

CHAPTER TWO: Writing and my life

Introduction

This chapter contributes to the thesis by showing, and describing, the way in which writing has been assimilated into my life. The chapter provides evidence of writing as a new expressive medium thoroughly grounded in my life; also of the way in which taking up writing has changed my life – sometimes disrupting well established habits within our family. As such the chapter contributes methodologically by showing me using writing as inquiry; also it contributes to the themes concerning energy and excitement, by showing how they connect to the quality of my life – to my fundamental humanity as I ask, how can I enrich the quality of my humanity?

The chapter also provides evidence for the way that the doctoral themes have become fleshed out in the course of the research journey – for the reciprocation between method and substantial theme. As I have engaged more fully with writing so I have begun to realise more fully what is at stake on the journey. The chapter illustrates how writing contributes to growing my understanding of the part the doctoral journey can play in the whole of my life, and not just in a part, such as my consulting life. The subject matter also enables me to introduce other aspects of my life such as my yoga practice. The chapter is divided into five sections.

Section One, *Writing is central to my life in CARPP*, shows how writing has become the most significant expressive medium within my experiences of doctoral supervision in CARPP.

Section Two, *Writing and my consulting life*, uses my description of a consulting case to illustrate dialogue with my supervisor and fellow students around my writing and also illustrates an early preoccupation with the emotional consequences of my way of working.

Section Three, *Writing changes and disrupts my private life*, illustrates the way in which I have taken up rituals of writing within my life and the way these have sometimes disrupted established ways of living within my family. The section also enables me to demonstrate writing as an attentional discipline.

Section Four, *Writing, feeling... and yoga*, also enables me to explore writing as paying attention to the detail of experience. The section also enables me to explain the relevance of my yoga practice to the thesis.

Section Five, *Experiential knowing*, supports a discussion of experience as way of knowing (Reason and Bradbury, 2001: 9) drawing on the interweaving of writing and experience from the previous four sections..

2.1. Writing is central to my life in CARPP

In this section I show in detail how I have created writing as a fundamental discipline for the way I have experienced the process of doctoral supervision. This fleshes out the description of writing practices in Chapter One adding more detail of the rituals, practices and experiences around writing as an important part of my research journey.

I started this doctoral journey as a part time student in March 2001, and I am now seeking to bring it to the closure of a final written document five years later. Throughout this time there has been a persistent pattern of meetings with my Supervisor, and the small group of fellow students (between six and three for most of the period), who constitute the supervisory group of CARPP 6. I have travelled from my home in Oxford to the University in Bath (or alternate locations agreed with the supervision group) for meetings of this Supervision Group six times a year, spread more or less evenly throughout the academic year. These meetings have become the most obvious way in which I have participated in the University as a student

Within this pattern of meeting my writing has emerged for me as a particularly significant point of contact with my Supervisor, fellow students, and, indeed, with myself in my role as an Action Research student. This has arisen out of how I have taken up and developed the opportunity provided by the supervisory process. Usually, in advance of each supervision session, I have prepared, and sent out a hard copy of a piece of writing about some aspect of my inquiring self such as an account of a consulting assignment or some other aspect of my life. This has often been a new piece prepared for the session, but sometimes it has been a re drafted piece modified from an earlier session – perhaps in the light of feedback at the previous meeting. Submitting writing with such regularity became a distinguishing characteristic of my studentship, although this only became apparent gradually as our individual practices emerged, and I saw that others were not submitting writing with such frequency/regularity. My chosen practice promoted the written presentation of myself and my work to a position of particular significance within the doctoral supervisory process: I would usually go to supervision prepared to present myself as the writer of a particular piece, written especially for the session, whilst the other members of the Supervisory Group would attend prepared to respond to me in the light of my writing.

I cannot claim now that this was a particularly thought through strategy on my part. We were all being encouraged to write of course, but creating a rhythm of written production around the supervisory process was not, as far as I remember, specifically addressed in our sessions together, and was certainly not expressed as a requirement of the process. In part the practice developed fortuitously, although it doubtless then became reinforced by mutual expectations and by the way it became for me such an important part of my research process. I want to introduce some examples of how a written dialogue developed around this particular text to illustrate how I quickly fell

into writing as a kind of conversation with my supervisor/supervisory group, and how this contributed to a richly textured ground for this thesis. The extracts show me drawing together my written piece and the written comments into a kind of conversational narrative. Using the terms introduced in the last chapter my writing shows some sign of becoming a bowl or hollow within which ideas and themes emerge into visible presence. In principle, within the supervisory process being offered by CARPP, the text of my written pieces together with written comments from fellow students and supervisor would support a discussion in a subsequent meeting. Often this fruitful co-ordination did not happen exactly as planned, either because I did not circulate the material (my writing, and the comments I received from others) sufficiently far in advance, or because other members of the group simply had not the time or interest to read the material. As a result there was only rarely a discussion based on all the written material, (The discussions I did have in the group were recorded (barring accidents) on a tape or mini-disc, which I took from the supervision session along with annotated copies of my original piece). In retrospect I believe that early exchanges such as the one I will quote from in Section 2 of this chapter helped me to the view that my relationship with the doctorate, and the associated processes would orient around what I produced by way of writing. This is what developed over the five years.

The emphasis on writing has been emphasised because I have not opened up other channels of contact, at least not ones that I have taken up very fully. I think, in comparison, of a fellow student who is in a close relationship with a post-doctoral graduate of the CARPP school, and who also teaches on an MSc programme with our shared supervisor. Her life feels to me to have a more multi-channelled contact with the doctoral process than mine does. My studentship feels more focused just into the writing. This focus has been further emphasised by the way I have deliberately taken up and reinforced the significance of the written word in the doctoral journey through having my writing published. I have regrets about this, and when I do begin to open more fully to belonging to CARPP, towards the end of the research journey I experience this as a source of happiness (I described some of this in relation to the EGOS conference at the close of the previous Chapter).

In the next section I will illustrate the relation between my writing and supervision by producing extracts from the first piece of writing I submitted to the supervisory process – an account of a consulting case. This piece of was submitted to three consecutive supervision meetings in the Spring of 2001 acquiring a rich surrounding of comment and further thinking that is still able to animate my thinking six years later in the spring of 2007. I experienced this process of conversing around my own written production as exciting partly because of its double edged nature: on the one hand I received feedback about the quality of my writing to support my exploration of this ‘new’ medium while on the other I also received feedback on the content of my consulting. It was a start that reinforced my enthusiasm for writing as a vital part of my doctoral journey, and as central to my

supervisory support. Let us now look together at the specific example of writing with in the supervisory process.

2.2 Writing and my consulting life

This section shows me accessing a dialogue that occurred in my supervision group around a piece of my written work I produced for the group in March 2001. The conversation recorded in a written exchange back in 2001 provides fresh stimulation when it is re-read in 2006. In addition to showing the practical use being made of writing on the doctoral journey this section also illustrates the origins, albeit in an inchoate form, of substantive issues for the thesis, relating to the way I might be blocking energy and human engagement. The paper quoted below describes how as a consultant I seek to make use of “bewilderment” in the face of a large system with its technically complex issues; also how I use my “stranger-ness” as a form of naiveté, which acts as a “cloak, enabling me to foray across the boundary into their world”. This illustrates an early orientation to what is not explicit and might emerge from the process of engagement with the client, and also reveals an ambiguous attitude towards belonging to the client system and towards my own presence in the client system (how visible should I be?). How has my skilfulness as a process consultant shut me off from sources of life energy?

The first extract is from the abstract of the paper, which helps to ground the paper for the reader. There then follows a written exchange with my supervisor that was originally inscribed in handwriting against her copy of my article. I subsequently typed these comments into a copy of the article and re-circulated it with my response. The article is the first piece of writing produced for supervision and the commentaries (including my responses) were added for supervision sessions in March and April 2001.

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to provide an account of the work of an organisation consultant from a Gestalt perspective. The first part describes a particular assignment with a strategy team working on behalf of a multinational oil company in an intense examination of technical and strategic scenarios for the first half of this century. This includes an account of how the consultant struggled to make use of his own bewilderment, and sought to sustain “stranger-ness” in his relationship with the client system..... (Farrands, 2001: 4)

Supervisor: An assumed goal or explored as potentially generative or degenerative - and what would make it either?

Me: I didn't start with the intention of being bewildered or of using my "strangeness" specifically. BUT on reflection I do carry a value about occupying a boundary position with the client system. I have a sense that this comes from two places. One is an intellectual construct about the nature of being a consultant: a *slightly alienated figure who in part is generating alienation* from the existing habits as a way of shifting awareness (similar to Mangham: 97). I also have a sense that this intellectual stance is supporting something deeper in myself, which may account in part for why I consult at all, and why I do it in a particular way. This is very much ongoing but I have a hypothesis that I have a *relational style that is simultaneously drawn towards contact with others and also*

fearful of it. I want and I resist. How shall I continue to explore this aspect of my self- particularly in the consulting settings in which I deliberately contact strangers? I assume largely without question that "strangeness" is generative - interesting? (Emphasis added.)

Supervisor: OK....and in the sense of a conscious feature (previously chosen, not discovered only in this engagement) working from strangeness seems to be a deliberate, choice of style. And I was checking if this is inquired intoas history in any encounter.

The exchange highlights two aspects that bear particularly on how the research will subsequently develop. The first is the reference to "alienating" as a quality of myself and also a quality I am seeking to bring to the system ("generating alienation"). In my response to my supervisor I suggest that alienation may be a route to awareness. Retrieving the reference to Mangham, on which I was relying, enables this to be clarified. Mangham was working with the idea of life as a performance in which people adopt roles. He speaks of taking a "metatheatrical perspective" in order to get closer to the phenomenon being experienced – a paradoxical notion of moving away in order to get closer.

Taking a metatheatrical perspective is an act of alienation, a large scale effort at role distance. Alienation, in the way that I am using the term, is the art of *making the familiar strange* by stepping outside it. It is the process of disrupting the taken for grantedness of every day life. As Brecht (1940) puts it: 'We make something natural incomprehensible in a certain way, but only in order to make it more comprehensible afterwards. In order for something known to become perceived it must cease to be ordinary; one must *break with the habitual notion* that the thing in question requires no elucidation. (Mangham, 1978 : 97. Emphasis added.)¹

My reference to this part of Mangham illustrates how I was interested at the beginning of the doctorate with the idea of being able to see what is closest to hand by stepping away from it. This idea takes on more substance as I

¹ Mangham's description of social being as a performance highlights a dramaturgical perspective on social life, which, in the words of Michael Billig, "is poorly equipped to deal with the argumentative aspects of social life, principally because of its emphasis upon social regularities and the coordination of scripted performances." (Billig: 14). The dynamic nature of social life means that the settled aspects of existing as a social being will need to be held together with those aspects that are about displacement and struggle. In this regard Billig does not claim that the metaphor of a theatrical performance is unhelpful, but that it is incomplete. The staged performance is only part of the picture he asserts, and takes place against a background that reveals conflict and argumentation:

"If all the world is a stage then what goes on backstage is being excluded. Thus a complete sub world, that of the theatre is not being considered as the model for social life, but only one element of that sub world: the public performance." (Billig: 15)

Billig proceeds by opening up the figural metaphor to its ground in the disputes and arguments that have been necessary to present the smooth performance.

engage with phenomenology later in the doctoral journey. It also relates to a second point I would like to make based on this article, which points towards an underlying concern about the cost to myself of my approach to process consulting. What is this cost and how does it tie in with the overall journey?

To help me respond to the question with which I finished the previous paragraph I would like to show a further extract to illustrate how I was using a number of images to try to express relational aspects of consulting. With hindsight I think I can detect emotional roots to this imagery- its these 'roots' that I'm in search of here. In this piece we see 'strangerness' being given a further twist of meaning through the idea of naiveté, and the metaphor of cloaking².

My notebook reveals that as I reflected upon the two initial meetings with the project leaders I found myself thinking of my role as being like that of a curious stranger travelling among a strange tribe – engaged with the client system but definitely not a part of it.On this occasion, it felt as if my main gift as the stranger was my naiveté, rather than any particular answers to the emerging dilemmas. The naiveté was also my cloak, enabling me to foray across the boundary into their world to capture what I needed to feed my own reflective space. This empowering stranger-ness was also something to be kept in balance: a tension or dialectic between in and out. To lose the strangeness too quickly disenfranchises the naiveté however to become too remote or to stay remote for too long also loses the right to inquire in this way. The dialectic of stranger-ness / increasing familiarity needs to be managed in such a way as to sustain the energy at the boundary between the client system and myself, because it is here that we will expect to see the emergence of a clear shared idea of the work which needs to be done. (Farrands, 2001: 5-6)

The cloak in this piece is obviously a magic cloak of invisibility; it enables me to hide myself. As the cloak is constructed out of a kind of naïve wonder it presents an interesting conjunction between seeing things freshly with a strangers eye and *moving in and out of visibility*. (I'm reminded of a time when my children were little and they would put their hands over their eyes in order to hide from me). The most direct reference for the cloak of invisibility is with spying, with its connotation of seeing what one is not supposed to see. Less obviously, and more positively, the cloaking metaphor suggests that others may need to be given space in which to show themselves, and that this might be provided by how I orient myself towards them. In this sense I take the metaphor of the cloak as having a generative connotation. As also symbolic of a general approach towards others – of being prepared to give them room.

² The compression of metaphors in the piece that follows seems to contribute energy. "Cloak", "tribe" and "curious stranger" arise together with my adoption of the theatrical metaphor of Mangham. These metaphors are opening a particular sense and feeling, which is what I now go on and explore.

Yet I also understand my interest with this and the other metaphors used in the piece as being about the potential personal cost that might be associated with “hiding”. In my response to my supervisor’s comments back in 2001 I noted a style of contact with others whereby I was both drawn towards contact with others, and also “fearful” of it. How am I a process consultant because it suits my emotional style? How has taking on the “cloaking” process described above effected my ability to really open to, and commit myself to others? Not long before I became a consultant I spent three years trying to manage a highly aggressive industrial relations situation in a large car plant: I was successful partly because of my ability to deflect violent emotion so I could stay calm in the middle of the storm. I can see something of that quality here in this case. Over the course of the doctoral programme I began to evaluate that life position. I wondered if my feeling antenna have become a little blunted through a constantly used deflective style. When I do encounter Merleau-Ponty he encourages me to see my simultaneous attraction and fear of contact as an embodied, generalised state that I have adopted as a kind of comfortable home for myself. According to this hypothesis this kind of ambiguous approach towards contact is a kind of recognised ‘abode’ for myself: a home I habitually seek, without thinking, whenever I’m drawn to either close contact or complete exclusion. As I think this through I wonder at the deeper emotional roots of my research interests. Do I want more excitement? Have I drifted into blandness?

This piece also shows something about me that becomes a resource for me on the doctoral journey. This is my willingness to stand in my bewilderment. This comes up again in the following Chapter of the thesis and then again in 2006 when I am reading a book by the phenomenologist and philosopher Jan Patocka. He makes a connection to bewilderment, which excites and opens something out for me. I feel as though at the end of the journey I’m returning to revalue something present in this early moment. The connection Patocka makes to bewilderment, is explained like this by Petr Lom in his introduction to Patocka’s book *Plato and Europe*:

[As Patocka reminds] us of Plato and Aristotle’s remarks that philosophy is borne from wonder that we are able to ask questions about existence, Patocka emphasises that this wonder is also bewilderment. For the discovery of questioning, seeking the truth is also accompanied by the discovery that the world reveals itself in an equivocal or two-sided way: it always oscillates between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible, identity and difference, truth and error, good and evil. Yet such equivocality or problematicity is a testament to human freedom: because of it, both philosophy and independence of action are possible at all.” (Patocka: xvi)

To read a phenomenologist associate wonder and bewilderment like this reminds me of how Merleau-Ponty quotes Eugene Fink, Husserl’s assistant, when he describes a phenomenological stance as “‘wonder’ in the face of the world.” (1962: xiii). A few lines further down Merleau-Ponty writes that this wonder is the source of a kind of radical reflection that “alone is consciousness of the world, because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical” (ibid). This reminds me directly of the way Mangham spoke of

being incomprehensible in order to be more comprehensible in the quotation I give above. As I reflect it seems to me that these thinkers are all pushing in the same direction; towards a process of stepping back in order to get closer. Is there a way in which I can honour, and possibly transform my own movement towards and away from contact?

These reflections, on the presence of aspects of my doctoral themes from the beginning of my journey, came to me as I re-read my own writing, and the responses it had evoked within the CARPP supervisory process. In my re-reading in the summer of July 2006 I was able to see my bewilderment more clearly as a potential resource for myself, because of the engagement with ideas around phenomenology in the intervening period. Looking back helps me to think again as I write the thesis. Also as I remind myself of my initial concerns I gain a helpful sense of continuity. This resource from the past is made available to me by the way in which I have taken up writing as an important aspect of my doctoral research and fattened out the writing in conversation within my supervisory group.

2.3. Writing changes and disrupts my private life

My doctoral writing is not constrained to my life as a doctoral student or an organisational consultant. I rapidly extend the reach of my descriptive effort on the programme to include my personal life. This section illustrates me doing this. The section also provides a closely observed description of how writing was intruding into my life. I have retained the close detail of this to provide an example of using writing as a practice ground for practicing attentional discipline, and, in so doing, for bringing experience to memorable life.

On a prominent shelf in my study sit twenty handwritten notebooks of various sizes and shapes. I have taken handwritten notes throughout my time studying; although the degree of care and deliberateness about this increased significantly in October 2004 when I started to keep a series of 'Moleskine' notebooks (currently – august 2006 - I am on volume 12 of these) which I carefully indexed as I went along. These notebooks include a wide variety of material all recorded chronologically; preparation for and accounts of consulting assignments are juxtaposed with notes from books or articles, together with reflections on the PhD and even the occasional shopping list. On the whole the writing in these Moleskines is very different from that in the notebooks that preceded them. The most obvious difference is that I am writing at greater length on each event that merits (in my eyes at least) a mention, and that there are more of these eventful occasions: it is now unusual for a day to pass without some writing in the notebook. The writing also has more of a continuing presence. I pick up one of the older notebooks and have difficulty in understanding what the writing means or when/why it was written, whereas in the later books much more attention is paid to indexing, and to writing more distinctly and coherently – as if the presence of a reader is more in mind at the time of writing.

As I flick through one of these later notebooks now I notice that, unlike its predecessors, it has the feel of being a part of a larger whole; a single body of writing contained within the twelve volumes. If I randomly pick up volume three (4th May 2005 to 1st June 2005), open it, and lay it alongside a later volume I notice distinct similarities and some differences. Both have indexes although in the later volume the index has progressed from the back to the front, providing a reminder to me of the way in which the index has moved from being an afterthought to being a much more integral part of the process of producing the writing. Both indexes reveal the same mixture of different aspects of my life, particularly my consulting and my doctoral life: this can be illustrated by reproducing the first four items for each volumes index:

Vol Three

- 1 – 13. Joanna Macy at Hawkwood.
- 14 – 27. MP [Merleau-Ponty], Barbaras, R. "A Phenomenology of Life"
- 28 – 31. Reflections [on the doctorate]
- 32 – 59. GISC [Gestalt International Study Centre] Leadership: 2.3

Vol Twelve

1 – 2 Exotopy

4 – 29 EGOS Conference. Bergen.

29 – 31 Shell. Xyz [I'm protecting confidentiality here], preparation.

32 – 41 Reflections on PhD shape/purpose.

A more extended comparison reveals another qualitative difference in respect of the doctoral content. In the earlier volume there is much more note taking from books I have read. Quite large chunks are sometimes transcribed without a lot of additional commentary from myself. I take this as a struggle to understand without a lot of integration into the specificity of a particular thesis. This contrasts with the later volume where much more of the space is taken up with planning this writing of the thesis. Each morning there is the assemblage of a plan at varying levels of detail. Every now and then an attempt to sketch out the whole and on other days just a few notes about what I will write about that morning. These notes often arise from an oneiric state; maybe a specific dream, but more likely that half awake time, cuddled next to Bridget in our bed, as my body comes back into consciousness to re engage with this task. The handwriting in this notebook has become incorporated into the ritual of writing the thesis. "Ritual"? Why do I choose ritual"? How has the writing become a ritual?

Rituals of writing

I would like to address the question posed at the end of the previous paragraph by describing in some detail how I have shaped my life around processes of writing. I do this for two reasons. a) I want to consolidate the significance of writing in this doctoral journey by providing a detailed description of the practice of writing. The quality of the description seeks to be evidence of a claim that writing has been significant for me on the journey. The evidential value of this description depends in part on whether I am able to evoke something of the feeling of, "Yes, I see what he means!" Laurel Richardson tells us in "Fields of Play" (1997), and also in the article she co-authored with Elizabeth Adams St Pierre in the Handbook of Qualitative Research of how she had "yawned her way through" (2005: 959) many exemplary qualitative studies. She tells of how she set out to see if it was possible to "create texts that were vital and made a difference" (ibid: 960), and to explore the idea that "*texts validate themselves*" (ibid. Emphasis added). Does what follows have this quality of self-validation? b) I first wrote this detailed description as a form of exploration for myself. If I sought to document what was happening to my life as a consequence of writing more often in greater depth would that help me to understand better the role that written expression was playing? Richardson and St Pierre claim that they have found "*writing as a method of inquiry* to be a viable way in which to learn about themselves and their research topic." (ibid: 959). From this perspective I'm trying to write in a way that illuminates what I'm writing about (i.e. the writing process), and also the 'me' that is doing the writing. This double illumination is what I later come to mean by writing about a life world – myself in my situation.

On most evenings during which I have been writing this thesis I have done whatever I needed to do to prevent interruption the following morning³. For example if I'm worried about responding to an e mail or paying a bill then I will do that in the evening so I prepare myself to be able to focus on the thesis; ensuring that the space and time will be available for me. When I awake and get out of bed at about 5.30 a.m., I follow quite a disciplined routine. I put on my smelly yoga clothes and pad downstairs into the kitchen. Our dog, Feste, will be sleeping under the kitchen table and will snuffle a greeting, shaking himself into wakefulness as I move to the counter to fill the kettle. While the kettle is boiling I slide open the glass door onto the rear deck of the house and step out to feel the early morning air. Then I return inside, take out my small blue teapot and my "special" cup with an aubergine painted on its side, and place them on the counter. I sometimes play a game in which I have to find, and clean if necessary, teapot, and cup (and get out the tea) before the water in the kettle has boiled, telling myself that I will not have good day unless I do so!

Once the kettle is boiled I put tea and water into the teapot, and move through into my study, usually followed by Feste, still sniffing and grunting himself awake. At my desk in the study I survey the garden and (hopefully) the arriving sunlight, open the notebook and begin to scratch out my preparatory notes. I reinforce the sense of ritual in the process by invariably using the same "special" pen: a "uni-ball micro Deluxe waterproof" (sic) pen produced by Mitsubishi Pencil Co. Ltd. (I have four boxes of these pens in my desk drawer...one blue box, one red and two black). At this time I am often still with arising from my bed⁴, and on these occasions I think of corralling the thoughts from my waking body much as a shepherd might corral his sheep together each morning, counting them as they emerge from the night. But as I express this metaphor I notice that it's not entirely satisfactory to me. I remember times when the thoughts are not properly formed, but seem to exist like a gentle haunting of my waking body,

³ The thesis both describes a research journey that has been completed, and also seeks to use this description as the basis of fresh ongoing inquiry as I 'write up' that journey. Sometimes I write as if confused as to whether I am recounting something that has been completed ("writing up"), or describing something unfolding as I write ("ongoing inquiry"). This shows up in the way I move between the present perfect continuous tense as if recounting something in the immediate past, and the simple present tense, used to account for something happening as I write. It is this latter tense I first gravitate towards in this paragraph. I seek to draw the reader in as if offering the invitation, to a tour around my writing practice as I write.

I have gone back and edited these two paragraphs to tidy up the tense structure. Nevertheless, the paragraphs still represent a wider ambivalence in the thesis as they seem to hesitate between telling a story about the past (present perfect continuous) or inquiring now (simple present).

⁴ Here's a tense shift from simple present to present perfect continuous: am I describing or commenting? I'm confused, and it shows as a hiccup in the flow of the text. This confusion goes on for the next few sentences.

tempting me to try to coach them into visible form, by coming to this special place and writing in my notebook. This noting acts as a prelude for turning towards my laptop, opening this file of writing, and beginning again to tap, tap away, transforming what has been written into existence in my notebooks into this form here; a “transformation” that has several distinct qualities.

As I type on the word processor my writing undergoes a transformation from a handwritten form that shows its origins through the amendments and changes to the text, into a form that tends to hide its origins. This distinction serves to differentiate the two forms of doctoral writing; also to link them in the sense that the handwritten notes provide a source of content, and form (the plan of what I will write is a shape as well as a content) that is then expanded upon in the typed text. In this sense there is a cycling motion between handwritten notes and the word-processed content. The handwritten notes feel more intimately mine; my the body feels more intimately related to the text because of the skill involved in moving my hand across the page. There is the residue of a kind of analogical sense in this form – I underline things, write more clearly and boldly for emphasis, scratch incoherently when I am feeling incoherent, strike through, or leave trailing into nothing the unsatisfactory or irrelevant. In contrast the tapping of the keys always discloses the same form of letter and word, no matter how angrily, or lovingly the keyboard is struck, or caressed. Attention to the unity and to the differences in my writing form brings me back to considering the way this whole process of production is also unified by its common space and the “ritualisation” of this space. The evocation of ritual has connected my text to a deliberately created context; also it has generated for me a feeling for the physical dimensions of the writing process – the space, the scratching and the tapping. It also reminds me through pattern and repetition of the practice qualities of being a craftsman. In addition there is also the feel of something mysterious happening; I think of an ancient, calling down the gods of writing! This activity does not take place within an empty space – it is introduced into an existing life space: with what effect?

Disrupting established rituals

I want to respond to the question at the end of the last paragraph by describing how writing has disrupted my life. I do this to illustrate that writing itself is a life practice - something that has inserted itself into my life. Writing has become important to me.

I have set out the space within which writing will take place. I have organised the books and papers of my doctoral journey into a position of prominence within my study, clearing out a special bookcase for articles and books relevant to my studies. I have also created a separate writing area in another room, so that I might continue undisturbed when Bridget, or our shared assistant Kate, occupy our study. Into this time and place I have then developed a practice of writing, which, although varied by the contingencies of life, has persisted sufficiently to become a routine for me and also for others. The social life of the office and the family home have been re-shaped

slightly by my commitment to this discipline. For example Bridget tries to leave me alone in our shared office until Kate arrives at about quarter past nine, and Kate is becoming adept at guarding me from being disturbed by clients and also at sensing when I should be disturbed. My children and a wider circle of friends have also come to organise their contact with me around this rhythm. In ways such as these, organising the context facilitates the writing to set in train further processes of organising space and time, which involves other participants in my life. This has changed our life together.

Such change has not been an entirely smooth process. One of the ways in which writing has appeared as a disciplined practice is as a disruption to well established patterns. Here the slightly unbending connotation of that word “discipline” seems to me to be appropriate. For example, getting up so early means that I am tired by the early evening, and usually ready to go to bed shortly after nine in the evening. In the history of our married life this is early, and Bridget will only rarely be ready to come with me. When she does come to bed at ten or eleven I am usually asleep, so she sneaks into our bed without the chance to read for a while before going to sleep, which would be her normal habit. Disrupting well established shared habits of how we go to bed is not inconsequential in a marriage. We lose an opportunity for contact as we potter around the bedroom together, chatting about the day that has gone, and perhaps peering into the next day together; also opportunities for sexual contact are reduced by moving out of synch our nocturnal habits. Writing is a personal process, but this personal aspect resonates into my relationship with others and into the institutional framework of my life. The influence flows back the other way: my writing is sustained and supported by the second and third person changes, which are initiated by my taking up of writing as a discipline. I could imagine for example that Bridget’s attitude towards the disruptive element in my writing process could be less accepting and encouraging; this would directly impinge on my ability to discipline myself.

According to the account provided above the introduction of writing into my life is a significant intervention. The process of writing (regardless of what I am writing about) has operated as *dissonance* or a force for *de-centring well-established habits*. Writing de centres me in my life world. It provokes an inquiry by changing my relationship to taken for granted aspects of my existence. This stresses the significance of my chosen method. Writing has become a way of life; the process of thinking and experiencing and researching that writing facilitates has become a part of the way I am. This in itself is new and, potentially exciting. How will I build on this potential?

2.4 Writing, feeling...and yoga

In this section I describe how writing about my life and bringing writing so thoroughly into my life involved me in the relationship between *felt experience* and writing. My life is lived in a felt way, and from early in the doctoral journey I engaged with the task of trying to write authentically about feeling and sensuality. As the journey progressed I began to appreciate that writing might also illuminate feeling by accentuating it, making it more memorable, and also by aiding in the process of sense making. Writing provided a kind of bridge between thinking and feeling.

The year 2006, when I started to write the thesis, was an emotionally turbulent time. In this section I begin by saying something about that in order to position some of the emotional background to writing the thesis. I then provide an example of how my daily practice of yoga was opening me to the feeling-full flow of my existence. This provokes questions about the relationship between thinking, feeling and writing that I take into the next section.

Writing authentically about feeling

My interest in feeling has been provoked during the last part of the doctoral journey by the discovery in November 2005 that my daughter Alice had a particularly rare form of cancer dispersed into several sites in her body. This led to intense chemotherapy, and to the whole family adjusting to find ways to best support her. For me this has been a complex experience that I would not wish to simplify by claiming to fully understand what has been happening for me or for others. One consequence has been that I have found myself weeping more – often unexpectedly. I seem to have been opened up to bouts of feeling that surge in to take me over. The immediate reasons for the welling up of tears, and the collapse of my bodily composure, often seem mysterious until I think on them later. That is why I use the passive voice of “been opened up to” rather than “I have opened to”. From the relatively narrow (in the circumstances) perspective of my doctoral studies my experience of Alice’s illness has accelerated my interest in the *emergence of feeling*, and the way in which it relates to writing.

As my experience of feeling has been that it has often caught me by surprise or kind of dispossessed me, I have also become even more interested in processes of tracking what arises for me, as I turn back to interrogate my experience. Where did that come from? In doing this I have been able to draw on resources laid down earlier in the doctoral journey. These have been partly intellectual resources as I will explain further on in this section, but they have also been resources of practice. The practice I would like to describe here is that of a daily yoga practice, and its relationship to the tracking of feeling as it arises for me in my body. The body is the site of feeling and I have found a physical practice has helped illuminate the origins and the course of feeling as it arises and becomes transformed into ideas and thoughts. Originally I had thought to use an example that referred directly to Alice, but on reflection it is too personal an example for what

will become a public document. Instead I will refer to an example that occurs in the same time frame, and which illustrates the fruit-full connections being enabled by the yoga practice as it takes place on most days of my life.

I practice yoga in the morning. If I have got up from bed early to write I will usually take a break at about nine. I move into the garden, take out my yoga mat, and work through a set routine that has been part of my existence now since I learned it in the early 90s. Weather permitting the yoga mat goes down in the same place each day that I am at home writing. This place is a small stone patio in a corner of the garden shaded by trees and bushes. From here my body moves through its habituated routine, as I pay a kind of homage to my breathing, which, in turn, brings me to noticing the condition of my body: I am alert to small nuances and connections. For example, if I have been out for a meal the previous evening and drunk wine then the breathing is more difficult to begin with, and my body is weaker. If I am too distracted by a problem that will not leave my mind then the practice is ragged and disrupted. Sometime the yoga can strengthen me, clear my breathing and my head; other times the practice breaks down, and I stumble to an end, or find myself sitting on my mat lost in thought. If the yoga goes well I frequently find that, as I finish, some problem comes back to conscious thought, but in a different way that will sometimes allow for a resolution or, at least, a different approach. My awareness is often heightened by the yoga, and I frequently find myself writing as a way of following up the yoga. In this way yoga frequently sets in train a process of experiencing and thinking. To illustrate how this may sometimes occur here is a description of an experience that occurred around my yoga. It illustrates the weaving together of a bodily practice with that of writing, and paying attention.

The experience I wish to re count occurred on the 2nd August 2006 which is just over three weeks after I started writing the thesis in Bergen as described in the last chapter. On this occasion I lay down my mat, and stood to face the rising sun. I lifted my arms above my head in a stretch, and threw my head back to look upwards. There, circling about 30 feet above my head was a Sparrow Hawk. She was languidly inscribing a tight but flat turn to the left, apparently orbiting around my raised hands. I was transfixed. In the early morning light she was very distinctive. As I looked closer, I could see that her apparent elegant languor was misleading. There was work going on. I could see her breast feathers being occasionally disturbed by her motion through the air. At her wing tips long feathers were separated and extended, working independently like fingers in the air to sustain bank and turn, while her tail feathers were twisting together to control yawing and pitching motions. The low sunlight heightened the rippling motion of the feathered body. It was a moving disclosure of work and elegance combined. By attending closely to the working figure I became conscious of an invisible participant in the drama being disclosed to me. The Sparrow Hawk was working with something that supported her - an invisible column of air that she worked both with and against. I had a strong feeling that the bird was

balanced in motion. I think with retrospect that it was my feeling of curious, slightly awed pleasure at seeing the bird's stability in motion that provoked what happened next.

The Sparrow Hawk flicked her feathers and sallied off behind my head. Then, as I started to move into my practice, a memory, until then forgotten, came back. First, it returned as a surge of nameless recognition; a feeling of familiar warmth and tenderness bursting out of me; a feeling that was then caught, or tamed, into thought. It was a part of a poem learned by the schoolboy me 40 years before. I remembered it haltingly, chanting out the alliterative sequence, which, after the practice, I went to check. A hundred years before I learned the verse, it had been written by the poet Gerald Manly Hopkins, who had seen a falcon on the wing, and had written a poem called *The Windhover*. I couldn't remember the poem accurately, but I could chant a few lines. The memory, and the stumbling repetition seemed to cap and complete the experience. After the practice I went to check the wording of the poem and copied it into my notebook⁵. I also made notes about the experience as I remembered it, and then, of course I quoted it here in this section of Chapter Two. It seemed on reflection to be an experience with epistemological implications. Something was given by the world outside of me – the bird was present as other than me. The presence of the bird to me triggered a surge of feeling that was gradually ordered, using language, which was processed first through handwriting in my notebook, and then through the laptop computer. As I moved into thinking about my experience a memory was triggered that was again announced by a surge of feeling. This resolved itself into a dim memory of long ago learned poem, which I sought to remember by chanting it out loud. How had the poem heightened the experience and made it more memorable? What role did my subsequent writing play?

It seemed hard to pull apart what was the 'raw' experience here. The process of nature seemed mixed up with the cultural one. Had the memory of the poem worked in the background to attune me to the bird? Had the natural event triggered the memory of the poem? What role did that sensual phase of naked feeling play? How has my subsequent writing shaped the experience? These thoughts occurred to me on that day in August 2006, just as I was starting to write the thesis. How has this experience, occurring as it did, when it did, shaped the way I have set out to write this thesis?

⁵ I caught this morning morning's minion, king –
 dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn
 Falcon, in his riding of the rolling level underneath him steady air,
 and striding
 high there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
 In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on a swing,
 as skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend:
 the hurl and the gliding
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
 Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Thinking about feeling

As I left my practice place and went to my study the yoga experience would not leave me. As I reflected on it I was drawn to remember another way in which I had encountered a connection between body, feeling and poetry on the doctoral journey. The memory led me back to the Spring of 2002 when I had been writing a piece called *Experimenting with Account*. As I brought forward this piece, and reflected on it afresh, it helped me to make sense of my experience with the Sparrow Hawk in my garden. The piece I went to find in my 2002 writing was a poem by the German poet Rilke. I had first seen this poem a year earlier on the wall of a Gestalt centre in Wellfleet Cape Cod where I had been teaching: the poem had been put on the wall by my teachers Edwin and Sonia Nevis. When I returned home I went and traced the poem and included it in my doctoral writing.

Re-engaging with the poet in the light of my yoga experience, my grief and love in respect of my daughter, and starting to write the thesis provided an influential conjunction. Beginnings may be propitious and I feel that this one was. In some sense the thesis, written over the following eight months provided a writing forum within which to think through what was happening in my garden on that August day, and the thinking that it provoked. In the Rilke extract I retrieved from my earlier writing, and quote below, the poet seems to me to write of how a poem has to *emerge from a deep ground of felt existence*. While this suggests a source for his poetry within the most personal and private place of his body this did not, and does not now, strike me as the whole picture as far as this writing is concerned. This is because Rilke also describes how this emergence is only made possible through a *fundamental participation with the world*. It strikes me as a very existential way to describe the sources of poetic inspiration. Let us read together what Rilke wrote:

One ought to wait and gather sense and sweetness a whole life long, and a long life if possible, and then, quite at the end, one might perhaps be able to write ten lines that were good. For verses are not, as people imagine simply feelings (those one has early enough), - they are experiences. For the sake of a single verse, one must see many cities, men and things, one must know the animals, one must feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the little flowers open in the morning. One must be able to think back to roads in unknown regions, to unexpected meetings and partings one had long seen coming to days in rooms withdrawn and quiet and to mornings by the sea, to the sea itself, to seas, to nights of travel that rushed along on high and flew with all the stars - and it is not yet enough if one may think of all this. One must have memories of many nights of love, none of which was like the others, of the screams of women in labour, and of light, white, sleeping women in childbed, closing again. But one must also have been besides the dying, must have sat beside the dead in the room with the open window and the fitful noises. And still it is not yet enough to have memories. One must be able to forget them when they are many and one must have the *great patience to wait* until they come again. For it is not yet the memories themselves. *Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer*

to be distinguished from ourselves – not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them. (Rilke: 26-27. Emphasis added⁶)

Rilke proceeds in this piece via a series of rebuttals. The “good verses” do not arise from simply feeling, nor from simply memories of everyday events, nor even from memories of deeply felt events of life and death, but they arise from the body into which these experiences have been sedimented; Rilke describes for me a process of the emergence of memory wrapped in feeling, which is based on a deep participation with existence. My experience of yoga took me back to Rilke who provoked me to ask whether I was experiencing life in the full way he described. Partly disturbed by the turbulence within my family, and provoked by the words of Rilke, I began to see the doctoral journey as an inquiry in to how to live a fully human existence. How was I fully alive to the world?

The poem also speaks to me of patience and waiting. Something comes but it cannot be forced. This resonates with another aspect of my early engagement with the ideas of others on the doctoral programme – my reading of Camus’ notebooks. He too speaks of patience, and of the way that experience may not be managed when he writes as follows in his notebook:

Vanity of the word experience. You cannot acquire experience by making experiments. You cannot create experience. You must undergo it. Patience rather than experience. We wait patiently – or, rather, we are patients. It is all practice: when we emerge from experience we are not wise but skilful. But at what? (Camus, 1963: 5.)

In this thesis I come face-to-face more than once with my own vanity. I also undergo unexpected dispossessive experience, and seek to find out *what it is that I should be skilful at*. A theme of the chapters that follows is the role that writing might play in helping me to patiently open to a fuller experience of the world⁷. I also come to see in the second half of 2006, following my engagement with the Sparrow Hawk, that an important aspect of my doctoral journey has been to find ways to see, and to feel afresh, how I am already in life: where are the sources of life energy – as they already exist for me?

⁶ The italics indicate the pieces my supervisor underlined when I produced this in a piece of my writing for supervision in March 2003.

⁷ See also from closer to the action research tradition:

“This [attending to what emerges] does appear to be something that people can be trained to do, but there is something paradoxical about this. To try to learn it is to try to give-up trying; to concentrate on it is to concentrate on not concentrating; to grasp it is to let go. The whole trick is to suspend thinking and to stay aware of your experience in the ever flowing present” (Rowan and Reason, 2001: 122).

Writing to feel

Writing has, from the beginning of the doctoral journey, figured as an important feature of my response to the question with which I concluded the previous paragraph. I realised quickly that, in addition to patience, opening and rich experience, I could prepare myself in another way. More specifically that I could refine my ability to express what I felt. I appreciated through my own early research experience (provided in more detail in chapter Three) that the ability to express might reciprocate with the ability to see and to feel. Alongside the extract from Rilke in my 2002 writing I placed another quotation – this time from a social scientist, who spoke about the importance of the ability to express when he wrote:

Even though there has been an explosion of self conscious writing about writing styles as tools of persuasion (e.g. Richardson, 1990; Van Maanen, 1988), what most have missed is the use of writing as a tool for comprehension. If people know what they think by seeing what they say, then the variety, nuance, subtlety, and precision of that saying will affect what they see, question and then pursue. Most people now writing about rhetoric in social science write with confidence, color, and nuance and seem to take for granted the fact that their linguistic competence enabled them to spot, label, and understand the issues of rhetoric in the first place.....Daft and Wiginton (1979) argued that organisation analysts were handicapped because they use low variety language to portray high variety entities. Daft (1980) followed up this argument empirically and demonstrated a growing gap between the complexity of models applied to organisations and the simplicity of the language used to discuss the models.

The counsel here is simple. Do whatever you can to increase the variety of the language with which you work. (Weick, 1995: 196)⁸

Weick reminds me that there is competence involved in expressing what I feel. Through expression, I locate my feeling and bring it into the world of thought, where it might be preserved in some way rather than disappearing into the next felt moment. One aspect of this competence is the breadth and depth of my skill with language⁹. Later when I encounter Merleau-Ponty I will discover him writing about words as if they were themselves sense organs: “an organism of words, establishing in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 182). In the later chapters of this thesis I will illustrate how I take on the idea of words opening me to the world differently. What form and vocabulary do I need to hold the complexity of my research journey?

Weick, Merleau-Ponty and Rilke help me to see two separate, but related, craft elements in my inquiry: the ability to describe evocatively, and the

⁸ Weick’s logic is similar to that in Shannon’s Law, derived within the field of cybernetics, which states that a complex system needs an equally complex management system to exercise control.

⁹ Not just language of course. There are other expressive media.

effect that this then has on my perception of the given world. My writing evolves throughout the doctoral journey into a way of interrogating what is given: the act of writing takes me back to the experience, and in the reciprocity of seeing and writing I discover the possibility of enriching and elaborating both. This is one way in which the act of writing is in itself a form of inquiry. To adopt a musical metaphor, developing an expressive style can be seen as a form of finger exercise, but the same moves on the keyboard will also inform the sonata that follows. In the context of Rilke and Merleau-Ponty this suggests to me that, although the inquirer might not be able to plan for the emergent they can prepare themselves, and that one mode of preparation will lie in the practice of articulation through speech and writing. This adds an element of active preparation to set alongside receptivity and openness.

The quest for authenticity in writing, expressing and feeling

Rilke, Merleau-Ponty and (less explicitly) Weick argue for a kind of authenticity that creates the potential for writing to be expressive of a world.

“...what we say here applies only to first hand speech – that of the child uttering its first word, of the lover revealing his feelings, of the ‘first man who spoke’, or of the writer and philosopher who re awaken primordial experience anterior to all traditions.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 179)

There can be other forms of writing which are, in Rilke’s words, “false”, or in Merleau-Ponty’s, constitute “second order expression, speech about speech, which makes up the general run of empirical language.” Am I able to get in touch with my own “first hand speech”? If I am will it show me the world of my existence differently? As I engage with phenomenology from mid 2003 onwards I come to understand my situation differently, and this reinforces in me an interest in how I express myself in writing. I engage with the idea that I have access to the real, but that this real is indeterminate – “partly veiled” in Merleau-Ponty’s words, and that my responsibility is to express my perspective. This way of seeing things helps me to invest my own perception – my own truth- with more dignity, and to prepare myself to accept more responsibility. This move is one strand that moves me towards some attempt at the resolution of the questions that motivate the thesis. Can I discover energy in my truth?

My growing sense that this question about my truth is an important one for me encourages me to return to my own experiences of those moments when I am taken possession of; when the silent basis of my existence seems to surge up and demand attention. Those moments I can prepare for, but not plan. Those moments that challenge me to discover a union of thought and expression, which will adequately express what arises: to witness and honour. Merleau-Ponty speaks of reaching for something first hand – of daring to believe this is possible. Rilke speaks of expression as being the culmination of a life, as being the product of a “wait” in which “sense and sweetness” are gathered. Camus speaks of “patience” and of the “vanity” of believing that we *have* experience. Weick speaks of the skills of expression

that might adequately bring us to the world. How might I write this thesis in a way that honours these thinkers? Is it possible that how I write will be as important to my chances of illumination as what I write?

As I inquire into these possibilities during the writing of this thesis I come to understand more fully the paradoxical nature of language. On the one hand the whole fabric of language is a cultural accomplishment of which I partake – it is a way in which I am socially and historically situated. The paradox is that this fabric is an enabling one; it does not tightly constrain me to only seeing or saying what the prepared stock of meanings indicates. Luckily language is not this precise and regimented. It has ambiguities and gaps through which language opens to the world. “Expression is never absolute expression, what is expressed is never completely expressed” (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 37). I have the opportunity to take up and use language in ways that will create something about the world that has never been seen or said in quite this way before. That is a possibility to be explored in the rest of this thesis.