of personal stories such negative critique is likely to instil fear, not only the flaws and frailties of the work *per se*, but the possible shaming that discredited personal stories can evoke. This work is shaped by the person I am allowing myself to be, the resources I am allowing her access to. In offering my stories I am censoring their content and their form, mediating the content and the form that might be used to shame. This work is showing a reflexivity not only of a dialectical acknowledgement of the researcher’s privilege in scoping arguments, offering empathic engagement with the researched and claiming the limits of the research text’s voice and those significant in the construction of the research text. It is also to illustrate reflexivity as, „confounding disruption – at times even a failure of our language and practices,” (Pillow, 2003, p 192). Wanda Pillow encourages me to, „challenge the representations we come to while at the same time acknowledging the political need to represent and find meaning,” (Pillow, 2003, p 192).

Uncomfortable reflexivity, then, is not about better methods, or about whether we can represent people better but, as Visweswaran states, “whether we can be accountable to people’s struggles for self-representation and self-determination” ... - including our own selves. This is not easy or comfortable work and thus should not be situated as such. The qualitative research arena would benefit from more “messy” examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research.

Pillow, 2003, p 193

Catharsis involves risking knowing my alternative forms, submitting writing for the scrutiny of others. In doing so I am asking for a reader’s generosity, humility. I am asking my reader to forgive me, and in the first instance I am my only reader.

Censorship in this work has involved removing the emphractic from the skins of my lives. Believing in a life that might one day be sufficiently robust to swallow others’ negativity and still believe I might nourish myself. It is to feel robust and to hope to continue to feel robust. A strength: recommending my understanding that for some this work will excoriate mediating their discord and for others the work will resonate meriting their accord of kinship. Morwenna Griffiths speaks to this notion (1995, pp 32-45). She

begins her recommendation that listening to others segues from the premise, „I am worth listening to ...,” (Griffiths, 1995, p 32).

This final section is of a voice, a person committed to self-effacement, to break a habit of cloaking shame and to purge the hideous in a written text that might ultimately help me to realise a person who desperately seeks to listen for and hear her own stories with empathy. This work reminds me powerfully of the experiences I managed and mismanaged, from which I gained and lost, felt nourished and eaten away by.

Time passes. I am satisfied that memoried forms are sufficient sustenance to contribute a robust presence. The ersatz of lives aborted, abandoned, deposited as vulnerable, rudiments of scripts, writing experiments, those intended assignment submissions of a number of years. In working through my phrases, seeing the pages of possibilities gaping, my vagrant imagination takes me to consider how it is I am now sufficiently disencumbered from the selves, the bodies, the feelings of lived experiences that inscribed a weight I struggled to hold. I have committed to offer to the gaze of others, who may or may not offer acceptance of the person/s undressed before them.

Sorting and removing to alternative places artefacts of my lives once lived, it is not only about physical onus, it is also about writing out of the self. Freeing my imagination sufficiently for the self to be played out on the page, the self that has/had fostered behaviours of pain to be made over, forgiven in a commitment made through an endeavour to understand (Blair, Holland and Sheldon, 1995, pp 3-7). The written



practices here have been about joining together fragmentary narratives of personal experiences, or of a being into a unified whole so that the resultant thesis might be read as one. Unity, the fragments belonging together, drawing upon each other and complimenting each other in one sense provides a salve of the wrenches of laying down injurious experiences. Writing is about passing the past, seeing that passing in action sufficiently so that the present is informed.

If only I understood the globe itself, complete, perfect, unique, is a story. Science is a story. History is a story. These are stories we tell ourselves to make ourselves come true.

Winterson, 2006, p 145

Let me crawl out from under this world I have made. It doesn't need me any more. Strangely, I don't need it either. I don't need the weight. Let it do. There are reservations and regrets, but let it go.

Winterson, 2006, p 146

Telling personal stories, autobiographic work, autobiography, auto/biography, autobiographical novels, autoethnography, ... there are a plethora of terms that might be employed in talking about/describing this thesis. More simply however I am concerned

to endeavour to lay an academic lens over felt personal experiences in order to provide them with a shape by which they might be handled and handed over in processes of negotiating more positive attitudes towards myself. I am interested in how I story myself how I represent myself. This work has also been about becoming cognisant of particular framing narratives shaping the socio-cultural milieux within which each lived experiences becomes (Bochner and Ellis, 2002, pp 87-232).

The stories a person's physiques tell are notably significant to me here. In considering particular framing narratives I seek to explore the strengths and the coercion against which I believe I may be rallying and those strengths and coercion I may be enacting and reproducing, exacting upon others. This is to consider the prejudices of the work. Such bias that defines the work but also influences its limits. There are significant writers who have explored allied concepts, for example power in educational research. A collection of writings, edited by Andrew Gitlin (1994) has served me well and I find much in the work that resonates, that excoriates, and reminds me to continue to write my story in my way. Morality, ethics and social justice are important issues to consider in finding my voice, empowering my voice.

This section of work is about developing courage in order to set down my own stories. Moreover in ways that I believe struggle within an uncomfortable reflexivity, in ways that challenge the parameters of conventions which might otherwise demand I remain silent and research others' stories in ways that are prescribed me. This section of writing is also to acknowledge significant writers in my work whose voices have given me hope

of developing, finding my own. Writers whose work has resonated closely with my personal experiences have been initiatives to explore my own self portraits. In previous sections I made reference to Linda Bell (2003). I have been drawn to her tales of struggle as a feminist philosopher during the nineteen seventies and eighties when patriarchal dominance in the studies of philosophy had been uppermost. I am encouraged by her words to find my own.

Susan Bordo (1993) has been significant in my consideration of the complexities and difficulties some groups, mainly women, yet some men, experience in confronting their physical presence(s). She considers women's bodies as inscription of socio-cultural prescriptions, proscriptions. She shows how the encumbering of socio-cultural significances that affect and effect embodied lived experiences manifest in disordered eating. Bordo tells of the „pathologising“ (Bordo, 1993) of the anorexic's or bulimic's body. She explores contributions a critical gaze upon particular Western traditions reveals in understanding causes of the diseases of Anorexia and Bulimia. Accordingly pathologising bodies of those experiencing disordered relationship with their food does little to acknowledge the complexity and the difficulties of those experiences. Bordo seeks a more consummate account welcoming knowledges from a variety of perspectives necessary if adequate aid is to be provided to those affected by harmful relationships which disorders of eating visit upon some lives. I find her writing's personal honesty encouraging.

... my own disordered relations with food had never reached the point of anorexia or bulimia, and I was not prepared for the discovery that large numbers of my students were starving, bingeing and purging, and filled with self-hatred and desperation. I began to read everything I could find on eating disorders. I found that while the words and diaries of patients were enormously illuminating, most of the clinical theory was not very helpful. The absence of cultural perspective – particularly relating to the situation of women – was striking.

Bordo, 1993, p 137

Bordo is a feminist, concerned particularly for the cultural significance in understanding stories of physique. It is from this position she posits a complex of explanations is needed to engage more satisfyingly with the questions and struggles physique may pose for some. Bordo locates her work in America and draws upon writing she first produced in the nineteen eighties and although these parameters limit her writing, I believe strongly her messages are significant to my truths of today – a young woman in the UK. It is important I write openly now of my own struggles.

### *Eating disorder*

It is the summertime of 2005. I have been signed off work<sup>5</sup> and signed in as an outpatient at Phoenix Wing<sup>6</sup>, St. Ann's. Throughout the summer I have struggled to negotiate my

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<sup>5</sup> At the time of this experience I was employed as a college lecturer in an institution of Further and Higher Education in North East London.

<sup>6</sup> Phoenix Wing at the time of this experience – 2005, was a unit with both inpatient and outpatient facilities in the treatment of disordered eating. Phoenix Wing was an annex of St. Ann's Hospital, North London.

encumbering body. This was not a fresh skirmish. Yet on this occasion I have incurred the attention of a medical discourse, and it has been recommended I am assessed so that the extent of the disorder is known. Previously my struggles have been my concern only and my physique or the lack of it yet my perceived abundance of it has now drawn the attention of another with explicit reference to my eating. Since the age of twelve years I have silently hated my body, my eating.

I am in the waiting room awaiting assessment; to be told who I am – awarded a label for my starving, purging and strict exercise regime of the past months. Waste and wasting is every apparition. I soon realise that I am grossly out of place, a gross outpatient. Grossly tall and grossly well. I continue to wait though. I am endeavouring to be a good patient.

I am seen and it is deemed it is my body I am „ill“with. I am diagnosed. The assessment is inscripted I am offered further appointments with dieticians and a follow up consultation in some months. I have symptoms to be eradicated. I leave with a promise a copy of the assessment will be sent to the referring practitioner.

Some days later I collect my life. One and a half sides of A4; a copy of the assessment sent to the referring practitioner was also sent to me. I had not expected this. I read my life in a letter from Consultant Psychiatrist of St. Ann's to the Consultant Psychotherapist of Thorpe Coombe, North East London Mental Health Trust. It might be useful I realise I am *Bulimia nervosa*.

Receiving a diagnosis of a named eating disorder confers me a narrative of identification, a series of experiences that are akin to subjectivities professed of/by others within the same category. I experience a homogenising effect. I recognise I am most similar if not the same as a number of others who have confessed to their „sinful“ behaviours.

„Disordered eaters“ are gendered by their stereotyping. „The overwhelming majority of people with eating disorders are heterosexual women, but a figure commonly quoted is that an estimated 10 per cent of all cases of eating disorders are male,“ (Shipton, 2004, p 4). It is not necessarily the marked difference in incidence between the female and male sufferers but the assumptions that arise from such statistics. For example the opening of a personal story begins with a quotation from one of Britain’s authorities on disordered eating, Janet Treasure, „Your help is needed and is critical for your daughter’s health,“ (Treasure, in Smith, 2004, p 19). In a self-help guide of Schmidt and Treasure (2002), the traveller on a journey to recovery is depicted as female, albeit it a very robust female dressed in shorts and muscle abound; an impression of an unisexed individual scaling their nemesis.

Statistics of incidence are useful in that in that they describe the number of new cases of noted disordered eating per annum typically. However statistics of incidence also sequester marked caveats. A person is allocated a gender: male or female. And a person can not be of both male and female. A single person has been reported a disordered eater and thus categorised singly. A person has recognised themselves and has been recognised in a predetermined set of symptoms and signs, such that they may be included or excluded as a disordered eater, and once determined as such are forever marked by the

tattoo such labelling effects. I might recover from experiences of disordered eating however always I shall carry the marks, the stigma of such spoiling. However recovery suggests I jettison my label outwardly. Yet without her presence no others shall legitimate my words alone.

Statistics indicate an investigator's concern (to quantify); their intention to acknowledge an arising number or reported cases. The consequences however of categorising and the derivations of statistics of incidence: the „diseased“ now have a suitably enhanced vocabulary – an enhanced epistemology of self. This in the first instance offers comfort. For example I am now validated chronically ill. On account of disordered eating manifest over a period of months I am diagnosed diseased by the Consultant Psychiatrist's assessment. Prior to such acknowledgement by a healthcare practitioner, I existed in the margins of social groupings on account I could no longer manage social transitions equated with those of their social groupings' normative activities (Billington, Hockey and Strawbridge, 1998). I was unfit and was signed off, „unfit for work“. My label: Bulimia explains „me“ satisfactorily not only to others but to myself. Yet I must live up to my label because to shed my protection means I must negotiate a re-entry into my work place and that will mean re-entry into the space that incited my dis-ease in the first instances. My work is now to become the diagnosis satisfactorily so that I do not have to move into the second instance – the lasting instance, such as my label evokes. I am „facing the discomfort of the attached stigma associated with acknowledged dis-ease, (the imputed) wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one, and at the same time to impute some desirable but undesired attributes, often of a supernatural cast,

..." (Goffman, 1990/1963, p 16). Although I am stigmatised on account of Bulimia I am also excused normative activities - work. The discourse effecting the categorisation and the category would become the ways I am known and I should shape myself in these ways. Bulimia is most practised in heeding shape requisites. The differences, the idiosyncrasies of my behaviours, my individuality are lost to the representation of the assessment. I must fit myself to the narrative I have been allocated (Moulding, 2003, pp 57-74).

My assessment sketched me a narrative by which I could identify myself and be identified it provided me a legitimate self. Twenty seven years<sup>7</sup> has been reduced to little more than a single page of A4 typewritten script. Educational achievements, occupation, significant relationships, family details, identities, embodied experiences in lives, living that had seemed to resource me had consumed me. Taken in. Succinctly put in place, replaced, inscribed in Bulimia. It is noticeable how Bulimia is offered as a narrative masquerading transparency: third person, stereotypical in her behaviours, sequential ordering of events and authenticated by Consultant Psychiatrist undersigning. The language/diction of my assessment and my reading of it epitomised my criticism of Psychiatry's account of disordered eating. A style that emulates, „Western Rationality, including scientific thought, (which) distorts and leaves partial our understandings of nature and social relations by devaluing contextual modes of thought and emotional components of reasons," (Harding, 1991, p 118). Following assessment I have failed to

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<sup>7</sup> This is, „true" to the time at which I received a diagnosis of *Bulimia nervosa*. I write of these experiences five years hence, aged thirty two.



continue to struggle to hope for a return to an identity that involved working as a college lecturer. Bulimia has surfaced powerfully I have become liminoid.

Time has passed since my initial appointment at the Phoenix Wing. I attend my final appointment. I have gained a great deal of weight and the burden of sadness is unbearable. Now I am no longer signed off but resigned. I am no longer employed. I have resigned from my commitment to slender ideals. I am ungainly weighty flesh. My embodiment speaks and seeps from this inscription. Failures and waste of a life given to gorging and purging in order to attain an ideal that never was.

### *Speaking out*

Images of death and emaciated forms intrigue me. I am occupied with the significance of these ideals. Jonathan Jones' writing (2003) illustrates my lived experiences in a commentary upon the work of Hans Holbein, particularly his work of a dead Christ prior to ascension. Ascension's promise is the benefit of death. The insatiable chimera: Bulimia only death, as is Erasmus' „Silenus“ in, „Praise of Folly,“ (Jones, 2003, p 31). The metaphorical value of Silenus is two fold. It is an epithet, „what is death at first sight, .. is life if you look within, ... , and life is death,“ (Jones, 2003, p 31). It is also an image of the unmasking of the hideous japes and the revelation of my truths. It becomes not so much what is looked upon, but how it is looked upon. It is from whose tongue the observations of „me“ shall be indicted. Truth is within the grotesque qualities of, „Silenus“. The gross apparition of Christ's body if the, „locus of self-formation: an individual ethos is constituted via work on the body,“ (Diprose, 1994, p 22). Allowing

myself a voice has arisen in consideration of a body that can not speak in the ways I would necessarily like it to.

For the week of the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> December 2009 I hired a car; I summoned courage and returned to the General Practice I had registered in haste a year earlier. I felt pleased when I made an appointment with a doctor, even more pleased when I realised I had been afforded an appointment for the following day – 24<sup>th</sup> December 2009. Would I attend the GP appointment I had made? Would I be able to deliver the lines I had rehearsed, lines requesting a prescription? I felt it would be easier to ask precisely for what I wanted to achieve from that GP appointment. A general request for help would lay me too vulnerable.

At the beginning of December during an experiential group session of an „Introductory Course in Group Analysis“ I had learned how mute my own emotional toil had left me. I found it most difficult to contribute to the group, to respond to others“ comments unless I was invited directly to do so. Moreover these invitations were inquiries about my own experiences, my own past experiences, and how I was feeling in the group about my own past experiences. I believed from that weekend“s experiential components I was being advised to endeavour to re-engage with individual therapy and gain additional support if for no thing else than to awaken the possibility of becoming more available in the experiential group. In addition individual therapy and medication/additional support, may help me to be able to satisfy those desires of mine that seemed to manifest in highly destructive behaviours. Truthfully during my drive home I felt angry. I felt inadequate.

Ultimately though I decided to work in accordance with the guidance, I perceived I had been told.

On this occasion though my journey has not been one of a hoped for achievement but one of being able to fail, and to feel that my failure, my failing is not „me“ but an action, a specific attempt, an enterprise that didn't turn out as I had anticipated. To „be“ on a journey is to change. To reject and be rejected and accept the conditions/environment of the rejection alongside the rejection too. Moreover my journey of learning to fail is about remaining with my failure, my sense of defeat such that it does not morph into an expression of personal emptiness.

I realised I wanted another to hold me, to bear my weight, to love me, because to do those things for myself was outside of the feminine role I felt I was expected to play. Caring for me was becoming responsible and independent yet spoke of a person reticent to engage with others, particularly others whom I was expected to engage.

There are understandably a lot of contradictory areas in girls' lives today, for instance, many of them want more economic independence and opportunity and plan to return to work after they have had children. But at the same time they cannot simply reject their, „feminine“ training and their expectations of traditional womanhood demand to be satisfied.

Sharp, 1976, p 304

Yet, even without the complication of contradictory „feminine training“ against expectations for responsible behaviour and independence, I couldn’t and still do not believe I can play a feminine role of domesticity, child-care. This role predicates a physique, an appearance that could attract the masculine soloist for my anticipated, yet never realised, feminine accompaniment.

Sue Sharp’s words (1976) were produced around the time I was born, albeit my birth was an event in Adelaide, South Australia of the late nineteen seventies. However although Sharp’s work (1976) is based in the United Kingdom, similar cultural effects might construe my life given I was born to parents of UK origins. My parents were married to each other at the time of my birth, both were teachers, my mother a primary teacher, my father a secondary teacher, with one child before my birth. I have realised that it is important to me to reproduce my parents’ young family, for me to play a role similar to my mother’s: assume a working life of a professional, yet marry and produce young children. Certainly this is what my brother has achieved: assumed a working life as a professional, married - twice. My brother works to maintain the status of married. He has fathered and raised young children, an elder boy and a younger girl. This is a very powerful precedence in how I might be expected to negotiate my adult years.

Since so much of feminine self-identity is internalized in childhood, it will be modified neither quickly nor easily. In order to modify it, it is very important for women to understand and make sense of both old and new ideas about femininity,

to share understanding with other women and to want to change their situation and their relationships.

Sharp, 1976, p 307

I revisit the exploratory and experimental narrative I wrote about psychotherapeutic experiences between January 2001 and January 2008 (Sutton, 2008, p 166). Previously I had recognised and attributed much of my, „feminine self-identity, ... in childhood (experiences),“ (Sharp, 1976, p 307). However until the moment I write now, I had not recognised and articulated my need to be held, supported by another, to be touched, to be loved, for the person who I then was, a young woman, alone. I was failing to care for me, all of me of course I was alone. I believed I would only find my voice if I were to be sufficiently supported by another.

Just hold me. Hold me as a parent carries the ageing infant. Let me be in the warmth a while longer. I need warmth to start, to tease apart the knots and reveal, my beginning. Breathe life into my encumbering numbness. Your embrace is needed. Support my weight. Hold my life forces that become me. Loose my still tongue so that words may fall into me and through me, so that I may speak me. Please hold me some. They said you would know how to hold me. A grip that would know how not to hurt. How not to bruise. Bearing my unbearable weight. Please, just hold me.

I had transferred my desires of my mother loving me, for me, to a psychotherapist. It was his attention I was now keen to attract, to be good enough for him. Perhaps here I would receive those aspects of mothering I had failed to appreciate previously. I had another mother.

I missed weekly psychotherapy appointments dreadfully in the time when I left London to work in Southampton at the beginning of 2008. Throughout 2008 and the beginning of 2009 my need to attract attention became increasingly important. Bulimia may be an illustration of personal emptiness and concomitant increasing failure to attend to me whilst satisfying an increasing desire to be attended to by another, a loving other. The more I sought to be desired by others, the more I emptied out. I perceived myself as undesirable. Bulimia's behaviours were undesirable but they were and specific and functional. They are particular behaviours of mine, they were and are not my entirety.

I admit I am forever hungry for attention. I misplace hunger. I am hungry to attract attentions, an appetite to appease my own need to love me, to be loved. Vulnerability divests a need to be loved, to be attended to, to be held. My failure to attend to me has resulted in feelings, inexplicable actions that have both surprised and ashamed me.

*Writing exercises*

I focus now upon excerpts of my own writing. The first is taken from a piece I wrote in order to try to uncover experiences of a desire to be attended to, which at the time of writing I did not understand. I wrote in an endeavour to make meaning which would in some way provide me a plausible account of my feelings. The writing also demonstrates how stylistic devising may illustrate awkward love, feelings and behaviours that are otherwise difficult to understand, to bring meaning, insight to and notably difficult to voice.

Laurel Richardson's work (1990) has been significant in developing my own beliefs that writing is a process of discovery. Her work continues to be informative. Here I develop my own writing in the ways of Richardson, particularly when Laurel Richardson and Ernest Lockridge (2004) chose to explore meanings of themselves and their worlds in a volume that merged sociological analysis and literary tradition. I too am engaged by styles of writing that blur traditions of literature and sociology in pursuit of excavating new understandings of experiences.

The extracts of writing exercises offer portraits of a person attempting to practise loving, loving and attending to her own needs/desires, writing about feelings that seem to defy coherence. The extracts illustrate meanings being tried out. What might loving appear to be if it is allowed its voices, if loving seeps onto pages, is allowed to remain on these pages, in these ways. I have become me. I may be able to understand more of me. Following each extract I attempt analyses.

*Extract one*

I'm not used to feelings. They unsettled, undo me. I am here now undone.

Before I resigned. Before I have given up on myself again. Before I had moved to this house. Before I had really started to undo myself significantly, undress myself and expose the softness of vulnerability to others. I registered at a General Practice because I recognised – at least I thought I did that I was undoing.

God arrives in the waiting-room.

Oh God. Please not me.

„Claire Sutton“.

Shit that is me. My name is Bulimia, but most know me as „Claire“ well, „Claire Sutton“ according to God. God and I am undoing. And now I am undoing somemore.

I do sour expression well. So I do. But deep inside I feel dread and then, ... nervousness. Fuck, and fuck. I am finding God attractive. This person is attractive to me. Fuck and fuck again. Is that really appropriate? Yes. I begin to stare. Fuck, fuck and fuck – perhaps if only.



The consulting room door is closed and a voice asks of me

„Well, what can I do for you?“

„Um, ..?“

I am referred to the Primary Care Project and Prozac prescribed. Dispensed within five minutes, possibly ten? Words? „Um, ... fuck.“ Hardly And the solution is there in that awkward gratuitous. Nothing. I am not sure how to respond to. Ellipsis is eloquent and considered as that.

Infatuation takes moments to become and then lingers, and lingers, and gnaws insanity on toothless gums – Bulimia does no thing for dental health. Tendrils of saliva hanging loosely from gnathic prominence, thereafter I am chewing on what I can not bite. As the edentate roll food residues together in hope of beginning to digest them; their mouths with out teeth to function otherwise. I guess that is what happens when I am undone and my own arms are failing to hold me in.

Sometime later that afternoon I can't remember Infatuation's face. Perhaps I do not care that I can not remember. Another lost event. Another event done, left in the past. An unknown presence of an unknown past. I am now residing in stupified existence. I fill the next box and bag for Thursday and then Friday, local charity shops have promised to collect the materials of my past.

I am Bulimia, I was Binge-eating when she first came to this country, but now I have developed. I think she was ten, may have been eleven, I can't remember when she first came to this country. I remember the time when she first delivered me. She had over-eaten, a tray of fruitcake, she had made it, had to eat it, all of it. She couldn't sit with me. I occupied her afternoon, provided achievement and solution. Achievement was important to her, I provided that. She was still hoping for a future with the dressings of „Pretty Woman“ when I became Bulimia. She was hoping for a career as a medic, a love, a marriage, a child, even children.

Slowly she has realised that „Pretty Woman“ was not hers and the places where she was looking for her career as a medic, a lover, a marriage, a child and even children were forever deserted places. She once joked there was more life on Mars. Yet she did not find humour. Overtime she has come to see that she now exists on the other side of the looking glass. I provided her with a new identity, an identity that excluded, debarred, but protected. She has grown close to me, over the years, slowly and carefully she has grown closely. I am insidious presence. Year on year she hopes that I'll find another. I am happy here though. Unhappy, I am happy, I know, unhappiness. I know how to cope and I help her cope.

*Analysis*

I believe my writing exercise ciphers meaning that traditions of linguistics and psychoanalysis may illustrate.

Lately, in particular, linguistically-minded critics have increasingly called attention to the artificiality and indeterminacy of the terms through which we think we know the world, while the psychoanalytic theorists have increasingly emphasised psychological forces that determine the apparently logical terms in which we think we think.

Gilbert and Gubar, in Belsey and Moore, 1989, p 81

For if language is a process of cultural artifice that both distances and defines nature, then it would seem that its workings might well embody the bodily differences through which each human being first confronts the fundamental sexuality of his or her own nature.

Gilbert and Gubar, in Belsey and Moore, 1989, p 81

There are two distinct voices in the writing exercise, Claire's and Bulimia's. Both voices are mine. I need both voices in order to source the complexity of my feelings in exploring aspects of attraction, such as I have experienced in relation to my mother, to Dr. S..., to Dr. B.... In the beginning Claire's words are defensive and abusive.

I question whether I was sexually attracted to those whom I professed a need to be good for. Was that why I needed another's attention, why I was so keen to attain and to understand the feelings that seemed inexplicable in the case of the GP who attracted me, why I felt so strongly.

I find feelings of attraction and physical proximity difficult. Such as the physical proximity between a patient and a doctor, touch both metaphysically and physically uncomfortable. „She hates to pass so close to him as she needs to when leaving. She prefers distance. It is how she has come to know herself in the world. At a distance from all. A distant monstrous shadow with unbearable weight,“ (Sutton, 2008, p 168). Being close to another are feelings I am unfamiliar with. Strangers to me. I have not allowed myself to become familiar with my feelings. I have opted for self-repudiation of such. Previously I have questioned what I am feeling. Here I question my feelings of unfamiliarity. Should seek to distance myself from? As a person who shows themselves to be different should be distanced?

I find it extremely difficult to be with my feelings. Although feelings of physical attraction, such as my feelings of emptiness prior to binge eating, are on some occasions surprising; they are most tangible testimony of my very humanness I find most uncomfortable. Why should „I“ be feeling, feeling anything at all? Emotions are those responses I make to experiences. Feelings of shame are compounded when I believe I am not in control. I am ashamed of my feelings. Feelings and emotions are those

experiences I struggle to control, they seem beyond me. Beyond the boundaries I can regulate. The more I struggle to control the more my feelings distress me. Developing a more fluid boundary of my feelings is important; a truth of mystory.

Truth in research, as elsewhere, is about frames. As Derrida (1987) points out, a frame delimits what lies within and without, while itself occupying an ambiguous position in relation to this inside-outsideness. The frame through its contextualization delimits, discloses a truth. But frames, borders, edges have an enigmatic quality of desire that invites transgression. Text and imate become mutually implicated through a process that “opens every system to its outside and divides the unity of the line which purports to mark its edge”.

Watson, 2009, p 532

The second extract of writing is an emotional awakening. It is painful and distressing as unruly feelings, emotions, in the first instance. It is not only in writing that sociological and literary ways might be brought together, as complementary, but in reading my stories too.

*Extract two*

Increasingly I become aware of being alone. I have always been alone. I have believed I might be otherwise. I know that now. On occasions people visit me and visit kindnesses, these are fleeing instances. I am alone.

My life is one of a person alone, a single person. And the world is not for people alone.

My sadness is not that I have never known passionate love. That I have never known career aspirations fulfilled. That I have never known a home made for me, or that I'll never know children. My sadness is I can not imagine myself to be loved, or made love to, or being fulfilled, or finding a home, or being able to share a joy of living with children. I can not imagine belonging to another. My overriding feelings are those of being in-service, in-service to my parents. In-service to a colleague whose drafts of an assignment I read and comment upon. In-service I am of use. And I allow myself to be used. I want to please, to be of use in-service.

I become painfully aware as I write this reflection how transient my life. How quickly I give up on one project after another, because I have no purpose to endeavour to sustain my choices. A life of beginnings, quick fixes, binges, emotionally labile. As a younger woman collecting recognition of others I

learned gained reward. Collect quickly, as many awards as you can. My collecting began early on and my collections disappointed me early on. Rather as I collect together a sugary binge for Bulimia. She is anticipating the pleasure of feeling the softnesses and sweetnesses, but then the consequences hit and I am disappointed in my loss of control and the collection disappoints and needs to be purged.

No matter though how I purge my possessions to charity shops, food to the toilet bowl, feelings upon the pages of this reflection. The person who collected the binge was empty in the first place. Empty and alone. This is my reality. I am empty and becoming increasingly empty and I am alone: sadness runs down my face, as I mourn and I celebrate this person who writes, who dares to become on these pages.

I am now beginning to see the painfulness, the reasons why writing this is so painful. It is another example of a way in which I do not belong. I am no longer a manager/leader. I write in retrospect and thus I have created an assignment to allow myself to try to collect the award of another. Whether I achieve or otherwise this qualification is no matter. What matters: I celebrate those times and call out their truths, my truths, „truths“ as they can be as much as they are in the instance of their creation here.

*Analysis*

I have lost an imagination, a place of my dreams. I have lost a sense of my significance of the person I am, to me, the person whom I may value, no matter her behaviours. I have lost a sense of my place in my heart. How quickly a place untended becomes overrun. In turn I loose the space in which to become, to be in my heart.

A recent journal entry shows well a person who has lost herself. The entry is an endeavour to demonstrate loss, writing of loss. My sense of loss. The following extract is an example of my free scripting, much in line with free writing. Free scripting is an amalgam of ideas of biographic research, psychoanalysis and the importance of attending to the present. Free scripting embraces a biographer's attention to their subject's „gestalt“ (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p 34).

The main theoretical principle is not the defended subject, but the idea that there is a Gestalt (a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda) informing each person's life which it is the job of biographers to elicit intact, and not destroy through following their own concerns.

Rosenthal, in Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p 34

Free association is often linked to psychoanalytic process. Such like may be seen as, therapeutic. The subject has now become the patient.



By asking the patient to say whatever comes to mind, the psychoanalyst is eliciting the kind of narrative that is not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic; that is, the associations follow pathways defined by emotional motivations, rather than rational intentions. According to psychoanalysis, unconscious dynamics are a product of an attempt to avoid or master anxiety. This suggests that anxieties and attempts to defend against them, including the identity investments these give rise to, provide the key to a person's *Gestalt*.

Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p 37

Helene Cixous inspires me to endeavour presenting my acts of presents; memories and testimonies of tangible marks. For Cixous such marks are as wounds.

The stigma is a trace of a nail's sting. The mark of the pointed object. The stigma is a scar that is difficult to efface. The stigma resists being worn down. The hole enters into my skin. The scar adds, the stigma digs, excavates.

I want stigmata. I do not want the stigmata to disappear. I am attached to my engravings, to the stings in my flesh and my mental parchment. I do not fear that trauma and stigma will form an alliance: the literature in me wants to maintain and reanimate traces.

Traumatism as an opening to the future, of the wound ... the promise of a text.

Cixous, 1998, p xiv

Cixous is also at pains to note the residual effects of wounds.

The instant – the eternity of the instant.

I come not to you this evening with tomorrows [*demains*]; with two hands [*deux mains*], of course, but with *nows*.

I like being in the present. You're going to say: then keep running! That's exactly what I try to do. And besides I have a particular affection for the present because it's the time of the theatre. That's something I discovered working in the theatre: the singularity of this genre that invents, invents for us, incessantly, a time without time.

Cixous, 1998, pp 43-44

For me Cixous works an ideological position with careful symbolism. One of her symbols here is a clock face. She tells me of two hands to instruct me of the face, the gaze of her clock, the hours and the minutes of time, that only is necessary if tomorrow is anticipated. Yet if tomorrow is not coming, I am forever „now“. Her ideology: critique of the production of „time“.

Detail is important in free scripting, attending to what is. The question of free-scripting is: What might I see, if I care to look? Who might I see if I care to look? If I take care of that which I am being, I am concerned that the free-scripting has been typed into the thesis, and there is a loss of graphological endeavour, and senses of graphological endeavour. I accept this concern. It is a limit I work with. It is the significant of the process of free scripting I seek to draw attention towards. Free scripting is a process acknowledging that a product is never achieved. „I“ am never achieved. I shall never achieve, have achieved, but be in my process of achievement.

The following free scripting is of a journal entry. It may as well have been of yesterday or of tomorrow and in these ways I can only suggest is of now. Yet is it of a now that is, „always a just-after,“ (Cixous, 1998, p 44). Another concern, another limit. I work on. I take up a pen, a black ink „fineliner“ pen. Irretrievable marks, finely made, detail, delicate depiction. On a blank page, two holes in the left hand side, one approximately one-third of the way down the page, another two-thirds – marks may have fallen into those holes, I set „write“, down on to the page. I endeavour to write down words that come to me to speak out the person who I am feeling, becoming in my writing.

*Extract three*

... to be me. Perhaps it is right I have come here. To explore and to uncover – and cover in words – thoughts and feelings that made me, contributed so

significantly to me. So that I might finger what I would have already thrown away were it material possession.

My photographs of times past – I throw away.

No photographs left.

So alone.

So desperate.

Angry no one witnessed my sadness. I phoned for help. I speak. They have lost interest. „Talk to us when you need to ...“

Nothing

Wanting to be able to accept me

I fear my parents.

I never will be the good enough child. Only the spoiled child.

My day is directionless. The promised plan, to my mother I suggested today would be better with a plan has not become. I've not written it. I'm directionless. Lost. Knowing sooner rather than later I'll collapse in on myself and eat to assuage the pain.

I have built in the past fragile days of hope. Keeping busy, spending time in shopping malls in supermarkets and café – places of people with no names. Filled though. Formed. Uniformed. Buy something – anything and belong. I buy coffee. I usually buy coffee now. In time this becomes a signature purchase. I'm hesitant this morning. I feel tense. To spend a day elsewhere, away from those endeavours that might ultimately bring hope but such is my despair

Free scripting is an unfinished sentence. It does not begin. It does not end it is present as long as I am. There is a great deal that is absent from my free scripting. My sense of love comes from others. I look for others to love me. I look for others to bring meaning to my scripting work. I ask my reader to bring meanings to my scripting work. I am asking too much for some. For my mother? For me? Boundaries limit love.

### *Exploring loving*

Being able to love me, for the sensitive, the emotional person I become is important. It maybe here I gain an imagination. It is important to me, to understand me. Writing is a method of inquiry that Laurel Richardson's words support:

Writing stories and personal narratives have increasingly become the structures through which I make sense of my world, locating my particular biographical experiences in larger historical and sociological contexts. Using writing as method of discovery in conjunction with my understanding of feminist rereadings of Deleuzian thought, I have altered my primary writing question from “how to write during the crisis of representation” to “how to document becoming.”

Richardson, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p 966

I need now to understand my discoveries. „Love“ is too simple a label for a complexity of feelings which may at one moment speak of erotic attachment and at another loyalty (Armstrong, 2002, p 11).

### *Childhood attachments*

I come to realise the importance of holding the hand of „my“ little girl, in order to realise the strength, depth, qualities of my adult woman’s clasp upon my worlds.

As a younger person I had believed the achievement of perfection in all endeavours would protect me against the rejection of others, others not choosing me. I also believed that if I were to care for others, I could be cared for. I would be valued because I showed „caring“. Even better, I should show competence in my caring. Medicine was sought as a means to confer self competence. I could control the means by which others made their choices with regards to decisions upon me.

Maybe I had never asked myself what the possibilities other than to study Medicine might be. I had applied to read for a Science degree in Biology alongside my applications to medical schools. Had I entertained the possibility of reading for a Science degree in Biology really? I had completed my application form as advised that was all. My reality was to read Medicine. I should not fail in achieving my reality. Yet I had failed before I had started, I failed to realise a reality greater than my goal to read Medicine.

My childhood was one of being serviced – provided for. At four years I remember sitting at a ledge fronted by the fly-wire of the windows, gently tapping at the ledge fingering my imagination's piano keys. I played the windowledge. How I knew to play my piano I am not sure. I can't recall seeing a piano being played. Yet I played two handed. It did not occur to me not to do this. I do not though remember seeing/experiencing a piano being played. In time, when I was old enough, and could stretch my right arm over my head and touch my left ear, I went to school and thereafter my mother took me to a real piano with primers and I began to learn playing „the“ piano.

Those first piano primers were the first of everything I wished for as a child. A guitar, a piano, a violin, lessons, books, private tuition, education and somewhere I began to believe that with each purchase I had to excel. I wasn't good enough as I was, doing the best I might with the purchases made for me. I came to want more and more. I required embellishment – adding to. Never good enough - satisfied. I took to gathering. I learned

to want more – to help me towards „good girl“, to help me to a place where I could be accepted. Only my achievements would recommend my parents“ love. Acceptance was a condition of my achievements. „My best“ was not enough not good enough. My hope of being a good girl became increasingly desperate as I realised that my effort would always be bettered by another. It would be possible to improve a performance. Such as, my piano had been surpassed with ivory and ebony keys of the piano that when depressed would sing. My entirety was surpassed with the achievements of others. Yet I believed I wanted these achievements for myself.

Today I question whether as a child I received too much, and learned to demand too much? Such that when as an older person I was not received and my demands were not met, I failed. I had no language in which to express my failure. I had not learned to know failure in the sense that I had poor experience of failing. Significant failure in my life came in my later teenage years.

Tears of frustration during teenaged failures came with such ease. I was frantic in failure. I look back and I see the body of a woman and the mind of a regressing child. A child who perhaps should have learned that not every endeavour is successful, most are limited achievements but success comes in the values I attribute to my own efforts in pursuing any endeavour. I failed. I failed. And I continued to fail, to complete to make good my anticipations. Feel the failed sentences.



Real and destructive anger exploded from me early on. Later I took to sulky presence and consuming food. I had learned that food was the way someone of my mother's care would negotiate difficult relationships and times. Yet my consumption was not driven by physiological hunger but an appetite to please my mother, my parents, to be a good girl. Confused I ate in order to calm myself. I ate to soothe. I ate to fill in. How do and shall I hurt my mother in my failures further. My failures not only to achieve highly, my failure to appease my appetite, my failure to control the weight that steadily crept upwards with each failure I identified as mine. I wanted a mother to say that my best was good enough. I never gave her that opportunity and I failed to hear from her those words, if ever they were uttered, I do not recall. I was not my father's concern. That project was my brother. Each failure of mine was etched in pounds of flesh and stretched skin. I look about my body today and I see in the silvery marks, failure of teenage-years tattooed on a body I hated and continue to dislike. Teenaged-years of a body that bled profusely and I did not fully understand. A body I was embarrassed by. A body that was not of a young teenaged girl, but a grotesque womanly presence who was too old by far and yet had none of the learning such a body suggested. My teenaged years were isolating and lonely. I hated the person I had become, physically and psychologically.

I struggle to accept my failures in specific endeavours, for example to perform well in a recent job interview (9<sup>th</sup> March 2010). Failure on this occasion is taken as personal insult. It is not my action, or my behaviour, or the writing I have been working on that is not successful, but me. This afternoon I learned a recent job application had not been successful, and although it was reasoned I was, „too quiet for the frontline position“. I do

so wish that the words had read, „Claire, you came across to me as very quiet in our interview this morning, and for this reason I am unable to offer the position for which you interviewed.“ I now have a language by which to reason my failing. „I was, ...“ being quiet. I was failing to convince my interviewer, to be me is to fail.

Since my admission to the Phoenix Wing in 2005 I have gained considerable weight. Yet I realise here that weight gain is not necessarily suggestive/symbolic of greed, my greed. Reaching a „healthy weight“ had jettisoned attention from an emaciated form though. I work to attend to my feelings in alternative ways besides physical dissatisfactions. Similarly I work to negotiate feelings of emptiness besides consuming large amounts of food I am then driven to purge. In soothing repetitions I lull myself to believe my past is acceptable my past of failings, dissatisfactions and disappointments is acceptable because to not accept all of the person I am, is to fail again. Yet I fail to attend to my feelings. Sometimes Bulimia is so closely present. Relief. Excused.

I tell myself it is okay to make mistakes, such errors I did not make knowingly. It is okay to have made the choice I made, at the time they may have seemed the best of the available options. It is okay to feel hungry, to feel tired, to feel angry, to feel loving. Yet not necessarily be able to account for those feelings. It is okay to be.

Do I believe in me? The person I am telling myself it is okay to be? In time shall I have reason to believe in me? At this point I continue to seem to me to be vulnerable, fragile, yet endeavouring to behave in more helpful ways, ways that will allow me to be all of the

person I am without the self-denigration. Writing here is a good start, a welcome beginning. I welcome this beginning I am making.

I have returned to my parents' house (2009). I have come and gone from this place a great deal. In and out, such as I cross and then cross back over boundaries and transgressions. As I acquired property and possessions in my twenties I have chosen to leave them. More to-ing and throwing. Failure to achieve exacts vulnerability. I exist in a vulnerable place now, with limited possessions. How far I have fallen? Yet here is a place where I am gaining strength, I am developing a voice, challenging vulnerability in working this thesis. There are significant words encouraging me that it is only in being in my parents' house, the house where I first began to realise how desperately I was failing to fit others' expectations to begin to appreciate the deepest ramifications of my experiences both as a child and as a young adult, aged twelve to eighteen years. I can begin to question the expectations I hold for myself. On this occasion however I need to evaluate my own expectations, to have undressed and stood in front of the mirror in my parents' bedroom. How do I bear the expectations I hold for myself? What did my parents see? Why has it come to matter so deeply and so painfully what they should see? What should I want them to see? How does this compare to what I see and what I am hoping I might come to see?

This past Mothering Sunday, I sob as I realise that I have failed my mother, again. In place of a card, a present, gift-wrapped, I take that small glass of daffodils into the room she will stay in tomorrow night. My gift is to share the flowers I bought two days

previously for the celebration lunch I had prepared for my parents. Cultural expectations are very powerful presence in my life, still.

It seems ironic that in coming towards the end of this writing I am endeavouring to prepare to read Medicine once again. At the time of writing (2010) I am trying to organise a work experience placement. I imagine being a young woman with career aspirations? In my request to be placed I am suggesting my placement as of „a doctor, qualified and in the first stages of their career.“ There is great sadness for me as I write this. I may have been that doctor I am asking to „experience“ were I to have completed the training I embarked upon in September 1997. My imagination is shot through with my past failings, yet failings are my truths, it is my story to voice them.

## FINAL WORDS

### *Initial responses from this journey*

I read the sections of this work and it comes to me how I have grown to deliver a text that is a more open, honest narrative of my experiences than I had anticipated I might produce at the start of this thesis. I used to believe that I was not good at endings. For example I found funerals, burials or cremations extremely distressing, I have only ever attended two, and at both I experienced myself as a person grieving in ways that I found were not appropriate. Similarly in saying good-bye to my mother on the station platform when I knew I would most likely see her in the following week, I shed tears of an emotional exuberance. The clichéd expression is intended, the parting was overly emotional, such as the words overly used. Today I realise that I do not need to be good at endings. I need to end in ways that fit the termination of the work I am engaged in and that function to celebrate the key knowledge, experiences I have come to in the course of my work. Being good is not a part of my anticipation here. Good: synonymous with suitable or desirable qualities. I do recognise emotional exuberance in ending here yet I am not a bad person because I am not a good girl.

I come to realise that this writing may have been formed and significances emphasised in a number of different ways; to be reflexive is to be human. Personal reflections are the starting places for all research projects, if they might be considered as robust examples of academic endeavour in the fields of the social sciences. With regards to my writing I consider how the work may have become an exposition of techniques in forming personal accounts. It might have become a celebration of feminist voices/theory in methodology

in social science/educational research. It might have focused solely on experiences of disordered eating and the consequences of such, or indeed disability. It might have focused upon my relationship with my mother – mother-daughter tangles. The writing touches upon many areas significant to me. Yet these possibilities have become secondary to my desire for a text/thesis that speaks of a person who has contributed significant time and resources into narrating endeavours that have evolved a self, an identity of which she has increased experience, increased knowledge. Telling such stories of self in ways that do not sanitise those aspects I still do read, and wish, did not speak of me in the ways they do.

This text is different from the thesis I produced for a Doctor of Education. It is a much longer inquiry. It tells and shows a person who is prepared to speak of herself more fully. This is not only on account of the greater word limit available here but also the style of the writing. This is a more measured account in a number of ways. It does not take risks in the same manner as, „Further Education(s); Remembering a Lecturer in Further Education; a Bulimia; a Daughter,“ (Sutton, 2008). This project speaks of a person who acknowledges that academic work is as much as negotiating compromises and expectations of readers as it is about communicating meaning and trying to set down understanding in a quest to further knowledge about some specified topic/area of research.

The thesis comments upon experiences of formal and informal education. Formal education being largely upon schooling of childhood, teenaged years and university

experiences; informal education: the learning garnered from life experiences and reflective work upon those experiences for example the experience of disabling verbal abuse, eating disorders and their treatment, health and feminist perspectives. The work claims that learning has occurred through the production of the thesis. It sees writing as a process of discovery, the actions of making declarations about experiences, and the actions of producing text from thoughts and feelings. Writing this work is/has not only been a cathartic experience, a notion of cleansing, speaking out about experiences that have been difficult, a way of making sense of otherwise burdens most difficult. Learning to write as an embrace of a belief: the form of texts may be explicitly complimentary to content. The form itself delivers learning, delivers an education, for example resolving my concern: should I balance the wordage of each subsection, or let the imbalance of them remain such as the imbalance of life experiences? Some life experiences last for months, for years yet are not overly encumbering. Other life experiences occur in minutes yet their effects are felt acutely and have far lasting consequences. Education here is offered as a complex of experiences offered in a variety of ways. Education research methodology that speaks to thoughts of postmodernist views is valued by the work. In this way the ragged, dirty, marginal experiences the content speaks of are reflected in the ragged, dirty, marginal representation, appearance, of the text.

Each of the six vignettes speaks to all of the mentioned themes. There is a circuitous notion to the thesis. Each theme is visited again and again yet in slightly different ways, from differing perspectives. The thesis also shows progression of thought. Whilst experiences of disability, formal education, health and feminist views imbue each of the

six vignettes it is noticeable the voice of the producer of the thesis becomes ever more boldly spoken. From disabled in the first vignette to valuing the person she may be in the final sections of the work. Early on she struggles to appreciate uncertainty, struggles to appreciate, hold her own views when those around her are not able to empathise with her. Later in the work she is not reliant upon the endorsement, the validation of others; she is more enabled in her life.

When I completed a Doctor of Education (The University of Sheffield, September 2008) I believed that I might further the work I had begun (and focused upon in my thesis) in writing a short text celebrating key moments/themes in the qualitative research I had carried out. I did not produce the volume. I do wonder if coming to the end of this writing I'll feel inspired again to embrace the challenge I had anticipated in September 2008. I wanted and continue to want, I believe, to communicate with a wider audience than might engage with an unpublished doctoral work. I had hoped I might find a publisher for this planned volume. This hope remains. I anticipated the volume as an invitation to others to engage in alternative qualitative research in fields in the social sciences but educational research particularly. I hoped to illustrate the importance of the key moments/themes I would draw a reader towards. I also wanted to give something to the community of writers who had published their work and had allowed me access to their accounts, their ideas. It was to be about extending an invitation to others, as I had been welcomed by those who previously had dared to risk publication of personal work. I imagined a tangible illustration to myself to engage in work that may be described as, challenging to conventions. Who do I write for? If not myself in the first instance, in



order to satisfy a desire to develop meaning, develop personal understanding, this was also to be a celebration, an invitation.

I do hope readers are inspired and may dare to try ways of research that themselves speak of the research spirit; its philosophy. I hope readers would hear a challenge to themselves, to researching and offering up their accounts in ways that inscribe alternatives, subaltern, marginal, quiet voices. I hope in producing a text I would encourage myself to work again, to research stories that have been and continue to be important to me. I hope to challenge the chasms between the researcher and the researched, particularly the intransigence that complex, obfuscating academic writing may on occasions exact. Research texts are of the researched firstly and lastly. Should a person, who has participated in a research project, question the authenticity of the character they are drawn as, the research text in many ways has failed. Notably it has failed those to whom it owes greatest debt. I can not help but feel cowed by the high standards I set for a research text. Is this my interest in autoethnography, because I am overly fearful of drawing a textual portrait of another that is not only inaccurate, unrecognisable, but inaccessible. I continue to fear failing. I do however want to see people's lives allowed to breathe more deeply and a little more fully. Perhaps however these hopes are more about my desire to live more deeply and a little more fully a little more honestly.

I hope I write because I feel and do have things to say and others would like to hear. I would like to hear my voice again. I have come to like the voice I have drawn out and

draw out. I am beginning to like the person I am, all of her, including those behaviours less than attractive. They are mine and contribute to me. This is a celebration of others' loving in my life too. Without the loving of people close to me, to my work, during the times I have been a doctoral student I would not have found courage to tell of myself as I have done. As a doctoral student at the University of Sheffield I was most lucky. I was encouraged to tell my story in ways that best seemed to perform the stories' tales. I did and continue to appreciate the ways I was held. I was allowed my imagination. This has given me a tremendous sense of possibility that I have continued to explore in this thesis, and hope to continue to explore in future times.

At the completion of a Doctor of Education I began to hope I had a future as a researcher/writer concerned to explore fields in the social sciences in ways that spoke fully of their painfulness. I wanted to believe there was another project, another goal following my doctoral thesis. I was inspired to continue to imagine a future in my work, and in work as a researcher when asked for my plans. I was engaged and hopeful following a positive viva experience. My work was embraced and a satisfying celebratory review I shared with my supervisor. I do not know if I shall commit to writing a text that is published, if a publisher might risk publishing my work.

#### *Limits and strengths of this work*

I have written what I am able to write given my available resources. I have written this work. I have drawn in and upon material that has felt uncomfortable to comment upon because there is a voice that suggests that a doctoral thesis (of this kind) is not the arena

for these words. Such as my references to a previous doctorate, my self hatred and distressed relationship with food, my resignation to loss of hope in a future, particularly of a future involving academic work in qualitative research. Yet I do not regret speaking these things. They are my truths at this time I write.

Allowing a narrative to form and be formed so that the pallor of the everyday, the usual unhappiness is disrupted, perhaps that ultimately is all any kind of research is. Research and its texts are a disruption to inevitable entropy. Research is a false ordering to create a disruption in nature's decline. An ordering I have needed in order to make sense of past and present experiences, feelings, emotions. My way of making sense has been to order them, story them, in one way writing this thesis. In another way: re-engaging in therapy. Chaos, disorder, such as lives might be. Mine most certainly is. A research text, no matter how it tries to capture the disorder and discomfort from which it arose and to which it speaks is only ever a temporary distortion of the pallor of the ordinary. It is limpid, flaccid, ugliness in which I have believed I might see, hear, feel, taste, touch extra-ordinary aspects. Such was my belief in the possibilities of my writing I started to write and continued to write in hope that my extraordinary might surface. What might my narrative reveal? Ultimately this work's meanings dissipate in to the pallor of everyday's grit as quickly as they are formed. It has only been in storying my meanings, my feelings, they have become in the first instance. Without the endeavour, the effort of telling their stories, their meanings are lost. I look now as I might upon the artefacts in a museum and although I gain an impression of bygone lives, I must create and embark on a new story in order to find meaningful existences/lives again. Some may have suggested

I need explanations. I need a goal in order to provide meaning to my existence. It is not so much a goal as a purposive engagement to tell my story, to have to make the effort to order events and consider the times and the ways of those occurrences.

I question my satisfaction I am now ending this work. I had hoped I would arrive differently; in changed attitude. However living is wholly unsatisfactory and only punctuated by „satisfactory“ momentarily. For many there are fewer moments of satisfaction than there are dissatisfaction and disappointment. I have failed in that in order to speak of my own dissatisfactions and disappointments, in order to bring a text into being that spoke and demonstrated such experiences of dissatisfactions and disappointments, in its appearances, its conducts, its behaviours, I have had to settle for and I settle for (no coercion required) a text that is distinctly ordered. I have also produced a text I hope satisfies at least one other reading, my reading tomorrow, if not also the readings of my examiners? The „one other reading“ the reading when some days from now I shall have found a purpose to tell my story again, pick up this text and read it – create another version of it, find alternative meanings in its words. That is the strength of this work: to have been able to create this text in order to facilitate its recreativity. At each reading of this work, new meanings, insights, may be located. The purpose of research, is not to find answers, explanations, remedies or cures but to act in ways that seek to appreciate experiences in the truest ways the researcher is able to and to endeavour to communicate their appreciation of the experiences under scrutiny to others. This has been the education of my emotions here.

Choice is not necessarily always of enticing, but my commitment to acknowledging my choices, and to making my choices, according to my values is. Heightened responsibility for and of my choices brings awareness of consequences of those choices. For example this thesis may fail for a number of reasons. For example it does not meet examiners' expectations and demands. But I have not failed myself in writing it. Moreover I have practised autonomy and I recognise such practice includes metering consequences of actions. I am committed to me, the values and ways I privilege. The choices I have made have not been wrong. For example leaving Medicine initially, taking two doctorates. My error: I placed self belief in the exteriors, others's recognitions. I lost belief in my choices, that I always had choices. Only I can choose for me. Yet I alone am responsible for my choice. I failed to practise listening for and to my voice.

*Significance of this work for educational research*

This is and has been a project of personal intrigue, essentially. For those reading my writing, it is not so much the details of personal revelation I hope are taken with them but the importance of deep, honest, self-scrutiny in carrying out the writing. I also hope that research texts developed in ways, which allow the producer of research texts to report deeply and honestly of themselves, are welcomed within research communities exacting quality judgements upon researchers' writings. I do continue to believe there are expectations research texts are ordered. They are sanitised scripts derived often of human messiness. I posit such cleaning-up is carried out in the hope that the inevitable contagion of reaching out, touching and probing into the lives of others' is removed from

the final product. It may be inappropriate but I wish such sanitisation were not so unquestioned.

I consider the reported genocides of some past one hundred years and think of the lack of horror often portrayed. It is one genocide to kill people, it is another to kill testimony of their voices, the horror of their voices. I am not condoning gratuitous horror I am promoting truths. If one of the tenets of an effective research account/text is the clarity of its communication, this does not predicate orderliness. I am not suggesting gratuitous disorder, dismissal of values, such as those narratologists would attribute to effective narrative style. I am suggesting empathic evaluation of what a person may be trying to achieve in their work that must be realised against readers' expectations of the work. In some instances a writer's desires are in line/s with a reader's expectations. In other instances a writer's desires will be markedly different. I do suggest that there is a need to develop a language that allows differences to be held sufficiently, that language development should not only be the priority of for example sexual politics but also academia.

This work does not seek to provide a chronological map of significant events in my life, yet it is life-history work in that it does draw upon significant events in my life and there is significant chronology in certain sections of the work. The resounding organised text has resulted from my development as an educational researcher, „professional values and practice,“ (Sikes and Goodson, in Sikes, Nixon and Carr, 2003, p 33). Events that embody me, as a researcher, and the meanings I may derive from such embodiment.

„Research practice cannot be disembodied. It is impossible to take the researcher out of any type of research or of any stages of the research process,“ (Sikes and Goodson, in Sikes, Nixon and Carr, 2003, p 34).

I wanted to carry out research that allowed me to explore something of the person who made the claim at the start of her Masters of Arts (Education) dissertation:

I have been interested to learn how my tutees, predominantly women on an Access to Nursing, Midwifery and Health Studies programme have constructed and deconstructed their identities. I have been keen to learn how they talk of themselves, how they have constructed themselves, how they have been constructed through discourse and the regard to which and within which they hold themselves and are held. I have been interested to understand those identities they privilege and those that they value less, and to explore the exacting effects of identities upon self narratives.

Sutton, 2005

On reflection this work satisfied requirements of a Masters programme yet significantly failed to satisfy me, on account I wondered why I was quite so interested in other women's lives, adult women returning to education in the hope of pursuing a career as a health care practitioner. I was concerned for the well-being of my tutees, yet I failed to acknowledge in my dissertation the fullness of my own desires to be listened to, to

become a health care practitioner, to be constructive in research processes. It was fitting that personal exploration was not furthered in the text I sought to offer of other women's lives as a Master's dissertation. There were neither sufficient words permitted that I might have used nor would a deeper exploration of personal material have answered the question I had initially set; the stories of other women's experiences.

On completion of this Master's dissertation, I did want to find a more satisfying response to a source of intrigue: my positionality in carrying out research, notably research proffering interpretations of others' lives. I sought to find myself in a research text that gave me my voice, mine, professed motives and desires genuinely. A text I could read and believe spoke deeply of my feelings, my emotions, my behaviours in ways that were mine, including those feelings, emotions and behaviours I wish and wished were not mine, shameful acts such as of Bulimia. I have never offered the thesis of my first doctorate to my father. I am too ashamed of the person it speaks. When asked by a trainee teacher what my first doctoral research was about „emotions“ seemed sufficiently acceptable. I declined to own my emotions. I sought an eponymous description for my research such that it would be vindicated.

I continue to feel I failed to confront myself effectively when I produced my Master's dissertation. I do believe were I to embark upon another project exploring lives of marginalised groups, such as the adult women returners who were my tutees in 2004 I should have far greater courage to confront my desires, my values, in carrying out the research. Hindsight suggests that I might have carried out personal exploration



sufficiently before I experienced others' lives, yet I was not aware that I needed to do this work at the time of embarking upon my chosen dissertation topic. It was only in carrying out the work, the dissertation upon other women's stories of their return to learning I recognised I was pursuing a question I wanted to be asked myself. The dissertation raised important questions for me regarding my motives for seeking to learn of others' lives, particularly lives I constructed as marginal experiences, for example my own.

In carrying out research in other women's stories of education I came to learn of significant words in stories of my own education. I am reminded of Liz Stanley's recommendation that in all biographical work there is an indexing of the producer, (Stanley, 1995; 1990). I am also reminded once more of the importance of Paul Valéry's suggestion that only ever is a draft of a story produced, (in Banville, 2004). I realise the account I might have formed from the taped interviews and their transcripts may be significantly different were I to embrace such a task not least on account of allowing my voice to permeate more judiciously.

This work is a methodological inquiry. Moreover it is concerned to surface nuances of its process in laboured ways. The labour of this work is to evoke a reader's response. „Be sad, be angry, be irritated, but let yourself be and subsequently ask who is such an emotional person in the context of your own research?“

Wilfred Carr suggested:

... what any serious examination of the current state of educational research requires is new level of methodological self-consciousness that would enable educational researchers to be more critically aware of the preconceptions governing their own understanding of what they do and what they are trying to achieve ...

Carr, in Sikes, Nixon and Carr, 2003, p 7

Throughout the work upon this thesis, I have questioned whether what I have engaged in is educational research? What have I sought to achieve? For whom am I writing? What is the value of work such as mine? Are my claims strong? Am I endeavouring to locate them in a most fitting discipline: Education? Truthfully? Perhaps. My lasting commitment to a reader is to continue to ask the questions I have ended with. The strength of my lasting commitment is not to answer questions but continue to question to speak my interrogation.

### *The complexities of making choices*

The thesis shows the development of my voice, of many layers and times but in the main from one of victim to one of recognising and owning choices, and making choices. I have selected experiences and episodes of experiences that have been significant in the development of my voice here. These experiences range across my life-story. However the experiences set down are intended to be read as chronological account of the development of my voice. I have paired the six episodes of writing. Each pairing though

speaks around a central image, idea. An image, an idea, might be viewed in different ways. I attempt to explore two differing views of one significant „memoried“ image.

The first pairing shows how differences in physique are inscribed. It is about phenomena of performance. It is about embodiment of values, how such values bring about physical differences and the recognition of physical differences. Phenomena of performance may be viewed negatively, the harm of differences spoken of in abusive ways. This is the work of „Disabling Women“. The second part of the first pairing endeavours to celebrate difference. It speaks welcomingly and openly of differences – physical differences. This is the work of „Transgressing Women“. Physique might be experienced in so many ways, I offer two contrasting positions to show plurality and to demonstrate a central idea to the thesis, it is not what is seen but how I see.

The second partnership serves to explain why I may have experienced the phenomena of the first pairing, what may have been constitutive in experiences of differences. „Dieting Women“ explores how what a person consumes, namely their food, but also anything a person may be expected, anticipates taking in, effects physique, embodies values. It is a negative view. It shows restrictions in diet and their effects. „Nourishing Women“ explores an alternative position in viewing consumption. It speaks of choice, challenge, quests for ways of being and doing that are alternatives to a restrictive diet. The second pairing is an exposition of whether or not choice is recognised and chosen or denied and compromise accepted. Choice though rarely is simply a decision between one idea,

thing, and another. I hope the writing of the thesis communicates decision-making, making choices, or otherwise, as complex and difficult.

The final two narratives work around consequences of having made a choice. I have chosen to resign twice in my lecturing/teaching career in Further Education. On both occasions I experienced, at first, exclusions. I felt I had transgressed. „Ostracism“ speaks of feelings of despair when a person is cast out of groups on account they can no longer boast the group’s inclusion criteria. Ultimately though I have come to develop a voice of my own, in my place, spaces of ostracism, and it is to celebrate this voice I speak of in the final section of work. This pair of narratives demonstrates processes of growth, having chosen to recognise choice. I recognise my uniqueness. This is a personal journey I continue on as I come to end of this thesis.

This thesis is an education as I draw out a text speaking the restrictions that influence significantly my truths of the person I am today in the context of educational research. As an educational researcher I am interested in qualitative work and the private lives influencing the choices researchers select to recognise in their work. This thesis celebrates multiplicity, namely plurality, it celebrates making choices. To choose suggests making a decision upon at least one, if not, more than one, alternative. The thesis questions also how I feel, the emotions I experience as I tell my story of education. On occasions I have found it very painful to write. For example the section „Ostracism“ contains long sections of third person narration. The experiences my journals spoke of

were too raw, too immediate to offer them in a first person tale. I struggle to own those experiences still.

The first draft of the thesis was produced as a continuous text. I have written the first two narratives, first, the final two narratives, next, and finally narratives of the mid-pairing/section. Although I have chosen to organise the six narratives to show the development of my voice it has been most difficult to accept the choices I make and can make in regards to acknowledging my needs. I have needed to write the mid-section as a recovering bulimic. The ordering of the narratives of the thesis supports the coherency of the thesis' claims, communicates its meanings most aptly.

It has been a significant challenge to produce writing that is directive. For example in the introduction I had started with a title, „What the work might say.“ Later I realised although such hinted the content of that section of work, I wanted more to direct a reader towards a particular understanding namely the key aims of the thesis.

The thesis maintains false limits and hopes. For example experiences are delineated in three discrete pairings. One pairing sets up the next and the second sets up the final story/ies of development, yet there is division between the pairs. Existence/life however is not divided. I realise I have created a text that in many ways belies its truths, yet it seems to be the best I can make it, form it, today as I write. For the moment I focus upon the process of writing, the practice of tapping at a keyboard, endeavouring to make sensitive communications, to make sense, both to me and to any other who may read this

thesis, supervisors and examiners after me. I set aside the emotional turmoil that ensues in my continuing struggle to reconcile my hope for failure, a failed thesis. Hope for failure because in failing I maintain my impoverished position. Of my past, my comfortable narrative, I tell readily of failure. Hope for success and I risk engaging in the work of a further series of stories. I choose to let this thesis go, for the eyes of others with an invitation they might read it.

*Comments and reflections, 2012*

I seek to re-engage with the thesis drafts of the early part of 2010. It has become increasingly important for me to work to submit a doctoral thesis. This work has had its time.

These brief comments and reflections I hope note a few of the strengths and limitations of the work/thesis as I pick it up again and move it towards submission. I hope to practise a measure of reflexivity in putting down these comments. Brief contextual details of today (the end of February 2012 and the beginning of March 2012) may suggest to a reader why now I am looking to end my time with this work; draw closure upon this doctoral journey; why now I have the resources available for me to draw closure. Yet engaging once more with the thesis; production of a text that satisfies at least some of my aspirations and sufficient of those who shall and do sit in judgement upon it as adequate testimony of doctoral level work is overwhelming.

I realise this morning, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2012, how difficult this work is to complete, to engage with. I recognise the pain this work speaks of, the loneliness of the lives of the work, writing – a task I do alone. I also recognise how this work shall end now.

However I am struck by the unkempt nature of the work, the spaces I had intended to deliver words into these spaces, for example to aid clarity of the preceding of the stories, or perhaps to work at a new line of argument, develop thoughts. Yet the words were not delivered and now almost two years later I question how I am to approach these spaces. Should I infill? The text shall then become a further amalgamation of times and experiences, memories. And how should I signal the words and the phrases added today (February 2012/March 2012) within the bulk of the text of early 2010? Alternatively it would be in keeping with the ethos of the work to allow the gaps, the spaces, ragged nature of the thesis to remain. After all the work has been an opportunity to capture in textual form, is a textual experiment demonstrating by forms“ appearances some of the educational experiences that have been significant in my life since October 2004. The text of the thesis endeavours to speak not only through its content but also through its form.

Not only has this doctoral journey sought to document the philosophical underpinning of its methods embraced in productions for example references to the writing of Norman Denzin and Laurel Richardson; these authors have provided inspirations, encouragement for me to adopt strategies, locating them within postmodern realms, which have allowed me to deliver and to offer a messy text as an academic work. It is also imperative the text

acts, the textual inscription is akin to its underpinning philosophy. The appearance of the text needs to be in line with the spirit by which it was produced and continues to live.

This text is an embodiment of my doctoral journal, thus far I am alive. I require a representative form of my writing here of embodied education experiences that is ethically sound.

Whilst ethical considerations include just treatment of those who are engaged in the production of the work, traditionally this includes scrutiny of methods involved, ensuring contributors, participants are fairly treated, not under duress, represented accurately.

Ethical considerations within my work centre a lens to seek to ensure the work is neither injurious in its production nor result in injurious residues in the lives of those who are engaged in it. Yet I am also concerned the work is not compromised by fear that it may be rejected may be injured once it is delivered. Ethical considerations also centre my struggle to maintain courage to be seen as the textual appearance of the work suggests.

The work is also an exploration in the tensions that ensue when maintaining for example academic discipline for example full sentences, clarity of expression, allowing contributors, participants in my stories to be known by their name – *Bulimia nervosa*.

Who and what am I serving whilst I obfuscate the messiness of bingeing and purging through vomiting in not speaking openly of the realities of lives of the text? This thesis is of and in phenomenology. This is how I perceive my realities at the time of my realities. I set down my experiences and my experiencing in congruent fashion. I have chosen not to use pseudonyms. Such contrivances, perhaps in efforts to maintain anonymity do not sit with the ethos of the text's content or the text's form.



The eclectic mix of supporting literatures is troubling me. Should I have been more selective? Do the wide-ranges of literatures, from light fiction to more weighted volumes compromise the focus of the contextual spheres of the work? For example are those from Schools of Education likely to demark the thesis on account the text is contaminated by words of wider worlds? I think of how Shaun Tan (2002), author of a book aimed towards children follows Ian Stronach and Maggie MacLure's (1997) exploration of educational research within postmodern times. In one way the playful, (as Stronach and MacLure might embrace) nature of postmodern experiences is demonstrated by the entries of the list of references of the work. In another way a sustained academic concentration that a doctoral thesis might be called upon to demonstrate is contaminated by such a list of references, such an eclectic mix of supporting literatures. As I end the paragraph with the words I opened the paragraph with I think how I am no further towards reaching a solution of my dilemma: do I filter my references or let them go - allow the waters of the rivers of the tears that I have cried in lives of this work to hold their muddy, dirty sediments.

It is marked the themes of „Ostracism“ remain prescient in my life. A reader may be led to believe that „A Voice of my Own“ suggests I have found a niche, at the least the confidence to speak of my ways I have come to see my worlds. Today although I have sufficient life-comforts such as a healthy weight and on only some days I wander within and out of worlds of others feeling as though I do not belong and as though I have no hope to belong. It strikes me how I continue to experience comments questioning my

gender based upon my appearance such as those spoken of in „Disabling Women“. I continue to battle my self hatred, the fleshy presence that at times is overly burdensome such that I restrict dietary intake for example. I continue to feel excoriated by research enterprises that fail to allow the muddy sentiments of lives sufficiently within their methods, within the textual contrivance that say a research article proffers its reader/me. Setting down my experiences has neither resolved them, nor absolved them. I learn laying an academic lens upon painful personal experiences does nothing to enable me to retell them, replace, accept, forgive, others and myself. My academic lens does enable to me tell afresh and to demonstrate my pain again in alternative ways, with alterity. It is this purchase I see as the value of the costs of doing this work; the personal costs of being known so fully, laying myself so openly for the scrutiny others. In broad contexts should this work be considered an autoethnography, and I hope it is viewed as such, the unique contribution of this flawed work is the opportunities for me to realise that I shall always carry those experiences I have had in my lives, should I choose to pick them up, cast them in narratives; on account that experiences are only and always limited by their resources of production. For example this work is limited by the time I am now giving myself to complete and move towards a final examination, my human conditions are only and always limited by the relations and the relationships I choose for myself in associating with the stories of this work. Forever I'll need to manage the ways words of others affect me. Forever I'll need to be mindful of the ways I negotiate my felt experiences through food, eating. Forever I shall need to be cognisant that I rely upon external validation to locate my self-worth. Yet I realise that increasingly I become more confident in letting go my stories, letting go for others to see me as my realities predicate.

I question what I have learned in the writing, the production of these textual explorations of memories, of times past, of times today? I have learned that I must risk another, others reading these reflections in the first instance if I am to find the support necessary in order to move this work from stagnant.

I ask where I am today such that I may be able to re-engage with my work of this thesis.

My personal resources, not least my emotional responses feel fortified by having completed an initial training programme in person-centred counselling; a course during moments of which I have been unable to believe I could complete successfully.

Memories of a Medicine degree (December 2002) prematurely terminated of study were triggered once more. I have dwelled upon those academic opportunities I have missed.

The missing school achievements, the missing public examinations, and thereafter the missing career. I was also missing my ability to understand the contexts of occasions, the situations in which I had missed them. Some of them I lost, some of them were removed, either way I was without them in order to support my esteem. I recognise today as a child and as a young adult my values were linked to academic credentials. As an adult I perpetuated the values I had acquired through my childhood and teenage years.

Acquisition of qualifications became all important. And I would not say that those qualifications I have, or those I seek mean any less on account of my realisation today. It is rather that I can appreciate I am not only of academic qualifications although they continue to be a significant aspect of who I am. Likewise my angst in managing my weight, my height, food and eating, managing my everyday as „unemployed“ stares at me

from the cinema ticket of last week marking the page of my reading in „Please Sir!“  
(Sheffield, 2011) I continue to allow others to prescribe my worth, proscribe my life“s  
sentence. I continue to feel I am disappointing to my parents. I am disappointing. Yet I  
no longer want to be telling my stories, creating my stories of the residues of experiences  
now long past.

I experience a small opening. I believe I may move beyond my pasts. I may realise more  
fully new experiences. I may allow myself to be more open to possibilities. On  
occasions I shake in my fear of the enormity of such prospect. Yet on occasions I am  
robust. It is time to let my stories here go. As any story needs lines of engagement, lines  
by which it shall be known. For example whether these are read as plot lines, themes of  
the narratives, of the words of communications I now try to cut free from these stories“  
lines of attachment, to change my relationship to this text and allow it to be seen by  
others. I risk needing to change aspects such that it shall meet others“ needs. My need in  
one way has been met. I am drawn out. I have been educated such that others maybe  
able to experience the development, both personal and professional, this work is  
testimony of.

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