

**Science and Mathematics Education Centre**

**Presence, Passion and Possibilities in Unfinishedness:  
Towards Exploration of the Whole**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**of**

**Curtin University**

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## **Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

**Human Ethics** The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262). Approval Number #SMEC-24-09.

Signature: 

Date: 8 March 2017

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## List of Unpublished Works by this Author

A trick of reflections (2013)

Green edged black (2013)

Steadiness (2011)

Tight (2007)

Breath (2012)

Fighting the flow (2011)

In depths anchoring (2010)

Silence in pink-poem (2012)

Silence in pink-prose retelling (2012)

The judge (2010)

At the cracks (2011)

I perceive (2014)

Between mountain and sea (2011)

Afloat (2014)

It is early autumn (2014)

In water I move, in air I move (2014)

It is mid-autumn (2014)

It is winter (2014)

Voids (2013)

Child twists (2014)

Feeding (2015)



## List of Poems by Students

I am Ruaumoko

All I feel is frightened

Hope

Spartan Soldier

Broken

## Abstract

An exploration of inter-relational mysteries within pedagogic and collegial relationships forms the basis of this thesis. These mysteries are revealed in the manner in which I meet and am met by others in three educational environments, occurring at different times, in different workplaces and in differing circumstances.

Phenomenological and hermeneutic possibilities in interpretation are unravelled with support from philosophers such as Hans Georg Gadamer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle, Max van Manen and Robert Sokolowski. Artistic inspiration from paintings and sculpture has accompanied a philosophical way, Johannes Vermeer, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni and Wassily Wassilyevich Kandinsky offering me means for disclosure of enigmas potentially concealed amidst the thoughts and feelings expressed in this work. Literary works by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Walter de la Mare have aided elucidation of comparisons and theories. Philosophers and artists have thus formed the framework of my interrogations, fuelling my imagination of possibilities for deepening of my scenario examinations.

Meaning-making has been further facilitated with incorporation of this writer's original works of poetry, prose and paintings which illustrate and demystify the dialogue between myself and the reader. Metaphors such as the image of the White Faced Heron, the physical activity of sea swimming, and the artistic forming of clay for ceramic work have been woven into explorations as I attempt clarity of communication.

I have converged these various means for expression, aiming for luminescence of technique and consequence, bringing thought and purpose towards transcending ignorance and naivety. Turning towards hermeneutic

inquiry to experience and flow into a spiralling impetus of phenomenologically reflecting upon and understanding the life of a teacher-researcher—one who willingly allows herself to be vulnerable to self-reflection and self-questioning—this thesis represents deep understandings of what it means to engage with others in ethical relatedness. I appeal to those readers who journey a similar path of self-questioning in this enigmatic world.

***Presence, Passion and Possibilities in  
Unfinishedness:  
Towards Exploration of the Whole***

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Figure 1: *Presence, Passion and Possibilities for Unfinishedness: Towards Attainment of the Whole* by Caroline Miller © 2015

## Chapter 1 The Source and the Waiting

The earth is melted  
Into the sea  
By the same reckoning  
Whereby the sea  
Sinks into the earth.

(Heraclitus, 2001, verse 23)

My ideas froth forth, exploding like so many sea foam fragments, my restless quest for understanding of self, other, their meanings and their interplay, surging relentlessly. I am wife, mother, daughter, granddaughter, friend and teacher. These roles I have attempted to balance throughout my life and have alternately brought both joys and anxieties. I believe my career as a teacher, within a formal educational environment, has particularly facilitated my way of being in the world—thrust as I have been into communities unknown to me before, with students, colleagues and physical environments. From this, my actions have formed a quivering spiral of energy towards a yearning to learn, to understand, to consider the path between, where actions and thoughts meet like sea and land, with creation made possible at the edges.

As I function in the breadth of social manifestations that create a school community and beyond, the role for self-examination and self-reflection seems imperative in my process towards development and I pursue this means for understanding in all my roles and through all my perceptions. In this work, I have expressed the impact of my selected narratives on the development of possibilities for expression of my humanness. I have examined the connections, tensions and traumas as expressed through communal interactions and have included consideration of concepts such as

havens, virtue and grace, judgement and discernment, readiness, tacit knowledge and intuition, possibilities and unfinishedness to this end. From these I have endeavoured to form a comprehensive examination, utilising narrative inquiry. My aim has been to weave my narrative explorations together as seaweed in a seabed, roots and fronds flowing together whilst maintaining individual integrity. Whilst the waves of time smooth the surface above the seaweed, ideas accumulate as sediments, forming and allowing new shapes, feeding the plants dwelling beneath the waves.

I think, I live, I wait and I search. I strive to be informed by my prior understandings of myself as gained through lived experiences, applying new, deeper comprehensions of these particulars to forthcoming teaching and collegial experiences as I aim to free my past with peacefulness. I thus begin with Hans-Georg Gadamer's manner of hermeneutic inquiry, with possibilities for an endless play of interpretation constrained by questioning and self-questioning, as my springboard.

Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus, every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. (Gadamer, (1975/2006), loc. 6856/8818)

“Every” word I use here potentially expresses my events, and each “carries with it the unsaid” to which I am “responding and summoning” as I investigate potent meanings. Three scenarios, which are my “events”, illustrate particular effects. I have explored and questioned these in terms of “bracketing” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 49), whilst questioning the meaning of this phenomenological term and whether it is feasible as a procedure towards making meaning.

The three scenarios possess some shared outcomes with different repercussions for my understanding of the world and my positioning within it. In this I have taken the role of action-researcher, where,

We develop the ability to see by looking with intent, by practising conscious looking and seeing. This is part of what it means to be a scholar—to develop our abilities and capacities to see. (Holly, Arhar & Kasten, 2005, p.143)

My “looking with intent”, which frames my intention for scholarly work, has resulted in the isolation of these scenarios from many. The re-tellings are representative of a natural attitude, prior to deep analysis, to unambiguously introduce the reader to the raw material for each inquiry. Each scenario recording appears in a font different to the body text (Avenir Book size 10), at the beginning of respective narrative explorations and sometimes previewed by a poem as I have attempted deeper expression of feelings and thoughts of the time.

Although there are three narratives with three different foci, a bond of experience exists within and between each one. The first and second narratives drew me into the realm of the will, demanding engagement, shaking me from my havens and forcing me to make choices in workplace imposed relationships. By taking a role in the interchanges that were orchestrated by my environment, I sometimes experienced a path of discomfort before moving towards the potential for deeper understanding of self and other. In the final scenario of the trilogy, I experienced the joy of connectedness and relished the meaning-making that was then available to me.

I responded in ways I deemed appropriate at each time, limited by my past, my perceptions, my presences and my absences in comprehension, that is, my composite of physical, emotional, psychical and intellectual being-ness at that moment, at that place. Other possibilities for response may have been present in my consciousness, but the actions I took related to my temporal and spatial relationship to knowing and naming and doing, an elaboration on these three ways of sense-making are included later in this chapter.

Below I present my visual image of this thesis. I have incorporated three colours that possess particular meanings for me, representing aspects of this thesis. I have transposed form upon form, indicating their interrelationships and the movement possible between each facet, as part of the whole. I have begun with a yellow/gold sphere, holding the centre of each impulse and illustrative of my source and completion, inspiration and answer. Gold/yellow is a colour I perceive as warming, encompassing, energising, healing, possessing promise and storage. The wave-wings of gold moving through this sphere represent lived experiences yielding my writing. Gold/yellow for this aspect emphasises its connectedness with my self, which is held by the golden sphere.

Next I have used green, an intermediary between blue and yellow, a vessel and percolator of ideas, where fecundity might give rise to further self-knowing. Green represents the methodological compilations as I attempt a path towards meaning-making.

The blue wave-wings, this rich, true-blue of sapphire oceans and endless star-skies, represent aspirations in meaning-making. Blue and yellow enfold green as they create it, whilst maintaining individual integrity. This shade of blue I perceive as soothing, welcoming, sincere, authentic, joyous and tranquil. This is my first diagram displayed as a visual image of an entirety, without words.





Figure 2: *Alchemical Aspirations—This Thesis* by Caroline Miller © 2016

The next diagram is a brief elaboration of particulars, incorporating my major philosophers, artists and influences.



Figure 2a: *Alchemical Aspirations—Unfurling* by Caroline Miller © 2016

I have unfolded the wings of each part as drawn in the first diagram, for I have imagined bird forms, inspired by the heron. Each centre is a circle of containment and possibilities, bird-bodies of mind-moving, heart-feeling

will-force. I have placed the full gold/yellow sphere above these bird-forms, but entreat the viewer to recognise the circle of movement from below to above in the repetition of gold, then back again, as interrogations spiral deeper, then ascend again as meanings are grasped. As each bird strives upwards, each manner of being in the world strains towards transformation in tranquillity. I have named the drawings in reference to an ancient Chinese meaning of alchemy, “*lien tan*—pill of transformation” (Marshall, 2001, p. 20). My intention for this thesis is as a means for my transformation, of rising above that in which I believe I have been encased, into clarity of thought, word and deed—to grasp my own philosopher’s stone.

### **From obscurity into flickers of light**

With phenomenology, I gradually unfold obscured meanings. Like tiny, glowing, sea beings visible only when agitated, I wish to illuminate my understandings of phenomenological impulses whilst seeking solace in hermeneutic intentionality.

The common definition for intention is an aim or plan, from Old French *entencion*, meaning stretching, purpose (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). When conversing, we may speak of intending to complete a project, of intending to contact that old friend—but there is no guarantee in the word. It is given form by the will of the speaker and can be nothing without this. Philosophical, phenomenological intending, is different. This intending can refer to “...the quality of mental state (e.g. thoughts, beliefs, desires, hopes) which consist in their being directed towards some object or state of affairs” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). This meaning seems to include a deeper relationship with the will and the life of the intender, incorporating the tangible with the intangible, where outcome desired is linked with the inner being of the intender. It is the ability to move into this viewing and consideration of an event that seems to form a philosopher. Aspects may exist in a life, but the choice to exert discipline within a manner of being

seems the difference. Therefore, as a determined thinker and explorer of events in this life, I choose to identify with the phenomenological manner of contemplation, beyond what Robert Sokolowski has described as the natural attitude. I launch my thoughts into philosophical intentionality and attempt comprehension of this way of being in the world, as a philosopher.

I question the path of my intentionality when viewing and experiencing and wonder if it is different to the intentionality I experience when considering a ceramic piece or a poem? I perceive objects in their completeness and I am aware of particular qualities above others, but I am observing an unchanging form, an object. When considering a relationship, there is a different energy, with modes of being in motion. Communication flows and forms, it may also retract, diminish, it may solidify then be compressed into a tiny space, out of mind, to forget or to remember later. It is this kind of intentionality that I am applying to my three scenarios. Although different, their lived-ness as narratives from my experiences unifies my intentionality.

Max van Manen said that,

Phenomenology is more a method of questioning than answering, realizing that insights come to us in that mode of musing, reflective questioning and being obsessed with sources and meanings of lived experience.

(van Manen, 2014, loc. 749/11093)

My questioning has led my search for a means to distance myself from my scenarios. Etymology, metaphor, poetry, prose, visual arts and dramatic scene-setting served to disclose hermeneutic elaborations.

For my first example, I turned to Jan Vermeer's painting, *Girl with A Red Hat* (1665). This artwork is illustrative of another's lived experience and whilst it is not contemporary and perhaps not an obvious revealing of issues

for the twenty-first century, I have sought hermeneutic understandings of my place and time. I have identified universalities, discovered in the humanness expressed by this artist, amongst others I have chosen for this thesis. In the same questioning and identifying manner applied to this painting, I look to my scenarios as illustrations open to interpretations. I acknowledge them by choice—in choosing, I attempt then to name my knowing and my ignorance. I have explored whether the naming contains the picture and whether this then might move me towards attainment of knowing. Vermeer's painting, visually engages the viewer in his use of colour and contrast. His method utilised his understanding of light and shade (*chiaroscuro*) and shadows (*sfumato*), terms that will be discussed in greater depths later in regards to examination of my narratives.

### *Girl in a Red Hat*

Vermeer's 1665 painting depicts a girl seated in a carved chair, head turned towards the viewer. Her hat is perched confidently on the crown of her head, its width encompassing her shoulders. The hat looks full and heavy with materials, a statement of colour and style. The girl wears a vibrant, ultramarine blue jacket or shawl, its folds framing her neck from which peeps a flash of pure white at the throat. The combination of blue and red harmonise the composition. Within this enfolding by colour, her right hand reaches out to support her turning, as her eyes, in half-light, meet the viewer's gaze.



Figure 3: *Girl with a Red Hat* by Jan Vermeer (1665)

I have now described what I perceived as major features of this painting. They were the first to call my attention, the first shapes and colours of which I was aware. My sight was thus engaged and this might have lead to awaken my feeling and thought but in my instant of viewing I was aware only of obvious, physical manifestations of shapes and colours. Consequently, I have named some of the figures that appear in my thesis and their subjects with words that entered my initial awareness of them through sight. As I have moved from one feature to another, I have perceived, described, then continued to the next point for my attention. I have named what I see.

I then look again. There are muted shades of the background, its indistinct nature, its shadows, smudgings and blurrings accentuating the foreground figure. I see the girl situated within this lack of clarity and notice the angle of her face as she turns towards me. I see her as engaged with the viewer—her direct look encompassing what is before her, eyes focussed. Although in shadow, these eyes are definite in their force and connection. Part of her face is illuminated, the light touching her hand as it rests on the chair, her left earring, her cravat and her jacket. The top of her hat glows with light, the edges are a soft blur of bluish red. Her lips are parted, as if in anticipation, maybe of a smile, or a kiss.

I am still naming the painting. I am naming the pose and presenting ideas related to my direct perceptions. Simultaneously, I am attempting movement into the doing-ness of the painting. By doing-ness I mean that I am applying meaning to the image. I am predicting potentials and imagining the outcomes, relating to the image with my understandings and projecting my experiences onto the subject. This is part of my hermeneutic intention, in the way of Gadamer (1975/2005), for interpreting what I see.

In this process lies my doing-ness. I see the painting. I name the painting. I then interpret, reaching for clues to this girl. I wonder who she is, why she is there, what she is thinking, where she is, how she came to be there, what time of day it is. Within these questions, I attempt to suspend my judgement and to consider the painting without emotional responses—but my empathy is won and I surrender to her.

I have attempted the depiction of that which I am currently aware whilst striving to encompass aspects of my humanness. I found this painting pleasing to my eye, my thoughts, my feelings and my own experiences, whilst I learnt to interrogate the painting's form and content with awareness of my own perceptions with which I had become acquainted through reflection. I acknowledge the words of others concerning this painting, but I focus on my interpretation as a means towards illustrating my philosophical methodology,

which encapsulates my meaning-making. In my exigency for veracity as I employ artistic modes of uncovering meaning-mysteries within these lived experiences, I have identified with Ruthellen Josselson (2004) and her perceptions of hermeneutics of demystification, in particular, which are accompanied by her exploration of hermeneutics of restoration. Further discussion of hermeneutics of demystification occurs in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Within the painting of *The Girl in the Red Hat* lays a scene that I could in turn name and describe. If I wished, I could recreate my understandings of the painting and in the 'doing' of this, I might come to access deeper meaning of its intentionality. Mark Johnson acknowledged the connectedness of experiences, saying,

Things and events have meaning by virtue of the way they call up something beyond them to which they are connected...What we emphasise and, conversely, what we ignore will make all the difference in what "things" mean to us. (Johnson, 2008, p. 269)

I ponder a life lived completely within doing-ness. I believe such a way of being would mean I would not experience thought as thoughts, as images and explanation in words, but as mild awareness of doing and being. I would conceive of some thing, see its 'is-ness', not dwell in it, but instead rest on it, within it, beside it and immerse myself in it. My doing would then involve inner knowing of the thing through absence of articulation, either outwardly or inwardly. I imagine that my doing would consequently encompass the thing-in-itself and could lead me to some understandings. In my doing-ness I would be encompassed and encompassing, boundaries blurred, and I would slip right into the thing itself. If I did this, how would I withdraw into my self once again? Is there danger of self-annihilation in this transcending of boundaries? Is this comparable to what is experienced by young children as they find their meaning within the world, where they are enraptured by the outside world and must at times be brought back to themselves, as many

parents would recognise? Does naming offer the space for withdrawal into self, to avoid loss of self in the other? I sense I must name before proceeding to doing. This might signify for me a step towards comprehension at a level beyond the visual, where the being, the existing, is identified as a noun and a verb.

Sokolowski (2008) stated, “To name a thing is to begin an adventure in manifestation, not to conclude it” (p. 112). Did he mean that by naming an event or object the whole cannot be perceived? When a tiny child is named, she can be known only for her potentials, for she has as yet not revealed the self that could be the child. The name gives some identification as human, but also signifies her being as a presence in the world to be known, as yet only partially known. There can be no end to the understanding of this child—she is in a continual state of unfolding, evolving, manifesting. There is no finishing. There is only the flowing onwards of knowing, and I “adventure” onward in this flow.

In contemplation of “an adventure in manifestation” I reach towards analogy and seek the swimmer. A swimmer can feel the flow of current for each swim in a different way and can be touched within this flow by different organisms and materials. The water is a constant, but it possesses difference in its nature. It holds a manifold of perspectives that can be brought to the swimmer as it flows on and around her body. The swimmer is the knower, the water is the thing, sea-flows and objects present are the building of manifolds, towards understanding the existence of a truthful-ness in the water-ness. I, as a swimmer, know water to be named and experienced by others as water. My own experiences of the water element exist as my truth-making—identifiable as my perspectives contained within a framework of others’ familiarity. Would it matter if I did not know the name of this watery space, to appreciate its qualities? Is the naming of the thing fundamental to my comprehension?



Within my scenarios there were many properties which, when combined, produced certain effects for my self-ness. I dwelt within situations, absorbed meanings I named at the time and responded in ways in which I may not now, with retrospection, respond. I did not always flow with the impulses. I struggled with the I-ness, the You-ness that is the individuality of the other and felt often as if I became lost to the way of the other, losing my own sense of being within interactions. I have felt encompassed by external demands and forcibly presented perceptions, and subsequently subsumed my own. My withdrawal as I recoiled from these interactions caused misunderstanding, escalated my anxiety and allowed space for more conflict. In time, as revealed in my third scenario, my withdrawals were tempered by collegial support where variations in naming were celebrated. In the meantime, I struggled towards my ideal, a place where I belonged, unknowingly reflecting a process described by David Bohm (2006) where,

The point of suspension is to help make proprioception possible, to create a mirror so that you can see the results of your thought...other people are a mirror, the group is a mirror. You have to see your intention. (p. 29)

I was unable to “suspend” whilst embroiled in the first and second lived experiences. My thoughts dominated and resulted in what Bohm called “felts” (2006, p. 61). I was not aware of thoughts producing each effect and so I was not enacting proprioception, which he called “self-perception” (p. 28). Instead, I believed the process to be the reverse, that my feelings preceded the incidences, resulting in my thoughts concerning the situation and then in my physical and verbal responses. I was caught in a cycle of prejudgement, leading to physical fear responses, then into judgement, subsequently into verbal expressions and back into prejudgement of others’ possible responses.

Like a swimmer in a storm, I struggled in wave forces, sank and rose with the coercion around me, swallowed external elements and spluttered fitfully between impacts, all the while trying to keep afloat in the direction required for survival. A most difficult thing for me, I believe, is to perceive others as a mirror of myself, especially when I perceive qualities that I judge as less

desirable. It seems pride and judgement could be interwoven. Is there a place for humility and compassion? Does transformation of perception exist here as a possibility for me? I breathe into my narratives and imagine.

### **Over the sea moss**

Each time I enter the water, the walking surface varies in length and texture. The tide and the waves determine the safety of this space before the water. It can be so slippery that I must take shortened steps to maintain stability. It can be smooth and firm, free of weed and sea moss that remains covered by enough water so as to be evaded by feet. It can be a brief few steps before the sea, or a longer series of uncertain steps. There can be storm debris, tiny crabs with legs missing, anemones still possessing all their spines but only an empty shell, bull kelp pieces and other seaweeds, branches, leaves and feathers.

All this meets me before I enter the water, but never in the same way. I possess awareness of the manner in which things can change, based on my prior observations and experiences. The variations pique interest and encourage continued development of my visual and sense perceptions. The same manner of perception I apply to my professional experiences. Although there are similarities between each of my narrative experiences, each presented itself to me differently. My interrogation of narratives acknowledges phenomenological and hermeneutic means by which to gain comprehension, qualitative inquiry is the manner for meaning-making rather than quantitative inquiry, where numerically collated data form a basis for proving or disproving a theory. I have utilised my personal lived experiences for development of meaning-making. They may be indicative of other's possibilities, but they exist as my own explorations of my own perceptions.

Elliot Eisner commented, "...qualitative inquiry places a high premium on the idiosyncratic, on the exploitation of the researcher's unique strengths,

rather than on standardization and uniformity” (1998, p. 169). Eisner was particularly interested in creative means for expressing world understandings, as expressed in his books, which include *Educating Artistic Vision* (1972), *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (1998) and *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002). His theory of arts-based inquiry has inspired much of my thinking concerning creative, effective, respectful, ethical qualitative inquiry that involves author integrity in presentation and interpretation. Norman Denzin has enlightened me further regarding qualitative inquiry in the mode I have chosen.

Building on what has been described and inscribed, interpretation creates the conditions for authentic, or deep, emotional understanding. Authentic understanding is created when readers are able to live their way into an experience that has been described and interpreted.

(Denzin, 2009, pp. 97-98)

To begin my task, I have pursued a manner and use of words to communicate as clearly and as authentically as possible, bounded by my past. I have then striven to present my situations qualitatively, “building on what has been described and inscribed...”(Denzin, 2009, p.97), looking to the particular whilst recognising the general applicability of some instances and results, within the various relationships.

To this end, I have not collated frequency tables, nor focussed on the mean, median and mode of event frequency. Instead, I have concentrated on events I considered meaningful, then interrogated them with the use of academic, poetic, artistic and situational references. I have employed a range of structures for gaining meaning, towards philosophical rigour—questioning, reasoning, and interpreting—whilst examining the possibility or impossibility of finishedness for a human, placing myself as example.

My data for this qualitative inquiry thus exists as description of lived experiences prior to releasing my comprehensions. Denzin (2009) identified “four lessons” that I, as qualitative researcher, must consider. I believe these

aspects could be applied within a search for meaning, signposting some of the qualities in interrogation necessary for my advancement in such a journey.

First, the worlds we study are created through the texts we write...we study (and create) lived textuality. Experience is always mediated and shaped by prior textual and cultural understandings...(Denzin, 2009, p. 171)

I recognise that I have attempted a creation of worlds in which my events occurred. These were my worlds of understanding and in my expression of these, I hoped for relief through the attainment of meaning. I also hoped for the formation of texts that were accessible beyond me, into worlds expressed by others. Denzin reminded me that,

Second, the social text is a performance, performative writing, a visual reconstruction, a re-presentation of the dialogue, voice and actions of the other. Through the lens of the text the reader confronts the other, whose partial presence is given in quotes and excerpts from talk.

(2009, pp. 171-172)

I have shaped my texts based on prior understandings. I have then presented and re-presented the events as I experienced them, choosing or omitting where and what I decided, as the recorder of my own lived experience. I aimed to show my scenarios “through (my) lens”, utilising inspiration from a world I perceived as external to me. I remain writer, reader and experiencer. I offer this trilogy to others through my “partial presence”, with me as the other to the reader, inviting engagement and mutual comprehension.

Denzin (2009) continued with his third criteria.

...there is no external authority for these textual representations. Their legitimation cannot be given by invoking a reality that lies outside the text...Validity, a text’s authority, can be given only internally, by the claims and spaces it makes and offers to the reader. (p. 172)

I believe this implies that the text cannot be judged against others’ experiences in order to attain meaning for a reader—that each text holds its

own integrity and to analyse it as external to the writer removes opportunities for authenticity. As I consider this idea, I restate that I am not looking to create, support or refute data in order to gain validity. I aim instead to earnestly record and present my narratives as parts of the continually expanding amalgam of human experience. Finally, Denzin said,

...the authority of the text rests on an experiential structure that moves in three directions at the same time. The text must reach out from the writer to the world studied. It must articulate a set of self-referential experiences that allow the writer to make sense and understand this world in moral and political terms. Finally, the text must speak back to the world it describes. (2009, p. 172)

I have been mindful of this “experiential structure”. I stretch into the external world as I record for myself and for others as readers. In my interrogations of the texts I have engaged in conversations with the situations and imagined possibilities. Each time I revisit these scenarios I bring difference, for time passes and I am moving through like a heron seeking sustenance between shore and sea.

And that evening, in the quiet waters, was a large heron, utterly frozen and still. It was the only bird on the river: in the evening crows and other birds would be flying across the river but there were none that evening, except for this single heron. You couldn't help seeing it: it was so white, so motionless, with a sunlit sky...that evening, that single heron and the three palm trees were the whole earth, time past and present and life that had no past.

(Krishnamurti, 2003, p. 269-270)

The scenarios inhabit a heron-like nature, standing alone between land and sea, standing as individuals even when amassed, possessing their own space, not inextricably bound by the horde. They might seek solace in the familiar, but they remain free in their choice, for they could fly away from their flock without turning back. Their haven might exist in knowledge of their heronness, in their independence framed by their belonging. I have observed a white-faced heron at the shore, watched its graceful, jaunty, halting dance as

it found food amongst the rock pools. Its neck extended swiftly, prey swallowed with the next in focus, wings containing impulse. Sleek blue-grey feathers, the colour of winter sky and sea, would unfold then enfold the bird's elegance. Like these wings, I wish to unfurl then rest, as necessary, these narratives of mine.

At this water and land meeting, where herons walk, I see the water lapping upon what seems solid and known, then notice the abrasions and deposits of the less familiar. Between the sea-ness and the land-ness exists a space of effects. I sit in this space between and attempt clarity of actions and thoughts, the sea-ness of time and the land-ness of place combining. I look to alternatives each time I revisit this space of event-in-time and each time I see with difference, for I am a being living daily in a changing world, inclining towards the known while anticipating and living in the new.

My scenarios form my framework as I examine and use terms and concepts as described by a range of twentieth century philosophers who were inspired in turn by historical figures, from Aristotle to John Dewey. In my wonderings these thinkers have questioned and reasoned, rejected and embellished, embraced and illuminated particular ideas and I draw from their insights as a seeker in my time. I am nourished by their words and am moved to develop my own methodology as I attempt to form a whole from these parts.

I have described ways I have sought for minimising prejudgement and prejudice within this thesis. I have an aim in sight and acknowledge that my choice of subject suggests prejudgement prior to analysis. My choices have been based on my own perception of my intellectual and emotional state within different occurrences. I have existed between a place of striving and a place of clarity. I cannot know now what I may know, but this sense has not halted my efforts, for within such twilight, where shadows bloom and light withdraws, I believe there is promise for mindful tranquillity.

I have chosen scenarios to depict potentials within the educational environment. I aim for understanding of opportunities for genuine dialogue, for,

In every genuine dialogue, there are three, not two, voices. The first is the voice of the person speaking, the second is the voice of the other person in the dialogue, and the third is the voice of the relationship itself, which inspires and speaks through the first two voices. (Kramer, 2013, p.5)

The dialogues chosen might be considered normal, usual and unremarkable. With identification of the usual and the expected within this educational world, I aimed to illuminate the extraordinary existing within the ordinary and consequently, the existence of the universality of human experience, particularly whilst interacting within an educational workplace.

Questionnaires, surveys and interviews have not been used in this work. While I recognise the value of these data collection methods and their frequent role in qualitative works, I have pursued a particular means of inquiry within my work with focus on the part as a fragment of the whole, as described in the seventeenth century by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and expressed contemporarily by Henri Bortoft (Bortoft, 1996). I have drawn strongly from works of van Manen (1990, 2014) within the research area of qualitative inquiry development and seek my own way towards accessing and exploring current aspects of qualitative inquiry, while imagining further optional outcomes.

I, as fragment, express my own truths. These personal truths have meaning and make meaning for me as an individual grappling with experiences. This grappling I identify as part of the whole, a struggle of human endeavour, with myself as part of humanity as I attempt meaning-making. I am making meaning on an individual level and offer it forth to the world. I see philosophy partly as a means for making sense of my world, “learnt by experience, that is, a posteriori” and also “by reason and a priori, that is, by considerations of the fitness of things which have caused their

choice” (Leibniz, 1996, loc. 1245/7874). Although Freiherr von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz acknowledged this way of things with which I concede, I reject his preoccupation with an omnipotent being whose nature encompassed all things to create meaning, but accept his ideas concerning the human experience as inextricably linked to community. Philosophy gradually evolved since seventeenth century Leibniz, and continued into concepts of true philosophy as being motivated and fed by pure reason, requiring reasoned thinking, with complex arguments meticulously expressed in the manner of Immanuel Kant, John Locke and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Individualised conceptions of truth that celebrate the solitary being of the person, with accent on the nature of being, consequently informed the philosophies of nineteenth century philosophers, a preoccupation that continued into the twentieth century with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. The being-ness of the person was further examined by Gadamer, whose work encompassed not only the being, but the other in their involvement with being. This progression reflected my meaning-making, as I have travelled from perceptions of external, omnipotent, omnipresent reasons for life events into an internal awareness and enfoldment of the lives of others into my own.

In his reference to the evolution of the concept of a philosopher, Gadamer commented on the Ancients, saying,

These thinkers simply tell how existing things combine, how they arise, how they connect with one another. They depict all of this as a process, whereas the problem consists primarily in comprehending the meaning of being.  
(Gadamer, 1998, p. 65)

The Ancient Greeks considered philosophy as ‘love of wisdom’. I note that philosophy could be described contemporarily as “the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). Gadamer (1998) wrote how the ancients described things in the world as



either in flow—*rheontes*, or permanence—*stasiotai*, which seem to me to link with post Renaissance concepts of experience as flow, and reason as permanence due to its explanation of the world as truth, as immutable, therefore permanent. This permanence, which could be said to be ‘being’, referred mostly to the tangible. The tangible, as being, might be expressed as that which can be touched, seen and manipulated for these Ancients and not to “...the modern sense whereby what can be established through experience and what can be measured count as ‘being’”(Gadamer, 1998, p. 66).

While I exist as a physical being in this world, I aim for expression of elements of the intangible, that which is enacted in the world. I believe my philosophical journey might accord with Karl Jaspers’ explanation, where, “Philosophy means to be on the way. Its questions are more essential than its answers, and every answer becomes a new question...” (Jaspers, 1954, p. 12). I believe the philosophy I wish to pursue is ineffable, neither generalised nor moderated, with an aim to rise, to unite with experiences of others as agents of doing in the world. Though concerned with my experiences, feelings, thoughts and responses, there may exist some generalisation but not, I hope, concern with trivia.

### **Flotsam?**

It seems generalisations differ from possibilities. Generalisations seem to possess qualities of judgment, where judgments exist as a kind of prejudice that rejects the judged based on negative preconceptions. From there, generalisations have potential, I believe, to triviality if foci are not deeply examined. Triviality implies superficiality, like broken and discarded pieces of sea flotsam with no anchoring and no purpose. I now put in place my ‘stage-setting’ device as I explore meanings of this word ‘superficiality’ and discover it as “appearing to be true or real only until examined more closely; existing or occurring at or on the surface” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006), from the Latin *super*, meaning above, and *facies*, meaning face. I fight against

this way of being—it is not my preferred foundation. If I pursued an ‘above-face’, that is, a surface level, way of being, I could not engage fully in this conversation for it would lack meaning for me as writer/reader and I would skim across surfaces, perhaps buoyed by a space beneath, but not engaged in its deeper nature. I would be like a swimmer who sees the point in sight, but focuses so completely on the goal that her senses are dulled, the water only a means to an end—the end to her is all. The glint of moon or sun on water, seaweed caresses, breathing of water as it washes in and out—she ignores them all. In this ignoring there might exist a reason for trivialising other things present—moon, seaweed, breathing water. This is where chosen ignorance can lead to an inhibition of meaning. The force of commitment to a goal could mean disengagement in the journey, in ignorance of possibilities existing in that moment at that time. I choose to dive beneath the surface, to feel the process in all its variances, as I attempt to find and make my meaning.

I claim that *to make meaning*, rather than *to find the truth*, is more relevant to my writing and more flexible in its application. Looking to the path of philosophy until recent times, I perceive the truth as a personal, not a universal, absolute. I see it as personally irrevocable. Its imposed replacement could herald confusion, even madness—at times the world has offered contradictions in meaning for me and I have struggled with my sense of integrity. My intentionality might reveal a truth for me as an individual, on an independent level, but if I encapsulate my meanings as gleaned from my investigations, I believe meaning-making, rather than truth, might offer me tolerance towards ways and thoughts of others, towards my self-development. My personal truths might then be encapsulated and allowed to flourish within a safe place, within my meaning-making, where change is possible, where flexibility is accepted and transformation is more than a dream.

## **A path of transitions—a phenomenological attitude**

In the pursuit of philosophy I attempt a phenomenological approach where it is “the science of phenomena as distinct from that of the nature of being and an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). If I apply definitions to my own understandings, I see my scenarios as providing the phenomena for examination, in the natural attitude, as described by Sokolowski, which is prior to contemplation, on the way to “phenomenological reduction”.

We are given various ways or arguments to help us to attain the phenomenological reduction...[this is] the move from the natural attitude to the phenomenological; it is the restriction of our intentionality from its expansive natural attitude, which targets any and all things in the world, to the apparently more confined phenomenological attitude, which targets our own intentional life, with its correlated objects and world. (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 51)

I first perceived the events from within the natural attitude (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 42). These are the specimens for my research—I have isolated and identified them as potentially illustrative of my developing understandings. They are the clay, the raw material, with which I now apply means for comprehension, using a phenomenological approach. van Manen considered a range of interpersonal scenarios in his work and has developed this perspective on the qualities of a philosopher. He said,

...the phenomenologist directs the gaze toward the regions where meaning originates, wells up, percolates through the porous membranes of past sedimentations—and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us, stirs us, exercises a formative affect.

(van Manen, 2007, p. 11)

van Manen’s words encompass what I see as the essence of my being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962/2008). The intimate core of whom I believe

myself to be is touched by this manner of phenomenological thinking. I slide into its depths and wallow in the flow around me, knowing I am not alone in my immersion, alternately and unpredictably delighting and rejecting its power as I question my way. In the shadowing of confusion, I rise breathless to the surface. So far I have named, and aimed to move gradually into the doing, which I see as the movement of self into embodied, contemplative, instantaneous comprehension whilst an event is underway. My version of doing-ness has rested in action initiated by reaction and not by thoughts heralding wisdom. I feel I have been imprisoned in transition to meaning-making as I struggled with the best ways to discern my paths towards self-understanding, as if through sea-struck water-paths into its waves.

In consideration of Hegel's view, I have experienced the first stage, the naming, the "thinghood" comprised of many characteristics (Hegel, 2014, p. 69), which created the wholeness I could identify as the thing. At this level of existing as a sentient being, I have named the first and second scenarios as uncomfortable and remained with this judgement. I did not, within the instant of the events, move into the wisdom of allowing and responding with tranquillity, based on previous knowledge and understandings.

Martin Buber's *I, Thou and It* (1958/1986) has moved me from the "thinghood" (Hegel, 1977/2014) to the pursuit of the relationships between people and that which is around them. Buber stated that in recognising a "thou", I have the opportunity to recognise myself, and by recognising an "it", I have the capacity to separate myself from the world and reject connections (1958/1986). I query the outcomes of remaining in an "I-it" response, which could involve withdrawing analytically and seeing only some things with which I might already be familiar.

I have applied these thoughts to the first and second scenarios and believe that at those times I remained isolated within the events. My relationship to myself as viewer and experiencer had overwhelmed my responses, pushed otherness to the fore, isolated me further in my

relationships and within myself—I tried to name my experiences but became entangled in my confusions. Could it be that I judged prematurely in the guise of naming—like naming a baby and immediately claiming intimate knowledge of her character—where the naming existed as the choosing of my narratives? How far might such naming have proceeded? Could the naming ever have possessed the capacity to contain action, effect and result of the thing within the world?

With hindsight, I see not only difference, but connectedness between. The range of connections began with my temporal perceptions and does not end. I have attempted to walk Buber’s “narrow ridge”, as mentioned by Maurice Friedman (in Kramer, 2013, Foreword) but imagine it in terms of my own metaphors. All the while, I have been aware of the between-ness of my quest and try again and again to bring understandings into an imagination.

Heidegger said,

Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. Being lies in the fact that something is; in validity; in *Dasein*; in the ‘there is’. (Heidegger, 2008, p. 26)

I have explored this being, named as *Dasein*, through narrative inquiry, metaphor, poetry and visual art. I have explored the finishedness and unfinishedness of this being that is me. I have recognised the applicability of Heidegger’s words to my journey, but they leave a space for me to fill so I have searched onwards to Gadamer, who rigorously and critically examined the concepts of Heidegger. Whilst acknowledging the understandings brought to the world by Heidegger, Gadamer brought humanity and connectedness to this for me, speaking of the continuity of self-understanding, which I interpret as a reference to the opportunities that exist in unfinishedness that allow for continuity of comprehension.

Gadamer's consideration of aesthetics has particularly aided my meaning-making and framed many of my queries. He explored the necessity of connection with the world around us in order to attain connection with the self, a possible process and outcome of artistic expression. He referred to the futility of isolation for self-understanding, that self-knowing is intrinsically linked to being-in-the-world, that withdrawal from and rejection of others is meaningless. Within this journey he considered the role of artworks for development of *Dasein*.

Our experience of the aesthetic too is a mode of self-understanding. Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self and includes the unity and integrity of the other. Since we meet the artwork in the world and encounter a world in the individual artwork, the work of art is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through it...

(Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 1560/8818)

I have employed artistic visual expressions, whether created by me or from other sources, to aid communication of concepts and understandings. I have used them as a ceramist uses tools, to form the shape of my imaginings and through this creation, to display the possibilities to myself and to others.

### **A trick of reflections**

Through the trees the water can be seen. Sight lingers, then focus is fixed. It seems a tree is floating in air, roots visible, branches extending as they should. I look, refocus my eyes and discover the roots are browning branches and foliage of another tree. The air tree is curving from the side, the curve hidden by the tangled branches. Beneath, above and around the bulk that presents as a possible trunk, the water forms the negative space, a tree above trees, suspended in steely blue, fooling my perception.

Another day and the illusion is less strong. The clear sky leads the eye to the water; the water encompasses the edges of the trees, but does not encroach so deeply on sight. The trees exist as branches and foliage, not roots.

I struggle to attain the same impression as before, then relax and enjoy instead the shimmer of the blue, the wispy sky and the shadowed limbs.

(Miller, 2013)

I first became aware that I was developing tact by noticing and absorbing meanings from objects, events and people around me when I was a child. It seemed evident to my very young self that different perspectives presented to my consciousness differing objects, shapes, angles and expressions; that objects and events could represent composites of themselves, or entirely different other objects, experiences, thoughts and feelings, like this 'air-tree'. There seemed to be trickiness in presentations and my interpretations as I reflected on my world whilst watching responses of adults and then trying to make sense of them. A glance could possess infinite meanings, a jug on a table could represent an entire family, a song could summarise any emotion I could imagine, a story could contain the hopes and grief of countless children, and pictures could hint at nebulous meanings.

I devoted my early life years to reading and not so much to interaction with others, always maintaining a distance between my physical self, my emotional self and those around me. For years I remained in the beginnings of tact, frozen in un-doing-ness as I was caught in anxiety and incoherence, despite seeing and perceiving so much. I was like the air tree, a conception of self-created manifestations, based on my prior perceptions but without roots. I was very sensitive—but only to myself. Whilst I remember comfort and nurture during these early years, I experienced it consciously only in the home. I was compressed in my outward expressions of the world beyond. Gadamer illuminated the path of interactive tact, where an individual exists in relationship and communication with others.

By tact we understand a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge from general principles does not suffice. Hence an essential part of tact is that it is tacit and unformulable. One can say something tactfully; but that will always mean

that one passes over something tactfully and leaves it unsaid, and it is tactless to express what one can only pass over. But to pass over something does not mean to avert one's gaze from it, but to keep an eye on it in such a way that rather than knock into it, one slips by it. Thus tact helps one to preserve distance. It avoids the offensive, the intrusive, the violation of the intimate sphere of the person.

(Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 561/8188)

My tact was therefore an inner feeling, not an outer response. I could express tact poetically in writing and in my comprehension of texts, but not in physical or verbal action, maintaining distance, attaining disconnectedness. I felt alienated and fed this with pious words and imaginative obsessions, my withdrawal fuelling an inner life and starving the outer. My sensitivity seemed not to give rise to tactful interactions, but rather to strained, serious, melancholic interchanges.

As a child I wanted desperately to understand. I was affronted by perceived injustice and disgusted by bad manners. Whilst I maintained emotional distance for years to come, I believed, like the Romantics, that I saw and felt for the whole world. Light-heartedness I found through others, enjoying their frivolity and spontaneity. Throughout, I continued writing, about anything—trees, mountains, flowers, people and animals. This helped to gradually provide me with a sense of connectedness with my external world and poetry still gives me release at times of brimming emotions. I have often grappled with the task I believed I had in this life and felt overwhelmed by that which I believed, that which I experienced and that which I sought. This poem touches on the confusion I have felt in view of external events and repercussions.

### **Green edged black**

Green edged black encloses a life.

Grey blocks the source and runs circles.

Where is the red? The orange? The wine



which is the elixir, joy?

The search stops each time.

Why crouch in the dark when the world explodes?

(Miller, 2013)

The poems of mine in this thesis are tender in my efforts in this genre. This feeling of being exposed, of allowing others to witness my inner journey, pervades me. Despite this, I take a deep breath and continue, for within the delicate pain of exposure is the joy of release in confrontation, of a sense of courage amidst possible dangers.

Gadamer explored the role of poetry in modern times in his essay *Are the Poets falling Silent?* (1970). He spoke of the hermeneutic process of interpretation and explored metaphors of a poem, attempting comprehension of its meaning through accessing imagery as well as the reader's own past.

If one reads a poem again, then one should not remember what has been said about it, but rather one should have the impression: there it stands. It is in the words of the poem and not what someone has said about it. Interpretation is completed when the interpreter disappears and only what one has interpreted is there.

(Gadamer, 1992, p. 76)

Gadamer chose two poems in his essay, one from Paul Celan, "In the rivers north of the future" (1992, p. 74) and another from Johannes Bobrowski, "The word human" (1992, p. 78). I read with awe his interrogations of the images and feel overwhelmed by his skill in language and evocation of his understandings. Then, he said the above. How do I move from awe to acceptance and respect of my own impressions, when those I esteem express such wisdoms? Then, from his words I gained entry to my own metaphorical world—"For the poet," says Gadamer, "it is always an anxious question whether from the deep spring of human experience, sedimented in language,

the radiant word which illuminates all will arise and endure - that is: becomes a poem..."(Gadamer, 1992, p. 77).

I do not know whether my poetry can fulfil such heights for human understanding. I strive for forms towards attaining clarity for my lived experience and these poems serve to illuminate my prose for me. They are my memories, summarised. I must suspend my self-judgement and allow the poems to live in harmony with my prose, their appropriateness to the prose a key to inclusion. I seek to satisfy myself, but yearn towards reader empathy.

Gadamer's conclusions for modern times, following his contemporary poetry analyses, was this,

As discreet messages are spoken quietly so that an unintended person cannot overhear them, so has the poet's voice become. He shares something with the one who has an ear for it and is sympathetic. He whispers something to him in his ear and the reader, who is all ears, nods finally.

(Gadamer, 1992, p. 81)

Whilst Gadamer spoke of the subtlety that can be accessed through poetry, I believe my use of poetry for this work is more blatant, for I have used poems to punctuate, link, soothe and celebrate. They may remain "whispers in the (reader's) ear" but they are meant as parts of a whole as I search for meaning. Re-reading in the passing of time, I nod and hope to generate the nods of others. My poems included in this work exist as punctuation of thoughts and expressions, as summaries of intensity and of understandings. My flow of prose has been met with freedom in verses which I composed spontaneously, seldom ponderously. A feeling and thought combined and poems arose. I consequently hope to add to spiralling comprehensions.

My poetry writing has been bonded with my love of classical literature. I saw my education in three different countries—Australia, South Africa and Singapore—as a deepening of living, of developing potential and nurturing

the inner life. I continued to study particular philosophies and read classic novels, fairy tales, legends, epics, sagas and dramas in an effort to find a path for the attainment of such a goal. Despite this journey, I remained internally isolated as I searched for meaning, sensing a space that existed within me and wishing to fill it with understanding. I wished to "...accentuate reality and to bring persons in contact with the many ways there are or might be of being alive" (Greene, 2001, p. 50). The main person I wished to contact was myself, to discover for myself what it meant to be alive. It seemed to me that if I attempted communication of the joys I sought, this externalisation of my dream could somehow aid its attainment in my own life. Joining study groups in my early twenties, I found some like-minded people who seemed aware of my journey and identified with some of my developing conceptions. Through such contact, which occurred in an organised routine, I felt the flow seeping into the cracks in my perceptions, softening and enlivening.

Bohm, in a paper written in consultation with Donald Factor and Peter Garrett stated that, "Dialogue is a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behaviour" (Bohm et al., 1991, p. 1). I know that I relished the interactions within study groups and felt energised by opportunities to question and find some clarity. At the time I was not conscious of the impact of my experiences on the forming of myself. I attended meetings and was welcomed by other participants. We did have disagreements within this oasis and our various backgrounds and manners of thinking did bring differing viewpoints. The diversity did expose prejudices, potentials, magnanimity and closed-mindedness. Bohm's explanation of dialogue united, for me, with the hermeneutics of suspicion, also termed "demystification" (Josselson, 2004), which I have attempted to employ as a vehicle for meaning-making, explained more comprehensively in 'Mysteries behind the light', Chapter 5 of this thesis.

The collectiveness of the experience of group-study soothed and held me. I became more engaged with the plights and fortunes of others and now believe that some self-comprehension did unfold. I believed myself to be

gauche, naïve and gullible, but gradually I felt my self to be part of this world on a more effective and intelligent level, making connections and developing concepts stronger than before due to interaction and interchange. Whilst the dialogue was often hesitant, untrained and sometimes unsuccessful, with arguments and judgements abounding, the ideal, of which we were all aware, held us as we strived.

Meeting ridicule and misunderstanding has trimmed and framed my efforts in life, but praise and compassion have supported and nurtured me. I now choose to move beyond the frame onto the horizon, the brink, the threshold, to explore further joys and limits in understanding of self and other. Through examination of the scenarios I strive to attain Gadamer's statement, where, "Only when we respect the other as an end in himself can we have respect for ourselves" (Gadamer, 1992, p. 190). So, I focus on relationships. I attempt to move towards self-freedom through acknowledgement of the other, of the "thou" and the "it" of Buber. Like the air tree, perhaps my past could be seen as a trick of perception with exclusions as the unknown influences within the light's focus. Could the unnamed and unrecognised have provided as much to my life as those things I have illuminated? Although I claim the path of awareness and perception of the influences around me, do I remain like the swimmer with the goal in sight, framed by my unconsciousness experiences? Are these absences, which are the things I cannot yet perceive, more forming of the self than named presences? Or are they in partnership, a necessary unity of known and unknown, with unknowns waiting silently for recognition, as potentialities around the centre, as present self? Is it ever for the good that things remain unknown, perhaps as protectors of innocence and imagination?

My air tree remains enigmatic, a mystery, in its changeability. Likewise, experiences can remain mysterious, for on another day, vision can be adapted and some illusions can disappear to be replaced by others. Remembrance of the beauty and pain of past illusion now stream into me. I

struggle to reclaim the joy, then, if able, relax towards acceptance of that which is newly revealed. As Heraclitus said, “From the strain of binding opposites comes harmony” (Heraclitus, 2001, verse 46), and so I attempt to bind what I have perceived as opposites and degrees of difference, to form harmonious connections, to synthesise the interrogations with tranquility.

### **Forming a way**

This writing formed with my questioning. As a swimmer pulls through water, gliding between each exertion, I have questioned, remaining within the question as I propel forward before drawing again from my will to continue my journey. The sea determines my speed, direction, comfort and force. As a swimmer I must adapt each time to the physical manifestations, working within them to attain my goal of movement and safe return to the shore. Similarly, my questions are framed by the world around me, by my interactions and my perceptions of the external impulses. In her article, “Hermeneutics as Embodied Existence”, Marja Schuster says, “Understanding always starts with experiencing. Otherwise there would be nothing to understand” (Schuster, 2013, p. 196). I live and wonder as I wander these varied paths of my existence.

Just as there are unseen weed masses within the sea, shadowed and disguised cutting sharpness of rocks and shells, life has offered unforeseen difficulties that were sometimes evaded and only recognised in hindsight, once the danger was over, or have caused me to trip and fall, or have forewarned me and aided my assumption of a different path. Jaspers commented,

...this on-the-wayness - man's destiny in time - contains within it the possibility of deep satisfaction, and indeed, in exalted moments, of perfection. This perfection never resides in formulable knowledge, in dogmas and articles of faith, but in a historical consummation of man's essence in

which being itself is revealed. To apprehend this reality in man's actual situation is the aim of philosophical endeavour.

(Jaspers, 1954, p. 12)

It seems Jaspers' focus is on the joys of the journey, on the emulations for the philosophical seeker. To me his omission of the difficulties of such a path bring to mind just that—the struggles and the conflicts. Whilst the “deep satisfaction...of perfection” (Jaspers, 1954, p. 12) may exist in moments and may be the motivation for a philosophical inquiry, I must first examine manifolds of my own experience, before I can move towards acceptance of his claim. I must look to these in all their “manifolds of appearance” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 31) and develop my consciousness of the gifts that may be in the perfections of which Jaspers speaks. My examination of lived experience is based on a capacity for “...wonder leading to knowledge, doubt leading to certainty, forsakenness leading to the self...” (Jaspers, 1954, pp. 24-25).

## Chapter 2 Presence, passion and possibilities

Extensive use of metaphor in this thesis has aided my expression of meaning and has unified impressions I have gained through my studies. Michael Polanyi (1975) explored the significance of the metaphor and its power in giving meaning. He described it as requiring a reciprocity between the image and the subject which, "...like a symbol, carries us away, embodies us in itself, and moves us deeply as we surrender ourselves to it" (Polanyi, 1975, p. 79). The metaphorical illustrations that have given meaning to me as I have written and interpreted my narratives include the swimmer within the sea, where sea meets land—the heron's space, the trilogy of *chiaroscuro* (light and dark), *sfumato* (shade as umbra and penumbra), *soglia* (the threshold) and clay. I will express the notion of edge and its transformation as it blurs through meanings to 'threshold'—which I will identify subsequently as '*soglia*', meaning 'threshold' in Italian. In this chapter, I show the ways I live my metaphors as I live my narratives. The narratives then become reciprocal and surrender to my metaphors.

### ***The Heron's Space***

I reach now towards the metaphor of the space where the sea meets the land—the heron's space. The heron is a symbol of connectedness of spaces, one foot on land, one in the sea and wings and will for flight. Often solitary, it feeds at the water's edge, dipping into the tiny eddies amongst the pebbles and shells. If disturbed, its flight is immediate, its landing point always higher and further than the disturber of its activity. The heron moves seamlessly between air, water and the earth. It is the edge dweller of ancient Chinese philosophy, a companion of the god Shou Lao, a symbol of longevity and communication.

The heron as edge dweller began another way of thinking for me as I realised that the idea of edge seemed to cover everything from environmental forms, to sentient beings' physical movement, to the psychical. The word, edge first leapt into my consciousness with Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002, p. 15), following his discussion of the perception of colour. He said,

The different parts of the whole—for example, the portions of the figure nearest to the background—possess, then, besides a colour and qualities, a particular *significance*. The question is, what makes up this significance, what do the words 'edge' and 'outline' mean...

(Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2002, p. 15)

I became fascinated with the word edge and its “particular significance” in the manner in which it seemed to combine with da Vinci's *chiaroscuro* and *sfumato*. Before settling on my trilogy of terms—edge, *chiaroscuro* and *sfumato*—I navigated ways of using and interpreting this word, towards attaining a meaning that resonated with the imagination I was drawn to create.



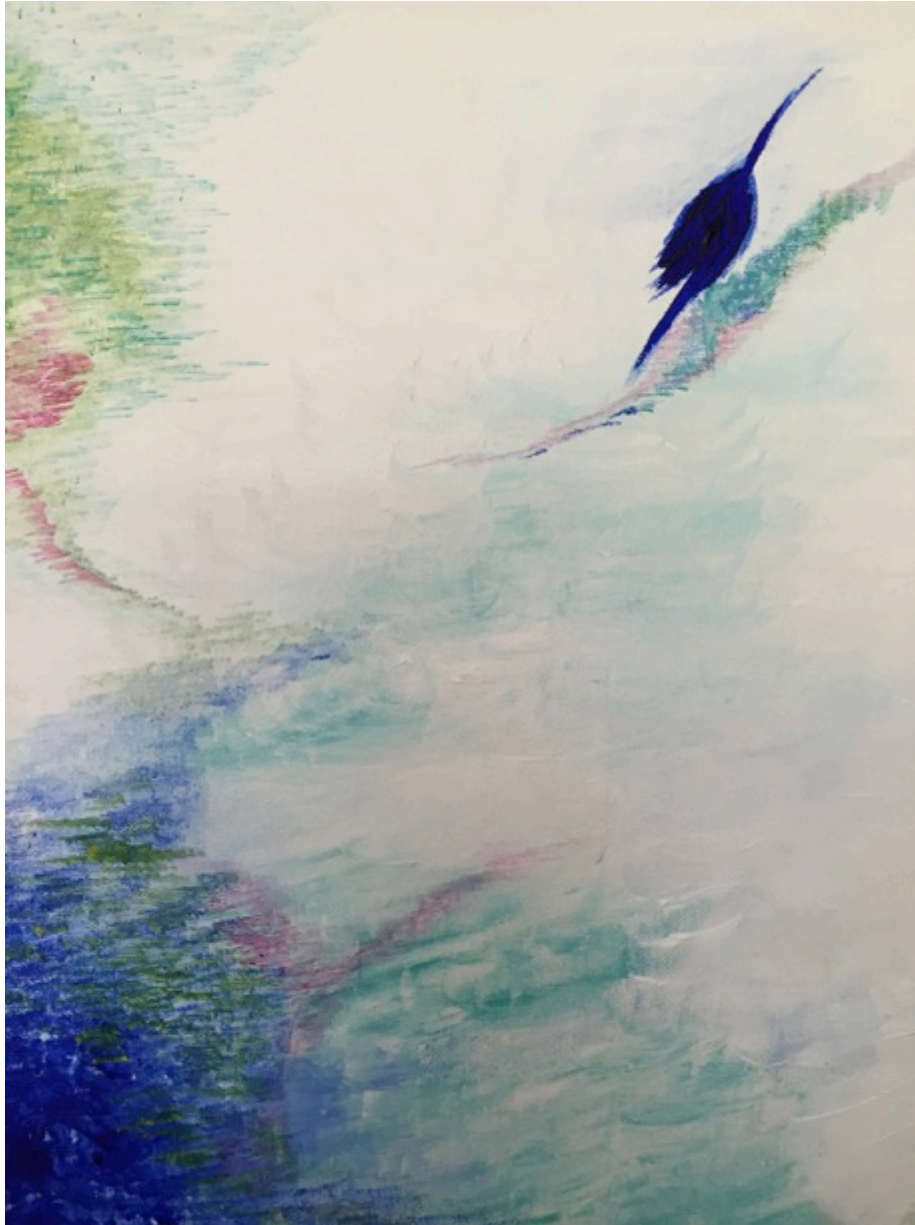


Figure 4: *The Heron's Space* by Caroline Miller © 2015

One of these meanings was “the point immediately before something unpleasant or momentous occurs; to provide with a border” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). This offered some hope for my elaborations as I considered the relationship between the edge and the artistic terms *chiaroscuro* and *sfumato*. The origins of edge rest in Germanic language, “the sharpened side of the blade” and with the Greek *akis* meaning “point” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). It seemed that edge must be conceived in relation to an other, for without a context, without a relationship, it could not be described. It must be situated in response to a

form or an experience. It cannot exist by itself, it is between—it is not only of itself. It is a place of initiation or completion, a place of fruition, a place of change. It is a place heralding revelations.



**Figure 4a: Cropped in black and white from *The Heron's Space* by Caroline Miller © 2015**

Even in movement, the edge involves defining parameters. As “the outside limit of an object, area, or surface...a line or area that is the outermost part or the part farthest away from the centre of something” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006), it offered itself to me as a certainty, but paradoxically also as a mystery, for it could be both, with edges an outer limit perceptible in their manifestation in and as objects, but simultaneously as a mystery, for it may not be as definite as it seems and therefore open to interpretation.

Figure 4a presents a definite edge around the heron—but is it? The living body does not possess a static line of boundary. Feathers settle around the body, but the body is in movement, whether through subtle breath, walking or flight, causing change to the edge at every moment. The body in movement, as the heron continues away from the viewer, heralds its own change. Even the paint as applied to create the heron form is subject to tiny blurring, as background absorbs the colour. Could this edge be considered “murky” (Gendlin, 2009) or blurred (Leonardo Da Vinci’s *sfumato*)? If it

could be conceived as murky or blurred, could indefinite-ness of this edge lead, paradoxically, to creation of a haven, a place of culmination of effects—could this softening of edges, where forms comprising of sharpness and pointed-ness are tempered by the smudging, maintain the edge-ness and lead to other manners of viewing, analogous to limitless transformation along the path of unfinishedness, where unfinishedness is brought to cognition and with this, becomes hope? Is there a place for ‘urging’ (edging) in this process, where the word edge incorporates an impulse of formation, reformation and redemption?

In my word trilogy of *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato* and edge, a need for adaptation seemed necessary, for it did not seem quite right to me to combine two Italian words with ‘edge’—a word of solid English bounds. I then discovered *soglia*, the threshold. It seemed to fit, in all ways. The word ‘threshold’ does not figure within the English dictionaries in relation to ‘edge’, but it is included when exploring the Italian meanings and synonyms. I subsequently explored meanings in English and found ‘threshold’ to be identified as,

a strip of wood forming the bottom of a doorway and crossed in entering a house or room; the point of entry or beginning; the magnitude or intensity that must be exceeded for a certain reaction, phenomenon, result, or condition to occur or be manifested.

(Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006)

I have drawn qualities, rather than physical manifestation, from these aspects of the definition, although the “crossing over” aspect of a household step could be appropriate if a house was considered a haven. Threshold is expressed as both a place and an impulse—both a naming and a doing. For me, it embodied the mysteries of the place between and the place before. When described as the *soglia*, the circle for me was complete, a beginning and an ending to the image I held. It was an image encompassing for me both finishedness and unfinishedness. In my imagination, the *soglia* (threshold) flowed from and is also a part of the *sfumato* (blurrings), which in turn arose

from dark and light contrast of *chiaroscuro* (dark/light) as focus could be made and changed.

da Vinci tried to express, via his *sfumato* (shadings), the fluidity of the body in its context and its presence as an object connected with its surroundings.

... interest in vitality and the integrity or indivisibility of life led him (Leonardo) to abolish linear definition in painting: the mystery or ineffability of the Mona Lisa's expression is owing to the fact there is not a single line or edge in her features: where most of us would draw a boundary line, Leonardo sees a continuous, curving surface.

Thus his famous sfumato- where lines are literally "smoked away"- is not a matter of passive smudging or blurring but of active examination, an almost microscopic scrutiny under which the edges are revealed as gross simplifications.

(Allen, 2011, p. 11)

da Vinci referred to his concept in his *Notebooks*,

The boundaries of bodies are the least of all things. The proposition is proved to be true, because the boundary of a thing is a surface, which is not part of the body contained within that surface; nor is it part of the air surrounding that body, but is the medium interposted between the air and the body, as is proved in its place. But the lateral boundaries of these bodies is the line forming the boundary of the surface, which is of invisible thickness. Wherefore O painter! Do not surround your bodies with lines, and above all when representing objects smaller than nature; for not only will their external outlines become indistinct, but their parts will be invisible from the distance. (da Vinci, 1888, p. 21)

*Sfumato* is generally considered as, "The technique of allowing tones and colours to shade gradually into one another, producing softened outlines or hazy forms" (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). It is a surrendering of the harsh border, allowing for inclusivity of variation, in focus. da Vinci spoke of

the “point-ness” of all things and not the “line-ness” of all. I believe “line-ness” would infer isolation, exclusivity and expulsion. da Vinci focussed on “point-ness” and expressed his belief that the line is itself formed of many points. Consequently, a line is a compilation, not a thing in itself, where each point that is viewed by the eye is reflected by the eye and forms the totality by observation of many points. These many points are amalgamated by the eye and therefore by the brain.

This manner of explaining sight linked with Bohm’s expression of the holograph (1980/2005, p. 240), where each point contains the whole, and when drawn together, a 3D expression of a reality is evident. I have questioned—a point, another point then another—does this create our worlds? Are composites of these points, the bringing together of edges towards continuity and fluidity, the precursors to creation of our individual havens? It might be that without acknowledgement of the existence of the *soglia* (threshold), the aspects in *sfumato* (shadowings) are designated to the unknown, which might incorporate the careless, the accidental, the naïve, the ignorant, the innocent. It might be that only through understanding of a *soglia* (threshold) occurring before a flowing into the next position, that only through a comprehension of the precarious teetering that can occur prior to forward movement, could *sfumato* (blurrings) really be conceived. Diligence, caution, patience, accompanied by categorial intending, might be the path. Ultimately, perhaps wisdom might be the most useful tool and outcome required and acquired for *sfumato* (shadowings) with connectedness as an aspect, perhaps, of wisdom, where might exist the space for which unfinishedness is searching.

### **In the presence of shadows**

Whilst this writing draws primarily from a Northern European tradition, I have included some Asian philosophical impulses, for they have aided my ability to find words for my path. Zhuangzi, a Chinese poet and teacher considered the principal writer of Daoist philosophy and writing around 742

CE, formed the book *Zhaungxi* which contains vignettes explaining situations and circumstances in daily and courtly life. *Nanbua Zhenjing*, meaning “True Classic of Southern Cultural Florescence” is another name given to this work. The wisdom of the writer has been incorporated into everyday scenarios that could be transposed into current times. I possess appreciation of the ability to solve issues with an action or comment perfectly chosen in that moment. With tactful words and actions, a receiver could possess choice and if ready, could hear the other with clarity, then act with conviction. In such a way a consistent, strong and determined path for tactful relationships could be created.

A path used again and again could become useful, a haven, offering sure footedness and definite destination. Conversely, it could become frustrating and limiting, mindless and habitual. How might the familiar open the way to deeper understanding? Is it necessary to follow a known path prior to perception of other ways, attainment of a wider world view a possible outcome? Or is it the presence of the *soglia*, existing alongside and at every turn, line, angle of the path, that gives meaning to a path, rather than the way of the path itself?

So, immersed in the explorations of ancient philosophers, phenomenological and hermeneutic adventurers and armed with these words, I attempt to bring my narrative inquiry to light. As expressed by Jaspers (1966, p. 26), “the ultimate source is the will to authentic communication, which embraces all the rest.”

In my thinking and therefore with my writing, using academic research, poetry, prose and metaphor, I wish to communicate. I wish to hold this as my philosophical aim, towards a sense of finishedness, if possible, whilst realizing the importance of the journey itself and the variations which exist in the movement towards a point beyond the *soglia*. So far, I have transformed edge into *soglia*, marrying it with *sfumato* as a means of escape

and insurance—to move beyond the understandings I believe myself to already hold and to ensure my comprehension of the next path.

Along this path, as I retrace my thinking again and again through *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato* and *soglia*, I add the words ‘umbra’ and ‘penumbra’ to my metaphor of the *sfumato*. A translation from 1891 of Zhuangzi brought these words to me. I had not been aware of the meaning of penumbra prior to this reading. I was drawn to the word and met with what I felt to be a revelation within my pursuit of clarity. On the path to inclusion of the word penumbra, I explored definitions of the root word, umbra. Umbra means the shade, the shadow, the invariable or characteristic accompaniment or companion of a person or thing, the perfect shadow of an opaque body where light is completely cut off, a phantom, as of someone or something not physically present (Dictionary.com Unabridged, 2015). I have focussed on the shade and shadow, also words describing *sfumato* (shadowings) and include acknowledgment of its light-hiding nature.



**Figure 4b: Cropped in black and white from *The Heron's Space* by Caroline Miller © 2015**

Figure 4b focuses on the body of the bird and the shadow generated by the positioning of a light source. It would be expected that this light is shining from behind the heron, onto its back as it walks away from the viewer. Consequently, its front cannot be seen—it is obscured and in shadow, it is an absence in this work, but we know its presence as a reality at the front of the bird, due to prior understandings of the bird form. The

elongated shadow is most dense beneath the bird, gradually lightening as it extends from the immediacy of the bird. This deepest darkness is the umbra, the part most affected by focus of light. The penumbra denotes the lighter shading on the edges of this shadow, the partial shading extending around the darkness of the central shadow, ‘where the light from the source of illumination is only partly cut off’—‘a shadowy, indefinite, marginal area’ (Dictionary.com Unabridged, 2015). It refers to the “peripheral or indeterminate area or group” and includes the Latin *paene*, meaning ‘almost’ and umbra, ‘shadow’, or as something that covers, surrounds or obscures, as in ‘shroud’. I look to combine these definitions towards further attainment of my aspect of the *sfumato* (blurrings), moving to the *soglia* (threshold). If I would conceive *sfumato* (blurrings) as containing umbra and penumbra, I must incorporate the fact that they require a concentrated source of light in order to be formed. They would then remain shadings, blurrings, smudgings as *sfumato*, but would express degrees of these qualities.

If *chiaroscuro* (dark/light) were considered an area of high contrast, where the light (the impulse) would be beamed and particular foci revealed, then interest and prior understandings, forming the viewers’ intending, would result in some elements being ignored. Only the focus could be enlightened—only the focus could be known. The absences could remain completely unknown, for with no energy extended toward what is not known, it would remain in that realm. Just as obstacles beneath the water’s surface remain unseen unless physical contact is made with the swimmer, so does that which is unknown remain unknown until an event occurs, bringing it to focus.





Figure 4c: Cropped in black and white from *The Heron's Space* by Caroline Miller  
© 2015

The umbra is the central shadow, seen in the above painting extract in the far left corner. It is surrounded by the penumbra, the extended, less shadowed area surrounding the centre, as created by the object and the light. The size of the umbra in relation to the object is dependent upon the direction of the light. If the light shines from above, close to the object and directly in line with its form, the umbra is very small and the penumbra almost indiscernible, as in Figure 4b, along the sides of the heron's form. If a light were shone from one side, the object's umbra would appear around the other side and the penumbra might extend into the background, away from the light and therefore into the less known, facets of this expressed in Figure 4c, with degrees of *sfumato* existing in the penumbra. Perception of the light's presence would be around the edges of the object, as penumbra extended beyond the umbra, like the wake behind driftwood.

The umbra and penumbra might contain limitless revelation, as well as limitless obscurity. Zhaungzi gave these concepts voice.

The Penumbra asked the Shadow, saying, 'Formerly you were walking on, and now you have stopped; formerly you were sitting, and now you have risen up:- how is it that you are so without stability?' The Shadow replied, 'I wait for the movements of something else to do what I do, and that something else on which I wait waits further on another to do as it does.' (Zhuangzi, 1891, loc. 330/4699)

As shadow exposes and hides difference over time, it is dependent upon the actions of others. Following this, the *sfumato* (shadowings) is therefore not only the result of other influences but the cause of movement of the next effect, which is that of the penumbra. Does this make it an infinitely flexible inspiration, or impossibly ephemeral, unable to be grasped and understood?

The *sfumato* (shadowings) including the umbra and penumbra, might be all these things. For this study I cleave to the inspirational. Fluidity and flow form part of my comprehension of the *sfumato* (shadings) and have lead me to presentations and to the improbable. I have chosen my perception as an imagination of change, looking at the unlikely and working towards an understanding of capabilities, capacities, relationships, responsibilities and consequences.



**Figure 4d: Cropped in black and white from *The Heron's Space* by Caroline Miller © 2015**

Figure 4d displays delicate shadings flowing from an unknown source of illumination. As surmised previously, the light seems positioned in the bottom left corner, beyond the scope of the painting. The penumbral flow, if considered from da Vinci's manner, consists not of a line of shading, but of a continuous arc of points, curving around the umbra, created by the illumination of the object, each providing a different aspect. The choice of placement along this arc is the onlooker's—that person's *soglia* (threshold) at that particular time, in that space.

Looking from the penumbra, into the umbra, the darkness beckons. If I look to the darkness, it might at times offer a calming and reassuring haven, protecting me, as the seeker, from intense warmth. It might also be a rejection of outer blurrings and of less distinct aspects, a blinding towards the unfamiliar which might remain hidden, its hidden-ness orchestrated by the self-positioning of the viewer. It could therefore maintain fixed, inflexible in terms of the viewer's perception and experience—such as when the path is adhered to doggedly, when openness to other options is not permitted by the protagonist. If recognised and embraced, the *soglia*, the threshold, might exist for me at any point around the penumbra.

Just as Evgenie Cherkasova grasped meaning in the “sideshadows” of her philosophising in a book chapter entitled “Philosophy as Sideshadowing: The Philosophical, the Literary, and the Fantastic”, I can grasp meanings in the *sfumato* of mine. In Cherkasova's “sideshadowing” lies

...the idea that every situation, imaginary or real, comprises not only what happens but also what might have happened...to understand any moment is to grasp its field of possibilities. Our lives emerge from choices we make, choices we avoid making and choices we are altogether unaware of. (Cherkasova, 2004, p. 202).

This is the space of my *sfumato*, once a focus in *chiaroscuro* has been made. In *sfumato* the action towards realisation of my decisions then could take me beyond the *soglia*, where I must face the results of my choices. My *sfumato* is a composite of knowns, familiars, inspirations, mysteries and yet-to-be. It is like Cherkosova's

Philosophy [as] a sideshadowing activity, for it is never satisfied with the apparent state of affairs but wants to explore all the latent, invisible and even unthinkable options. Such persistent explorations lead to infinitely diverse intellectual patterns and images. Philosophy does begin with wonder; and it has been always characterized by generating 'what if' questions and thinking through their implications. (Cherkasova, 2004, p. 203)

## **The swimmer within the sea**

I, as swimmer, swim all year round in the sea. This sea in which I swim possesses elements of the ocean and the river, for it is contained on both sides by islands. One island exists as a compilation of many cities, towns, villages, hamlets and farming communities. The other is a slither of land, a wisp of solidity between the ocean and the water channel, that culminates both in the north and the south in knobbly forms of rock, sand and salty soil. I am at times comforted, accosted, repelled and encompassed by this water. When considering its aspects, I have recorded its archetypal nature, as identified as part of our whole, as humanity.

The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism offered a seacape of images.

Just as her innumerable progeny, flashing their bioluminescent lamps now here, now there, will light your way over her darkness, so on the mythic night sea journey, the glittering, intuitive, “living lights” in the psyche will help illuminate the depths. (2010, p. 36)

Here the link between water and light has been made. I have relished this connection and have discovered further links, where “Traversing its Great Waters brings oneside[dness] face to face with its opposite shore. The bitter salt of engagement with unknown depths can transmute into wisdom” ( p. 38).

Whilst there is similarity with a river, this channel between would possess only some of a river’s characteristics as bound by land, but the channel’s flow is determined by the ocean, with accessibility remaining from north and south, around the smaller island. The tides still wax and wane, the current still pulls and plays, but there is a safety in this channel that is not present in open ocean. Never so far from shore, the swimmer could save herself, with “unknown depths” avoided by turning back to shore, the between-ness demanding its own responses from a swimmer who must rise to those

demands for relief of tensions of this between-ness. “The waters of the river can promise rebirth” (p. 40) but can also symbolise death, for, “The river is a boundary between lands and between the living and the dead. Crossing is transition and a metaphor for travelling between the mind’s two shores, the conscious and familiar shore and the unconscious farther shore” (p. 42). I do not write of crossing the water to another shore, but my swimming has other boundaries, including a lighted marker, weather conditions, seasonal water temperature, life events. These form the space between and fuel questions concerning my choices and responses.

I now link the water with the act of swimming as an archetypal image, referring to an ancient chemistry. “In alchemy, swimming is an aspect of *solutio*; in the saline waters of experience the ego’s defenses are softened so that it can surrender itself to more flexible motility” (p. 438). In this image, I am an ingredient in the sea’s experiment, a facet that might bring change if combined appropriately with other chemicals. I am in the saline and it flows into me, through my skin and around me. It is within and without. When in the water, the space between seems erased.

I am speaking of the water, between the landforms. But what of **at**, **in**, **beneath** and **above**? Do these four positional words also frame my experiences? If I am **at** the water’s edge, **in** the water, **beneath** the surface or **above** the waves, am I experiencing differently, or more of the same? Could these prepositional words aid my immersion in and subsequent comprehension of the lived experiences I explore in the three narratives of this thesis?

It seems to me that the words **at** and **in** share an impulse of completion. Being **at** somewhere implies, I believe, a definite presence and position. It supports an attitude of being-ness, for it is a statement not of intent but of presence. An object is there, it is nowhere else. Likewise, **in** seems to contain a definite action. I see the word and concept of **in** to imply a sense of being surrounded, contained, encompassed, absorbed. It is not a half measure,

unless coupled with other words. When in water, an image of immersion comes to me. I do not picture ankle deep water. Unless qualified as such, in-ness is not a matter of degrees. It demands complete engagement. There seems a finality and an anticipation in being **in**. This is a quality I see shared with **at**. I can be near to, far from or **at** the water's edge. There is a commitment to a bound place of being. As expressed later in this work, the place of in-ness or at-ness can exist in the *sfumato*, in the blurrings of space as it moves to a *soglia*, a threshold, but I see the nature of being **in** and **at** remaining firm, determined, a consciousness either dawning, developing or already mindful, but contained by action, by doing. I believe these small words, when left to themselves, without the addition of qualifiers, have many potentials when applied to relationships, referring to the quality of relationships through the engagement of the protagonists.

What of **beneath**? There is a sense to me of pressure, but also of solace. If I am **beneath** the waves, I am away from their force. I am blind to what is on the surface, unless I look up and see the light as it filters from above. I am silenced and within silence as the water fills my senses. I am surrounded, immersed, overcome by the element's qualities. Objects are obscured, my body a different colour and my limbs taken with the flow. I feel claimed by the water. I feel less sure of the space between myself and the water. I feel absorbed as my body seems to absorb the liquid. The water is all around and within me as it enters all openings. I fill up and must rise again above the surface to breathe.

What of **above**? As a swimmer, my body is still in the water, but my head is **above**. I still collect sea water in my ears, mouth and nostrils if the waves thrust around me, but I am able to dislodge their influence and reject their invasion. The water cleans, then leaves or is dispelled by my own force. I can remain unaware of all that is around and beneath me as I move along above it all. Anything beneath me must show itself, for I am unconscious in my placement above. I do not look. I focus on my body's movement forward and can do so without contemplation of what is occurring with my muscles.

I know the action so well that it is mindless, proprioceptive. Familiarity propels me forward and I am held in its company.

How long can this last, this mindless above-ness? Perhaps till the water's chill seeps in too deeply, till the mind turns to the future and its immediate demands, till a disturbance from nature, such as a bird swooping, or tiny fish leaping, just in front, or a sudden weather change, till human actions intervene and a boat is near, or a shout is heard. It seems the duration of the mindless-ness can depend on the attention taken of that disturbance. If I, as swimmer, give any other thing importance, then my surface dwelling, my above-ness, ends and my perceptions have the opportunity to change.

Then there is the true above-ness of the water vehicle or flight. I fly as a bird only in dreams. As a kayaker I am aware of the forces that change action above the water, on the surface. Much that effects a swimmer, above the depths, is changed with the introduction of an object between sea and person. The water remains an influence, but being above, with object between, introduces the air element more forcefully. With this combination, a kayaker may quickly find herself immersed, then struggling to resume position. Once resettled above the water, she may perhaps move again to gentle movement, but awareness of disruption can result in anticipation of the possible next gust. Although on the water, the air element becomes more important to safety and comfort. In anticipation, tension exists between action and elements. As kayaker, I move with care.

For peaceful contemplation and mindless above-ness, conditions must be perfect, with mirror-like water, still air and moderate air temperature. It is comforting, while it exists. Relaxation, contentment, a sense of wellbeing and happiness can accompany this state. Change comes and transformation begins, or is resumed. The tide may turn, the wind may rise, the waves may reconfigure and I must adapt my flow to these. Although on the surface as a kayaker, I may find myself forced to navigate submersion, invasion and

forcefulness. To be above might be soothing, but beyond the tensions could exist other personal meanings, for which I do not yet know I yearn.

## Clay

From water metaphor I move to the earth, as clay. When I work clay, forming usable objects and sculptures, my fingers work as my mind rests. At first, the clay sits in my hands and I close my eyes, willing the space in my mind and my hands to be filled with the forms for creation. I attempt utter peace within, prior to manipulation of the clay. I eliminate language from my thoughts and focus completely on the doing. This can sometimes be a battle, but I find that if I continually refocus on the substance in my hands, the shape begins and I can relax into the revelation. I apply this manner of being to my philosophical application of understandings and view my mass of language in my head as the clay, then follow my mind-fingers as they probe, part, pull and caress the words that rise in my quest, my *soglia* of meaning open to my kneading.

Veins of moisture, tiny river-flows in clay, cross and collide in malleable mess, containing variations for understanding my form. They are my possibilities at the *soglia*, my potentialities for the forming—if observed and respected, new forms might arise, but only with attention paid to the manner in which things cling and mould together. If perception were not intense, veins would be missed. Opportunities for creation would be a consequence. I struggle to bring unity to a form.

If I choose certain words, a flow of ideas might slip through with meanings. If I recognise veins of movement, knowledge of the precipice of form, which is the edge, would be present. If I do not perceive the flow, external pressure could over-compress words-as-clay, until, with repeated manipulation, dryness would cause them to fall apart—they would be separated—and separate. Too much heat, the result of over-manipulation,



would lead to crumbling and cracked forms without strength. Life would then be gone. No creativity could be expressed, for the materials would be robbed of flexibility and life-force. I do not wish to force unnatural moulding with my words, but rather to allow meaning and form to pass the *soglia*. The words would then be open to fraternizing, where sensitivity and awareness might expose the form that desires release from the conglomerate.

I return to the block that exists at the centre—this is the scenario of the narrative, a solid mass. It is immobile in its natural attitude, it remains as it is, no matter the movement and manipulation possible at its edges. Could such solidity produce such heaviness that it burdens the flowing blur within *sfumato*, as it runs to the *soglia*—to finishedness rather than fecundity, which might be unfinishedness? Could each narrative become but an examined yet over manipulated event based on impossible to understand discourse? If the narrative is drawn and fixed, made to seem unchangeable, it is a narrative that confirms what must be steady. It is then that we must question it as a burden, amidst the energies of our world, something to be overcome.

I believe rather that at the centre sits an essence. This essence is my self who exists within my world. As clay remains clay no matter the manipulation by forming, my self is my self—it is not the other, it is as it is. Before all, it was my self, after all, it remains my self. The changes exist on the *soglia* (threshold) and surround this self. The essential nature remains within but as water and artist might force change upon a clay mass, surface nature can vary. This is the substance that identifies my self as self, and not as other. It is my humanness, but it is more. It is my individuality—my essence is my individuality, where my real self sits, as it plays on my *soglia*, which is comprised of a myriad of interpretations and engagements, constantly defining my self and others, interplay and counter-play, melding and perceiving, retracting and holding more than it imagines, being more than it can contain, aspiring without consciousness, attaining sight it cannot hide. At the centre of this I see the steadiness of my deep self—that which lies at the centre of the being that is my self. Heroism might lie in my capacity to

recognise, accept and work with my centre, which is surrounded by external forces, forming the *sfumato* (blurrings) of existence.

### **Steadiness**

The steadiness at the centre as the busy-ness surrounds,  
the silence in the middle as the world spins all around.

The firmness, the stability, amidst the whirling mass

of ever prodding fingers and

thoughts of faithlessness to self—who cares?

if self faithlessness is deep,

if applied rods of metal cannot steer the shape

but prop and tear and force a shape that is not true—

true to the self, true to centre, true to the real hue of colour,

light and darkness, shadows and clear brightness—who cares?

The centre is the secret about which all must revolve.

The centre is the founder of the new,

the guardian of the old,

the keeper of the kingdom of the gold.

(Miller, 2011)

As I struggle for actualisation of my self which I imagine as the steadiness that is my reality, perhaps even containing my finishedness, I move towards the continuous flux of my *soglia* (threshold) with its enfolding, moulding and unfolding. Influences meet for creation, constantly changing as my focus alternately shimmers and settles, ripples in light, the light source moving, effected by another and flowing into, around, through, its being.

The slices along the *soglia* (threshold) are part of my whole. Each slice contains what could be real. Each part of my essence contains truths and meaning, which might be fuel for my action. I remain unfinished, however, in my understandings and my unfinishedness necessitates inclusion and

exploration of choices that herald, allow or eliminate action—that is my freedom, for in the freedom of choice I am aware of my *soglia* (threshold) existing all around me and am thrilled and petrified by the voices speaking to me, for my *soglia* has a voice—my narratives, which are my own scenarios, are illustrative of the manner in which I re-imagine events, looking to the variations and striving to make meaning. My narratives exist as both me and as my tools, separated but not separate from my being, surging on waves of questions.

### **Channelling the flow**

The waves are not in lines, but folds. They move with grace into the shore, whether forceful or subtle. I see the waves and I notice the blurrings in my sight. I cannot see all waves clearly. I cannot see all the horizon, for my eyes are unequal in strength and they strain to see far distance. I am perceiving the waves, but I am beset with my own weaknesses.

(Miller, 2013)

I have questioned myself and my abilities with repetitive regularity, a process leading me always to writing as reviewing my doing-ness with other and the world. Each swim continues to bring difference, whether within my mind or with my body. On the day when the waves encompassed me, I related their action with my own mind action. I wondered—can seeing the external world as I engage in, with, at, under, above, find correlation with my ontological journey? If ontology is the nature of being (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006), my metaphors and analogies form meanings for my understanding of being—and philosophers, visual artists, storytellers and my experiences gather as my inspirations. I know that I, as human-being must sense, feel and do. I believe language may frame, but doing can transform.

I explore understandings that might lie behind my narrative interrogations. Consequently my narrative inquiries, the research component of my thesis, is necessarily moved further into the central body of this work., I cannot

progress with authenticity and integrity without displaying the assumptions and attitudes I hold towards particular ways of thinking and being. Thus I have spiralled into the composite of my thoughts, feelings and actions. My self-exposure through ever-deepening self-questioning is revealed via a path decorated with metaphor and allegory.

Every interchange, every look apprehended, every physical action, is evidence of my connectivity with the subject of inquiry. The lives of those outside of my physical body link with mine in my pursuit of understanding. As a viewer and a participator, I become my own subject, entangled with the life of the other. Whilst my first narrative is caught in intrasubjective questioning, between the interplay of self and other, it depends on my being ineluctably immersed in an intersubjective world (Bonnie Litowitz 2014). I comprehend that,

...my experience must present me as something experience-able by others, and something that others can experience as a subject. A full analysis of intersubjectivity must also show how my experience presents me as something that others can experience as a subject the same way that I experience them.

(Romdenh-Romluc, 2011, p. 136)

Awareness of traps in expression and perception aligns my focus. As I express my perceptions, I am wary of evoking sympathy, which I think might entrap the self into narrow perception—for me, sympathy is sentimental. I would rather invoke empathy as more universal and less judgemental. Sympathy with the subject (myself) exists as only a tiny fragment of this philosophical process for it is not my aim to immerse myself with others in emotional interchanges, to be consumed by my selfness without acknowledgement of the impulses outside of the self. Self-awareness with empathy, however, demands distance from self. According to Gadamer (1975/2006), it is necessary to attempt and gain distance from the self, as a mental, intellectual immersion, not emotional immersion. I felt

concern regarding this impulse and have queried whether Gadamer recognised any quality of the intangible—the feeling and sense world—in his work or did he focus only on mental, intellectual exertions? Are understandings with which I resonate, “tacit” understandings as expressed by Polanyi (2009), Bohm (2006) and van Manen (1990)? Could my understandings in this thesis attain to what Grondin said of Gadamer’s writing, “...a project in which I am always co-implicated, where the “object” of understanding has, like me, historicity as its mode of being” (Grondin, 2003, p. 76)? If I am ‘co-implicated’, does that mean that if I follow this path with authenticity, I might perceive that which cannot be seen—the tacit—within the ways of others, in our interchanges and the effects these have on the world around us, as umbra and penumbra of the *sfumato* (blurrings)? Is this then the hermeneutic intention for which I seek, with empathy for self and other at the core?

If this is indeed the manner of being I have desired and am empowered to flow, then the hermeneutic intention of my work must be embedded in my writing, whether consciously or subconsciously and my message will be formed with tacit understandings of my ontological journey. I do hope to bring such a vision of a potential world through presentation of my lived world, my historical world. As Grondin says, “There is tradition and event in all understanding, Gadamer notes, and to forget it is to be exposed still more blindly to the hold of unmastered prejudices” (Grondin, 2003, p. 76). I wish to break through my prejudices as effectively as possible in order to reveal potentialities, with their blessings and lessons.

### **Shells in sand**

As I consider the role of connection and prejudging through discrimination between events, I reconsider the role of bracketing. That which is bracketed might be like shells in sand as waves wash over them, partly revealed in their shape, moving them ever so slightly in their sandy bed. Perception of shells would then be changed, but they remain shells. Like wave-washed shells, my

narratives were surrounded by other acts and others' acts, in a stream of movement like the earth's encircling seas, as parts in the whole. The part, which is one action, may contain all that is in the whole, which may be the individual herself (Bortoft, 2007, pp. 9-13). In reference to hermeneutics, Bortoft says that "...a difference between the whole and the totality is clearly demonstrated by the evident fact that we do not need the totality of the text in order to understand its meaning" (Bortoft, 2007, p. 7). In choosing some events over others, I have aimed to express meaning that is contained in my entire life. Although I isolate the particulars to express the whole, no aspect can be withheld from view in the examination of these parts of me. Openness of self to the world has seemed a necessity.

Gadamer's hermeneutics stated that we all contain every thing, every thing contains us and nothing is divisible when it comes to understanding. *Chiaroscuro* might well encompass all—a light on one piece would not eliminate all others, but could bring one perception to the fore, in the presence of all else. If it were impossible to completely bracket our prior judgements, as Gadamer said it was, my intentionality towards a particular could act as a catalyst for increased awareness of my judgments. Gadamer's words have unfolded questions for me as I have wondered if he referred to the entire human being in his reference to *Dasein*, or if he meant only one facet, thereby bracketing—focussing—in *chiaroscuro*, on human intellectual life. I have then pondered on the role of the arts and the artist in his book *Truth and Method* (1975/2006), while attempting to trace my way to Gadamer's path. Ultimately, I perceived his path as a more holistic approach to a life, one where the artist and art would embody the seen as well as the unseen—the tacit as well as the concrete and obvious—not only an academic, technical manner of understanding the lived world.

Johnson referred to the embodiment of understanding as the embodied tacit understanding of a human functioning and interacting with the world.

Our meaning is human meaning - meaning grounded in our human bodies, in their humanly encountered environments.

All of the meaning we can make and all of the values we hold grow out of our humanity – interacting – with – our - world. Our humanity encompasses our animal needs, our personal relationships, our need and capacity for love, our social relations, our cultural institutions and practices, and our spirituality. We make sense of all these dimensions of our being by means of body-based feeling, conceptualisation, reasoning, and symbolic expressions.

(Johnson, 2007, p. 283)

Johnson's meaning-making seems analogous with conceptions I have formed of Gadamer's. If meaning-making is based on that which is contained and expressed in our bodies and minds, based on our lived experiences, then we are an amalgam of all that has been for us and this cannot be put aside, for it inhabits all that we are. Bohm (2001, 2006) has further explored concepts brought forth by his own questions concerning the nature of understanding, looking to that which we contain as individuals. Bohm's reference to proprioception (body memory of familiar, practised movement) and its place within the human experience, is examined as embodied memory, the experience of having moved in a particular way, informing future experiences of the same kind, even after the passing of time. For proprioception, temporality is not an issue. The memory remains and is not dependent on time or space.

These ideas are appropriate to interrogations of my scenarios chosen as lived experiences for narrative inquiry in my work, for I perceive my world physically, and I am aware that my physical senses embody my emotions. Yet there is still another facet that exists for me, every day of my life. This is the intangible presence of an other. I sense the presence of an other whilst I am in their physical presence but I also sense other-ness in my bodily knowing. How can I express this element of existence that is not intellectual, is not formed in my body, but is received by me and understood as from the other? It goes beyond my visual perception, although it is part of it. It is not only "in the eyes", in the posture, in the language. I embody all that I have ever seen, heard, enacted, chosen, tasted, smelled. Should all this be remembered

and revealed? I know I am vulnerable in my self-exposure, but have found van Manen's words reassuring.

It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions and theories. We try to come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing nature.

(van Manen, 1990, p. 47)

### **Gathering on the shore—hermeneutic imaginations**

This 'making explicit' might be a manner of self-bracketing. I have isolated things I recognised as existing within my composite as a human being and I continually strive toward openness and depth in character. I now desire expression of some of my hermeneutic understandings through application to an imaginative story. I am particularly drawn to consideration of the "shallow or concealing nature" against which van Manen seems to be fighting. Literature has come to the fore as means for interrogation of this idea as I make reference to John Cobbler's mother in *The Lord Fish* (de la Mare, 1946).

In *The Lord Fish*, John Cobbler's mother made assumptions concerning her boy, based on prior knowledge of events, mother's love and everyday routines and responses. Her assumptions had, in some ways, protected her from pain, for she could not understand her boy. Early in the story, he did not rise to his life task—of which we are initially unaware—for he was still rehearsing, a rehearsal involving shallow engagement with others, superficiality in his caring and labelling by the village as lazy. Although surrounded by negative appellations, he remained immune to ridicule. He correspondingly spent no time considering others. He acted on his whim for fishing and sought other waters in which to fish, not questioning his role in the village world. He remained in a cycle of unawareness, dreamily above the influences that created his haven. His world was a dream and concealed any



greater intentions, for he was as unaware of these as was his mother. He was ignorant, naïve, innocent in his daily process of following his passion. He was not mindful. He lived in a state of mindless-ness that could be viewed as carelessness or carefree-ness for he was so detached from caring that his mothers' assumptions did not touch him. In an environment where reality demanded satisfaction of basic needs, he was a failure. But he did not care.

I have considered John's way in the world and applied it to my journey. I look to John's story as an artwork within an artwork, a story within a story. When I consider an artwork, whether painted, written, sculpted, filmed—however it is presented—I experience a sensation similar to the feeling I have in my body when responding to another person, a physical sensation to which I immediately respond. I wonder—does this signify for me my existence in this world? Am I a being whose world is ruled by such a sense of physical connectedness? Or am I like John, who was so much in his own world that only objects fitting his passion were perceived, which would mean that I am so linked to the physical and visual that subtle ways of the world are unavailable to me? If so, could I be enacting what Rudolf Steiner expressed in one of his early poems, referring to mindless lack of connection?

I feel at last the world's reality  
Which, lacking the communion of my soul,  
Would in itself be frosty, empty life,  
And showing itself powerless  
To create itself in souls,  
Would in itself find only death.

(Rudolf Steiner, 1982, p. 40)

I see the soul as the depths, not the shallows. I see the world's reality as living within the world, making meaning through interactions and reviews, in a communion that encompasses the gift and the receiving. I see the powerlessness as detachment that eliminates synthesis of the worldly influences, death indicating an ending to growth. If this is evident to me, am

I moving beyond the obvious and into the potentialities of existence and connectedness?

Gadamer's belief in the importance of interactions of the individual with the world, involving interchange, implying adaptations and finally true dialogue, where true dialogue would involve hermeneutic perception of the other, greets me. (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 6690/8818) Hermeneutic understanding is tempered by the individual's life experience to that point and is continually enriched by further interactions. I continue to interrogate the idea that living is a hermeneutic experience, that the hermeneutic manner of interrogation is embedded in an aesthetic manner of viewing the world and that life is, therefore, an artistic experience. My expressions of understanding through art are inspired by lived experiences, which in turn inspire my art. I understand that all pain, all joy, horror, love, is experience of the essence of being human. My freedom might lie with my ability to perceive my choice as I wish. Through hermeneutic inquiry of choices made, I could look historically at my life. I could review, recount and remember. My use of prior understandings to perceive my felt reality of my present might be a path to greater self-understanding and therefore to world-understanding.

### **Re-memberings**

Past exchanges remembered include those in which I have felt threatened. At these times I questioned my communication skills, my strength of character, the power of my physical presence, my inner convictions, my teaching skills, my intelligence. I have felt as an island, adrift from the mainland, the eddying waters rising to swallow my smallness in the ocean of angst and depths unknown, isolated and abandoned by my own self-ness, a mystery to my self, an ineffectual and confused combination of life-force and living matter. At such times, the islands of familiarity around me, that seemed unattached to me and beyond communication, were ever more distant. When faced with a trial, I could not reason the logical attachment we

have as teachers who, like islands, are actually part of one whole that exists beneath. All I saw were individuals, surviving amidst the surface tension of the waters, seemingly unconnected although within close physical proximity. In my island nature, the attacks from foreign sources rose and surged, flooding me with insecurity, the threats settling deeply within. I look to Bonnie Litowitz (2014) in her article “*Coming to Terms with Intersubjectivity*” as I struggle with my sense of isolation. She spoke of possibilities for reception of other’s words.

Misinterpretation is inevitable when we communicate. We may share the same sounds and rules for their combination and uses, but each of us has learned these in unique experiences and, consequently, the webs of meaning—the semantic/conceptual/imagic interconnections and their attendant subjective feeling states—are subtly different. (What is dirty and disgusting to me may be sad and pathetic to you.). Misinterpretations provide us the opportunity to explore those differences. The structures of language are conservative—they resist change—or we could not use them to establish joint reference, but through such usage meaning is always in flux (i.e., always both expanding and contracting). This tension between finite structure and infinite generativity of meaning is a unique characteristic of human languages and is tied to its capacity for self-reference.<sup>10</sup> For it is through its capacity for self-reference that the inevitable misinterpretations are explored and meanings evolve. (2014, p. 302-303)

I begin my second narrative inquiry from a position of confusion as I explore the various interpretations of the events and conversations. There are limitless ways of existing within experiences, where experiences become the product of memories, forming present and future being-ness. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley suggest that memory is not “action” but

... a kind of knowledge like perception, imagination and understanding. Memory constitutes a knowledge of past events, or of the pastness of past events. In that sense it is committed to truth, even if it is not a truthful relationship to

the past; that is, precisely because it has a truth-claim, memory can be accused of being unfaithful to this claim.

(Kearney & Dooley, 1999, p. 5)

In both good and painful memories I have dwelled, visited and revisited a myriad events, a myriad times, carrying into each day my past. At times I have noticed in others what I believed I could identify and cleaved to them in my mind, if not in my body, searching for my identity in others. My memories have fed this venturing.

I have focused on what I have believed to be the reality. Does belief in the reality of memories make them truths? Can it be proved that they are not true? I reclaim my meaning-making from truth, where truth is not as a crystal promising pure delight and relief, but instead, perhaps paradoxically, as a distractor, a smudge in my striving for meaning-making, for my veracity, amidst effects of past events which hold greater importance and greater reality for me. An idea of truth carries the weight of eons for me, a weight that might encompass some of my essence, as clay exists prior to manipulation, but for my three inquiries, meaning-making is accommodating, flexible—more human, allowing space for interpretation. My meaning-making encompasses my memories. I exist as a composite of my memories. How do I determine my veracity in reflection of my rememberings?

Kearney considered memory to possess the same energy as physical action. He related this directly to the ethical implications of memory, which in turn seem to apply to narrative inquiry. He stated a relationship between memory use and ethics.

It is possible because memory has two kinds of relation to the past, the first of which, as I have already mentioned, is a relation of knowledge, while the second is a relation of action. This is so because remembering is a way of doing things, not only with words, but with our minds; in remembering or recollecting we are exercising our memory, which is a kind of action. (Kearney & Dooley, 1999, p. 5)

Memory as action requiring initial recognition, then movement and response, is the memory of Kearney. In reference to my previous discussion of the doing-ness of a naming, could it be that memory, as both naming and doing and as a form of creation of the individual's way in the world, is both the *telos* (Aristotle's end) and the means for attaining *eudemonia* (Aristotle's happiness)? There might be potential for my meaning-making to be valid and valuable, virtuous, even noble, if I maintain mindful, and intentional, connection between my self-perceptions and my world-perceptions.

### **Here or there?**

What sorts of intentions are at work when something is seen as both memory and relationship? Sokolowski reflected upon connections in the space of between-ness, where space absorbs both memory and relationship. Each remembered event lies in one place or another—here, where it seems to be held, nurtured, encompassed, or over there, where it seems estranged, differentiated, mysterious. The space of between-ness creates a borderless union. For Sokolowski, “the mind is a public thing, that it acts and manifests itself out in the open, not just inside its own confines. Everything is outside.” (2000, p. 12). In Sokolowski's phenomenology, “The very notion of an “intramental” and an ‘extramental’ world are incoherent...The world and the mind are correlated with one another” (ibid.).

I have considered my intentionality with reference to Sokolowski's comment, where my intentionality would be attempting clarity in comprehension of world/mind, experience/self, other/I, then my impulse outward must be a manifestation of my inward. Polanyi (1975) and Viktor Frankl (2006) expressed their understandings of meaning and linked the inner and outer life of the human in their pursuits. Both referred to concepts of freedom in correlation to meaning-making. Frankl said, “the human being is a finite thing, and his freedom is restricted. It is not freedom from conditions, but it *is* freedom to take a stand toward the conditions” (Frankl,

2006, p. 130). He saw freedom as a mental, emotional and intellectual capacity, touched by physical freedom but not defined by this. Polanyi used the term 'self-determinism' to explore individual freedom and placed it in opposition to perfectionism, where perfection embodied a crushing of the creative spirit, with its basis on societal norms clutching at objectivism (Polanyi, 1958/2003, p. 226). He further explored this connection between freedom and meaning in *Meaning* (Polanyi and Prosch, 1975) where meaning encompassed intellectual freedom. I imagine my own mind as a "public thing" with self-determination. My ideas concerning freedom—which exist as my meaning-making—would be inherent in my interactions, my conversations and my silences, part of the inner and the outer of which I am made and manifested by these things, open for viewing by others. I would be totally open to the world, I would be absolutely known. Do I feel absolutely known? If my mind and the world are completely one and the same, therefore open to all, why do I assume the searching for meaning through this thesis? Why is my task towards understanding self and other necessary if there exists no division between the inner and the outer world with which I exist as human? Or is it that I am somehow intrinsically compelled to explore and make myself vulnerable in my expression of self-explorations so that I might know, become conscious, be mindful of my meaning-making, which is embodied and therefore unconscious, implied, tacit?

As I wrestle with this way of being, ripping apart my narratives here and therefore ripping myself apart, am I tricked by my musings, and tricky in my explanations—that is, is it possible for me to mask my authenticity? Litowitz's words concerning deception contributed to my queries.

...our communication system provides unique capacities that have profound effects on what separates us from other species. Like them, we deceive others but, due to the properties of language that I have mentioned (reciprocity, reflexivity, self-reference) we also deceive our-selves.

(2014, p. 305)

In my interrogations I have imagined as many potentialities for meaning as I could conceive. It was via this process that I intended to break through my self-deception. I have accepted the protective and defensive nature of deception as a facet of human existence, but I have wondered whether its attribution to human nature has permanence, or whether it might be a facet of personality that could indicate transitioning, moving from one known space into the unknown—stepping from the *soglia* (threshold). Polanyi stated that, “A man’s sincerity in professing his ideals is to be measured rather by the lack of prudence he shows in pursuing them” (Polanyi, 1975, p. 10). Does this reflect the ‘actions speak louder than words’ homily? Is this really the crux of my questioning—I am what I do, and so my thoughts are always visible?

I have explored the connection between the unseen (thoughts) and the seen (physical actions and responses) further, for I am aware that seeing has not always led me to understandings. To see might create the possibility for understanding, but not the assurance of it. I have looked to Merleau-Ponty as he acknowledged the mind/body unity, to Polanyi who embodied his knowing and to Bohm, who stepped beyond embodied knowing into mindful discernment, where doing would be suspended until thoughts are stilled, and this flow of thought into action has brought forth my memories concerning various interactions. I have questioned if there is commonality in my searching, in all my relationships, whether intimate or casual, which might exist as my search for human sincerity amidst the words of undisplayed actions.

In my searching, am I a dreamer, like John Cobbler of Walter de la Mare’s tale *The Lord Fish*, a young man obsessed with fishing, whose “... love of water might one day be his ruin” (Lines, 1946, p. 55)? Am I, like John, only capable of actions related to my passion, maintaining a distance from the reality of caring for those closest to me? If so, how will it end? Will it end? Could some resolution come for me, like John’s, who followed his passion, forced through his will to survive to complete difficult tasks, then ultimately

achieved his and his families' hearts' desire? John's mother wondered, "...was there some secret in his passion for water of which she knew nothing" (p. 56). In my own search I have identified at times with John's mother, as I attempted to view "I" as "Thou" and questioned my way of being, my choices. I have wondered why I have been involved in this writing and researching. Yet I have surged on. John surged onward, too, following his passion for water and fishing.

Sometimes the fish he caught in far off waters tasted fresher, sweeter, richer, juicier than those nearer home; sometimes they tasted worse-dry, poor, rank and muddy. It depended partly on the sort of fish, partly on how long he had taken to carry them home, and partly on how his mother felt at the moment. (Lines, 1946, p. 57)

If I could be both John and his mother in my quest, I have then allowed my journey to take hold of me and guide me outwards, the products I bring to myself mixed in their quality. In this thesis I have aimed to offer the best, sweetest, juiciest fish and to discard the lesser, whilst appreciating the lesser's ability to offer some sustenance.

I celebrate the wonders of prose extractions and visual art as communications to the whole that is this thesis, at this time. As I have worked with artworks and their individual presentations, mindful of what I believed I had learnt from da Vinci, Gadamer's reference to the 'language of art', that "...all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event" (Gadamer, 1975 /2006, loc. 1592/8818), thus linking it to the "unfinished event", I have been struck with this as further evidence as to the relevance of my choices for discussion, as I utilise artistic terms within the scope of the hermeneutic and phenomenological.

Gadamer expressed the constancy of humanity's evolution of understanding in response to art works, where comprehension at one particular time might be completely changed and transformed at another



time. Like artworks, my lived experiences might be totally reinterpreted with time and refocussing, with remembering and forgetting, once a relevant approach encapsulating my perceptions of the world is attempted. In contemplation of this, meaning of memory has come to the fore and I have looked towards forgetting. Gadamer's words, "Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fused with the new into a many levelled unity" (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 559/8818) resonated with my purpose.

I have interpreted forgetting as withdrawal in time and maybe space from an event. It seemed that physical disengagement could bring a sense of safety and within this safety a haven of contemplation might be formed. This haven for comprehension of an event might reveal my meanings with more clarity than if viewed from close proximity in time and space. By using the terms *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato* and *soglia*, I have aimed to create a space by naming, a word haven from which to examine in self-created safety. This withdrawal I have attempted as I have interrogated my narratives. As sea-salt water merges with river-fresh, my metaphors above have combined with phenomenological terms as I have gathered them to further illuminate my narrative inquiry path.

### **Transcending the storm**

Within my phenomenological exploration there has existed my attempt at transcendental reduction, where

...the transcendental reduction should not be seen as an escape from the question of being or the study of being as being, quite the contrary. When we shift from the natural attitude to the phenomenological, we raise the question of being, because we begin to look at things precisely as they are given to us, precisely as they manifested, precisely as they are determined by 'form', which is the principle of disclosure

in things. We begin to look at things in their truth and evidencing. This is to look at them in their being.

(Sokolowski, 2008, p. 64-65)

I have linked this explanation with the premise in hermeneutics that as humans we are comprised of our lived experiences that form us and hold us. As a woman within this world, I am a composite of experiences within my world's time and place. I have acted and been acted upon, seen and avoided, had freedom and constraints, for throughout my living I have journeyed with others whose actions have crushed, impinged, framed, encouraged or inspired my acting in the world. The actions of others continue to form my world and through attaining comprehension of the acts and their impulses, I have reached to phenomenological and hermeneutic manners of being in the world as a means towards attainment of my clarity.

In this hermeneutic labour for comprehension, Caroline Ellis and Tony Adams have assisted me to understand that

Autoethnographers recognise the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process...Consequently, Autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist. (Ellis and Adams, 2010, p. 3)

In the way of the autoethnographer I have included some description of my early life and the influences I have perceived as most forming throughout these years—I have chosen from many to write of a few. As the writer of this work and the thinker of these words, I cannot escape my self. I see each word as an expression-drop of this self into written word, building an image of existence within my constantly changing horizons, adapting, assimilating, fighting, questioning as I forge my way.

I have turned away from a Cartesian philosophical scientific tradition, which for me demeans personal discernment in favour of objectivity as an

ideal. In Cartesian mode, philosophical writers withdrew into their writing from the world and referred to ‘realities’, which might not have been their direct experience, but which might have been recorded as truth/fact by others abstracted to justify their own stance. Observation was tempered by hermetic wisdom and through this, the truth would ultimately be revealed. Engagement was not the answer—logical process rejecting emotional attachment was revered. Perhaps this remains the way of many in this century, as professions attempt meaning-making. Their concept of truth-seeking might involve research based on past examples, bound by present conditions and desired logical connections. The individual’s experience might then be generalised through collection of similar data, then applied to many. I have chosen the path of phenomenology due to its fundamental premise as given here by van Manen.

In some sense all phenomenology is oriented to practice—the practice of living. But from the perspective of our pragmatic and ethical concerns we have a special interest in phenomenology. We have questions of how to act in everyday situations and relations. This pragmatic concern I will call the "phenomenology of practice." Thus, we wish to explore how a phenomenology of practice may speak to our personal and professional lives. (van Manen, 2007, p. 13)

I claim the wonder and mystery of my every-day experience, as van Manen expressed. My narratives were not epiphanies or turning points, which might indicate for some the characteristics of the autobiography (Ellis & Adams, 2010, p. 4). Instead, they were culminations of situations and ways of thought through which I was attempting to find a way into calmer seas. They were highly emotive but not extraordinary, situations that could possibly be experienced by anyone within an educational context. I was aware of degrees of intensity in experience at many previous times but I did not attain immediate, deeper understanding of meaning. Instead, a sense of the importance of each culmination to my own narrative drew me from the natural attitude into the phenomenological and though I struggled, I also relished the thought-haven of understanding.

In work by David Rehorick and Valerie Bentz (2009), Bernie Novokowsky wrote of his reclamation of personal power through phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiry into his traumas. His internal passage from victim to self-victor used philosophical manners of perception, and he found that, “Any understanding of power must account for personal experience” (2009, p. 139). I look to what power I gave to myself or gave to others in my interactions and reclaim my strength in vulnerability. Could my eclectic choice of thinkers and ways for examination facilitate a path for me as open and vulnerable, encompassed in unfinishedness, which might manifest as finishedness? Zhuangzi said, “A path is formed by (constant) treading on the ground” (Zhuangzi, 1891, loc. 202/4699). I trudge along unsteady banks besides water that seeps and surrounds, incorporating earth with silent victory. Zhuangzi has offered direction with the promise of repetition as I try to find my way.

## **This narrative space**

### **Tight**

Tight.

The space is small,

but it could be the universe in the power it wields.

I struggle to stay in a place once familiar-

for a while.

But now, it is

Tight.

I stretch my arms,

move them, sweeping

around my head.

It feels good.

But small is my being  
and mild are the smiles  
that habitually frame my teeth.

Now.

I must move, or the crush will ensue,  
the space between will become  
a speck on memory,  
a regret,  
for remembrance.

Tension binds my body  
yet powers my soul.  
I, fully grown  
must move my way,  
face this pain with strength and freedom.

Once a child  
amidst karmic tensions,  
I shed the past  
and surrender.

The space between-it is so small  
yet vast  
in its power.

(Miller, 2007)

I have recorded and re-written several times my scenarios as I strained to understand them. I recorded the first narrative the day after its occurrence. Writing of the event formed part of my healing, allowing me to withdraw

from the situation, slightly. It also gave me an opportunity to connect with my colleagues in this workplace. They all read it and laughed sympathetically with me, acknowledging their own experiences and giving hope for my future. Each time I read it I remember the sense of my inadequacy, of powerlessness, then afterwards the humour-filled interchanges with which I could not, at this particular time, laughingly connect. The version of this narrative that appears in this thesis is my ultimate expression towards understanding.

The second narrative was recorded initially as an incident report. I represented it in a more emotive fashion months after this, as more parts were unfolded in result of the actions I was encouraged to take. Throughout, I felt in shock. I did not understand how this situation had escalated and was desperate for comprehension of the role I played in the interchange.

The third narrative, filled with joy, I wrote during and after a collegial experience. It is illuminated by friendship and a deep sense of trustworthiness and integrity which I perceived in my colleague and which I came to know she perceived in me. This relationship has remained a part of my everyday life and thinking.

Whether written immediately, in following months, or continuously, these narratives come from my memories, embedded in my lived experience. Kearney and Dooley (1999) said, “It is because memory is an exercise that we can talk of the use of memory, which in turn permits us to speak of the abuses of memory” (p. 5). While I acknowledge the capacity for memory to be clear or tainted, I have found consolation in Ricoeur’s words, in Kearney and Dooley (1999, p. 9), who commented that narratives are helpful because “...it is always possible to tell in another way” (p. 9). This has suggested to me a vision for freedom through such narrative inquiry, as I have explored the manifestations. My intention has been to place blame nowhere, to own my situations and outcomes and to move into the future with increased

understanding. I wish now and in the future to apply new understandings to my life and to consequently move fully into my authenticity. In this, I aim for forgiveness, where, “To forgive is basically to be liberated from the burden of the past, to be untied or unbound” (Kearney and Dooley, 1999, p. 10).

### **Wave tracks in the sand**

I acknowledge the reality of my past and its place in my written and spoken expression. Kearney and Dooley commented, “The past is something that is no longer there but which has been there, which once was there. So the grammar of the past is a two-fold grammar. It is no longer and yet it has been” (1999, p. 15). As wave tracks in the sand, melding with that which is already present, then moulding it and introducing new forms with wave energy, the past amalgamates and creates space for the new.

Kearney and Dooley considered remembering as encompassing a composite of memory and imaginations. Like an artwork examined, each narrative can yield meaning. I have questioned this and wondered if it matters if events, or event fragments, are imaginary, whether my memories are considered reality or unreality by those involved, or those who witnessed interchanges. If these do matter, then what role does fictional literature, which might be considered unreal (fantasy), play for humanity? Does it matter if my meanings are imaginary? Are imaginary worlds applicable to my life and if so, what role does visual art, expressing at times tacit and imaginary impressions, play for me as part of humanity? Could it be that imaginary worlds expressed in the arts are so deeply rooted in human storying and history that they carry their own reality, ferrying humans through the unbelievable and into living and lived? I have drawn from the arts to explore capture of event and meaning and for identification of commonalities and interchanges. Alfred Schutz analysed music as a means of

communication, of transcending the division between “I” and “Thou” (Buber, 1958/1986). Schutz hoped that his work would,

...in some measure contribute to clarification of the structure of the mutual tuning-in relationship, which originates in the possibility of living together simultaneously in specific dimensions of time. (Schutz, 2014, p. 58)

Schutz contributed to twentieth century philosophical discussions in “...phenomenology of social action, the life-world, the notion of multiple realities, the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life practices...” (van Manen, 2014, loc. 3704/11093). Various references are made to him in a number of contemporary works, from Greene, to van Manen, to Gadamer. My thesis has included exploration of such Schutzian realities, in the context of my own living.

My first narrative begins my venture into concepts of *chiaroscuro* (dark/light), *sfumato* (shadowings) and *soglia* (threshold) as a means for understanding my lived experiences. I have accompanied these terms with phenomenological ideas including intentionality, presence, absence, identity, aspects and manifolds. The second narrative continues such examination but in a different context and situation. The third narrative unifies with positivity and joy. As preparation for my three narrative inquiries, I have examined da Vinci’s *Lady with an Ermine*. I attempted an analogy between this painted work as representative of perceptions and expressions da Vinci brought into the world, in light of his visual art technique, with my own exploration of written narratives.

It was said of da Vinci by Vasari, a sixteenth century biographer and artist that “...the instability of his character caused him to undertake many things which having commenced he afterwards abandoned” (Vasari, 2005, p. 50). da Vinci secured support from wealthy patrons throughout his life despite this sanguinity, dying at seventy-five in the court of the French King Francis the First. da Vinci’s *Notebooks* have inspired and fascinated me as I read his observations on dark, light and sight. As I have explored life as an artistic



experience, I have tested my thinking with the following quote, replacing the word ‘painting’ with that of ‘lived experience’.

There is a difference between how the painting [lived experience] appeared to the artist and how it appears to the viewer, as well as differences between the viewing of a cultivated viewer and a mere curiosity seeker. The painting [lived experience] waits for its viewers in order to be completed as a work of art...the identity transcends its manifold of presentations, it goes beyond them.

(Sokolowski, 2000, p. 30)

I acknowledge that the “manifold of appearances and identity”, considered by Sokolowski (2000, p. 31) as one and the same thing, could be different depending on the form of the phenomenon, that is, whether an artwork or a lived experience. I believe there is mutuality between the two forms of expression—that there seems analogy between living my life and my experience of an artwork. This application has helped me to express the manifolds available to me as a dative of manifestation and to consequently aid my comprehension of events.



Figure 5: *Lady with an Ermine* by Leonardo da Vinci (1485)

### *Lady with an Ermine*

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My description and examination of this painting is an impression based on what I have noticed and conceived as worthy of comment. I recognise

that other viewers bring other understandings to the picture. I know that the creator or instigator might view from different perspectives than the onlooker—‘the other’. *Lady with an Ermine* presents differently to me each time I view it, the presentations dependent on the ongoing lived experiences of me, as viewer. The painting’s many manifolds unfold in response to its identity as a painting as I, in turn, feel enfolded by the painting. I am enveloped within my experience of the art, much as expressed, where

The work of art is understood as the consummation of the symbolic representation of life and towards this consummation every experience already tends.

(Gadamer, 1975/2006, 1236/8818)

In such a manner I have delved into the presentation of this painting, seeing it as both a re-presentation and a summation of artist, model and my own lived experiences, as humans living then and now, with our own histories, theirs and mine, then and now.

da Vinci’s paintings are few, for he had profound interest in so many aspects of nature and life in general. His notebooks reveal a mind ever moving, a mind that I describe as existing within *sfumato* (shadowings) and moved through the delineations of *chiaroscuro* (dark/light) to eliminate edges between object, space and time. He created works that explored the representation of character and the mysteries of the human being. The unfinishedness of so much of his work inspires me as I wonder at his process. Recounts of interactions and analysis of his writing seem to portray a man of humour, integrity and determination. I keep these ideas within my perception as I interrogate the painting, as I might a lived experience.

A paintbrush equipped with compassion and sensitivity seems to have created this painting. *Lady with an Ermine* was painted in 1485, when da Vinci was thirty-three years old. It is a contrasting composition, the darkness of the background elevating the subject as she is propelled forward into light. Cradling an ermine, a creature symbolising purity, Cecilia Gallerani looks pensively to her left. She is poised and demure, anticipating in her gaze some

occurrence, or maybe diverted by something already in play. She is slightly tensed through her back, perhaps through holding the ermine, as it may have sought escape. Her hand calms the animal, her right fingertips resting gently on its shoulders and neck as it, too, is drawn towards the left. Her long fingers press lightly onto the animal's skin, the hand in proportion, in perspective and thus seeming larger than necessary. She is carefully bound in the fashion of the day, hair clasped firmly by nets and ribbons, smooth, sculptured, controlled. Her jewellery is simple, perhaps a rosary of dark beads. The beads reflect the light gently, but move into obscurity as they encompass her neck. The heavy, partly embroidered gown is in the colours of the Madonna—sky blue, red and gold. She is protective, soothing and aware.

Cecelia curves from the canvas as da Vinci blurs and shades. Her entire right side is in shadow, *chiaroscuro* gradually giving way to *sfumato* as the eye moves across the painting, from left to right. There is much that is obscured by the darkness, but her face presents as the focus, brown eyes, like her ermine, looking outwards. Her pupils are not dilated, showing no overt arousal or any dulling through lack of light or interest. They are firmly grasped by the event before her, her attention required, but not demanded. Her eyes look to have seen much. They could perhaps be interpreted as the eyes of a resigned woman.

I believe this woman's beauty may not have been thus captured without a compassionate and respectful attitude towards her. Her story is told through acknowledgement of her feminine appeal. da Vinci's work is powerful in its contrasts, yet yielding and encompassing in its embodiment. To me, it seems Cecelia is captured in her capture.

da Vinci has used delicacy of brush strokes to communicate the lustre of Cecelia's skin and the subtle traces of weariness around her eyes. He has embodied an almost-smile, perhaps heralding the later enigma of his Mona Lisa painted in 1505. All facets of Cecelia that are visible in this work are the

product of light/dark awareness and its effective employment. da Vinci has explored the life of a contemporary woman through a moment rendered permanent.

da Vinci used the concept and technique of *chiaroscuro* through transformation into *sfumato*. The definite lines existing around figures, which characterised many works by many artists, were edged away. The forms became part of the surrounds, without losing distinction, revealing the connectedness of the figure with the space it inhabited. Although one moment is expressed, it is representative of many. The woman becomes a symbol of her own life, whilst holding a symbol imposed from her world. She looks toward something which is absent to us, yet attained definite presence for her. Her unknowability is expressed while she is engaged in the act of being explored. She is perfect, yet unfinished in her gesture towards the other, who exists as a mystery for me, the viewer. She has chosen her way and turns from that which she has rejected.

In review, I am reminded to look with sensitivity and compassion towards that which I have commenced, as I expose my vulnerabilities, as I believe da Vinci did as he painted Cecilia, applying my interpretations of *sfumato* and *chiaroscuro* and accompanying them with *soglia* (threshold). Whilst my perceptions of Cecilia might be at odds with formal critiques, I am unashamed. I have seen and applied my own comprehension and interpretations. In such a way I have interrogated my narratives. The interrogations are mine, but in my expression van Manen's words hold a promise that

In drawing up personal descriptions of lived experiences, the phenomenologist knows that one's own experiences are also the possible experiences of others. (van Manen, 1990, p. 54)

This idea has fuelled my determination. I have accompanied this fuel with an imaginary conversation between my chosen philosophers and me. Such a conversation has given me permission to move forward into my narrative events, naïve, curious and unfinished as I am. In a book by Jeffrey Kottler

and Jon Carlson (2009), Chapter 18 is devoted to the focus of creativity as propounded by Alfonso Montuori, a doctoral educationalist. They say,

Creativity involves imitation and novelty, tradition and innovation, rigor and imagination, head and heart, knowing and not knowing, learning and unlearning. (p. 248)

Montuori prefers to frame this process as the means by which you “situate yourself among your people. These are the people who, like you, care deeply about the subject you have chosen. Think of them as your ancestors. Some of them are long dead, and some may have even been killed for having an interest in or opinion about this subject. They are your colleagues, your people. (p. 251)

The following conversation epitomises my intentions for the narratives in a manner reminiscent of Montuori, where I have imagined my “ancestors”.

*Husserl: So, you are saying that you agree with me? That we must begin at the beginning, before contemplation, with the event itself viewed with naïvety, without judgement?*

*Me: I suppose so. Though I am more inspired by van Manen’s contemporary description of the lived experience as a fundamental source to be accepted, a prior requisite towards phenomenological understandings, leading to development of tact and compassion.*

*van Manen: My awareness of my work and family life has fuelled my perceptions of care and relationships. We can come to know so much by focussing on the details of an experience that manifest for us. From the familiar we have the possibility to understand the unfamiliar.*

*Me: I feel most vulnerable when acknowledging my naïvety. I judge myself and almost invariably see the negative in my interactions. There seems to be hope in the concept of beginnings, but how do I delve without drowning?*

*David Bohm: Remember—suspend judgement. You must practise this in groups, as people speak. It is a means of suspending judgement, in hindsight, of the self, in order to attain self-understanding, which is a path to world understanding.*

Gadamer: *This I believe. Look inward. But first look outward, for all understanding is self-understanding. What is external is also internal. What you see is what you can see, as a temporal being with particular historicity.*

Maxine Greene: *It is in our external expression of our understandings that we can gain insight into the world. I regard literature as an artistic means to explore self and others, as I read and interpret texts.*

Gadamer: *Once more I agree. To pursue text, or, in fact, any artistic expression from others, with sensitivity and determination, embodies the hermeneutic. Time has brought my attention to David and Max's joy in the unfolding of ideas, viewed with grace.*

Elliot Eisner: *As an educator I see the impact of judgement. I see also the joy of growth. I believe we must encourage artistic expression in order to progress and flourish as humans.*

Me: *It seems all point towards one. Life is an artistic experience, as we create, retract, add, imagine, inspire. Merleau-Ponty, you brought the 'edge' to me and catapulted me into new thinking.*

Merleau-Ponty: *All is too intense—I go to the edge and there is still more to see, I cannot fall but must keep the motion, there is too much to understand, I am falling into the abyss of my endless words, always more to see, I am desperate to understand, there is too much...*

Me: *It seems your journey reflects that of great artists, Maurice. You wrote. They painted and sculptured. da Vinci focussed the viewer's attention on blurred edges, melding dark and light to communicate more intensely the lived experiences he created in his paintings. Meanwhile, Michelangelo's sculptures, particularly "The Slaves" demonstrate for me the blurred edges of man's existence. I will elaborate later on this point. They are on their threshold, a word I prefer to use instead of your edge, Maurice, I hope you do not mind. It seemed more illustrative of the journey I perceive as a path towards comprehension of this lived world. So drawn was I to Leonardo's Notebooks and Michelangelo's sculpture that I wished to name this threshold in their language, Italian and so the edge, the threshold, became my soglia. I recognise that the concept of threshold is universally used to express the crossing from one thing to something else. When accompanied with chiaroscuro and sfumato I feel a unity towards understanding. It makes sense to me. It is especially the 'in-between-ness' of the soglia that seems to express a consciousness of my unfinishedness.*



*Leonardo da Vinci: I see the contrast of the form in space with the cast of light moving and changing in time. I am enthralled by the action of the eye as it shifts focus from brightness to shade. Why does the dark seem so dark when viewed from brightness? Why does the dark seem less so when viewed from shade? I write this from the sense of a painter. You apply it to your developing philosophy of focus and possibilities, Caroline, with life as an artistic experience. It is not what I intended, so read carefully to determine the relationship you wish to create between seeing the natural world as a precursor to artistic creation and rendering and its applicability as a means of perception, interpretation and path to some understandings of life experiences.*

*Michelangelo: My slaves of marble I abandon to the will of the viewer. They are exposed as I perceive their will in the rock. So, the will of the viewer interacts with that of the figure. They move forth but cannot escape.*

*Me: They seem unfinished to the viewer, but is this their truth? Can their hidden-ness allow thoughts of possibilities, rather than the crushing of the self, the enslavement of the self? It seems in their struggles, great beauty strains for recognition. Still, their entire physical bodies are not easily evident. In this obscurity, I see hope. I also see a connection between the shadows and that which is obscured by the stone, between darkness and that which is only imaginable, between light and that which is understood.*

## Chapter 3 First narrative: Of doubt

### **Breath**

Pulsing, watching, waiting, playing

pressure building

smiles abandon

Moving, talking, pleading, walking—

Stop.

Stop.

Stop.

Stop.

Too much,

so few,

so much

to do—

Waiting wasted,

patience ended

waiting, waiting,

quickly fading.

Stop the talking.

Stop the forming.

Conflicts mounting.

Tensions rounding.

Constant need

for all attention,

space invading,

actions testing

NO, No, end, end!

The breath is ended

circling in

it

dives for depths

unfurled it sits

and cringes in lungs so filled with words and words and words and words  
and words.

(Miller, 2012)

I sat and watched as he snatched from the floor two pieces of paper he had ripped, with help, into tiny bits, then licked and stuck on his chin and above his lip, a pale, dirty, frayed goatee and moustache on a skew-eyed, broken-glasses, pixy face.

All morning time had stood still. Each action and reaction had the sense of timelessness, of endless repetition and endless reinvention, as 'the group' moved from one misadventure to the other. From a controlled sensibility they progressed to general anarchy on the return of their classmates. I stood bemused, summoning all my force to attain order.

"Right, counting to three and C will be back in the circle. Good. N, sit."

"I am waiting for J to sit WITHOUT TALKING. You may not realise this, class, but I actually do not like talking very much—I would rather listen—but I have never in all my life had to talk as much as I have these last few weeks. Just as we are all quiet, ready to listen, someone starts talking to the person next to them. It is rude, it is annoying, and it wastes our time! Now, that is better. J, STOP TALKING!!!!!"

"N for goodness sake sit there and DON'T move!"

"F, leave B alone, yes, I see what is happening, now, you know what to do, so do it."

"Yes, move!"

"B settle down, she did not mean to...yes I see, but you are all right, you are not hurt, just move your knee down gently...T, stop whispering to J—move away from him right now. N, sit down! There, not there!"

"AND...Ten little candles bur...J, stop talking and sing...burning bright, ten little candles in the night, along comes the...B! She HAS moved...F, leave him alone—I can see what is happening...O, stop whispering to D...along comes the wind, whew..."(whistling around the class as the children enjoy the excuse to make inappropriate inside noises).

Children shown next maths task, make partners, set to work.

All is well for 15 minutes until—

"T, what are you doing? N, get off him, what are you doing? Why are these all over the floor? T, why did you do that? You tipped them over your head, what a thing to do! Now pick them up."

"NOW."

"S, we are matching counters and numbers, we are not making tallest towers. O, this is not a construction task, it is a counting game, now keep going..."

"Right, N and T, that's it, yellow card. Pick up the blocks before you go!"

"COME BACK HERE. How dare you run out without finishing the tidying. N, start tidying. Oh no, where is JS and M? They ran after T? Who just ran out?"

"T, come here NOW. Come back inside NOW. T! Now! J, what on earth are you...JS! Come back here! M, where do you think...M, NOW! Back to the classroom NOW!"

This scene is scanned by a teacher's aide in the hall, who rushes to tell her own teacher—whose class is elsewhere. This teacher flies down, red hair flaming, protective arms and voice coming to me as I stand in complete helplessness wondering what the hell I am doing wrong. Her kind words, "Go, Caroline, I'll be right, just have a break," and her hug, sets off torrents of tears as I dash from the class to sob in the toilets.

What is going on? Am I an ineffective teacher? Are the children so unimpressed by my skills that I am totally without credibility? Am I too soft? Should I be more fierce, less patient, less forgiving? Am I trying too hard? Am I aiming at the wrong thing? Am I unsuited to this job, this school? Oh God, what am I doing wrong?

I decide to take my tears to one of my bosses. No good suffering in silence. I run to her office, praying she'll be there. Outside the door a well-known chief offender sits in his familiar isolation chair. These children notice everything. My tears cannot be hidden.

I close the door and sob uncontrollably. Two senior teachers come to me as I pour out my soul—trying so hard, don't know what is going on, so tired, some things they do are so funny, but today I cannot laugh, they have worn me down...

"Ahh, Caroline, I had a day like that a couple of weeks ago..."

and,

"Caroline, my first six months here I could NOT believe. I know just how you feel..."

A quiet lunch ensues, with my lunch duty taken by one of these ladies, accompanied by an offer to take four of the 'chiefs' from my class (definitely not enough Indians!) for the afternoon, calming me and the rest of the class. We have a lovely, clay-sculpturing afternoon, beautiful little clay birds the product. Such enjoyment is seen in the children's faces, once their fear of the new medium is overcome. All use the clay appropriately, respectfully, awe-filled as they find their bird in their hands.

The 'chiefs' return to my classroom unannounced—then are caught by the senior teacher, for they had left her without permission and without finishing the task she set them. But they admire the birds.

"Great, can we make one?"

"NO."

At times the actions are tolerable. At times I can endure in peace and equanimity, offer solutions that extricate the thorn or thorns from the general workings of the class and all moves on. There are other times when the weight of the behaviours forces my breath, tightens my chest and constricts my throat. In this mass of pain—foster child, abused child, tormented child, manipulative child, too-wide-awake child, sexually precocious child and many no-parameters children, I swim in swirling eddies of emotion.

Mostly, my head is clear. Each day I attack another issue.

We are allowed to say no if we do not wish to be touched, chasing people when they do not want you to is the same as touching when they have said no, people do not always tell the truth—their stories may be said just to try to impress you...and it goes on, something new every week to tackle as the days blur in a giant smudge of do's and don'ts. I spend my days building parameters that do not seem to be made of the right metal.

There is a moment of beauty as I receive instructions this same afternoon from my autistic student on how to make a certificate for myself, from him, for "teaching all the class in a good way", signed with his name. I had to copy the school emblem from his jumper, do the dashes for my name and his signature and write exactly what he said.

What treasures there are in the trauma.

I first wrote about these events the day after they happened. My exhaustion had peaked and I remained home, needing silence. My habitual method for attaining some clarity regarding an event is to write, so I recorded events in

peace with no demands in my domesticity. Once written, my reflection brought me a sense of collegial connectedness as I remembered the comments and responses of those around me that day. Whilst in the midst of the event I felt inept and anxious, despite years of experience in a range of struggling communities. On my return to school, after my day of rest and remembering, I shared my initial recording of events with colleagues, who received it with recognition and good humour.

### **Salt encrusted buoys**

The examination that now ensues was constructed over years and forms my phenomenological interpretation of the class experience. The scenario recording has been reformed and re-remembered, using variations in voice and a combination of heuristics to aid my trek. From a day-after response, and over time, I moved from the natural attitude towards a philosophical approach, my interrogation of the event a construction towards deeper understandings of my self and my world. I have ventured deeper and deeper into my narrative, spiralling through clarities and conflicts, revisiting the same to expose the new. I have desired a hermeneutic interrogation of my narrative. Spiralling inward and downward, into mysteries and surprises, I have formed my meaning-making.

This spiral has moved to encompass myself, moving from my inner self, where my own internalisations have ruled, then weaving into intersubjectivity, where relationships between my self and other individualities, have created my being. Sandra K. Simpson (2009) explained this spiral of understanding,

...the spiral is as a manifold or strata of interpretation, with each layer taking us into a deeper and richer place of awareness and knowledge. The understanding reached at each layer suggests the way into the next layer, as we continue to explore the depths of understanding that can be achieved. (Simpson, 2009, p. 54)

As I pushed aside accumulations of debris from within me, my fear of failure emerged as a prime impulse—I refer to my responses with these children as my cause, my catalyst. These children existed as an embodiment of my long-held fears, like salt-encrusted buoys embedded beneath mussel and oyster infestations. The nature of the children as catalysts might be revealed only inadvertently—I could not speak for them, but they remained the fuel for my deliberations. I believed I knew best my own responses for navigation of this journey. I could describe my own presences and absences, but I only surmised as to the manifolds that existed for the children, whilst imagining what could exist for them individually, based on information of their backgrounds of which I was aware and what I observed daily in the school environment.

This manner of exploration I believe to be from a position of hermeneutic self-interrogation, for I have delved within my self to search for my answers—although the situation of the scenario was relational, my analysis has been personal. Schuster commented in her article, “Hermeneutics as Embodied Experience” that,

A hermeneutic way of being in the world is about making meaning of our lives. It is about trying to understand one’s self and others in a common world. What do we do when we try to understand something? Understanding is not about solving a problem, but it helps us see possible problems with the phenomenon we are dealing with. (2013, p. 197)

As a hermeneutic inquiry into my perceptions of the lived experience, my inquiry has wound above, around, into and between my understandings of my world at this time. This particular space of contemplative inquiry inhabited a place of childhood. There and at that time I was caught in my own perceptions and struggled with my meaning-making. Litowitz spoke of the movement to mutuality of subjectivities, of the self and the other, which forms the space for intersubjectivity.

Viewing the object in terms of its recipient functions has made for an easier transition into conceptualizing the other person also as a subjectivity in its own right. We can chart



that trajectory in our evolving narrative arc about countertransference: from impurity to be eliminated; to a source of further information about the patient [students]; and finally, to our contribution *as a subject* in dialogue with the patient [student] *as a subject*. That is, as two interacting subjectivities. Thus we have evolved to our current interest in intersubjectivity. (Litowitz, 2014, p. 297)

I believe mutuality in intersubjectivity between myself and the children remained elusive. I existed firstly within a tangle of external judgements, encased in my own self-judgements, which solidified around me and cemented my fears as I grappled with my inner self. I spiralled deeply into my own meanings and wonder if these could exist along my way to intersubjectivity, where I might perceive with a sense of interconnectedness. This first lived experience examination, my first narrative, is one part reflecting the whole, and I hope some truths beyond this might be encapsulated in the wholeness of my meaning-making. In this way I desire a path of self-discernment rather than self-judgement as I unveil my personal clarifications of prior discernment and judgement. The impetus for the inquiry in this chapter lies with a spiralling inward of my self into myself, as I apply questions again and again to my way in the world at this time, in this place, with these human beings.

My day, this particular day, began as many others, unfolding the scenario between recess and lunch. The children had eaten and exercised, supervised dutifully by the teachers. Recess at that school was always like a jungle, a *mêlée* of disturbances, fighting and swearing, where wildness lets itself loose. On a day when possibilities for calm through rhythm and rhyme could not work, I tried to settle them as was customary, with a tune that they usually loved singing. My choice was ineffective and the jungle erupted in chaos.

Behavioural boundaries required daily, hourly and minute-by-minute reiteration, change and refurbishment as I tried to facilitate effective academic learning within the classroom. Maintaining a strong routine of

activities and expectations was paramount to the creation of the classroom haven in which all knew they could safely communicate. I had been thinking deeply as to the children's ages, individual damages, potentials and responsibilities when formulating classroom procedures. Amidst my attempts to nurture their minds and spirits, accordingly, external, departmental outcomes focussing on tasks within specific learning areas seemed a beautiful dream. It seemed that no matter what I did, a classroom haven for effective academic learning towards departmentally designed educational outcomes for their age groups escaped me.

As teacher, I wrestled with what seemed to be my ineffectual use of strategies developed, learnt or indoctrinated over years of experience. One method—lectures and reasoning—was useless. Unfortunately this method I applied especially when most weary and frustrated—not best practice! On this day, my impatience, anger and frustration overwhelmed any equanimity I might have possessed. I recount one of my outbursts.

“Right, counting to three and C will be back in the circle. Good. N, sit.”

“I am waiting for J to sit WITHOUT TALKING. You may not realise this, class, but I actually do not like talking very much—I would rather listen—but I have never in all my life had to talk as much as I have these last few weeks. Just as we are all quiet, ready to listen, someone starts talking to the person next to them. It is rude, it is annoying, and it wastes our time! Now, that is better. J STOP TALKING!”

It seemed I could not stop myself from talking as I raged onwards, protesting my innocence as facilitator of their behaviours. I attacked them for that which I was doing. Was I justified in my anger or was this an example of hypocrisy? Despite the creation of a strong daily routine, punctuated by predictable experiences, the imposed order was constantly under attack by a core group of students responding viscerally to instructions, comments, actions and tasks. Order, structure, and sequence seemed unattainable as constant distraction and rollicking disorder continued. As the teacher, I was forced to draw strength from my own resources, resources

that drained away as quickly as I could fill them. I found myself desperate to communicate, trying every strategy I could imagine as I struggled to contain their energy. Their presence permeated all facets of the day. Those not in ‘the group’ developed a number of responses for avoiding, minimising or resolving conflict for themselves. I became lost in directions as I raged on.

“F, leave B alone, yes, I see what is happening, now, you know what to do, so do it.”

“Yes, move!”

“ B, settle down, she did not mean to...yes I see, but you are all right, you are not hurt, just move your knee down gently...T, stop whispering to J—move away from him right now. N, sit down! There—not there!”

I was at this moment swamped with the external effects of student behavioural response. Before I experienced this day, I was a dative of manifestation, with empty intentions. Sokolowski (2000) assisted me to see this day in new ways as I allowed understandings of the terms he used to explore insights into some phenomenological ideas, such as “empty intentions”, “filled intentions” and “intuitions” (pp. 34-36). These terms offered me means for interpreting what was manifesting within me.

I have explored firstly the phrase that named me as the dative of manifestation. As the dative, I have presented myself as the identity to which all things manifested, a composite of “the interplay of memories, imaginations and perceptions...in the flow of [my] awareness of interior time” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 32). I am who I am, “at the centre of [my] own consciousness” (p. 33). As the dative, I have responded in particular ways because of my inner and outer composition. I have been defined by my events, past and present. I have experienced and continue to experience this scenario as only I could, attempting attainment of my own connectedness with the world. This has comprised my meaning-making, where I have identified a manner in which things might be revealed to me that possibly link with others’ perceptions. In these strands of my own existence I search for my haven.

Amongst these strands twine those of intentions. As the dative, I have intention towards things outside of me that can either be anticipated or already known. I experience things as either present to me, therefore recognisable and possessing identifiable characteristics, or absent to me, unknown, mysterious, hidden. Dependent on whether the known, the unknown, or both, are apprehended by me, my manner of perception and understanding of the world can be translated as my intentionality, which is either empty, or filled.

Presence and absence are the correlates to filled and empty intentions. An empty intention is an intention that targets...something not present to the one who intends. A filled intention is one that targets something that is there, in its bodily presence, before the one who intends.

(Sokolowski, 2000, p. 33)

I have interpreted these words and have found that the class no longer exists in the present, in my presence—it is an absence upon which my reflections have been based. I, as the dative of manifestation, witnessed the class and now reflect with phenomenological empty intentions, not knowing yet what I might understand. As an identity, the narrative account was comprised of my perceptions of manifolds (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 23), where the manifolds existed as different aspects of the experience, as viewed from varying perspectives available to me. These manifolds existed as either present to or absent from my deliberations. I thus hope to move beyond my judgements to view the scenario as if from an external viewpoint.

The manifolds are both symbolic and unique, the little containing the whole as I, as the dative focuses on one revealed aspect to another. I have explored as much within the *sfumato* (shadows) as I could, my explorations dependent upon my openness to variegations that existed within the situation and in my temporal consciousness. At the time of the event, I perceived ruptures within the class and was dimly aware of other aspects and interchanges from child to child, child to teacher or teacher to child. In the *sfumato* I met with ambiguities, where students did at times respond

appropriately and respectfully, but in this scenario I was overwhelmed and maintained focus on particular negativities, closing my consciousness to positive revelations.

My experience was limited by my skill in intuiting the class. At the time of experiencing, I was intuiting the class, that is, “having a thing present to us as opposed to having it intended in its absence” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 34). When I existed within the scenario, I could say my intentions were filled, as the class presented itself to me over time. The absences of which I was aware prior to this day changed as I viewed retrospectively. Whether an event is deemed momentous by me or of minor consequence, absences are still different for me as the dative of manifestation before and after an event. My understandings at the time of this event and beyond it have been dependent on my focus, within my *chiaroscuro* (dark/light) and therefore dependent upon that which is seen and unseen by me, as the dative.

### **Changing tides**

Each day conflicts within the class were outwardly the same, but organised differently, that is, by the children—a different time of day, a slightly different part of the body to pinch or poke, a slightly different look of threat, a slightly varied physical and verbal response to stimuli. The children seemed deeply aware of each other’s and the teacher’s weaknesses and with daily relentlessness exacerbated them with persistence and constant redefinition. As B endured subtle, perhaps accidental, touching, the rest of the class endured my diatribe against those who interrupted our flow of activity. These two events within the totality were repeated daily. B was usually upset by any unexpected physical contact whilst in the classroom. I was consistently negotiating with him, attempting to minimise his trauma and its impact on his peers.

Each morning I had empty intentions in anticipation of the day in this class. I based my empty intentions upon my prior experiences of the class. My heart beat with anticipatory anxiety as I left home each day. Each evening I pondered and planned in efforts to minimise conflicts and aberrations. While my empty intentions were of potentialities and the already present, my physical body displayed my thoughts as heart palpitations, arm aches and general exhaustion. I was unable to see each day as new and fresh, for the weight of the past was too heavy for me.

What were their motives? Did these children perhaps seek difference in the unpredictable? Or did they seek power, exploring options for rupture whilst remaining in their own haven, in their own perception of the world? I struggled in my search for reasons, hoping to find 'the answer' and to consequently eliminate my tension. Might I ever have expected them to have motives or indeed, any consciousness of them? They were young children. Could they be mindful of their own actions and words?

As I have explored these questions I recalled classroom mornings. Each day the children arrived with smiles, either wide or shy, some with little letters written to me, some with a story to tell from their daily life, some with a grimace, then a grin. They were always pleased to see me. Almost every day subsequently spiralled into an abyss of disagreements, bad manners and abuse as the core dissenters raged their way through the day. Masters of the snide and sneaky at only seven and eight years of age, their responses were perhaps predictable as I focussed on attaining some academics. Looking for revelation and hoping for peace, I attempted every means I could conceive to engage and maintain engagement of these children and to preserve the safety of others. I floundered in a discord of self-doubt, internal and external sounds, interactions, methods and curriculum.

Based on my own prejudices developed over years of my own schooling, I judged myself as incompetent in relation to traditional educational concepts and as a teacher who was incapable of achieving visible responses as defined

by the department, including conforming behaviours of my students, as well as incapable of teaching the children what they needed to learn. I made visible my inner frustrations. The students responded by not responding. They continued exactly as they always did, as if nothing had been said.

“COME BACK HERE. How dare you run out without finishing the tidying. N, start tidying. Oh no, where is JS and M? They ran after T? Who just ran out...”

or

“T, come here NOW. Come back inside NOW. T! Now! J—what on earth are you...JS! Come back here! M, where do you think...M NOW! Back to the classroom NOW!”

My words were completely ignored by the possé, who, although following ‘yellow card’ procedure, that involved referral to senior staffs’ offices, enacted their own process of classroom withdrawal. I ranted, they flew, and my subsequent words were as rain on the sea—additional, but indistinguishable from the rest.

I subsequently focussed on my inability to create a haven for these children. I illuminated this inability, excluding all other options in my mind. Thus within *chiaroscuro* I made a choice and all other options were designated to darkness. From illumination, that is, determination of my focus, I moved to shadings of my *sfumato*, struggling in blurrings of understandings in the wake of my choice. I imposed my own shadowings of comprehension, creating my own way with my judgements and prejudices. The children were set into my *sfumato*, their disobedience the blurring from which I drew self-blame and self-condemnation. The umbra’s containment of this space was clear. I made my choice of perception and accordingly my penumbra brimmed and blurred with self-doubt, self-judgement and insecurities.

I have looked for meaning of my event as an agent of disclosure (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 100) and have coupled the terms of Sokolowski with

language sourced from the artistic world to name and explain my perceptions, as explained in Chapter 2. I aimed to disclose my understandings of the event at that specific time. I endeavoured to encapsulate qualities of interchanges during the event that held potential for my hermeneutic comprehension. This involved isolation of the essential. I tried to avoid the impact of accidentals, which are stereotypical, shallow representations of a thing. I aimed for clarity and depth, for

Confused persons don't know what they don't know, but they use the names and the words associated with the things they are talking about, and so they seem to know or at least think they know what the things are. Mixing essential with accidentals leads to more than just embarrassment in speech; it can be lethal in life. (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 104)

I disclosed my essential relating to the children and decided the essential was their presence as students in a school. I focussed on the essential, in *chiaroscuro* and revealed this particular for myself. The accidentals, that is, that which is secondary to the fact that the children existed as a class under my care, exist in the penumbra—the extension of the umbra, where shadows are less intense but still present, reaching towards the *soglia* (threshold). I must be wary of attachment of accidentals to my event, but have struggled as I found the ‘beautiful dream’ unfolding in this nebulous space. Perhaps this ‘beautiful dream’ is my prime accidental. I have spoken from my own knowing of my own experience, winding and spinning in the fluid depths of manifestations, where the children were my inspiration and my catalyst. They existed as my essential, surrounded by my penumbra of uncertainties.

There are times when we go on to formulate the essence in itself, that is, when we attempt to formulate a definition and say explicitly what a thing is, but this achievement comes only after we have grasped the essentials in the multiple of manifestations we have brought about concerning the thing in question. (Sokolowski, 2008, p. 103)

I have explored manifestations available to me, in retrospect, therefore with filled intentions, towards rich embodiment of my essential. Possible



manifestations have formed my phenomenological profiles, for the children as members of the class, as pieces of the whole, where, “Pieces are parts that can subsist and be presented even apart from the whole; they can be detached from their wholes” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 23). Correspondingly, the whole—the class, has been expressed as my “concretum”, “something that can exist and present itself and be experienced as a concrete individual” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 24).

Phenomenologically, profiles are described as varied presentations of particulars, as available to the perceiver (Sokolowski, 2000). The class, as a single form, was a composite of children from age five to eight—that was its essential nature. If viewed from different profiles and not only my own, this class could be perceived as a group with academic potential, or alternatively, without any academic potential. It could be viewed as a miasma of unrepressed energy, or a party of boundless potentials awaiting inspiration. These profiles could form within my *chiaroscuro* as I have settled into my focus. I chose my manner of perception and have created my narrative inquiry accordingly.

### **Shimmers on the surface**

As I have considered my path towards possible understandings, I have been drawn back to one prospect again and again—the ‘beautiful dream’. What of this teaching myth I held and have now recognised as one of my accidentals, that aimed to encapsulate perfect students, learning perfectly? What of the idea of ‘the class’ as distinct from ‘the collection of individuals’ that haunts my imaginings, my empty intentions? Did I, as teacher, exist in this perfection, perhaps as a shimmer on the surface of the dream, remaining intangible, elusive, isolated from the students with my unspoken aspirations and yearnings?

I have reflected on my presence as teacher on that febrile and fragile day. I constantly demanded the students' engagement and attention to each task, whether singing a familiar rhyme or using concrete materials for numeracy. I was intent on success—which included educational engagement. If my intention was to teach, was this a phenomenological moment that could not be separated from the class, for without a class, there can be no teaching? I have looked to the phenomenological concept of the 'moment' and saw that, "*Moments* are parts that cannot subsist or be presented apart from the whole to which they belong; they cannot be detached. Moments are *nonindependent* parts" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 23). If the children were an inextricable moment in the whole narrative and my intentionality rested with what might be an idealisation, how did that affect my role and action as teacher? What place is there for a teacher when perfection is a teacher's expectation? Gert Biesta, in his paper, "Good education in an age of measurement: on the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education" (2008), commented on this concept of educational expectation.

...what ought to be done can never be logically derived from what is. This problem, which in the philosophical literature is known as the is-ought problem and was first identified by the Scottish philosopher David Hume in *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739–1740), means that when we are engaged in decision making about the direction of education we are always and necessarily engaged in value judgements – judgements about what is educationally desirable. (Biesta, 2008, p. 35)

I placed value judgements on the scenario. I looked at occurrences in hindsight, with filled intentions and identified reasons for the class' ruptured experiences, based on my inability to bring the 'beautiful dream' to them. I have questioned—whose perfection, whose 'beautiful dream'? If it could belong to anyone, then what would it look, sound, feel, smell, like? Would it be smoky, fetid with creativity and surprise, or crystalline, containing colours yet to be experienced? Could it be both these, as the class expressed its own particular sense of perfection? Could it be that this imagination is a construct

that, in its perfection, could exist without the presence of me as a teacher? If so, what purpose would it have for my being as teacher? If it is an ideal formed by me, why did I feel it necessary to bear and nurture it? Was it formed by my pride, my ignorance or care?

I have been intending the entire event, but constrain my intentionality at this point to my conception of educational perfection, which might in fact be an accidental, rather than an essential. I have gained some solace from Sokolowski,

This is not the kind of thing that is subject to our choice. We don't *decide* to be blinded in this way; having or not having the ability to distinguish between essentials and accidentals occurs prior to our choices and makes them possible...It is a failure in veracity. (2008, p. 105)

I believe I have moved towards veracity as I have recognised the focus to which I have channelled my aspirations. In my *chiaroscuro* at the time of my scenario, I abandoned all else to obscurity. From there, I moved into the blurrings I had formed by my intensity and subsequently created the umbra and penumbra within the *sfumato* (shadings). I saw the object itself, the idea of perfection, whilst witnessing the shadows containing the children's responses. I sought to dissipate such unknowns within the educational experience of a class of young children and strained towards knowing. I was blinded by the brilliance of my ideal and these blurrings smothered my comprehension of the class' living nature.

The children were both group 'I' and individual 'I'. I could not focus and refocus to allow enlightenment of the whole. I was confused when submerged in eddies of student-to-student, student-to-teacher and teacher-to-student interactions. I could not sense the surface and I held my breath beyond my lungs' capacity. Suddenly, I burst beyond, trusting the upward flow, but found still more eddies to wonder as to their source. I was trapped in the umbra and striving towards penumbra, to a *soglia* of my willing. My

distant imagination of perfection seemed beyond my skills. I stepped beyond my *soglia* at this time and crumbled.

### **Seeking the shine**

Biesta commented on some concepts of education that exist in this modern world saying, "...some would argue that education should only focus on qualification – this is often seen as the justification of the 'traditional' school as place for the transmission and acquisition of knowledge..."(Biesta, 2009, p. 9). I have tried to make my own sense of the need of institutionalised qualification and acquisition for teaching wisdom, mourning a process of education that has appeared to avoid celebration of teachers' personal strengths and skills, focusing instead on the idea of perfection in teaching.

In retrospect I have conceived that my fear—departmental, educational expectations, rules and regulations—were framing my teaching life. Although a teacher with years of experience, in fear I was forgetting anything I understood for myself and falling into prior understandings developed over years of prejudging, prejudice and anxiety. I was losing clarity and with it, I lost confidence. Biesta asserted that, "there is a need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education" (2008, p. 33).

Instead of simply making a case for effective education, we always need to ask 'Effective for what?' – and given that what might be effective for one particular situation or one group of students but not necessarily in another situation or for other groups of students, we also always need to ask 'Effective for whom?'... (Biesta, 2008, p. 36)

The consideration of what might be effective for whom might have existed beyond my *soglia*, which could contain as many variations and configurations as pebbles on a shore. I have felt drawn to the idea of responsibility, for surely in the attainment of being effective, there exists the adult professional's sense of being responsible for and to students. I felt deep

responsibility for many facets of these children's day, from physical safety to intellectual development. I wished to be responsible in the role I gave myself, the role that seemed like a coastal cave, eroded drop by drop by culture, department, community and school. Was it a cave of exclusion, formed by the constant drip of critique, isolating me in a space of fear and assumption of responsibility? Was this weight of responsibility necessary for me or was it possible for me to acquire lightness and still retain my integrity in being responsible?

My sense of responsibility towards others has deep roots within my cultural experience. In a family with history as primary producers and bakers, the reciprocal relationship between the community and my family was unspoken but tacit. We understood that the community provided support culturally, emotionally, economically, artistically and spiritually. We visited and were visited by neighbours and attended community events, we celebrated or commiserated each other's joys and sorrows, we exchanged, bartered, bought and sold local produce and products, family members played in bands and acted in plays, we went to church regularly and ate Sunday roasts. Within this, my sense of responsibility for my own behaviour and that of my younger siblings' developed. Was this the fuel for my anxiety concerning this class and others like it over my teaching years? If I were able to withdraw from the word 'responsibility', could I withdraw from the concept—and so withdraw from the action? If this were possible, what would be left? As I have attempted various teaching strategies towards writing development, counting and abstract representation, could I do these things fuelled exclusively by obedience to the educational system? Could it be possible to teach without personal engagement, focussed on defined performance outcomes, as judged and imposed by others?

### **Guarding the shore**

I have revisited explanations of phenomenology as I whirled in intellectual impulses, seeking the rhythmic exploration of deepening revelations.

Phenomenology directs us to the fullness of experience rather than a remote or pro forma accumulation of information and facts. The creative capacity is enhanced by the opening of vision resulting from immersion in the subject matter...(Bentz and Rehorick, 2009, p.3)

My phenomenological seeking has coupled with the hermeneutic as I have pursued my notion of being responsible. I have looked to the phenomenon, I have analysed mindfully, exposing notions that were revealed in my analysis. I then delved deeper, remembering that which I had already realised, adding to further revelations and looked again, onward, further, deeper, spiralling hermeneutically, each inspiration eroding misunderstandings and creating constancy in my meaning-making.

I have pursued ideas of judging and concepts of discerning, and meaning swept before me, as if it were a composite of tiny treasures after a storm on a coastal shore. Acts of self-judging and self-discerning have been exposed as I strove for meaning-making, discarding debris as I twirled into the sediment of my ideas. I have moved over, in, then around and down, a spiral of narrative interrogation. This has been my process of being in this context, as with determination I have investigated my narratives. The following explanation describes such spiralling.

We may begin with a question or a concept that guides our explorations. As we seek understanding, we travel a spiral that brings us close to understanding as the spiral tightens. When we reach an initial understanding, the spiral opens up once again, with this initial understanding pointing to a question or concept...The understanding reached at each layer suggests the way into the next layer, as we continue to explore the depths of understanding that can be achieved...It is necessary to remain open and curious, and to trust that understanding will come.

(Simpson, 2009, p. 53-54)

In such a manner I have arrived at various formulations of ideas, but always my curiosity has pressed me onward. If judging could be comprised of

opinions based on prior understandings, then self-judging would involve application of memories to present and future self-assessment. Bohm's assessment of judgement includes judgement's origin as comprised of assumptions and opinions, where assumptions and opinions are one and the same thing. He rallied against judgement, as defined by personal opinions and assumptions, as a means for communication in a group, and implied that if an individual or a group were to make judgements, incoherence would ensue and remain. He suggested opinions and assumptions to be set aside, "suspended" (Bohm, 2002, pp. 22-24) to attain personal openness in group communication.

I have applied this to self-judging and recognised a correlation between unsuspending opinions in a group and unsuspending opinions of the self, where the self could be beset by thought upon thought, analogous to living in *sfumato* (blurring), flavoured by a particular focus in *chiaroscuro*, based on inflexible opinion, leading to self-confusion as other assumptions manifest. Suspending opinions would throw a different impulse into the mind. It would require acknowledgement of the assumptions and recognition of their power. It would require flexibility.

Bohm commented that openness required conscious release from judgement, which would allow us to focus on our best path—towards coherence, which is "order, beauty, harmony" (Bohm, 2000, p. 89). I wonder—if I had focussed in *chiaroscuro* with coherence, framed by such openness and flexibility, rather than concretised self-judgement based on past knowledge, would the outcomes of this day have occurred?

Bohm wrote that, "the observer *is* the observed" (2006, p. 80) once the barriers created by opinions are overcome. I was observer, forming assumptions about the children and their motivations. I had already formed assumptions over my years of experience and I applied them once again to these children. In doing so, I was lost—I looked outward and judged them and in judging them, I judged myself. My sight brimmed with self-

prejudgements and blinded me to the world. I had remained trapped in my prior assumptions, but it could be that now, at last, I might break free, acknowledge my assumptions and in such recognition, step beyond another *soglia* into new understandings of my self and the world.

What if self-judgement forcibly imposed itself, fuelled by the will of an individual or a group? This path might exist somewhat violently, in an incoherent way, moving from *sfumato* of opinions and assumptions into the murk of confusion. I imagined this and believed I had lived it, but now I wonder—could it be that, as the swimmer’s scope of physical movement increases when surrounded by water, the scope of possibilities could increase with the abandonment of preconceptions?

If a pull towards self-judgement gives way to self-discernment, opportunity for openness as a channel of comprehension could unfold. I have explored etymology again as I have attempted to spiral into deeper hermeneutic understandings. As I explored, I found a range of English dictionaries expressing ‘discernment’ as a personal ability or a quality to perceive and understand what is obscure (Dictionary.com, 2015). Its synonyms are wisdom, insight, perception, sagemess and sapience. Its etymological origins are found in Old French *discerner*, from Latin *discernere*, to separate or set apart. The word has identifiable parts, comprised of ‘dis’—off, away, and *cernere*—distinguish, separate, sift (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

I discovered another meaning for discernment, sourced from an English/Hindi perspective, and more depth in meaning unfolded for me. This meaning alluded to the quality of delicacy, where the example given related to tact, to understanding and clear perception (Soni, 2003/2015). While the definition incorporated etymological meanings such as divide, distinguish, separate, it also included ‘perceive’ as a key descriptor. I have combined the various definitions and come to this—that to discern requires



understanding, insight, perception, subtlety and tact. I have drawn from Gadamer as this combination towards my meaning-making has unfolded.

Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we called experience in the proper sense. Insight is something we come to. It too is ultimately part of the vocation of man—i.e., to be discerning and insightful. (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 5362/8818)

Discernment and therefore self-discernment might, then, embed openness and fluidity, like a swimmer manoeuvring through weeds and obstacles visible on the surface or hinted through eddies, smoothly adapting to new lines, with a goal in mind and view. Even if seawater is churning from an inundation of rain, stirring sediments and layering salt with fresh water, the sea remains the sea to the swimmer. Introduced impulses—rain, snow melt and silt—bring old fragments to mix with new, for the swimmer to accept movement and change in the sea's nature. The sea is still the sea. The swimmer, embedding discernment, can flow with its change.

Could such openness and flexibility be compatible with the formation of appropriate concepts or would this be too flexible to create form? Would openness involve lack of will, a lack of commitment and therefore little thought or care? Or might this capacity rely fundamentally on perceptions already present for listener, watcher, sensor, who possesses instead great strength of will? Could focus-in-discernment be flexible, mindful, good-willed and thus bring peace and understanding? I wonder, had I abandoned my self-judgements in this classroom scenario and moved instead into self-discernment, could I have escaped the trauma of this event and risen immediately from dissonance to transformation?

Gadamer asserted that, "The finite nature of one's own understanding is the manner in which reality, resistance, the absurd and the unintelligible

assert themselves” (1975/2006, loc. 334/8818). Could dialogic actions within a group as described by Bohm, where judgement would be suspended and discernment attained in coherence, solve this “finite nature” of the individual, to create something larger than the individual, perhaps even larger than the group? Could this manner be ascribed to a classroom of small children and employed to minimise instances for future conflicts, due to the shared vision (understandings) reached as a group? Could I as an adult transcend the outer events and my inner thoughts and feelings towards harmony, through a path of self-discernment?

Sokolowski said, “Our power of disclosure, our being the dative of manifestation for things that appear, introduces us into the life of reason and the human way of being” (2008, p. 112). He referred to the power of the individual in creating her own conceptual framework, where, as actor of her own drama, she could focus on that which exposed itself. The focus would be dependent upon her clarity of mind, her emotional state and her physical being.

Manifestations are facets of the whole and could be enriched through the expansion of perceptions to encompass more aspects of the whole. During my event with the children, my attention in *chiaroscuro* determined my impression, whilst my manner of *sfumato* (shadings) either united or distanced my self from my event. Bohm said, “...we need the ‘negative’ sense of incoherence – *which is the road to coherence*” (2000, p. 89). Could it be that I, then, with my anxiety—which is my incoherence, perform the good—which is coherence, due to the path this experience has offered me as I have explored with hindsight?

## **Self-judgement and self-discernment combine**

### **The judge**

In Perfection

Judgement sits  
wry hat askew  
the view  
awash with tears for tomorrow's  
possibilities.  
Process unlimited  
Judgement's power,  
control  
till madness  
or sanity  
claims knowledge  
and knocks Judgement's hat  
into the spiralling energy  
that is unfinishedness.

(Miller, 2010)

I forge deeper still into my hermeneutic understandings as I have allowed my perception of judgement to identify itself as static energy and rejection of temporality and flexibility. Judgement sits stolid and immobile around my lived experiences. It has not accepted unfinishedness. It holds hands with finishedness-as-perfection.

I must acknowledge the formal definition of judgement and find this to be “the ability to make considered decisions or come to sensible conclusions; an opinion or conclusion” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). It comes from Old French, *juger* ‘to judge’. It has been recorded in relation to divine judgement, where terrible outcomes are the result of bad behaviour, related to discrimination and sagacity, discernment and common sense are listed amongst its definitions (The Free Dictionary, n.d.). An etymological definition referred to judgement in the mid-thirteenth century, as an “action of trying at law, trial”, the word deriving from courts of law.

I have already expressed aspects of discernment, but now move to identification of the essential and that which I am attempting to bring to light through my narrative inquiry. I discovered that ‘discernment’ was not incorporated in the descriptors of ‘judgement’ until the 1530s ((The Free Dictionary, n.d.). The original meanings of this word, record discernment as related to the word judgement, but not owned by it. To facilitate the process towards my meaning-making, I have reflected on my classroom experience to enact interrogations of these words and possibilities, and have subsequently compared self-discernment with self-judgement, whilst placing the word ‘responsibility’ directly within my presence as teacher, where responsibility could be seen as the role taken by a person within an occurrence, an expectation or an obligation. The power held by the responsible one to perform in a particular manner could denote their responsibility. I imagine the responsible one as a heron, patrolling and guarding its habitat, protecting its sustenance on the shore. The meanings of ‘responsibility’ have incorporated burden and control, with accountability as another facet, originating from the French word *respondere*, meaning to respond and interpreted as being accountable for one’s actions, being reliable and trustworthy, obligated (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006).

I choose within my *chiaroscuro* to focus on my own sense of being responsible, pertaining to my own morality within my lived experience, the responsibility held by consequences of my actions and the “prospective responsibility” that attaches itself to the role I have chosen as teacher (Williams, 1995). This contributes to my I-being as teacher.

I have returned to my question of responsibility and asked whether this might be imbued by an impulse of judgement, for without self-judgement, surely I would not know the extent of my responsibilities? I have judged my abilities and outcomes in teaching, but was my self-judgement too harsh? Did I forget the humanness of the children in my judgements and therefore lowered my expectations? Or was self-discernment evident in my scenario

examination as I sat within it, surrounded by it—overwhelmed and self-doubting?

Gadamer spoke of responsibility,

...obviously it is a characteristic of the moral phenomenon that the person acting must himself know and decide and he cannot let anything take this responsibility from him...To put it positively, through education and practice he must himself already have developed a demeanour that he is constantly concerned to preserve in the concrete situations of his life and prove through right behaviour.

(1975/2006, loc. 4776/8818)

Gadamer encouraged the protagonist of action to see and strive for the most appropriate actions based on her own knowledge and experiences. His concept of responsibility appraised competence, honesty, capacity, reliability and trustworthiness, as he responded to Aristotle's moral knowledge—*phronesis* (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 4900/8818). He communicated an intrusive morality of education and a value of integrity, which encapsulates all qualities of responsibility. Gadamer's words have brightened my way as a teacher interacting with the world, where my obedience to a system has been intertwined with my striving for integrity. But I cannot merely obey a directive. Gadamer rejected such a path of action, where personal actions would come from external authority, and said that, "Authority, however, is responsible for one not using one's own reason at all" (1975/2006, 4303/8818). I have chosen to act on Gadamer's statement, mindful whilst exploring the statement's veracity in accordance with my events, aiming with and for, self-discernment.

As I viewed synonyms for responsibility, more of my struggle bubbled towards the surface of my awareness, like oyster shells revealed at low tide. Bitingly sharp, often empty, the shells carry warnings and promise. Likewise as a teacher I have struggled with the ambiguities of perception as things lie hidden and then reveal themselves unexpectedly. I have huddled between

self-judgment and self-discernment, the ‘beautiful dream’ of the perfect educational experience at once a curse and an inspiration to me, offering both incoherence and coherence along my way.

I have focussed on aspects of life around me and sought understanding within my *chiaroscuro* whilst languishing on personal inadequacies rather than triumphs. In my self-judgement I floundered. Perhaps if I had practiced self-discernment, enacted as insight, tact and delicacy, rather than self-judgement displayed as an absence in *sfumato* (shadowings), my response and resolution could have differed. I speculated on whether an Aristotelian examination could then have been applied. Aristotle said,

You must remember also what has been already stated, and seek not for exactness in all matters alike, but in each according to the subject matter, and so far as properly belongs to the system. (Aristotle, 2005, loc. 499/4264)

For Aristotle, a way forward was dependent on context, that right action was reliant on the particular, not on a generalisation. From here, I have been inspired into self-discernment, beyond my *soglia* into the brightness of understanding and peace, rather than into further divisions of self-judgement, containing confusion and exhaustion.

I continue my journey to a point of brightness, which I believe might exist. At the time of the event, I felt drawn in, then expelled from the students’ reality. They formed their own, shared state, united in their ‘class-ness’, an entity presenting itself to me as the teacher, one entity to another—while in *chiaroscuro* my focus was on my responses, my feelings, my questions. I was desperate for student realisation and responsibility of classroom behaviours. Disempowered by my emotional responses, I felt satisfied and justified in their afternoon exclusion from something in which they were interested. My *soglia* had been breached. I felt my right to say “No”.

If an element of my perfection-as-self-knowing existed in my power to say “No” to the small group, what was perfection for the children? Could it also be self-mastery, self-control, or is that only a construct beyond their understanding and cultural experience placed by me as the hopeful, desperate teacher? If perfection for me as teacher is self-mastery, a balance between the extremes of fury and indifference—the place of excellence—could I place the children beside me, in and as my aspirations?

I have considered these questions as imperative to the essential nature of good teaching, towards the achievement of the ‘beautiful dream’. My purpose is to focus not so much on the delivery of curriculum content, but rather on the means and attitude with which I developed its concepts with the students.

### **Tidal consciousness**

Inward I spiral, asking not, “What were they doing wrong?” but, rather, “What was I doing wrong?” Was this truly the case, or was I absorbing the children’s actions and subsuming them as my own issues? In this, was I selflessly, self-consciously, extending this question before all others? Perhaps the wrong-ness, according to my perceptions, of the students’ actions was so blatantly obvious to me that it passed as beyond perception, beyond my judgement, living in me, transitioning through all that was me, the effects visual and visceral, whilst the children’s creative impulse was ignored. If so, was there absence in my understanding accompanying my lack of cognitive awareness, or could my responsibility for the children’s responses have existed within my tacit knowing, as a non-pervading reality due to its subconscious and conscious familiarity to me, as expressed by Polanyi (1966) and Bohm (2005)?

If so, then my assumption of responsibility might have existed at the core of my understandings as a teacher managing a classroom, in *sfumato*

(blurrings), in the umbra, for though present in my view, it remained unknown to me in its complexity. It was a mystery, something to be solved. I was ignorant of its impact as I shouted the “I am” before the assault on my senses of the children’s various actions. Was I listening to the “WE ARE” which reverberated in response?

The clutter of children, straining the edgings of the room, struggled in its imposed academic adventure. I, as the teacher, ignorant of their struggles, enforced rule after rule. Order, respect, silence became the inner mantra as I raged in the face of what I perceived as utter chaos. Order, respect, silence seemed as far from the minds of these small children as I could imagine. I was the adult. Were my senses open to their screams?

Then, *chiaroscuro* could reveal whilst simultaneously conceal. Shadows form as the focus is shone and *sfumato* (shadowing) enacted. I was absorbed by the energy of the room, where boundaries were merged. Here I was not only ‘me’, I was ‘them’. I was a part and their every action was part of me. There was no division between us, no line accentuating the spaces between. The unknown—unknown, that is, to the ignorant, the naïve, the gullible, with whom at this time I identified—penetrated the malleable surface to bring havoc to my prior creation.

I have considered again da Vinci’s words, “The boundaries of bodies are the least of all things” (1883, p. 21). I have identified with this least-ness as I found myself sliding into the space of other-as-student, lost in their ‘thou-ness’. My *soglia*, my point along the threshold at this time, was breached and self-containment dissipated.

“T, come here NOW. Come back inside NOW. T! Now! J, what on earth are you...JS! Come back here! M, where do you think...M, NOW!  
Back to the classroom NOW!”

I was overwhelmed, violated by their words and actions. I struggled to withdraw. As I fought for self and child control, my words overtook me and



the children were lost to me as I joined the just-another-adult realm, voicing frustration at their freedom. Before this sense of self-loss, I watched and tried to comprehend actions. I saw interactions and questioned paths chosen. As perception shifted around the group, in *chiaroscuro*, I have recognised da Vinci's pyramid of sight as enacted, with concentration on particulars before contemplation of generalities. I have reached forward with my eyes as I sought connection with protagonists, one by one—my vision focussed, then moved to the next target. “The perception of the object depends upon the direction of the eye” (da Vinci, 1888, p. 22)—as each point of light touched me, I sought the next point in *sfumato* (shadings). Here, I was lost in judgements and expectations, fear and anger.

### **Frayed shadow fronds**

In my *sfumato* this class was a blend of features, faces and personalities. Eleven children figured directly in my recount—half that class—but all the class were incorporated in my judgements at the time. All the children were as little frayed shadow fronds, unified at the stem in their identities as school students. I felt unfinished, unknowing and unwise as I floated in our tangles of action and response.

A *soglia* might occur at any time or space along the penumbral shadowings of emotional, artistic or intellectual journeys, heralding mysterious outcomes on a continuum of confusion to illumination. My emotional sight at this time accepted only conflicts, not joys, as focus. A *soglia* might offer solace, a haven containing inner silence, pre-empting action. Impulse in *sfumato*, whether in anxiety or self-discernment, might determine the path beyond. In self-discernment one might attain self-awareness, where mindfulness might be embodied in action. If my mind and body could be united by me as one, in harmony, then I believe I could have given myself permission to heed the world within and around me with engagement and tact. As Johnson said, there is no separation between body and mind.

There is no radical mind/body separation. A person is not a mind and a body. These are not two “things” mysteriously yoked together. What we call a “person” is a kind of bodily organism that has a brain operating within its body, a body that is continually interacting with aspects of its environment (material and social) in an ever-changing process of experience. (Johnson, 2008, p. 11)

As I hesitated in penumbra, I was not consciously aware of my body/mind connection—but I only recognise this connection in hindsight. I acted at the time as if threatened and fell beyond my *soglia*. Through spiralling examination, revisiting, remembering, re-telling in my writing, I have aimed to rise into illuminating and transforming my understanding of what was happening to me.

In my pain I was blind to pain of the other. I was self-absorbed, emotions beyond the mean, imbalanced, as I was seeking happiness (*eudemonia*), as described by Aristotle—happiness as my haven. I felt no balance this day as I drew their energies in, breathing them in, then breathing out, dispelling them from me. I felt caught in extremes. I felt my ignorance, my gullibility, and my naïvety. What allowed the mass of student energy to overtake individual intent in such a flowing of energies? Was it a physical and psychic strength, the will of a few overtaking that of the mass? I have found Paolo Freire waiting for me.

Freire’s critique of social order illuminated some of my understandings concerning classroom relationships.

Inssofar as I am a conscious presence in the world, I cannot hope to escape my ethical responsibility for my action in the world...If I am a pure product of genetic, cultural, or class determination I have no responsibility for my action in the world and, therefore, it is not possible for me to speak of ethics...we know ourselves to be conditioned but not determined. (2001, p. 26)

Freire spoke of our human-ness, our ability to adapt, change, to make choices, where opportunities exist for conscious presence, for teaching and for learning. At the time and place of this scenario, my desire to communicate with all my students seemed over-ridden by their desire for my undivided attention. How might school teaching occur when personal needs are so great?

As I have reflected on so many questions, Polanyi's writing on the unknowability of impulses that might move me as a human being, has offered some consolation. He considered the mysterious path towards connectedness between student and teacher.

But if we know a great deal that we **cannot tell**, and if even that which we know and can tell is accepted by us as true only in view of its bearing on a reality beyond it...then the idea of knowledge based on wholly identifiable grounds collapses, and we must conclude that the transmissions from one generation to the other must be predominately tacit...the pupil must presume that a teaching which appears meaningless to start with has in fact a meaning which can be discovered by hitting on the same indwelling as the teacher is practicing. Such an effort is based on accepting the teacher's authority. (Polanyi, 2009, p. 61)

Polanyi expressed the concept of authority in his "indwelling". He affirmed the student's responsibility in the relationship between teacher and student, for whilst the teacher can facilitate direction and purpose for learning, none will occur if the "will to will" is not present. Biesta follows, interpreting Jacques Rancière.

An ignorant schoolmaster is not an ignorant person who is thrilled by playing teacher. It is a person who teaches - that is, to say who is for another a means of knowledge- without transmitting any knowledge. It is thus a teacher who enacts a dissociation between the mastery of the school master and his or her knowledge, who shows us that the so-called 'transmission of knowledge' consists in fact of two

intertwined relations that are important to dissociate: the relation of will to will and a relation of intelligence to intelligence. (Bingham & Biesta, 2010, loc. 30/2308)

As I follow the hermeneutic spiral towards deeper comprehension, I have relived each class interruption, when every head swivelled, observing actions, players and outcomes. From side to side they swayed between the grappling of wills, between me, as the teacher, with particular purpose and direction and children, as the students, with their own. Within this movement is a mystery for me in teaching—the manner in which I might be observed by the students, through my action and inaction. My will must focus on the guidance of the students through the next task, with their engagement a necessary precursor to desired outcomes. All the while I am watched and they make their own conclusions as to the nature of me as teacher.

I have questioned whether my desired outcomes are prescriptive or open to the unexpected, the creative, the inspirational. Do I, if I identify as an ignorant schoolmaster, as examined by Rancière, have a deeply developed sense of a desired outcome, or am I floundering in aspirations without anchoring in the waves?

There is stultification whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another...It becomes stultification when it links one intelligence to another intelligence. In the act of teaching and learning there are two wills and two intelligences. We call their coincidence *stultification*...We will call the known and maintained difference between the two relations - the act of an intelligence obeying only itself even while a will obeys another will - *emancipation*.

(Rancière, 1991, p. 13)

The children, as subjects with their own experiences and understandings and me, with mine, struggled in combination to ratify the connectedness between self and other. Did I as teacher stultify the students? Did I expect will-to-will, intelligence to intelligence, rather than emancipation? Could this explain their lack of engagement in tasks? Could this explain their behavioural rebellion?

Polanyi's "indwelling" seemed to possess a possible connection with Rancière's "will-to-will". Could it be that both these terms express means towards a sense of finishedness? Could it be that by connecting "will-to-will" with another individual, whilst maintaining intellectual distance, meanings could be exposed? Could the unknown within *sfumato* be consequently lightened to expose new, deeper understandings?

Desperate and angry words certainly did not achieve lightened comprehension for me on the day of this event. Instead, I excluded myself from any possible insights beyond my *soglia*, where I imagined creative teaching and good humour resided. Could meanings attained through my observation and self-discernment have led towards elements of finishedness, either for students in their institutional environment, for me in my professional role as teacher, or for us all? Could finishedness within the educational sphere become a possibility, or desirable or necessary as a goal? If so, what would comprise this finishedness and could it ever be discerned, ever be measured and if so, should it be relegated in such a way to numbers and accounts? Or is finishedness intangible, unknowable, tacit and mysterious, inextricably linked with the path towards it, which embodies unfinishedness?

## **Submerged**

As I grapple with my questions, sinking, surfacing then sinking again, I return to Polanyi's reference to indwelling as a tacit knowing, which might be part of finishedness. I have considered finishedness as mysterious and enigmatic, and I desire understanding of it. Could indwelling exist as a part of this mystery? I take a breath, then submerge myself again in Polanyi's words.

We had envisaged tacit knowing in the first place as knowing more than we can tell. We identified the two terms of tacit knowing, the proximal and the distal and recognised the way we attend from the first to the second, thus achieving an

integration of particulars to a coherent entity to which we are attending. Since we were not attending to the particulars in themselves, we could not identify them; but if we now regard the integration of particulars as an interiorization, it takes on a more positive character. It now becomes a means of making certain things function as the proximal terms of tacit knowing, so that instead of observing them in themselves, we may be aware of their bearing on the comprehensive entity which they constitute. It brings home to us that it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning.

(Polanyi, 2009, p. 18)

There exists a link between my philosophical discourse, Polanyi's process of identification and da Vinci's recordings on perception of objects in nature, for in all, there is a moving towards and away from the subject that hints at the development of a philosophical attitude, progressing from the natural attitude. There is a melding of the outer with the inner that has the potential to increase understandings. This breathing in and out of the other I perceive as a characteristic of a phenomenological attitude. It also agrees with the melding of dark and light into shades within the *sfumato*. There can be many shades of a thing. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bahktin exquisitely painted shadings in words and suggested how light gives things colour,

The way in which a word conceptualizes its object is a complex act - all objects, open to dispute and overlain as they are with qualifications, are from one side highlighted while from the other side dimmed...And into this complex play of light and shadow the word enters...If we imagine the intention of such a word, that is, its directionality toward the object, in the form of a ray of light, then the living and unrepeatable play of colours and light on the facets of the image that it constructs can be explained...the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle.

(Bahktin, 1981, loc. 3912/6379)

Following Bahktin, I thus look to the word to represent a narrative in shades and colours. In revisiting events, the irony of the song I chose for the class stings me now, like jellyfish tentacles pressing lightly yet powerfully into my skin.

“AND...Ten little candles bur...”J, stop talking and sing...”burning bright, ten little candles in the night, along comes the...”B! She HAS moved...F, leave him alone—I can see what is happening...O, stop whispering to D...”along comes the wind, whew”...

If the *soglia* has the potential for being “the atmosphere that surrounds the object, [making] the facets of the image sparkle”, why did I choose to ignore the possibility of beauty and humour at the time of this scenario? I see now that the *soglia* could have brought promise of joy and of pain, combining colours to create intensity of lived experience.

### **Capturing light**

Children embody potential, existing between departmental, educational demands as represented by me as teacher and their families. Within this trilogy, parent-child-teacher, I aimed to provide elements for rainbow creation, that is, for educational inspiration and productivity. I needed the light I could use to be reflected from a proper angle to form a rainbow, but I could not adjust my light accordingly. I could not, will to will, listen to and follow the children’s lead, melding and moulding with sensitivity and openness.

Can awareness of an other’s needs lead to lightening of shadows from *sfumato* (blurring), with its umbra flowing to penumbra, prior to a *soglia*, moving to a new, safer path, a new haven, where light shines and is captured by ready eyes? Could my consciousness of connectedness—which might also be indwelling—be the sparkle beyond my *soglia*? Could my consciousness

towards possibilities for illumination signify my striving for “Virtue”, transcendence from emotional imbalance into “moral excellence”?

It is moral excellence, i.e. Virtue, of course which I mean, because it is which is concerned with feelings and actions, and in these there can be excess and defect and the mean: it is possible, for instance, to feel the emotions of fear, confidence, lust, anger, compassion, and pleasure and pain generally too much or too little, and in either case wrongly: but to feel them when we ought, on what occasions, towards whom, why, and as, we should do, is the mean, or in other words the best state, and this is the property of Virtue.

(Aristotle, 2005, loc. 791/4264)

Aristotle identified the balance between reaction and non-action as manifesting courage, allowing for a place in virtuous action. I recognise that each day brought different ways of being for me as teacher and for the students—these ways were not an exclusive realm, for both the children and myself made choices, whether consciously or unconsciously. I wonder whether the children were pushing towards just action, meaning virtuous action, manifesting as self-mastery, a state tacitly—unconsciously—agreed between child and me as teacher. Aristotle referred to human motive for action.

..all men aim at that which conveys to their minds an impression of good, and that men have no control over this impression, but that the end impresses each with a notion correspondent to his own individual character; that to be sure if each man is in a way the cause of his own moral state, so he will be also of the kind of impression he receives.

(Aristotle, 2005, loc. 1080/4264)

Gadamer expressed prejudice as present, temporal and spatial depending on the “kind of impression” one receives—present due to its reliance upon current responses, temporal with its reflection upon all life experiences until that moment and spatial, determined by place. He said of the hermeneutic circle—a cycle of interpretation, then re-interpretation, towards understanding—that “All correct interpretation must be on guard against



arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought” (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 4164/8818). I have focussed on my habits of thought, which are “fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones” (ibid.). I have been examining then re-examining my narrative, with my ‘fancies...limitations...habits of thought’ in order to deepen my inquiry.

I recognise that in my initial interrogations of the scenario, my understandings were applied to the situation in my classroom, with me as my own subject and object. I looked to the children with emotions and conclusions bred of years of experience and study, of listening, reading and studying the role of a teacher. I worked in an environment of external judgement. I allowed my belief in the force of external perceptions to control my thoughts and therefore my confidence as a teacher.

Litowitz spoke of three aspects of intersubjectivity and I wonder as to their embeddedness in my narrative re-telling, as I review my fears and prejudices. She named reciprocity, reflexivity and self-reference (2014, p. 301) as forming the facets of intersubjectivity, all based on interchange, using words. She firstly expressed reciprocity as comprised of self and other. “Our subjectivity is thus constituted through dialogue. In analysis we attempt to disentangle these voices, but as soon as we step in we become one of them” (2014, p. 301). If I experience reciprocity, I must acknowledge that I contain all I have ever heard and that my own words might contain these words of others, as I function daily with others—my past dwells in my current interactions. Regarding reflexivity, “...the speaker is always his own addressee since he hears himself when he speaks” (Litowitz, 2014, p. 301). Interchanges require continual movement between and from one to the other. Each time, each person is either the ‘I’ or the ‘you’—one is either speaking, or the one to whom words are spoken. Finally, Litowitz described self-reference.

The creation of an existence through language establishes factivity...But that is only one part of a speech act, which

always includes how the speaker feels about what exists as well as his appeal to us, his intention. (2014, p. 301)

I wonder why I was not aware at the time of my narrative of these aspects of intersubjectivity between the children and myself, and whether my tacit experiences are relevant to this manner of meaning-making. At this time I was aware of potentials for these qualities of intersubjectivity, but could not name them. If I could not name, was I still capable of doing? Previously I have referred to the doing-ness and its subordination of naming, claiming that action is more powerful than named recognition of a thing. I know I was not conscious of my words and actions whilst dwelling within the time and space of the narrative, but does that mean that I was totally unconscious of my own impulse and that of the children? I do believe this interrogation has foreshadowed my awareness of these things. The beginnings of mutual comprehension, therefore of intersubjectivity, in the exchanges between the children and myself have been presented here. This awareness is embedded in my spiralling upward and downward, between my application of knowledge and discernment, towards meaning-making.

Freire compared “banking education”, where things appear to add-up to that which is expected, with problem-solving education (Freire, 1972, pp. 56-57). He placed dialogue between teacher and student as the highest mode of teaching, as opposed to control-based educational practice. I found a haven in his ideas, but remained caught in what I felt to be a swelling tide of academic debris, believing that if I could not control, I could not teach. I constantly questioned this assertion, trying to find my meaning in the directive. To what degree must control be achieved? Within the imposed ‘beautiful dream’, could I forge a place for innovation, exploration, mistakes and laughter?

Problem-solving education affirms men as being in the process of becoming - as incomplete beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality...in contrast to the other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, men know

themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompleteness. (Freire, 1972, p. 57)

My inner knowing was both compromised and supported by developed prejudices. Through my spiral of questioning and seeking wisdom, I have come to know that it is possible to have inner knowing, based on empathy and understanding, in the face of such cultural impact. Was I therefore capable of indwelling? I have come to realise I do possess tacit knowing, unbuoyed by fantasy, but uplifted by philosophical pursuit of human meaning.

...to philosophize is to question not only *what* one sees, feels and thinks, but also *how* one does it. Philosophical practice is by nature self-reflective and self-referential, for embedded in it are attempts to analyse one's assumptions and beliefs, motives and fears, favourite cliches and intellectual strategies, insights and blind spots.

(Cherkasova, 2004, p. 203)

This is where I have been spiralling into finding the meaning in my lived experience.

### **From innocence**

From innocence we move to light.  
We fight the flow and stun our might  
with words obscene, words of blight  
which rob our mind, our way, our sight  
of others in sweet array of flight.  
On angels' wings  
we escape the night.

(Miller, 2011)

I choose angel wings for my flight, above the darkness of self-judgement as I strive for self-discernment. In this space beyond, I choose compromise and accommodation of my own and others' requests. Whether presenting as fundamental and monumental, representative of belonging to or rejection

from a group, or small and functional, allowing a gentle ebb and flow in the interactions between myself and others, I strive for meaning-making. Apprehending the value of a request to both requestor and requestee may allow opportunities for hermeneutic understandings, revealing unshared meanings embedded in individual perceptions. I must delve beneath to uncover these and so have followed this interrogation of my scenario. Consequently, I have queried concepts of personal power, which may be symbolised by requests and result in ruptures if deemed unrecognised by requestor. Power exchanges in the classroom were evident as I have proceeded with this inquiry, indicative of the tension that might exist in many relationships, whether in a classroom, with an acquaintance, in a collegial interchange, a friendly bond or a structure of intimacy. I believe navigation of this tension is demanded towards making meaning of my world because, as Frankl advised,

...mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become. (Frankl, 2006, p. 104)

I remain encompassed by various tensions of daily life. In all aspects of my life and in my effort to make sense of my world I have cleaved towards philosophical and artistic expressions, drawing ideas together, blending shade, tone and colour. This has given my search some of the meaning I desired as I struggled through incoherencies. I was giving the montage of ideas space to assume form as I questioned, lived and changed my questions—

..each man is questioned by life: he can only answer by **answering for** his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible....responsibleness (is) the very essence of human existence. (Frankl, 2006, p. 109)

One little boy had been open in his gifting to me. His heart and mind were engaged in the task he wished me to complete and his determination ensured its completion. He watched and he saw, and in his seeing he wished for action. I felt blessed by his perception. I saw his responsibleness as a compassionate human being. I was lifted from uncertainties of my murky

*sfumato* (shadings) at the time. Hope and gratitude infused me, soothing my hurt. The entire class benefitted from his actions towards me. He helped me to see.

Parker J. Palmer (1998) recognised the subtle aspects of good teaching, the tacit qualities that form the good teacher's whole being.

The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts—meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self...The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able...(Palmer, 1998, p. 11)

Seeing, naming and doing remain my means towards my understanding of the art of teaching. Seeing, feeling, responding inform my whole being. In this chapter I have seen the classroom event, named it, applied my subsequent understandings to ongoing teaching experiences and enacted the doing. As clay gradually resolves tensions in the hands of the creating impulse, lines of division smoothing and blending, so I have aimed for my perceptions to be viewed and formed. My interrogations continue into the next chapters, as I pursue my meaning-making through other possible manifestations of interactions and relationships within educational environments.

## Chapter 4 Second narrative: Of the psyche

### **Silence in pink**

Gone now.

Silence in pink. Gentle music and pages set for next day's task.

The space swells with peace. Huge windows clasp the afternoon sky.

Machine drags across grey ground and enters

with handler,

eyes grasping one space.

No words. Handler stops,

eyes greedy, licking lips,

hose ready,

sucking in the soft pink light,

apologies fervent for presence and noise.

Polite allowance

gives licence to voice

sibilant questions,

with face burning and eyes bright

as full bag blows with sediment.

Machine grunting, swaying, head flaccid,

still sucking

as rough hands deemed healing by owner

grapple the bits with more to say, so

worldly, knowing

(invasive, presupposing).

Machine anchors the handler

as words enhance

desire and yearning with body turning.

Pink light allows—does not exclude and

room aches with unresolved perfumes

of dust and crumbs.

Machine it sucks and sucks

and sucks.

(Miller, 2012)

A new cleaner assumed his role at the site. An apparently affable man, he was initially well received and performed his cleaning task with pride.

Gradually something in his manner changed. He seemed to become over familiar in his discussions with staff as he did his rounds of their rooms. He would make suggestions such as inviting you to his house for this amazing massage experience involving a manipulating, mechanical contraption he had designed and made that would straighten your backbone. His conversations were light, inconsequential, therefore humourously dismissed.

I felt uncomfortable in his presence when he entered my classroom. He would stand, watch and engage me in polite conversation, which, having been brought up to be polite, to allow others to speak, I willingly would follow, until he picked up my hint for him to move on and I was able to resume my work. These interchanges continued for some months, until gradually I realised he was becoming more and more personal with his questions and his comments. Communication can take many forms and involve disparate subjects, but these comments referred to my belief system and my reception to activities which I believed were out of the scope of everyday, male/female conversation, especially when alone together, unless mutually well-known and trusted. Comments concerning massage and its medicinal benefits ("I am very good, you know, at massage"), some personal comments and then finally what I considered a most peculiar talk, pushed me into communication with my deeply trusted female senior teacher.

"Afternoon. Working hard?" the cleaner had said.

"Yes."

"I am hard at work for the soccer club. We are organising a fund-raising evening."

"Good for you."

"Yes. Well, I have hit on a bit of a problem. The event that I organised for the club has been cancelled by the committee. It has caused a bit of a problem. I don't know why. I arranged for a stripper to do a show at the hall. What do you think of strippers, Caroline?"

I did not know which way to look. With the energy he was giving off, the way he looked at me as he asked the question, and the shock of the wording, I immediately felt very unsafe, mumbled something like "to each his own", that I had forgotten to do something, and then raced up the path outside to find my manager, J.

I told J of the interaction and her support was overwhelming. This man had been inferring things to other female employees as well and comments had been filtering back to her. The male employees did not think anything of the comments, yet many women had said they felt uneasy in his presence. He had even offered J one of his very good massages for free!

J encouraged me to record all conversations I had with him until that time. It seemed I had borne the brunt of his attentions and could therefore record accurately a fair number of comments that, in this context, could be considered inappropriate.

J called the teachers' union and filed a claim for me for sexual harassment. She believed the only feasible path for future ethical practice, with the emotional and physical health of girls and women potentially at risk, was to remove the fellow from this environment. We were professional women intent on the maintenance of a safe, nurturing, inspirational educational experience for all students. I accepted J's concern and agreed to participate in her proposed action.



His workers' union responded and a meeting was organised. The chief manager of my workplace was informed but declined involvement.

The day for the meeting arrived.

All parties assembled in the office, union representatives on both sides.

First, he spoke. He talked of how friendly he had found the staff, how he loved to have a joke with them and how he felt he had contributed in a positive way to the work environment. Throughout his speech, his union representative glowered at me. She would roll her eyes and caused me to question my presentation of myself. I wondered whether she thought I was hypersensitive, over reacting. I waited.

It was then my turn.

I brought out my notes and told my story.

As I spoke, I watched the workers' union representative sink deeper and deeper into her seat and wave after wave of incredulity passing over the man's face. This time, my excruciation transformed into clarity. I felt my mind become a crystal, images remembered, including verbatim responses, body movements, position in my room, times, everything came to me in lucidity, it was as if I was reliving each interchange. With precision came sureness of communication, organisation of thought and reason and definitive action from within.

At the conclusion of my words, an agreement was reached. An apology came, executed in wounded tone by the man, extricated by his union representative. This surprised me because I had at first thought her to be ill disposed towards me.

Soon after that, he moved to another venue to perform his work.

For me, it did not end there. His mate, employed in a similar position, accused me of irrationally victimising his friend and of possessing not a skerrick of humour. This mate's accusations were delivered with venom and aggression, complete with finger wagging and 'shirt-fronting'—he wedged me between him and a wall. Eventually, just prior to me leaving

the school, it seemed he forgave me and our relationship became civil on his behalf. My sadness concerning his response took time to heal.

### **Mysteries behind the light**

I have written and re-written this account, which on the surface sounds quite simple. Each time I return to it, I see differently, with at least five versions written over time. I read, I edit. As I examine, a range of concepts and judgements are revealed to me. Over time, my manner of expression has changed with my being in the world. I now perceive with difference to the time at which the account was originally recorded. The essence, which is the event and its impulse for me at the time and into my future, remains unchanged.

In my desire to discover meaning in this episode of my life that caused me so much harm, I follow a “hermeneutics of suspicion”, assisted by Josselson (2004), who uses the interpretative manner of Ricoeur. This manner of examination “problematizes the participants’ narrative and strives for explanation beyond the text” (Josselson, 2004, p. 1). I have attempted to deal with hidden and disguised meanings present in *chiaroscuro* (dark/light) as I focus on particulars. Josselson commented that,

The data for this enterprise consist of some phenomenological account of experience obtained from the person or persons under investigation, and the epistemological praxis relies on hermeneutics, a disciplined form of moving from text to meaning.

(Josselson, 2004, pp. 2-3)

She renamed the “hermeneutics of suspicion”, the “hermeneutics of demystification” (Josselson, 2004, p. 5). This term fits my perception of lived experience with paths taken as mysteries, requiring clarity of thought to unfold meaning. I have wished to allow for what remains intangible, with subtleties of human interaction manifesting like the sense of a storm brewing

over sea, despite sunshine in full power above. I have chosen this way in order to explore the tacit, acknowledging and interrogating my prejudices lying along “...horizons of understanding constituted by language and culture, [which] are the position from which we live—and interpret others” (Josselson, 2004, p. 10). As well, the terms that Sokolowski explained in his *Introduction to Phenomenology* (2000) assist my questioning. Using his terms, I have considered both the cleaner and myself as “categorical” objects (p. 88), that is, each of us had a particular descriptive quality. My aim in my narrative has been to “try to obtain a more complete idea” of what or who we are (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 89).

I have incorporated my trilogy of *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato* (shadings) with its umbra and penumbra and *soglia* (threshold) to help disentangle aspects of the event from surface manifestations, something like seaweed fronds on a sea’s surface, down to that which is anchored well below, beyond obvious sight, in depths from which this narrative originates, holding me as a professional in a work place and as a woman amongst other women. As I have sought my process of inquiry as an ethical one, I have accompanied this manner of exploration with Buberian “I-It” and “I-Thou” interchanges (Buber, 1958/1986). I have desired to display and celebrate aspects of common humanity through my venturing. “The interpretive effort,” Josselson said, “is to tear away the masks and illusions of consciousness, to move beyond the materiality of a life to the underlying psychic or social processes that are its foundation” (Josselson, 2004, p. 13). Masks of school identities, illusions of power and fractures in human communications and interactions have formed my examination.

I have looked to meaning firstly in my seeing, where manifolds of appearances exist in the outer, in that which is obvious to the physical eye (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 27-33). I have chosen this as my beginning point, whilst realising that others may initiate interrogation of appearances from a different point. Sokolowski said “...the identical fact can be expressed in a manifold of ways, and the fact is other to any and all of its expressions”

(Sokolowski, 2000, p. 28). Mindful of this, I have viewed facts of this scenario as I experienced them and believed them to have unfolded, thus enfolding them in my own perceptions as related to manifolds of appearance.

Initially, I looked from obvious part-to-part, vague and disengaged interest tempering my contemplation of manifolds of physical appearance (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 27-33) moving to prejudgement of the man in the early stages of our interactions. With familiarity, different aspects (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 17-20) were revealed to me. His affable demeanour was extended to include other gestures of friendliness towards the staff—the *sfumato* (shadowings) of the relationship between him and teaching staff gradually extended, the penumbra shading further and further beyond contrasts of *chiaroscuro*. I have recognised the man as he first presented to me, but now the presentation is manifesting as a compilation of other qualities within the workplace, with particularities more accentuated with time, as these come “to the foreground against the general background of the whole” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 90).

In *sfumato* shadows oscillated, light melded with darkness, shadows deepening. His joviality stirred good humour amongst other employees, but darkness moved, obscuring perceptions as some questioned amongst others his motives. In penumbral blurrings, understandings became murky with sexual innuendo smudging his openness. Shadows of shadows expanded beyond my perception and I could not perceive an end along the *soglia*, where some resolution might exist. Each of his comments were assigned meanings by the hearers. Resultant judgements were shared as umbra extended and penumbra encompassed group perceptions. Ultimately the group reached the *soglia* together, along the same threshold—then stopped. I made the step beyond this *soglia*, taking sole responsibility as the representative of female staff, mentor at my side, but alone in the journey that ensued following disclosure. It might have been easier for me to ignore the uncomfortable, rather than to bring it to the light, but I could only

speculate on this, for I made the choice at the time to dive beneath the surface, to expose the sediment for me at the base of this scenario.

This workplace interchange evolved over time as the man's friendliness moved towards intimacy in his words. Many staff continued to support and joke with him and he continued to perform his paid tasks with competence. However, "the continuous flow of perception" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 90) formed something apart from initial conceptions. The whole image of the fellow was accompanied by a highlighted part and the continuum, "This man is affable...friendly...familiar...suggestive..." became, "This man is overly familiar and is taking liberties in his conversation". This was my categorial intuition. I made a judgement of this man through our interactions and my observations and came to the conclusion that he was overly familiar.

Sokolowski explained categorial thinking as,

...thinking, in which we do not just perceive things but articulate them, manifesting not just simple objects but arrangements and states of affairs. In categorial thinking we move from the experience of simple objects to the presentation of intelligible objects. (2000, p. 5)

This manner of viewing, termed "categorial" by Sokolowski, moved from a generalised, non-specific view of an object or event into a more focussed view, moving through *chiaroscuro* where the particular was illuminated, before consideration of variations that could exist in *sfumato* (shadings). As focus was forged, the umbra manifested and its penumbra extended towards mysteries. Finally I reached the point on my *soglia* at which my understandings had coalesced. The whole—the man—and the part—his friendliness—moved with me into the intentionality of judgement. "A state of affairs click[ed] into place" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 90) and I moved into categorial thinking. Accentuation of the part caused the part to become **the** part, the defining part, the part that characterised the whole.

From first recording, judgement of the man was contained in my re-telling. Phrasing, language and punctuation combined for embodiment of my judgement. With each edit I have attempted to minimise its embodiment as an emotion-loaded monologue, expressing understandings I had at the time it was first written. I recorded incidents and words between us at various times, after the fact. Since then I have interrogated my re-telling again and again. The clarity I felt whilst recounting events in the presence of the union was a physical tensing and stilling, a concentration of physical energy channelled into an attempt for an enlightening accuracy. In subsequent thinking and external expression I searched through my *sfumato* where all manifestations of all interactions resided, melding a way forward for understanding towards my *soglia*.

### **Oscillations in the tides**

As I have considered the role of judgement in my re-memberings, I have looked in this section to Buber's concepts of "It" and "Thou" and the role these manners of understanding the world play in my own way of being. My questioning forms the tidal oscillations as I observe and redefine. I consequently ask whether I regarded this man as an "It" in terms of Buber's analyses of human interaction. Buber explained,

I perceive something. I am sensible of something. I imagine something. I will something. I feel something. I think something. The life of human beings does not consist of all this and this alone.

This and the like together establish the realm of *It*.

(Buber, 2011, loc. 145/1740)

I speak throughout my narrative inquiry and analysis of feelings, perceptions and thoughts. I question if these are excuses for my outcomes, realities that justified ends. Or did I set up the situation from the beginning with this man, my antipathy towards him on first sight leading to ongoing rejection of his

presence, tainting all interactions, connections rejected and distance maintained, ensuring his “It”-ness in my consciousness?

This narrative is my reconstructed experience. As I entered a hermeneutic world of further possible understandings, I entered a hermeneutics of demystification. Perhaps it was Buber who helped me to find a means to demystify the guises veiling understanding, to reveal the mystery created by this episode in my life. It could be that the entire story belongs to the “I-It” world. Said Buber, “The man who experiences has not part in the world” (Buber, 2011, loc. 161/1740). I interpreted this as meaning that my experience existed as my experience of the outer, with the interchange of equality characterising the “I-Thou” interaction unacknowledged—the man was outside of me and I kept him there, his impulse at the time unpursued by my desire for understanding. Dialogue between us that might have illuminated us both and formed a basis for trust and understanding was denied by me. I withdrew from him and in my withdrawal allowed the event to unfold. Only in retrospect do I acknowledge his otherness as well as his sameness to me. Can and must I honour his humanity, as another human endeavouring survival?

I explored my own human-ness in reference to this man, querying and imagining in an effort to gain “thou”-ness, which I see as the recognition of common humanity. I interrogated my own judgements through imagination of this man as someone believing himself right in his words and actions based on his perceptions of the environment. It seemed he believed himself to be communicating competently and humourously, a colleague of all staff. Was he actually a victim of oppression enforced covertly in his workplace? I believe he remained in the blurrings of the *sfumato* in his workplace interchanges, unaware, ignorant, with no explicit warning of the discomfiting impact of his interchanges until he had caused much dissonance amongst many. Opportunities for his enlightenment were not availed him, despite working in an educational domain. Did we as educators fail in our responsibility to our culture?

Who was this man? Was he like a dreamy child, lost in his world, his conception of reality as based on his history unaffected by input of the world around him, innocent and naïve of his place in this work space? If innocent of his impact, he might well have had no understanding of the repercussions of his words, perhaps always in the natural attitude (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 42), never questioning responses of those around him. Was he capable of perceiving reactions from others, forging a reflective way through the *sfumato* (shadows)? Could there be blame for someone with no awareness or understanding, for being ignorant of his lack of awareness and understanding?

As I review these queries, I look to Buber's reflections on a tree, reminiscent of da Vinci's in his *Notebooks*. Buber referred to the tree visually, scientifically, numerically, as one of a group, spatially. He then extended his perceptions and said,

It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is no longer It. I have been seized by the power of exclusiveness...Everything, picture and movement, species and type, law and number, indivisibly united in this event. (Buber, 2011, loc. 187/1740)

If I had drawn from a position of “will and grace” could I have handled this differently? If I had “...become bound in relation to...indivisibly united” with him, could I have clearly perceived the potential for misunderstandings and avoided the entire situation? Was I so locked in prejudging that I abandoned any hope of graciousness in dealing with this set of interactions? I look again and wonder—if the man had been given specified boundaries before undertaking the employment, would he have realised impacts prior to escalation of staff consternation. As I recorded,

...he would stand, watch and engage me in polite conversation....gradually I realised that he was becoming more and more personal with his questions and comments...



He did appear to feel himself welcomed, valued and accepted as a member of the school team, and specifically in my room. A sense of belonging seemed to encourage his relaxed and forthright manner with all staff. Eventually, rather than maintaining his ignorance of acceptable conversation topics, I took a stand. In doing so, I removed myself further from him, as Buber explained.

I do not experience the man to whom I say *Thou*. But I take a stand in relation to him, in the sanctity of the primary word. Only when I step out of it do I experience him once more. In the act of experience *Thou* is far away.

(Buber, 2011, loc. 211/1740)

While I have questioned my capacity of clear perception through Buber's tree analogy, I draw now on his expression of "Thou". Could it be that it is unnecessary to immerse the self in the nature of an other, especially another person? If I maintain distance, Buber implied, then the other's "Thou"-ness is experienced. Was this the impulse of my stance? I believed I was polite and accommodating. But is politeness always fair? What outcome could have transpired if, somehow, he had been quickly set on a path that minimised or even eliminated social and workplace misunderstandings? I do remember a colleague telling me how she dismissed him quickly from her room and from any conversation every time he cleaned. Consequently, no verbal interchange was made with this woman. Both sides were acknowledging, without words, the same *soglia*, beyond which neither would step.

Freire referred to the term "limit-situations". These are situations in which an individual becomes more aware of themselves and their own precepts, and thus

...exist in a dialectical relationship with the determination of limits and their own freedom. As they separate themselves from the world, which they objectify, as they separate themselves from their own activity, as they locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and their relations with the

world and others, men overcome situations that limit them: the “limit situations”. Once perceived by men as fetters...these situations stand out in relief from the background, revealing their true nature as concrete historical dimensions of a given reality. Men respond to the challenge with actions which Vieira Pinto calls ‘limit-acts’: those directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the ‘given’. (Freire, 1972, pp. 71-72)

I struggle to move beyond the limit situations in order to gain understanding of the events. I examined this scenario in view of my own limit situations, attempting to identify that which seemed to “stand out in relief” for me and to imagine if the same occurred for the man. In imagination, I have tried to comprehend. I strive for grace in my discernment of meaning.

### **In suspension**

In my process of demystification, if I imagine Freire’s “limits” as the many manifestations of the sea’s energy and Freire’s “actions” as my body’s movement, perhaps an analogy between sea swimming and the struggle to form a sense of self can be made.

If I can attain a path in communication, as I believe may be possible between me, as the swimmer, and the sea, can I bring a swimmer’s grace to social interchanges and consequently aid development of tact in myself and others? Is this an honourable motive, or does it express my desire for control of not only myself but those around me? In the sea, I focus on movement of my body in water, sensing surge and flow and using my body to accommodate rhythm. I also see the water’s movement. I feel coldness and I adjust my swimming stroke to generate warmth. I recognise the time to turn back to shore, feeling my fingers and toes gradually stiffen. On shore, I wrap myself in a large towel, don a thick coat and return home—a haven containing a warm fire and a hot shower. I acknowledge the path I have chosen, then act on discomfort, remembering fuelled by experience and

others' warnings of the time to move from the situation. That is my way in and with the sea.

I did not follow such a way with this man. Did I instead do this man a dis-service by continuing to accept and receive his words until what I perceived as extreme dissonance lead to extreme actions? Did I ultimately contribute with 'tact-less tact' by forcing the situation, pushing him over a verge, forcing his step over the *soglia*, like a swimmer reluctantly entering icy water? Did I commit an act of violence towards him by creating a situation that had potential to force his self-examination and is it possible to force self-examination upon another being?

I turn again to metaphor as a means for demystification as I attempt to delve deeper into realms of my restoration of the event. When I swim, once I conquer fear and anticipation of cold and submerge myself in water, I am aware of many potential responses. I can choose to sink or to swim, to enjoy and laugh then wade out, to grasp at stones and flounder, then drag free, to scrape upon rocks and stumble as the body emerges, to scramble quickly out and into warmth and safety. These are just some ways in which such an experience could manifest for me. My responses are a mixture of joy and rejection.

If I choose one manner in which I could respond, I can explore a possibility. So, I choose to identify shock. If I am shocked by the impact of my submersion in the water, can presence of mind exist for me? Can I transcend the physical to recognise the emotional and intellectual impact of the submersion? Can I observe myself in this moment with clarity and comprehension of impact of my chosen actions? If I compare this metaphor with that of a person thrust into societal expectations, I question—where does the human's will exist when incorporated into decisions and subsequent actions wrought by the will of others, often symbolised by laws? If this incorporation consumes the individual who seems ignorant of the causes and effects, is there a role for and effect of the threshold, the *soglia*, in the

personal journey of those who seem less conscious of their actions? Can this process be made visible? Must it be made visible?

This man existed in his own blend of light and dark and this *chiaroscuro* was formed from his historicity. I cannot know his past. I rely on what I saw as displayed by his actions and interactions. The atmosphere of our workplace may have fed his good self-image as his colleagues engaged in open conversation. His *sfumato* (blurrings) that resulted from these positive communicative experiences may have led to a strengthening of his belief in his worthiness as a colleague. He may have revelled in the acceptance of his presence amongst adults. Increased familiarity over time may have led to a broadening of his choice for conversation topics. His blurrings of past understandings with the present may have resulted in the misunderstandings and misconceptions rather than creating deeper perceptions and social sensibility. An individual may move through *chiaroscuro* with its dark/light foci, into the blurrings of understandings of the *sfumato* once a choice on focus is made, into the shadings made by different thoughts on the matter at hand and thus to the *soglia* where decisions are made and acts are performed. Did this man's experience of his work environment support his perceptions and potential learning? Or did the women at this workplace enable and abet his ignorance, deepening his oppression? If this was the case, were the women just and justified?

As I consider the man again, I remember. This man did not seem self-reflective. As more people became uncomfortable and more anecdotes were registered by the manager, he continued to converse on the same topics, his jokes becoming more suggestive, his remarks more lewd. It seemed he remained inviolable and drew other male staff into his manner of being. As the women protested amongst themselves, his self-image seemed to be magnified by his interactions and he forged onwards with confidence and delight, completely ignorant of discomfort. By not engaging directly with the issues he was presenting, and not informing him of his inappropriateness, were the women acting out of oppression, or fear? Was their inaction due to

a lack of courage or was it a response to perceptions of powerlessness with no hope of rectifying the situation? Were they perhaps unwilling to cause ruptures, to take a stand before others? Were they content to remain as bystanders, emotionally removed from any ruptures? Or were they apathetic, dismissing the interchanges as inconsequential? I was not to know.

### **Demystification in vanity or virtue?**

I continue attempts to demystify the scenario. My reconstruction of the event has been formed through a “hermeneutics of faith...to re-present, explore and/or understand the subjective world of the participant and/or the social and historical world they feel themselves to be living in” (Josselson, 2004, p. 5). I, as participant, am exploring my own world in relation to these particular external events. I review, step beyond, then return again to the unfoldings, the *sfumato* (blurrings) rhythmically yielding, retracting, extending as I shift relentlessly around the penumbra.

As I continue to move forward, as a swimmer through veils of rain, immersed above and beneath in water’s flow, I review the values in which I was immersed. I see the interactions, in recollections, through eyes opened during ensuing relationships at different workplaces. I search into the mystery of the restoration of the event, hermeneutic demystification attempted through imaginative recollections that place myself before him. I bind myself with my recollections of the other women. I am bound and trapped in my judgements. My concept of my own virtue and the impulses I believed to be surrounding me historically and culturally entreat me to stillness and surrender, as seaweed entangled around time and effort-wearied legs.

I speak of myself as entangled and surrounded, but then remember the man. Did my entrapment within my past create shadows, the *sfumato* for his oppression? Was he oppressed, feeling the force of his own will moving and

yearning outward, towards freedom? Did I enliven and maintain the power to keep him in his place, which I intended to be extraneous to me, as he clambered beyond his past, into the place in which I felt comfort? Who was I to impose restrictions on this man's journey out of unemployment? Was I just, was I fair, in my response by attacking him within a situation that could ultimately have created happiness, especially for this man and perhaps for his family? If I take Aristotle's connotation here, in respect to being fair and just, "...in one way we mean by Just, those things which are apt to produce and preserve happiness and its ingredients for the social community" (Aristotle, 1923/n.d., loc. 1670/4264). Through my response I wished to "produce and preserve happiness". I wished to be scrupulous in the enactment of what I believed to be my values. Was justice an enigma in this case, an unknown and unknowable feature of an uncomfortable workplace interchange? I attempt an examination of values I hold as important in human interchanges, as manifested in the doing-ness of exchange.

I spiral further into my interrogations. I was entirely willing to be polite and yet unhappy to continue the conversations that ensued at each meeting, each day. But did I explain my discomfort? I did not. I listened, cringed and laughed politely at crude comments until my *soglia* was attained. What I believed to be my attempts at patience, kindness and receptivity within this *sfumato* (blurring) allowed the breaching of my limits, my inaction and my silence condoning his words. This silence existed in my "limit situation" (Freire, 2000) and was not only manifested in my inaction, in my allowing of a space to be filled by my discomfort. It allowed a space, an in-between-ness, for the intangible to thrive. In silence lives mystery. When the head is relieved of external sound, ears may tune with heart to sense what cannot be seen with eyes. Wassily Kandinsky spoke of the immaterial existing between and around, that surrounds all. He said that, "Not only visible actions, thoughts and feelings, with outward expression, make up this atmosphere, but secret happenings of which no one knows, unspoken thoughts, hidden feelings are also elements in it" (Kandinsky, 1977, loc. 922/1732).

I believed I was aware of the tacit present in the between-ness of the man and me. Conversation did not continue for long and his work necessitated silence, or at least, absence of speaking. I allowed space for him to speak. I spoke little. I listened and allowed, giving space for his words. Was this virtuous, or vain and egotistical? Was my fervent hope, which was held in my silence, for his sudden self-awareness, fair to him and is hope ever an effective means for attaining an ideal outcome? Can hope alone, without words, forge a positive outcome? My sense of hope did not seem to touch the man in any visible manner. I hoped and hoped and nothing changed. In fact, it seemed his comments became more suggestive with the time and space available between us.

Ultimately I faced my *soglia*. Once this *soglia* was reached, forging through *sfumato* (shadowings), where the blurring of the lines between polite and rude, accommodation and invasion seemed present, I stepped towards the extreme (union action) and took my stand. I felt oppressed. As I strove for freedom from the discomfort I felt as a woman, I stepped into the space beyond the *soglia* and found myself in control. I felt discomfort in this position of control. I felt the responsibility of action and revisited in my thoughts the situations that had resulted in union intervention. I also reimagined the union meeting so many times, trying to make sense of my journey and his journey. I felt mortification at my situation and wished for resolution of my pain. I wished for compassion, for him and for myself. I wonder whether compassion can exist here and if so, where?

The judgement of me that I perceived in the fellow's mate the first day we ever met at our workplace, as he observed my clothing and my general presentation, seemed to remain until my last days of employment at this venue. I remember looking into his eyes on my last day and believed I saw respect. Seven years I had looked into his eyes during interchanges and had perceived sardonicism. Throughout my time at this place, my enthusiasm for various artistic environmental projects had been openly discouraged and often thwarted by him for many reasons. For some unfathomable reason, in

the end—perhaps because I was leaving—he supported my final venture, an artistic installation by the children, with a kindness I had not seen before. I appreciated it. I felt joy and sadness.

All this pertains to words and actions. I move beyond that which is manifest in words and actions and look to impulses transporting these. As discussed previously, I believe hope without action can be empty. Perhaps also, words and actions achieved without the doer's conscious engagement, in spontaneity and ignorance, even naïvety, are even emptier.

### **Bittersweet as sea salt mixes with river flow**

In her book *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay*, Anne Carson explores the concept of *eros* and expresses it as fuelled by the inability to possess what is desired.

Infants begin to see by noticing the edges of things. How do they know an edge is an edge? By passionately wanting it not to be. The experience of *eros* alerts a person to the boundaries of himself, of things in general. It is the edge separating my tongue from the taste for which it longs that teaches me what an edge is...The presence of want awakens in (the lover) nostalgia for wholeness. (Carson, 1986, p. 30)

Carson serves me with yet another demystifying heuristic—*eros*. The cleaner's conversation topics, the rude jokes, the extended room visits seemed to me to be accompanied by the intangible, that which cannot be touched. This was, for me, found in the man's presence. His eyes seemed to encompass everything as he moved around my room. He watched everything. His physical presence was of a spring about to launch. All his words seemed like driftwood on the surface of the surging waves, unconnected to the depths yet supported by his physical presence. His being was as river water striving towards sea salt, to be encompassed and claimed.



His energy was pervasive, especially when he spoke to me of his massage skills and his fund raising event. It felt to me that space between us was permeated with his lust. It was not visible. There was no sensual interaction at all, at any time, but I sensed the invisible to be present. I felt unsafe. Could this atmosphere of desire be one vehicle for appreciation of an other, akin to artistic appreciation?

Kandinsky refers to the dependence of harmony on the interaction between forms, where,

(1) The ideal harmony alters according to the relation to other forms of the form which causes it. (2) Even in similar relationship a slight approach to or withdrawal from other forms may affect the harmony.

(Kandinsky, 1977, loc. 738/1732)

I experienced the energy emanating from the man as a stone experiences the smashing of waves—bits broke, but I did not give them freely. I was not a welcoming participator in the energy that ensued. As a being allowing myself to be acted upon and not an instigator or willing participator, can I name this energy I perceived within the space between us? If I do, am I correct in my naming? My naming of the energy is based on my personal history and experiences. I have watched, listened, read, witnessed, sensed. Am I qualified to name a thing that has caused my discomfort, something of which I have only experienced the negative, without acknowledging and accepting any positive aspects of this situation?

Was it lust that drew this man towards me? Lust is historically considered an excess, an extreme, as expressed by Aristotle. Its energy can be fierce yet intangible. It can rely not on action but on presence. Presence forms relationship. If I consider that Kandinsky expressed ideal harmony as relational, then if there is an energy imbalance between forms, can harmony be attained? If the space between forms contracts and expands with the force of the forms' energies, can harmony be found? Can lust become analogous with passion, then transformed into respectful and caring service

of the other? If so, is it possible for compassionate inspiration to steer forms from lust towards a powerfully good outcome, rather than into murky discomfort and collision or crisis?

If I view the scenario in terms of *eros*, which can incorporate lust, then can I see this narrative as a lesson in love? Was each interchange between this man and each woman a lesson in caring, for each individual, each woman dealing with his interactions idiosyncratically? I contemplate whether my experiences exposed the relations between the man and I as examples of boundaries overstepped, of *eros* present but not respected. I believe it is towards the *soglia* that I am drawn in this contemplation. I am grasping for comprehension of the senses, the feelings, the words and the outcomes of this situation. I now feel I have stepped beyond my previous understandings and have fallen into the fetid muck of unresolved tensions. I scramble upwards with my exploration for a new and deeper understanding of this narrative. I look to the hope of positive outcomes as I attempt to lay it to rest. I muse—if I rename this event, retracting it from lust and positioning it in *eros*, could new and fresh connections be created?

As I venture towards achieving the renaming of lust as *eros*, I explore first the option of shock and surprise, designating transformation of lust as a surprise, a new development. I believe lust can be intangible, unseen, a sense, a feeling perception, not only an enactment of physical passion. If this gives lust meaning, then were the women's egos reacting to his attentions, or was this all misinterpretation, where I was imagining the situation based on my own past and present experiences and needs of male relationships, placing myself in the centre through my desire for attention? Or was the whole interchange an opportunity for the formation of something new for the actors in the drama, providing hope for the future?

Everything is in the effect of surprise. The new spirit depends equally on surprise, on what is most vital and new in it. Surprise is the greatest source of what is new. It is by surprise, by the important position that has been given to

surprise, that the new spirit distinguishes itself from all the literary and artistic movements which have preceded it.

(Kostelanetz, 1982, p. 12)

Despite my age and life experiences at the time, I remained capable of being surprised in this situation, for I was naïve in my interactions and maintained some innocence in my ignorance. I have interrogated this lived experience due to the anxiety it brought into my life at the time and into the future. The scenario was a surprise to me—I had never been exposed to such a situation before. As for its political resolution, I was never sure of the path I was encouraged to take, that being the incorporation of the union, never fully confident that this was a necessary and good path to pursue. I felt tormented by the process through which I was taken. In my effort towards peace, I believed that philosophical analysis could perhaps bring me comprehension of the event and therefore carry me forward. I turned to hermeneutic demystification as expressed by Josselson (2004). I wished to scour the situation, to remove the impurities and to reveal it in crystal clarity. It has caused me more anxiety as I scrub and scratch, but my aim bears me through. I wished to work within and through my unfinishedness, towards attainment of a whole self, whatever that came to mean for me. The process of interrogation has been excruciating. I continue to strive

For the man who is truly good and sensible bears all fortunes, we presume, becomingly, and always does what is noblest under the circumstances, just as a good general employs to the best advantage the force he has with him; or a good shoemaker makes the handsomest shoe he can out of the leather which has been given to him; and all other good artisans likewise. (Aristotle, 1923/n.d., loc. 590/4264)

I strive to be a good craftsman, to make the “handsomest” possible with my chosen tools.

### **Moulded or melded?**

I examined this man with a degree of intensity. I questioned whether I am right, whether I am just, to ascribe an identity to him that is “presented, preserved, and transported through speech” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 92). Have I presented him, as categorial object, as indivisible, as both whole and part and whole again, no gaps between, no space before and therefore no other possibilities after? Have I presented him as existing unbecomingly as forever on the *soglia*, with no hope of stepping beyond? If so, I ask again of myself, is there violence in my action, in singling him out as a subject for study and consideration in light of a narrative inquiry? Am I entitled to such discussion? If I describe the intangible as important, perceivable and part of human existence, can consequences be present without conscious awareness of the subject?

I am examining the man in reference to myself. I cannot know his perceptions—I can only speculate whilst exploring my own. The scenario presented me an opportunity for interrogation of my own life perceptions. As Josselson said “...persuasiveness rests on careful documentation of the interpretive journey from observation (text) to narrative explanation on a theoretical level” (2004, p.19).

I believe I have followed this form according to a hermeneutics of suspicion renamed “demystification” by Josselson. I began with a recount of events. I continued with what I hoped to be as humanistic an expression as possible, based on my prior understandings of my social environment as a woman, thus exploring hermeneutics of restoration or faith (Josselson, 2004), where I had faith in my ability to express my meaning-making (Josselson, 2004, p. 5). The study then moved to a hermeneutics of demystification, where the depths were uncovered, debris swept aside and the sediments analysed.

I am a philosopher desiring to pursue a philosophical manner of being in the world. By researching and reading, by living and loving, I have engaged with my world. I wish to transform this experience into an act of courage, as I strive towards a greater understanding, of myself, others and events. Am I courageous or foolhardy in my examinations? Am I innocent, naïve, too trusting, in my public expression of these lived experiences?

I believe that there was a degree of idealism and obedience in my actions. My idealism existed where the possibility for rescuing and redemption began. My naïvety existed in my incomprehension of the debris that would remain following the execution of the union confrontation. My innocence rested in my idealism. Perhaps the man's innocence rested in his apparent unconsciousness of his actions. I can only fully explore my own perceptions and speculate upon his intentions and understandings, so I refocus on interrogation of my self.

Aristotle considered,

..some men are thought to be over-complaisant who, with a view solely to giving pleasure, agree to everything and never oppose, but think their line is to give no pain to those they are thrown amongst: they, on the other hand, are called cross and contentious who take exactly the contrary line to these, and oppose in everything, and have no care at all whether they give pain or not. Now it is quite clear, of course, that the states I have named are blameable, in virtue of which a man will let pass what he ought as he ought, and also will object in like manner.

(Aristotle, 1923/n.d., loc. 1550/4264)

I am now objecting, after being agreeable to acts with which I was uncomfortable. I clamber for the mean, where my perception of good action in the face of personal events is balanced and tranquil. Towards this, I continue exploration of the presences and absences (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 33-41) that existed in the interchanges and revisit the presence of values and

virtue. Within this scope, self-assertion, which seems aligned with self-respect, rises like sea undercurrents forcing the water surface to eddy. A rupture has occurred as I consider the place of assertiveness. Would my self-assertion at the time have eliminated the outcomes as written here? I question whether assertion could imply less politeness, less empathy, less compassion, that is, impoliteness, antipathy, heartlessness, characteristics I have consciously rejected nearly all my life? Or does assertion mean the demonstration of stronger understandings of my *soglia* and consequent heightened awareness of the *sfumato* (shadowings). Would self-assertion have meant that my recognition, through conscious identification of issues, warned me of the possibilities and therefore dismissed any opportunities for subsequent conversations?

It was as it was. I acted. He acted. If violence has been performed against the man, it has also been performed against me, as interrogator of the events. I aim now for a gentleness that encompasses his and my humanity, in my venture towards finishedness through understanding.

I wish to attain a degree of finishedness, towards a degree of perfection, through my interrogation of this scenario. I attempt to venture towards Aristotle's *eudemonia* (happiness) as I grasp for a *telos* (end) for my questioning. I believe I was at times "over-complaisant...agree[ing] to everything..." (Aristotle, *ibid.*)—anxious to represent myself to the world as an agreeable person, not "cross and contentious". In my effort to be liked by all, my *sfumato* (shadowings) became less and less distinct and the penumbra was so faded as to be almost imperceptible. My *soglia* was therefore attained without warning to others, a gradual and subtle inclination towards my limitations until I tipped beyond it and sought definitive action to resolve my stress.

### **Polished in waves**

My initial narrative contained many judgments. I read and reread, adjusted

and changed words and expressions, trying to minimise the presentation of my indignation and my stance from a self-created moral high ground. I questioned the tone I used and continue to question my narrative expressions. I am aware of assumptions as to the man's potentialities, of the presences and absences I imagined could exist. These exist as a means for gaining clarity, for hermeneutic demystification (Josselson 2004). All this has arisen due to conversations I allowed with the man. As pebbles rolling in tides, the narrative has been burnished and polished to reveal its colours.

I am aware of another example that I believe to be extremely similar but a more blatant situation of social misunderstandings. In another workplace, a staff member was chatted to as work was completed in her classroom. She was asked on a date, said she was flattered but declined. Prior to employment at this workplace this particular man was educated as to expected behaviour in the workplace. A contract required his understanding and compliance with the appropriate etiquette. He ignored this. He was fired.

Is this situation analogous with my past experience? When I consider it, I believe there seem parallels. However, one difference seems the knowledge possessed before employment. In my particular lived experience, the man seemed unaware of the social etiquette. In the manifolds of potentialities, if I use terms expressed by Sokolowski (2000), I have determined what I consider a lack of consciousness and social awareness in this individual. If he was truly naïve, ignorant of how he was received by women in the workplace, was the entire situation the result of innocence and unwavering trust in his workplace, with the school environment as his perceived haven? Who, then, is responsible—the innocent man, or the polite colleagues? Was his incorporation into the school environment possible when the man can be seen as the oppressed, subjected to the will of his oppressors?

Was his desire to be part of the whole the cause of the ruptures? The desire to blend with another implies a desire for unity. The unity speaks of

the possibility for the whole. In the journey together, the oppressed and the oppressor may be perceived as interchangeable. In contemplation and examination I have grasped for the whole, which could symbolise finishedness for me. But does separation really exist? Are the pieces (players) only ever inextricably linked in the whole, which encompasses the interrelations of and between all beings? For Christopher Lawn (2012), “The gap between subject and object is like the gap between appearance and reality and the most important gap of all, between thought and the world” (p. 40).

The issue that remains throughout this examination is this man’s presence. No matter the outward intentions, he exuded a sexual intensity that threatened me and other women in this workplace. I return to an initial question—if he had been more physically attractive, would the response have been the same? Would his words and conversations been construed, then, as titillating, rather than offensive? If he had a position of power within the workplace, would his manner have been tolerated? This possibility cannot be known, but it can be contemplated, with comparisons to other workplaces, other people and other times.

I have attempted to view this scenario from some of the different aspects and profiles forming the whole of the experience. I have returned to it through reading and memory. I have exercised my memory during re-examination. At this particular time my *soglia* for the experience was crossed and from this *soglia* I moved from physical and mental disharmony into action. I made a choice and followed it till the culmination. My actions resulted in a degree of awakening for him as to his impulse in the workplace. My actions resulted in a sense of completion. I did not ultimately feel empowered as a woman through my separation from the man, although my actions withdrew him from my workplace. I felt exhausted, manipulated, isolated and abused. I felt no triumph, only relief when finally it seemed over. But memories remain, and it has not been over, for it has haunted me ever since.



I have aimed to not “project things into the remembered event that I want to see or that I think I should be seeing” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 69). I have relied on my feeling memory and the notes I made immediately following the final interaction. Constantly self-questioning, I look again to self-criticism and find these words from Bohm (2006). They refer to the possibility of arrogance in self-perceptions. I apply this as a potentiality for myself, in this situation.

If you represent yourself as noble and capable and honest, that representation enters the perception of yourself. That’s how you perceive yourself. Now, if somebody else gives another representation- which is that you are dishonest and stupid- and this goes in, too, and affects your ‘perception’ of yourself. And that shakes up the whole neurophysiological system in a very disturbing way. Thought is now under pressure to represent the situation in a better light- and there you see the beginning of self-deception. (Bohm, 2006, p. 64)

My self-perception was brought into question constantly in this lived experience by the world around me. I believe that by questioning, the reality of my individual nature can be revealed and made stronger. If I question my integrity, I believe there is a potential to aid my ability to develop and strengthen it. If I query my capacity to operate with grace and integrity, then the opportunity for higher awareness and understanding of what these mean may become available to me. Through self-questioning and stern self-examination, I believe that possibilities for self-actualisation are presented. This may mean steps towards finishedness, but at this time, I feel decidedly unfinished.

If this self-deception of which Bohm speaks is presented, is it the deception of the shadows, once the focus has been decided in *chiaroscuro* as I move into the indistinct realm of the *sfumato*’s blurrings? If I see it as a reality that forms my being, then it may be seen as a facet of self-creation. Perhaps I create myself much as an artwork can be created, forming my character and image as an expression of what I desire as my individuality. Can it be that I am like Kandinsky’s art, for example, reliant on form and the relationships

existing between forms, colours accenting as voice, movement and action, my abstractions an extension and exploration of alternative possibilities? If so, did I create an image for the external world of my interactions that led the particular audience to different conclusions than I intended? I have commented previously on my inability to control the responses and judgements of others. In my effort for authenticity I struggle with that which I see to be outside of myself. Paradoxically, I am bonded to the world. My body, my digestion, my sensations, everything, is in constant change within this world. As a being in constant and unconscious change, what right and what power have I to exert parameters, to attempt control of the ways of the world?

If I view myself as a work of art in progress, not 'Work of Art' as expressed in regard to great expressions of artistic modes, but a work of art in terms of a creative piece, formed through acts of creation, my unfinishedness comes to the fore.

My senses strain towards attainment of accuracy in perceiving the reality of my moments with unveiled eyes. By cutting, moulding, moving, freedom of being may yield itself to me, as seeker. Meaning may then be my reward. I surf a swell of ideas, attempting balance as I ride waves of inspiration. Within this swell my narratives have lived. All were viewed and in viewing, my eyes' energy extended towards the forms of interaction, a grasping of meaning encircled by my sight as my physical and perceptual eyes moved over scenes, from form to form, my mind in connection as I attempted comprehension of each event's unfolding. My eyes encompassed, protagonists enacted their parts then moved on. I remained connected to each occurrence despite withdrawal. I remain connected as re-enactments flourish in my imagination. In shades and tones of swirling movement, I struggle for understanding of what I have witnessed.

My freedom exists in choice. There are times when I have felt choice taken from me as the passions of others asserted such power, I felt absorbed

by the storm and lost sense of self within their needs, an effect in *sfumato*, as I surrendered my power to others. How can I maintain my essence, as encompassed by the boundaries of my body and my past, whilst beset by the influences of known and unknown others?

Elliot Eisner commented on the making of meaning within a mobile world.

As one Chinese scholar is said to have commented, “First I see the hills in the painting, then I see the painting in the hills.” After a while it is not art that imitates life—it is life that initiates art. The outcomes of art education are far wider than learning how to create or see the objects populating museums and galleries. The world at large is a potential source of delight and a rich source of meaning if one views it within an aesthetic frame of reference. It can be said that each subject studied in schools affords the student a distinctive window or frame through which the world can be viewed. To see the world as matter in motion, the way a physicist might, provides a unique and telling view...The outcomes of education can thus be said to diversify and deepen the kinds of meanings people know how to construct and to provide them with the appetite and ability to shift frames. (2002, pp. 44-45)

With so many means for attaining understanding, how can I know a way, especially as I feel overwhelmed by impulses surrounding me? How can I forge a path when it seems I cannot tread the same path consistently, when I feel I am straying from known paths constantly, testing waters beyond, like John Cobbler? Where can I gain insight and therefore trust in the way I have chosen, amidst so much difference?

Eastern philosopher Jiddhu Krishnamurti’s view of the natural world was aesthetically rapturous. In each view, he perceived the strength, beauty and profound aspect of the physical world. This view afforded him reverence for the world that both inspired and nurtured his thinking. Can I develop this

sense of the world? Perhaps my heuristic questioning will lead me along this way. If I develop such perception, my ability to observe a space for understanding with equanimity, a space between action and watching, perception and doing-ness, self-judgement and self-discernment, may lead to my meaning-making.

What of personas, of identities created by an individual? Are these real, or a figment, a construct, an in-authenticity aimed to deceive? Are such maskings real in their power, or an illusion, based on flimsy, shallow intent? Am I as viewer the responsible one in such an event, or does the mask wearer bear the burden of responsibility? If I exist in the moment yet remain unconscious of presences and absences, focussing in *chiaroscuro* on that which I am capable at that time, am I authentic when my seeing does not capture or is not captured by the thing itself? Or might I eventually, with mindful living, with perseverance and dedication, arrive at some wholeness of impression of a subject, and then sigh into some sense of finishedness? Is this the aim of my investigations?

As I struggle with my confusions towards purification of my ideas, I aim to eliminate lumps in my unreconciled paths through employment of subtle and meticulous analysis, towards authentic viewing of subjects in the present. My examination of past experiences aims to enfold the sweep of movement towards deeper comprehension of the lived reality of each experience. As clay gathers in homogenous forms through physical tension, so do I attempt to form authentic perceptions of scenarios recorded in recollection.

In the mystery of 'finishedness' there exists for me two realities, one a path of letting go of control, the other a conscious doing-ness of responsibility and self-control. I query whether letting go, which can imply lack of striving, lack of involvement or engagement or lack of responsibility, can lead to finishedness, and if it can, whether results would be desirable, when produced from apparent lack of will. Can I describe 'letting go' as an authentic path and not an escape and a rejection of responsibility?

I have searched for words to express my understandings. As ‘edge’ catapulted me into this journey, I saw meanings revealed as a means for examination and transformation of my being in my world, a goal I believed to be fundamental to my task. Imagery and metaphor guided me as I slipped through darkness, into *sfumato* (blurrings) in-between, then beyond into mysteries of my *soglia*. My enigmas have not offered completion for me, as I still feel discomfort, like a swimmer in familiar waters when the tide reveals the weeds, but I wonder—is it possible that my yearned-for finishedness is really unfinishedness, perfect in its imperfection? Is there really any difference between letting go, which I have identified as implying absence, and acceptance of responsibility, which I have said might imply presence? Might I both let go and accept responsibility towards finishedness, if a connection between finishedness and unfinishedness is revealed to me?

Softness might exist in *sfumato* (shadowings), a beauty indistinct, smudged, unreadable, unknowable. In *sfumato* I crave for understanding of self, giving way to fluidity as holder of potential. The *soglia* embodies the unknowable-ness of myself, of a journey that is mysterious, frightening, surprising, ineffable, intangible. As clay is wrung from a block, ripped from rectangular mass production, a gash is left, finger marks pulled through as scrape after scrape is drawn outwards and away. Edges remain unused, whilst liberated clay is mauled, mashed, pummelled, bashed into submission by knowing or unknowing hands. The clay resists in its solidity, but forces impose themselves, for clay is made for shaping. Yet, if stored uncaringly or ignorantly, clay may block fertility of ideas, its tiny particles joined in aridity, withholding potential.

With umbra and penumbra encircling human-ness, *sfumato* might contain beauty and be pleasing, authentic, desired and admired. *Sfumato*, with fluidity in shadow-forming, could surpass all imaginings. Movement in *sfumato*, bonded in *chiaroscuro*, allows for inspirations, bringing the new from combined self-perceptions, allowing my self to taste completeness, where the taste is a part of finishedness, residing in unfinishedness. In *sfumato*, my self

might feel transformed by beauties, as I am taken beyond a state of comfortable familiarity. Thus, too, is my experience of awe when viewing art.

When an entity or experience is perceived as beautiful, one remains in control and maintains one's distance; when an entity or experience induces awe, one feels overpowered, overwhelmed, far less in command. And yet, as the result of further visits, the awe can be tamed and yield to the pleasurable sensation that announces or accompanies a feeling of beauty. (Gardner, 2011, loc. 812/4201)

As I immerse myself in Michelangelo's *The Slaves*, with awe transporting me, I ponder mysteries of my lived experiences, seeking transformation in self-discernment, through artistic contemplation and subsequent application of my understandings.



Figure 6: The Bearded Slave and The Atlas by Michelangelo (created from 1530-1534)

### Dazzled reflections: *The Bearded Slave* and *The Atlas*

When I first stood before Michelangelo's *The Slaves*, I was transfixed. The statue of David was in the background, but my attention was completely taken by these rough sculptures. Tears formed and I struggled to quell them. My body froze before the statues and the words of the guide were lost to me. These men seemed to be struggling free of their blurrings, their bodies encased by stone, melded to the half-life of marble. They were neither totally free, nor totally trapped. They moved outwards but could not take their final step—they endured stone, yearning for freedom.

I was in awe. Everything seemed to point to this moment in time, me before these works, seeing this trauma, these burdens, this exhaustion. It seemed to infiltrate my body. There seemed an overlapping of my self with the artworks and I felt as if I drew them into me, as I, too, was drawn into them. Now, in reflection, I wonder—was the awe recognition of my self in other? Was my *soglia* enacted within this awe and then connected to my own sense of finishedness, or unfinishedness? Was I subsequently present, through these artworks, to my own appreciation of my own imperfection? I returned a year later to this place. I have wondered here whether the feeling would remain, or would I assume a difference in my self when confronted by their power, whether this would lead me to peacefulness, within self-discernment, as I recognised my own form within these works. I can say now that on return I remained transfixed by the statues' force. I remained connected to them, rather than the beautiful boy, David. My awe resumed and I cried, once again. There was bliss in my reconnection.

I experienced the same when entering the Pantheon in Rome. I expressed this phenomenon afterwards to an Italian friend, who identified it as “Stendhal Syndrome”, “A psychosomatic response - tachycardia, vertigo, fainting, confusion and even hallucinations - when the ‘victim’ is exposed to particularly beautiful, or large amounts of, art” (The Free Dictionary, 2012). Stendhal was a Victorian traveller who had witnessed this reverential

response around him, particularly when in Italy. I remember overwhelming emotion and my tears as I entered the Pantheon's space for the first time. Despite the press of summer crowds, I felt alone but not lonely, connected but not consumed, by the enormity of the place in which I stood. I visited again when in Rome the next year and again succumbed to inner ecstasy. I felt connected to both *The Slaves* and the Pantheon and it was beautiful.

I have been as clay in my change and questioning. If I scrape away surface clay with an intention of creation, edges are made, then dried, cracking (or not), then fired with a pressure that is immense, then revisited with eyes new. The product of time, space and energy, the clay is revealed in its pressured self, moulded and remoulded by hand, instrument and heat. I believe my understandings might be gained from sight, sound and time in a manner similar to this process. I question if continual smoothing of my burrs is necessary to attain a sense of finishedness or a consciousness of unfinishedness. Potentialities are viewed by me, then discarded, or cherished, decisions based on various impulses such as my bias, self-judgement, or self-discernment. They are in the penumbra of my understanding, treasures of my perception and pains of my heart. I am afraid, surrounded by choice. I strive to tackle the issue of innocence, ignorance or naïvety. Why do I choose to struggle with this? I struggle because it forms a fundamental question for me in my interactions and relationships.

Some have claimed my surrender to beauty as immature, but I celebrate the intensity of my surrender and rejoice in the feeling. Does this mean I am immature, or innocent, or naïve, or ignorant in ways of the world? To have innocence I must be “without experience or knowledge of; free from moral wrong, pure, guileless, naïve”, deriving from *in-* meaning not and *nocere* meaning hurt (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006. Naïve incorporates “showing a lack of experience, wisdom or judgement; natural, unaffected, innocent, unsophisticated, from the origin native, natural” (Dictionary.com, n.d.), while ignorance involves “a lack of knowledge or information, or awareness in general; uneducated or unsophisticated; discourteous or rude;



easily angered” (Dictionary.com, n.d.). I include ‘gullible’, “easily persuaded to believe something; credulous; from gull, a person who is fooled or deceived” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). Is it, too, relevant to my trilogy of, naivety, innocence and ignorance?

### **In depths anchoring**

In depths anchoring  
the surging has set paths in this life,  
the valleys deep with silt,  
the plant off-casts upon this murk  
transforming its nature  
as layer meets layer and melds with past  
its creation a new bed in which to lay  
for those dropping seeds in abandonment  
or accident or choice.

(Miller, 2010)

Perhaps my problem lies with my unfinishedness, ignorant of which way to journey as my sense of self is coloured by particular self-perceptions. How may I travel from murky *sfumato* into *soglia* fecundity, beyond which might exist promises of transformation? Or must I allow that this dilemma cannot be consciously resolved and must remain enigmatic?

When I have been conscious of perceiving with tranquillity, it seemed my options expanded, my calm mind encompassing then sorting them with clarity. In clarity I recognised the particular way forward and acted upon it. The *chiaroscuro* receded, contrasts softened as I allowed more light to dominate. The *sfumato* (blurrings) united me and the *soglia* allowed promise of the new and bright. When I stepped from the *soglia* in this state of mind, it became not a fall, but an ascension, the cliché ‘rise to the occasion’ coming to mind.

As I move beyond the ascending *soglia*, support appears. Trust, sincerity and hope transport my steps into my unknown.

### **Luminosity**

A friend told an anecdote from a number of years ago. She spoke of a teacher in America who was, she said, invited into the most difficult classrooms to work her magic. What was her magic? Praise. She would walk into the room and focus on the one child sitting quietly. She would praise the child's behaviour and completely ignore all others. She would calmly and quietly engage in conversation with the student. Gradually, the other students would notice the interaction. As the realisation registered that their extreme antics were not eliciting any reaction from the teacher and that a peer was gaining all the attention, more and more students slowed down, watched, then joined with the teacher. Within a relatively short period of time, the class engaged in conversation and a haven was created.

This manner of being seems to illustrate self-mastery. There was no imposition of will on will. There were no acts of violence in any form on the students, whether through physical, emotional or intellectual presence. There was only the teacher's personal dedication to her belief and her strength to fulfil her ideal, her luminous aspiration transfiguring behaviours. She required patience, dedication to and focus on her desire, whilst ignoring the undesirable and modelling her ideal. Her perfect classroom was not comprised of the perfect students. It became a haven, allowing learning in individuality and unity in impulse. Was her way an illustration of "presencing"?

When we suspend and redirect our attention, perception starts to arise within the living process as a whole. When we are presencing, it moves further, to arise from the highest future possibility that connects self and whole.

(Senge, 2008, p. 89)

Conviction, strength of character and devotion are words that may be ascribed to those who create this magic. Is this magic one joy that may exist beyond the *soglia*, a possible result, an ultimate outcome, a destination, or a journey?

It's the stream that counts. The two banks merely give form to the stream-the stream is common to the two banks. So there'll be (in dialogue) a stream of thought or perception, or some sort of energy flowing between us, unfolding, and that would be the meaning of the dialogue. (Bohm, 2001, p. 34)

If interaction between teacher and student can be considered as a dialogue, flow within the stream of interchange could begin with a one-to-one response of student to teacher prior to the engagement of others. As others respond, dialogue may expand to include them. When struggling to gain order in various classes, I have lost this flow. With my colleague teacher who appears later in my third narrative in Chapter 5, and with the cooperation of the students, a haven was created and artistic expressions of students flourished. van Manen said, "Phenomenology wants to respect the thing in its whatness and its otherness" (2014, loc. 1352/11093), which I see as haven creation, where the students are respected and supported in their sameness and in their difference, allowing self expression.

I have previously in this work looked to art works as a means by which to express understandings. I have explored some of their possibilities. I understand my perceptions are not complete. They are bound by time, space and experience. I am a being under constant reformation, unfolding my being as I am enfolded by the world around me. I stand in between and grasp for the shore. I am pounded by waves, churning in the flow.

Eisner (2002) has explored the tensions that exist in artistic expressions and the contribution they can make for developing life understanding. His discussion of the artistic way of creation brought such images of correspondence for me between the phenomenological attitude and the

artistic attitude. His words helped forge my incorporation of artistic terms to express my way in the world. I believe I am in the process of creation, every minute. I am constantly unfinished.

As Josselson says "... all hermeneutics is an effort to interpret to a deeper apprehension of the world of the people under study. It is the process of arriving there that is of concern here" (2004, p.14). Wherever the arrival point, which may exist at any of an infinite number of points around the penumbra, which signifies the presence of the *soglia*, individual intention for comprehension and transcendence exists. The degree of transcendence may be immeasurable and is, I believe, of little importance in view of the effort taken to move beyond.

## Chapter 5 Between earth and sea

To hear, I believe I must attempt to brush away lies. I have previously viewed lies as wicked, manipulative and thwarting of my reality. My view has, however, shifted in time, with life experience, for I believe now that lies might, at times, be truth protectors. I have continued to look to scenes before me, whether educational or social and attempted to pull aside any sea spray of pretense. What has then been revealed to me?

I have seen fear and dread, but also nurturing and responsibility. The children of my classroom did not lie. They acted. Their actions were open, expressing their attitude to the world and particularly to adults in this world, whether institutional or familial. They did not think before they moved. They moved from one inner expression to the next. If they lied, it showed their truth—that the world was a place of fabrications and inconsistencies. In my scenario, told in Chapter Four, the man did not lie, rather it seemed he did not see things as others did and could not comprehend the impressions he imposed upon his workplace colleagues. His actions were utterly honest—he did not lie by concealing his attractions and interests, for they were there to be read in his actions, his face, his gestures and his words, every day. He was a deeply honest man, authentic in his expression of his true nature. However, his lack of guile, his absence of fabrication in outer expressions of interaction, was a problem for those around him, who had to deal with his way of being in the world, a way that seemed, to these others, to lack empathy and foresight.

If I were to develop compassion, which encompasses empathy, could I love the lies and see them as a path towards what is real, rather than away from the meanings available? It might be that in hope, as a dweller within compassion, lies cease, for the presence of hope might signify safety. In hope, lies could be cradled and gifted as a possibility for clarity of intention. I

contemplate hope and I become aware of its potential as a deceiver, where cynicism might enter when events do not result in desired outcomes. If I could focus on the development of compassion, perhaps the tidal pull of hope would fall away and I would float with tranquillity towards the appropriate shore?

I have seen these shades and struggled in my *sfumato* (shadowings), seeing the far reaches of the penumbra as light so bright shines on that which is around me. I have remembered my *sfumato* as indirectly affected by the actions of others, for the source of shadow is open, unable to escape from the movement of an other. In the same manner, the children's effects were comprised from their families and communities—the man's effects were comprised from his past and flavoured by his situation in a family and within his community. These were not static effects, for they were evolving continuously as each person made choices from those offered, consciously or unconsciously, by others.

Is it necessary for me to always be mindful of the *soglia* (threshold)? I wonder if my awareness of mindful action can couple with my phenomenological and hermeneutic understandings, existing for me on the *soglia* of my comprehensions, and whether I can make sense of this space between, which holds my intentions and promises possibilities for action.

I have looked to my narratives thus far and explored concepts expressed by others concerning their efficacy as subjects or objects of phenomenological inquiry. Komarine Romdenh-Romluc said, "Phenomena are vague Something-or-others that invite further exploration. As one explores them, they take shape as things that others could also discover" (2011, p. 18). I have perceived my phenomena as "vague Something-or-others that invite further exploration". I have determined in my wonderings that various possibilities might exist for others if I am successful in my explorations, with me as an adult in particular working environments that differ from other workplaces in form and content. Might universality be

attained through examination of my known, with a transfer of understandings to other contexts, if I effectively express my meanings?

If I agree that, “The object of phenomenological investigation is the phenomenal field: the worldly region perceived, as presented to the perceiver” (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011, p. 35), then I might be entering a common space for perceptions containing shared meaning. My perceptions of the particular could then have the potential to inform others, in their disparate worlds. Perhaps, then, contexts for events hold less importance than any ensuing exploration. It could be that as I unfold my understandings the whole is, and becomes, unity (Bohm, 1985/2001). Could this be the “soulful space” (Todres, 2004, p. 1), where universality exists, where vulnerability is accepted and celebrated through shared pain?

As I bring forth imposed force on clay, my memories and hopes, which create my soulful space (Todres, 2004), feed my fingers. I focus visually and tactilely on the material. The smell and sound of the clay is present, but at this time in the creation of a form, these qualities are deemed as less important whilst my focus, my intentionality, is on the possibilities of physical creation. Within this process of perception, all my sensations are not instantaneously, consciously engaged, but I still possess a sense of the nature of the clay.

In view of this, my perception of the clay is bounded by the horizons of my judgement. I am aware of other facets whilst being less engaged with them, by my choice. I exist in the *sfumato* (blurrings) as I move towards the *soglia* of creation and formation of the new, my perceptions evident through the choices I have made. I have looked towards the umbra and out into the penumbra and have seen resemblances and proximities. The resemblances echo that which I have already apprehended in life experience. The proximities hint to the similarities held between the particular *noesis* and that of others, *noesis* being “...the intentional acts by which we intend things: perceptions...judgings, rememberings” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 60). I search

for a meaning of *noema* for my self as perceiver within the phenomenological attitude, *noema* described as "...the thing being thought or the thing we are aware of" (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 61). In my inquiries I look to that on which I have focussed and have grappled with forms and prior understandings towards gaining a sense of my whole. Can I realise the order that is inherent in the interrelationships, as they inhabit in-between-ness comprised of that which exists around it and me, within *sfumato*? Merleau-Ponty spoke of the tension between the perceived and the perceiver, where,

The unity of the object is based on the foreshadowing of an imminent order which is about to spring upon us a reply to questions merely latent in the landscape. It solves a problem set only in the form of a vague feeling of uneasiness.

(Merleau-Ponty, 2008, p. 20).

Might I gain insight into this uneasiness "based on foreshadowing" and thus move towards a sense of finishedness—or unfinishedness?

### **Chasing flight**

From early events of family disruption and loss and my own interpretive use of memory, I have quested towards meaning. Might it be that I have foreshadowed my philosophical path with my unceasing venture for happiness, as elaborated by Aristotle, yearning for human excellence, knowing "By Human Excellence we mean not that of a man's body but that of his soul; for we call Happiness a working of the Soul" (Aristotle, 1923/n.d., loc. 632/4264). Is Aristotle's happiness a conception of finishedness? Have I been searching for finishedness, or happiness, or both as one? If so, is it possible for any human to attain and am I doomed in my journey?

I have chosen only three from many events for this exploration of possibilities. By remembering these events I have made them choice-worthy (Lear, 2004, p. 9). I have designated the people involved as choice-worthy. I



have considered the events and the people as notable in my pursuit of finishedness, if that is what I am pursuing, which seems to indicate a pursuit of happiness. The events included here are my 'on-the-way events', feeding both my anxieties and my aspirations, as I journey towards that which I cannot yet see.

Do havens exist within the scope I have explored? This word, 'haven', returns readily to my examinations, as regularly as I physically seek them. The word originates from the harbour serenity available to seagoing ships. If I am a ship under sail, I know I have discovered a range of havens to soothe me but I must question how safe they might be for me. Are they all worthy spaces for my contemplation? Are they safe only because I have assigned to them a certain virtue? Are these havens and my need for them indicative of my unfinishedness? Are the waters of these havens comprised of memories or 'presents', where 'presents' denotes living the moment prior to remembrance? Or do I turn to these with a more discerning presence of current living, accepting and celebrating change and growth?

If I am living with discernment, is it possible for me to live a contemplative life that is in a state of continuous present-ness, or are these waters of memories, of present-nesses, too deep for me? Might I uncover connectedness that could bring me towards finishedness? Could it be that if I grow in mind, the waters would calm and then, though seemingly boundless to me in their end, become open to my navigation? Aristotle said,

And whereas the incidents of chance are many, and differ in greatness and smallness, the small pieces of good or ill fortune evidently do not effect the balance of life...nobleness shines through when a man bears contentedly many and great mischances not from insensibility to pain but because he is noble and high-spirited...

For the [woman] who is truly good and sensible bears all fortunes, we presume, becomingly, and always does what is noblest under the circumstances.

(Aristotle, 1923/n.d., loc. 584/4264)

Perhaps in these waters I might celebrate my havens of metaphor that have provided a framework for my life, existing within my artistic life. They are not my whole life—they are expressions of the yearnings of a life held. My havens exist due to the cracks I have endured, which I continue to endure as I create and choose *soglia* of my daily living.

### **At the cracks**

At the cracks—at the

Edges—the possibilities are given.

The possibilities—the choices.

The choices—the direction.

The capacities.

The embodied is exposed

The exposures

The creativity the creation

The innovation the new

The path forward

The inspiration

The imagination

The wisdom.

(Miller, 2011)

If I recognise my havens, I am seeing, perceiving and acknowledging them—I am naming, within my seeing as I enact sight-in-action. If I thus regard seeing, then seeing might be a manner of doing-ness prior to a more overt physical action of the body. I return to da Vinci as he explored his world. He saw, labelled and explained. Comprised of artistic technique, his world was

fed by observation of the self and its mechanisms. I applied my interpretation of da Vinci's discourses on perception (da Vinci, 1883/n.d., pp. 50-55) on a leisurely walk as I illustrate the relevance of his visual perception descriptions to such an everyday, commonplace occurrence as walking the dog.

I perceive the area around me. I look ahead. My dog is in close proximity to me as we walk in unison. Around me the trees merge into greens of many shades, the further ahead I look the more greens and shadows, the more potentialities. I look close to myself, my dog trotting beside and see the greyness of the road, the texture of the path and the small weeds that punctuate. I cannot see ahead when I am looking beside. I see only that on which I focus, the edges blurred until I shift sight to include other spaces. Then those edges become clear and new edges appear.

(Miller, 2014)

da Vinci examined the effect of distance, proximity, light, shade and dark on the eye's perception. I have transposed his investigations into a scenario of daily functioning to reflect an awareness of processes through which meaning-making might be gained, if guided by his observations. Through his manner of seeing, which is deeply observant, I wonder if I might attain a sense of connectedness, that might aid my philosophical journey into finishedness—or happy unfinishedness?

### **Finishedness and Unfinishedness**

I find finishedness as “brought to an end; completed; no longer useful or valued; ruined; expert or accomplished” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). This is the ‘entelechy’ of Aristotle, a term included by Leibniz, who commented,

Aristotle...gave to the soul the generic name of ‘Entelechy’ or Act. This word ‘Entelechy’ apparently takes its origin from the Greek word signifying ‘perfect’...Act is a realization of potency. (Leibniz, 1951/1996, loc. 2997/7874)

‘Entelechy’ is a realised act, a doing-ness, something which has come into

being. Would this mean that to act, to do, could be a way of perfection? And if so, could that mean that unfinished-ness could be perfection, since it is always in the process of becoming? My quest for understanding of finishedness and unfinishedness is foreshadowed by a crumbling of my preconceptions of these words.

Leibniz added perfection and the doing of a thing—“realization of potency”—to my comprehension of finishedness. I have included the prefix ‘un-’ to gain its contrary meaning, finding unfinishedness encompassing such concepts as finding no end, still useful and valued, undamaged, ingénue or learner (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). It is also identified as imperfection and un-readiness—which is a revelation to me. I think to myself in the light of this discovery, surely to be unfinished is a far greater thing than to be finished?

Freire discussed unfinishedness at length, and said that, “It is in our becoming that we constitute our being so. Because the condition of becoming is the condition of being” (Freire, 2001, p. 38-39). Has my journey been as commendable and as normal as Freire has implied? As I have struggled to make sense of my self through the consideration of my lived experiences, have I been in the process of becoming, maybe of becoming something other than what I have seemed to be? Convinced of the human’s capacity to learn, Freire saw unfinishedness as possibility, potential, hope-filled and inspirational. It is not an end, but the promise holds its joy. “I hold that my own unity and identity, in regards to others and to the world,” said Freire, “constitutes my essential and unrepeatable way of experiencing myself as a cultural, historical and unfinished being in the world, simultaneously conscious of my unfinishedness” (2001, p. 51). Could I, too, aspire to this? Or could I already be this?

Freire’s humanity and compassion for the individual’s path echoed the role of the philanthropist or the art-appreciator who not only actively

supported those creating art, but also continued their personal meaning-making through engagement with others. There seems a bond between self-creation and art creation. If art-making strives towards wholeness of perception for a human, and a human person strives from imagination to manifestation in their daily living, a life in totality might be viewed in the same way—as a creation towards full expression, towards a finishedness, which may be unfinishedness. This quality of finishedness might be attained when an individual decides her edge has been reached—the *soglia* of her care and capacity for growth. If she is considered as a work of art, would there be an end other than that determined by her own will? If art could be a conscious expression of her life, could her unfolded and unfolding life exist as a conscious expression of art? Would such a thing be dependent upon her intending of events, that is, the intention with which she might engage aspects of her existence?

### **Intending through the swell**

The philosophical applications of ‘intention’ greet me as I attempt clarification of my questions and seek for answers. I have aimed for epistemological clarity—that is, through making meaning, I wish to build knowledge of my self and of ‘the other’ as agents of intention and action within particular professional settings. In the swell of my events, my intending has steered my progress.

In applying the phenomenological concept of intending and intentionality, I refer to my metaphors. As I am “intending” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 8) clay, a painting or the sea, I am presenting a degree of understanding in this “conscious relationship” which is a phenomenological process according to Sokolowski. I am conscious of an object or event, but does that mean I am immediately “intending” it? Or does the intending come only after a process of examination, leading to some knowledge of the object’s or event’s nature?

It seems a “conscious relationship” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 8) implies some process, not only a witnessing, viewing or observing, but a conscious connection with the object or relationship. If this is the case, if consciousness is a process of taking in impressions, may it also infer that possessing consciousness of a thing automatically implies an inherent phenomenological attitude?

If consciousness is akin to a phenomenological attitude, are we then all philosophers?

This question draws me to other queries involving categorisation of human activity, skill and endeavour, such as—

If I am moved by an event and write a poem, am I a poet?

If I question a process of growth in nature and create a test experiment, am I a scientist?

If I notice the colour of the sky at twilight and explore colour on canvas in emulation, am I an artist?

If these labels are legitimate, does this mean the possession of a capacity or desire for interpretation and exploration automatically leads to an ability? I have clambered through terms, processes, arguments, discussions, dialogues and disparate ideas and have decided the intention possessed by the doer seems to determine the label. If this is a legitimate summation, then if I pursue poetry, art, science or philosophy with enough enthusiasm and will to learn—if I focus on my goal with strength and authenticity, I might then become an artist, poet, scientist or philosopher.

### **Penumbral shadings**

Merleau-Ponty (2008, p. 20) noted the blending of spaces that can occur with distance and focus. This might well be his metaphor for

phenomenological intending. I have applied his schema to my perception of clay, and if I adhere to his way, I would see the clay, notice its clay-ness, then conceive of what its form reminded me, or what it could seem in relation to its surroundings. I could apply this to my narratives, and I would then see them as manifestations of a whole, before separating their differences and developing more clarity of sight of a particular—that ultimately creates a whole. I move from what seems obvious, from *chiaroscuro* (dark/light), into the *sfumato* (blurrings), with both umbra and penumbra concealing and revealing, then surface with new understandings beyond analysis, beyond the *soglia*.

The *sfumato* with its umbra and penumbra can contain the mystery. Around the bounds of the penumbra, the indistinct edgings might become clearer as new ones appear, sitting on the verge of visual perception in breathless, noiseless anticipation. This is the tension between the known that has been experienced, and the unknown, the yet to be. This is the space between the breathing in, and the breathing out, into the new, letting go of the past.

I believe my narratives demand such a movement. I perceived within my focus, concentrated on that which I judged at the time as being the ‘right’ thing, then dealt with the consequences of my choices. My perception was in *sfumato*, blurred, my consciousness in the *chiaroscuro* of focus, where I chose to be at that time. The central focus determined the entire experience. If another focus had been made, experiences may have been entirely different—for example, if I had been flattered by the man’s attention, if I had focussed instead on the young students’ good choices, if I had withdrawn into my thoughts rather than observed nature’s movement, I would now, perhaps, be in a different intellectual space. My penumbra and *soglia* have been formed by my interaction with phenomenon of my choosing, where I have chosen the framework of sensations. My sensations are the parameters of my perception. My view is perhaps existential, for I embrace thoughts of the unknowable in the framework of the familiar. If

phenomenology could be viewed as within the existential meaning of the lived world, then I am attempting to work within this tradition.

### **A pause in space**

Winds can assert power, glimpses of grey whipped intermittently into white frenzy, sea and sky in stormy harmony. I slip from thought to thought, rising and diminishing as the wind. A continuity of force is evident in the rhythms within and without my mind. To harness the integrity of the impulse and so to discern meaning is my goal. The wind cleanses in its wake, it awakens, causing movement amongst creatures and vegetation, it stirs and lifts, repositions and reconstitutes. If thought can be as wind, let it be the same—stirring and illuminating, reminding and revitalising, awakening those in its wake.

I observe the notions, feel the forces gathering, and pause. Around me the effects are tangible even as they are in process of becoming. In silence I await the next movement, anticipating the coming of the gust of earth breath—of thought. If I were to sit within the silence, without anticipation and only with presence, what would happen? Would I cease to think? Would the creative force of movement be dismissed, ignored, therefore made impotent? Would the ideas stop? What then? If in the silence I thought nothing, what then? Is this the soulful space that may exist in silence, which may be peace? Can I attain this space through insight (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 181), which is insight based on intensity of imagination as a means to expose the essential?

Each day a challenge is renewed. Relationships swerve then collide, swept by this wind of thought, as thought pre-empts action, then actions, then words, erupt between. I am immersed in this sweeping as it drives my actions in ways I believe I understand at the time, in the moment, but question in recollection. The relationships, in recollection, seem repetitious



in their impulse. They seem not isolated, but reconstituted, their similarity with previous interactions evident when I examine them, aiming for passionate clarity. My passion for understanding underlies the impulse of recollection. Perhaps, in silence, comprehension may come and the truth will reveal itself. I seek possibilities for this comprehension as my head fills with the thoughts of other times, other contexts and people. Could it be that a comparison can be made, despite the press of variables that might exist for each examination? I wonder how I can attain understanding when so much seems not as it was before.

So sweetly in gusts the birch seeds fly. Tiny, they are propelled together, then, as the gust releases and subsides, their own paths are made, following every possible direction. Movement seems their objective, their delicately circular vehicle encompassing the essence of the next silver birch, landing in soil with purpose, but without hope, for hope does not create, it only buoys and promises, makes bearable the unknown. For a seed, its purpose is its possibility. Perhaps where there is no thought, there is no need for hope (Sardello, 2002). There is only possibility. A seed possesses possibility in its nature as a seed. It is fertile, or not. It is mobile, or not. It finds fecundity, or not. It is a seed. It is nothing else. In its “seed-ness” lies the possibility of transformation, but conditions must be as they need to be for this to occur. If thought were a seed, could it remain an unquestioning silence contained within a capsule of safety? Would it be content to be as it is, or would it seek always, in the silence or the movement, its possibilities?

In a seed’s possibilities lies its unfinishedness. In its unfinishedness could exist its beauty. The promise of fruition exists as surely as a seed is a seed. Could thought, too, transform into that which it must be, with purity of intention and a consequent clarity of purpose? Can unfinishedness be transformed and overcome if thought is authentic in its impulse?

In perception truth may be revealed. I have wondered if perception without thought is possible, if an event, object or living being could be

perceived accurately if its nature was unquestioned. I look to the possibilities of internal silence. If an individual could hold the potential for such inner quiet, perhaps tact, as part of wisdom, could be instant, brimming with thoughtfulness as mindful, instantaneous tact. Could discernment, embodying tact, be instantaneous and instinctive? Might wisdom be contained by mindful-ness, which can only result from presence in the moment and from summation of the past?

No matter the thought, action seems the key to understanding. Is this a symptom of soulful space (Todres, 2004), where vulnerability and authentic action combine for its manifestation? Thoughts inspire and consume, but only through action is meaning-making manifested. To act authentically an examination of action must be taken and for this, thought is necessary and this could form another path to authenticity, which is not an instantaneous response, such as provided by the children and the man in the first and second narrative inquiries. Authenticity might come at times from innocence and naïvety, involving aspects of trust in the external world, as an actor expects words and deeds to be immediately understood by others. The space between thought and action might be so fine as to seem almost absent. Children and many adults seem impulsive—a quality often identified by others as a fragment of thoughtlessness—when they move swiftly to action. In their actions they are authentic, for there is no space between the naming of a situation and the doing in the situation—the noun and the verb are entwined. Is this authenticity valid, or must thought be examined rigorously to expose weakness and if all thought should be examined before action, where does spontaneity lie?

If spontaneity is something to avoid on the path to finishedness, how does this fit with an artistic mode of viewing the world? Is an artistic mode of being based on spontaneity, expressiveness in the moment, and authenticity? A situation could be examined and discernment attained, but must the process involve consciousness, mindful-ness and presence to allow authentic passion that could enliven possibilities? Is unfinishedness only

revealed and re-revealed if transformed through thorough investigation—is contemplation more important than the event in the phenomenological mode of being?

### **Tangled in the seaweed**

“Living in the possible” is suggested through the imagination of a life. This proposal by Robert Sardello acknowledged the penumbra of experiences, where, “There is always a kind of surplus to any event that we experience, something that goes beyond the content of what has happened” (2002, p. 17). In this surplus I have become entangled and pull it apart in order to anticipate what might be ahead, exploring the fronds and seeking their bed, where commonalities exist in their roots.

Must I always be on the move in order to make meaning, to remain outside of the situation, see it from a distance, rather than reside in it—take up residence? Is it possible to ever perceive an event with clarity in which you have been involved? For, Sardello said, the moment we reside, feel secure, all truth becomes lies (p. 18). Why is this his view? Does it bond with any other? I believe it encompasses and overlaps numerous perspectives already included in this writing, from Bohm to da Vinci. To view things clearly, flexibility and focus are important. Here exists suspension of expectations and use of discernment, rather than judgement. Imagination, enacted via creativity, seems fundamental.

Devotion to teaching, to education, must be accompanied by creative thinking, a constant work of putting the element of reflection into the act of devotion. This kind of thinking is a kind of witnessing. We develop the capacity to witness the act of devotion itself, and that witnessing becomes part of devotion. (Sardello, 2002, p. 30)

It seems to me that to teach effectively, with devotion, I must be present to my own thinking, to interact in all educational forums, present and aware. Could devotion to purpose be related to the feeling of awe?

Yesterday I cried. The words flooded my fingers, but caused such confusion and pain I felt lost in the flow, thoughts swirling and diving for cover from a feverish mind. The tears began with pain and ended with pain and streamed like the rain that forced the silver birch seeds' flight. The sound of tear expression roared like a storm whipping sky and sea. It lasted only the time of a wind burst over lapping waves—it came, then vanished. A pall then sat within me, a silence of exhaustion and reserve. I felt an unreachable silence, distinct in its manifestation and unable to be eased. The pain remained into the evening. It was perceived by others, though I made efforts to explain the lack of enthusiasm and joy at their presence. Am I at these times living within the soulful space, of authenticity and potentiality? Did I enact freedom by allowing the energies within my heart and head to be externalised?

I have examined my tears as a symbol of meaning-making. I have questioned their origin and thought initially of solitude, which I enjoy, particularly when a gift through circumstance, for I have created my physical haven of solitariness and delight in the knowledge of its presence. I generally view solitude with anticipation—I relish it. Alternatively, I relish the eventual end of solitude, with its gift of anticipation. Anticipation of solitude, then anticipation of its end, possess different impulses, both containing gifts, flowing from the same whole, the mother of my inspiration, each part of my aloneness.

My tears were not for my loneliness, but I know that others cry for this. I wish to understand others, but within my identifications and explorations I want to allow for the other, for the *sfumato* (shadowings) that exists behind and beyond my outward expression. If I focus in *chiaroscuro*, only some things are revealed to me. If I go beyond, into the blurrings of my understandings, I

may witness my own options, perceiving bonds between accompanying loneliness and peaceful solitude, which form the whole that is 'being alone'. In aloneness I allow myself space between experience and knowing. Aloneness is my in-between. It is the space at my *soglia*, where I stop, listen, allow, then step beyond.

When consumed by interrogation of my narratives, I find that physical and mental heaviness can be replaced by calm. I make choices and arrangements to ease pressure. Exhaustion still permeates, but not with hopelessness, for it seems to herald a coming into balance—a redefinition of my boundaries that have long been eroded. The balance is tempered by tears, enriched by pain and sustained by anticipation. It tantalises, its subtleties rising with each breath.

In recollection I offer myself to this work.

I have desired space, sun, water, air, moving, my body craving outward expression of action and word. New connections have been forged, offering delight and inspiration. Tired habits of relationship have begun to drain away, storms weathered and new spaces formed in fertility. At last the old seems to recede towards reconfiguration as my *chiaroscuro* refocusses and the resulting umbra asserts itself through my determined will. The pain I feel is the shedding of this, as subtle stagnation is recognised and in its recognition, is transformed into newness. My exhaustion, waxing and waning like moon shadows on my fragment of predawn coast, is a response to change as it melds with relief and quiet joy. A reverence for old lessons replaces bitterness and anger.

To each step I bestow a new name. The names are joy-in-pain, creativity-in-recollection, productivity-in-presence. By day I am aware that wind still swells, but seeds and waves can be settled. They can be stirred, lifted, distributed. The rain has moistened the air and soil, creating unexpected

havens, seeds in soil that was, till now, vacant, though rich in promise. The sea has received the rain's purity and amalgamated the tastes. Trees shaking and writhing tremble instead, gently, periodically, all violence absent in their force. The faces in spaces between branches and leaves reveal themselves in quick glances, leaves framing and forming, then vanishing into slate grey sea.

Unconscious expression of beauty creates its own country—my world watches as shapes and colours flow. My world is as clay. I cannot know as I begin what form will result, as clay's yearning grasps hands and commands expression. I am caught in the spontaneity of expression, fuelled by will for creation. My desire to create is authentic and I am passionate about the formation of this clay—this life—into whatever reveals itself to me. Though dense, clay moves with fluidity then is crushed as I begin again, until the form is revealed, material and imagination marrying. The relationship between energies and qualities grows, changes, collapses, rises again, upward and outward, shaping air and the creator's breath. A fold in the clay is eliminated—what if it had remained? Would beauty have lived? Or with its forced departure, has this thing become more beautiful, clay's suffering revealing increased potential?

My plans are for creation. I do not know what will result. I am innocent of the outcome while I am captured by desire for this interchange between clay and myself. My authenticity rests with my desire. I am pursuing that which I wish to pursue at this time, in this place, with this material and my outcome remains a mystery.

Were the children and the man fuelled in the same way? Did they pursue their desire to create some thing—utilising what materials they had (the context and me) to form their own artworks of lived experience? Did either the children or the man conceive of any outcome? If so, were they successful, in their own perceptions? By speaking of a collective in the same sentence as the one, the man, am I demeaning the man's value, or giving it more, since I have not delineated between the children? Have I continued to relegate all

people within my inquiry to an I-It relationship, rather than moving forward into connectedness and the possibility of peace?

To flow with life, my ability to let go past perceptions and to allow the senses to be fed in other ways, ways of which I have been unaccustomed, may be a path for clarity. Immediately prior to the forthcoming narrative inquiry, which encompassed a year and ended a culmination of six years of subtle anxiety, I lived in the past. All my thinking was tuned to already lived experiences. I had no concept of the future as a new entity. It existed only as a continuation of what I believed I already knew. Years of observation and pain, I believed, gave me intense insight into possibilities. I did not include surprise and spontaneity in my version of the world. That did exist, I knew, but it was a tiny impulse in my world-view. I believed my world could be controlled through my lived experiences, through the years of wisdom I felt I had gleaned from the varied scenarios from a varied life. I did not allow for anyone or anything else, not in my deepest thoughts. Outwardly I embraced difference and possibilities whilst inwardly I trembled with fear of change, fear of my own difference and fear of the unknown. Thrust into a decision based on a statement from a distrusted source, I flew away. I chose to leave my haven. In this manner, I freed myself of the boundaries I had set. It was profoundly uncomfortable.

### **Immersion and dispersion**

My mind and my world are correlated with one another. Things do appear to me, things truly are disclosed, and I, on my part, do display, both to myself and to others, the way things are. In this writing I have continued to disclose my intentionality as a being amidst other beings. Sokolowski said, “By discussing intentionality, phenomenology helps us to reclaim a public sense of thinking, reasoning, and perception. It helps us to reassume our human condition as agents of truth” (2000, p. 12.) I have replaced “truth” with ‘meaning’ and believe this to be my crux of phenomenological study. I have immersed myself in the contradictions and confirmations of the first two

narrative inquiries and now move onward, with a different impulse.

When I consider any relationship, I see the modes of being in motion. Communication flows and forms, maybe retracting, then diminishing. It may solidify then be compressed into a tiny space, out of mind, to forget or to remember. A particular experience was the precursor to my narratives already explored here. I have struggled from this prior event, clogged with mud and debris. Through phenomenological interrogation, I believe some of the mud has lost its consistency and the debris has begun to wash away—the storming has passed and heralds the new. In this space, after the storm, I embody by my final, concluding narrative.

I include another poem as I attempt expression of my thoughts and views. I find the process of artistic creation aids bracketing of myself from an experience, for I feel less connected from the experience, although embedded within it. My *I* (Buber, 2011) recedes as words surge forth. I surrender to the words, I am engulfed by them and they flow until they stop—and I never know when they will stop, but a sense of completion flows in as quickly as the words and I am compelled to obey.

### **Between mountain and sea**

And still more tears.

It seems I have cried my way through this year.

Streams of salt down unyielding skin

pouring

down into the valley of darkness

So they flow and finally settle,

more and more.

But what occurs when streams fall,



waterfalls,  
into a gap,  
from edges,  
in?  
The space is slowly filled  
the level rises  
till creatures beneath  
reach heights unattainable  
in their limited dreams of darkness.  
Tears may fill those gaps, water meeting the edges,  
fill-  
then bridge the edges in soothing waves.  
The depths, still present, hold the way above,  
become vessels for possibilities.  
With the tears the new may be forged  
gently rocking on surface, as, floating,  
the creatures view the light  
to which they, in ignorance, remain complacently unconscious  
fill the flow fill their space, creating new sights.

(Miller, 2011)

A completed poem can bring clarity to me for a moment, an event or an object. What then occurs if the flow from one stimulus to another is not stemmed, if there is no completion, no fulfilment, no halting? Science recognises the flow of osmosis. What occurs if one being allows a continual flowing outwards towards another without erecting defences? Can unity be achieved—which may encompass understanding—if there are defences, or must there exist boundlessness between, to attain understanding? Can boundlessness, in fact, lead to personal elimination?

With the *chiaroscuro* the light (focus) changes. The direction of the light (focus) upon the form exposes differing potentialities (shadings). These presences determine possible perceptions. Is *sfumato* (blurrings) a way for grasping understanding, or for unregulated surrender? Can I emulate that of which Bohm (2004) spoke, where,

Every division we make is the result of how we think. In actuality, the whole world merges into one...Fragmentation is one of the difficulties of thought...we are constantly producing that sort of problem...by the way we go on with our thought...the point is, thought produces results, but thought says it didn't do it. And that is the problem.

(Bohm, 2004, p. 10-11)

Bohm discussed ways in which we create and respond in our world. He examined our processes and suggested a manner in which judgement could be allayed when in dialogue with others. I revisit the second narrative, and conclude that in dialogue with the man, I brimmed with pre-judgements—I judged him. I did not, I believe, see him as a “Thou”. I swallowed words and consequently did ‘good-girl’ action, not right action. I express good-girl action as that which can be encouraged by families and communities breeding accommodating and obedient wives, mothers and employees. I believe I was raised to enact good-girl action, obeying, suppressing responses, accepting and surrendering. My judgements were based on prior events and were applied unconsciously and consciously as I navigated life experiences. I did not put aside my pre-judgements and allow the man to exist as his own subject. I perceived him as embodying characteristics I had encountered through years and reacted to achieve my freedom from all experiences in which I had felt threatened by men. He offered the problem, but I did not take the initiative, instead relying on my own weaknesses, as developed over years of obedience, to judge his behaviour. As a conscious being, I have a responsibility to bring learning from and towards others and my self. With these thoughts I continue attempts at hermeneutic demystification, exploring as deeply as I can, using my imagination to create and recreate, exploring eidetic intuitions as imaginations for the essential nature of a thing, concerning my events.

I have judged this undertow in which I was struggling for breath. I look again to the word “bracket”, finding another manner of description, accepting that, “We put the world and everything in it in brackets...Brackets are the quotation marks of philosophy. They express the kind of distance we take to things when we are engaged in philosophy” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 193). This has been a storm-ridden way for me. But do all paths include possibilities for bright-lit self-affirmation? Could it be that this path was ultimately ‘the good’ for all? Could it be that the subsequent understandings achieved resulted in beneficial outcomes, perhaps for some who seemed completely uninvolved at the time? I look to Krishnamurti,

The distant look includes the near but looking at the near does not include the distant. Our life is spent in the immediate, in the superficial. Life in totality gives attention to the fragment but the fragment can never understand the totality...Of the little we are certain, in it we are secure...But actually we can never be certain of anything.

(2003, p. 118)

I have included a fragment to gain understanding of the whole. I have explored the way of part and whole, where the part is contained by the whole, and the whole is contained by the part (Bortoft, 2007). I have looked before me and ignored the distance. I have thus attempted to comprehend a situation that encompassed a lifetime of experiences. Yet I remain uncertain. From my stance, within the first and second narrative inquiries, I have looked out, towards the *soglia*, then fallen, before straining upwards and into a new relationship with myself. I gained insight into the power of memory and the clarity possible in anxiety. I explored guilt associated with taking action and the unknowability of outcomes.

These slices, these narratives so far, are part of the whole. Each slice contains my reality, my meaning-making. Within this meaning may lie wisdom for action. Ambiguously, action may precede wisdom, when unfinishedness necessitates choices, for without choices there can be no attainment. I believe that in this space of unfinishedness can exist freedom.

Through *chiaroscuro* I move, forming the blurrings of my understandings. I have made decisions that became judgements and moved closer to my *soglia*. I wonder if towards finishedness I may travel if I allow my threshold to speak, for its speech is in the space before I act. Can I listen in the absence of love in this place, or must I be aware of love, before attainment of a mean, which I place between listening and acting, might draw me towards peace?

At the *soglia* the possibilities may also be deceptive if I am viewing them from a position of judgement rather than discernment. If my seeing exists in the absence of judgement, I believe there is a chance to perceive what is the good choice at that time, for that unfolding.

In *phronesis*, which is the path towards Aristotle's "Grand End", truths, which are my meanings, might exist. Aristotle explains as, "Reason directed by Goodness or Goodness informed by Reason" (Aristotle, 1923/n.d., loc. 4154/4264). Practical knowledge, claimed Aristotle, encompasses the scenario and the event, where right action is transformed from that which may be considered universally right (moral) to that which is suited to the particular situation—set in time, space and energy. Tact as discernment, and common sense, as right action, might meet to form a new understanding. Through the *chiaroscuro*, the human moves, watching, noticing the mix of forms and textures, the *sfumato* (shadowings) evident in subtle blends of communication and language. As the *soglia* is reached, concepts of meaning-making create the bridge upon which I imagine ascension towards new, stronger, deeper knowing, perhaps towards finishedness.

The final scenario reflects, I believe, a culmination of experience, thought, opportunity and action. With each re-reading, I am elevated into appreciation and confident renewal.

## Chapter 6 Third narrative: Of transcendence

Like clay subjected to external influences, bearing consequences of manipulations, I have, as teacher, struggled with impulses and tried to resolve burrs and irritations. I am conscious that I work clay like I work relationships—I pull, twist, reform, discard, allow or caress. The relationship in this particular narrative required minimal intervention in order to form a thing of substance, strength and beauty. As companions, I know my colleague and I created a space of safety, creativity and celebration. Gadamer spoke of possibilities in interrelationships when we are open in thought and feeling, in naming and doing, hermeneutically.

...the way we experience one another, the way we experience historical traditions, the way we experience the natural givenness of our existence and of our world, constitute a truly hermeneutic universe, in which we are not imprisoned, as if behind insurmountable barriers, but to which we are opened. (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 215/8818)

In my collegial and teaching experiences, I continually re-form my sense of self—it is modified through confrontations and delights. I am not ‘imprisoned’ when in this ‘hermeneutic universe’. I am not formed in one way, as a building, or a fired ceramic piece. My path is shared as I move along the space of manifestation of ideas, and I need not be forever cast in one form. Perhaps such self-discernment might be indicative of finishedness in unfinishedness. What might trigger recognition of self-potentialities?

By characterising tacit understanding as an object, as an artist when expressing her meanings, a distance might be formed between the known and the yet-to-be-known. When working with clay, the will of the manipulator is imposed upon the material. The subject, applying pressure to the clay, is externalising an inner movement. She is expressing an impulse. She is unfolding the possibilities, presenting them in clay. Even in copying another’s inspiration, the form is made new, for it is created from difference.

Nothing can be hidden of the self if the object is competently, intuitively and mindfully examined. All aspects of the form must come from within the consciousness of the artist, even as yet unnamed. Suspicion that something might be absent from her consciousness aids her apprehension of that which is present—a reciprocal relationship between what she sees and has not yet seen has been created. So, as with the artist and her clay, I respond to lived experiences. I become an artist of my own learning, conscious and suspicious of what is present and what is not.

Gadamer expressed his understanding of the potential nature of being and of potentially being human. Our nature is not only based on the lauded purity of scientific process, but on the completeness of an individual's ability to perceive the world. This completeness is not only determined by the person's logical, factual method of operating, as a means of living, but also by the individual's knowledge of self in relation to others, a self that embodies knowledge built from life experiences (Johnson, 2007). The self becomes a living totality of all influences and might be understood, I believe, through the ways that one might respond aesthetically to works of art. Is it possible to recognise self-potentialities through comprehending the quality of human existence as inherent and embedded, whether consciously or unconsciously, when an individual's aesthetic understanding occurs as one moves, as a human being in contact with others?

The following narrative signifies a culmination of experiences after years of being at my *soglia* (threshold) as a teacher. It is illustrative of one manner in which my self-recognition has been energised—my state of in-betweenness released as I connected professionally and emotionally with a colleague teacher. I was opened to joy and no longer felt imprisoned in a professional world I seemed to misunderstand. As I strove for perfection as teacher, it seemed at last, with this particular colleague, my striving was recognised, understood and celebrated. Feeling nurtured, I thrived. With her class, I attempted connection with a different age group through my enthusiasm for

the arts. The space emerged for my entry into self-confidence and self-acceptance as a teacher.

### **Afloat**

Joy seemed to pulse between us. “Really? I have you again this year?” Her smile sparkled with her eyes. “We are going to have so much fun!”

This teacher and I shared a vision—to inspire every student with delight in their own writing creativity, at whatever level within which they experienced and expressed grammatical understandings, word articulation or spellings. We wished to penetrate into the depths of the students’ thinking and unveil individual understandings, particularly concerning empathy and authenticity.

In initial planning time, the teacher and I faithfully followed our ideal towards dialogic involvement in creativity and agreed that a poetic form seemed most harmonious for our shared purpose—forgiving in its form and structure, inspired by personal interests, experiences and understandings, with word pictures and word rhythm offering accessible foundations for the word games that are possible when a writer is relaxed and motivated. With celebration of their efforts, students’ self-belief was evident in their group interchanges, questioning and their spontaneous comments, and students left our quiet room with the same sparkle I saw in my colleague’s eyes. The poetic form was a focus for buoying their self-belief as they completed primary schooling and for fuelling other literacy work, whether written, drawn, vocalised or dramatised.

Each week I arrived in the room with enthusiasm and anticipation. I planned carefully, choosing either visual or literary artworks to inspire. I endeavoured listening with all my being to everything said by the students, sometimes commenting on potentials for future creations. In response, they smiled and glowed.

It was not always easy. Some groups of boys were initially lost in their manliness and could not embrace the subtlety of the process, based as it was on openness, co-operation and honouring of others' ideas. Gradually they relaxed as I attempted to link their individual perceptions and applauded authentic sensitivity. As I watched and listened, I noted their interests and incorporated these, where feasible, to motivate their writing, finding prose, poems and visual art depicting the particular facets of their pride and obsessions.

The class teacher's support and understanding of my approach energised me. The students clambered to be in 'the group', voicing their disappointment if it was not their week for involvement. Every session I delved into my own verbal expressions, interrogated my own manner of engagement, tried to uncover my misunderstandings of their words and their misunderstandings of mine, then rallied, poked and prodded myself and the students through imaginative engagement. Gradually a shared space of trust arose from hours of reassurance and our mutual celebrations, an in-between-ness where each student's concerns entwined with my hopes.

Above all, I wished for an atmosphere of dialogue, for non-judgemental, patient and compassionate listening within every group, each person encouraging and acknowledging every skill brought to light in a place of safety. As adult, teacher and philosopher, I possessed the knowledge, but strove for transcending wisdom via a dialogic haven, one in which our words could be gently crafted into fluid poetic flows,

The class teacher recognised and validated our path—and rejoiced.

### **Unfurling fronds in waters deep**

I viewed interaction between the students and myself as an interchange of positivity, hope and creativity towards freedom. Eisner (2002, p. 24) stated, "that education is a process of learning how to become the architect of your



own experience and therefore learning how to create yourself'. This class and collegial experience allowed me to feel empowered, as "architect of (my) own experience". I felt I had to some degree attained the 'Beautiful Dream' for which I was yearning in the first classroom scenario of Chapter 3. Although this situation was completely different to that of the initial classroom based narrative, with I as visitor, sent in hope to urge, inspire and move students in small groups towards particular, specific educational outcomes, I could still relish my own growth in understanding and the tacit presence of student interest and willingness.

Most of these students were familiar with me in some capacity, over my years at the school. I had continually questioned my own being-in-the-world, in all areas of my life and it seemed at this school, after years of self-doubt, I was gradually accepting this being. With newfound confidence I explored my world and attempted daily to contribute to school-wide emotional wellbeing, examining the manner in which I interacted and purifying as much as I could, my thoughts, words and actions. I claimed a share in responsibility and decided to greet everyone I met, every day, with a smile. Consequently, after five years of my smiles, most students in this class were at least a little familiar with me. They were also witness to the rapport between their teacher and myself and I believe their respect for their teacher flowed over and around me.

During each group session we explored a particular curriculum focus with a variety of creative approaches, including imaginative, teacher-created visualisations, a range of poetic forms or visual artworks. We all wrote our own first thoughts concerning the week's focus, each student and I minimising self-editing by writing without hesitation for a few minutes. I did my best to model desired action, concentrating with intent, with unguarded physical gesture as I sat, looking into space when I needed to find the appropriate word, stopping and closing my eyes for a minute between inspirations, or re-reading my words to aid continued flow. We then looked at our ideas, these first impressions, isolating then bringing together the most

interesting in each student's work for their further elaboration. In this way it was possible for me to identify and encourage some of the students' individual personal interests, knowledge and understandings. The students related in individual ways to the focus and in the sharing we discovered together that particular facets were evident for each student, no one sharing exact meanings. If a student had copied another's work we discovered that even in copying, difference was exposed in the manner in which students accentuated points within their writing, expressing aspects of their particular natures. I wished to allow expression for each student's being-in-the-world whilst embedding my own being in our time together.

On day in the final term of the school year I decided to story-tell a self-created story for the students. I was aiming to introduce other possibilities for expression of their understandings of natural disasters into their science unit. In a series of smaller groupings, students closed their eyes, or otherwise minimised distractions, as I tried to form an imaginative space for their writing. I was sparse in my improvisation, avoiding adjectives and emotive language as I described verbally the process of a coastal earthquake. The story was three minutes long.

The students listened well once they overcame the embarrassment and threat of having their eyes closed during the telling. Some did not close their eyes, but this act was secondary to the capacity of each student to listen to the short story whilst applying their own imaginative images. Following the verbal telling, and drawing from understandings I had gathered of the students' interests, I encouraged differing perspectives in their expression of the disaster, such as different time periods, from ancient through to modern, different personal perspectives, too, such as from a child's view, a mother's, father's, or as the earthquake itself. Some students were of Aboriginal or Maori lineage and were inspired into legend.

The students were proud and created a book for me that they entitled *Poetic Poems*. They presented it to me with such pride. It was deeply moving

for me and I felt at that moment that perhaps I had impacted in a positive manner upon these precious individuals with their already burgeoning life experiences. I valued our journey towards creation, but conceded to the tradition of ‘culminating performance’ as the students embraced me in their grins.

I include a piece from a boy of proud Maori descent.

I am Rauamoko a god of this land if  
you don't respect me I will shake  
the earth to cause noise like  
thunder from earthquake balls of  
lava and rocks I will make you  
suffer everything that you created  
I will destroy and you will be angry  
at me but I won't care but if you  
respect this land and do not  
vandalise our land I will stop I am  
Ruaumoko I have responded I am  
looking out to you I can see  
buildings destroyed and roads crack  
I can hear my brother Tawhiri send  
him wind over through I can hear  
people crying because the land is  
heart I did this to teach them  
a lesson you deal with the  
consequences of your actions.

(Anon 2013)

This boy was immensely proud of his work. Our research on Maori myth had intoxicated him and he had responded to this by sharing an extremely precious book with me, written and published a century ago. This

voluminous book traced the lineage of the boy's ancestors. We looked at the names and I listened to his explanations. I felt encompassed by the power of his pride and his sense of connectedness within a noble Maori family. His poem communicated this and we celebrated its power, especially after his poem reading, as he savoured each phrase and seemed to grow with the energy of his own words. I have faithfully recounted his poem here and I continue to enjoy the ambiguity of some spellings (*heart* instead of *hurt*, *lessen* for *lesson*). Throughout, I wished to minimise his anxiety towards writing, which had regularly bubbled then exploded into apathy or anger. His thought recordings flowed as he flowed with the tide of his passion, avoiding frustration and joyfully completing the task. At this time, he was as a heron, stalking purposefully along the shore, discovering nourishment amongst the shore-driven stones.

This next poem has a different focus and impulse, composed by a confident and engaged female student. She was definite in her textual formatting of her poem.

All I feel is frightened...

Scared and terrified,

I want it all to stop,

I'm so confused,

I'm getting dizzy,

I've lost control, I cant take it anymore,

Everything is rattling underneath me, I take a step, I fall to my feet, I break out in tears,

But I get up and move on.

(Anon, 2013)

This girl expressed potential physical and emotional responses. She used words describing fear and trauma—"scared", "terrified", "confused", "dizzy"—then she transubstantiates these external earthquake effects into internal, personal emotional realisations, a vision of horror to hope—"But I get up and move on". She immersed herself in imaginings, embraced the task

and wrote fluidly. She envisaged viscerally, as if enacting proprioception through her rememberings of her past. Her honesty and clarity aided the expressions of others, giving them permission to display their understandings of fear. Most students offered themselves unconditionally to their creations, accessing their own memories, sometimes, but seldom, spoken. I was entranced by their vivid word pictures and found my *sfumato* yielding with theirs as we moved towards a mutual *soglia*.

I imagine these teacher/student relationships as clay. Such clay would contain no separation between substance and manipulator. Clay shapes—student/teacher interactions—were formed each session. Each fissure, mound or protuberance—revelations of diversity, recognised in magical transformation—brought renewed form and excitement. That which was obvious to teacher and student was enthusiastically brought forth, whilst that which was absent, less visible to us, remained in obscurity, in the darkness of *chiaroscuro* ignored or unrealised, or surfaced in the penumbra, following mutual understandings through dialogue. Our learning was bonded, each educational event unfolding marvellous mysteries, with insights into self and other—where the students and I inhabited both—became a celebration of creativity and commonalities between us all. As I hoped for and attempted to fashion a space allowing that which was as yet unknown to flourish, whilst providing an atmosphere of support, safety, respect, I remained and still maintain mindful of what Greene said, “We are marvellously incomplete” (2001, p. 159).

The students and I together formed a place to express personal beliefs concerning the world. In the following poem, this girl moves from sweetness, into trauma, then beyond. She focussed initially on her dream-like and heavenly existence, dramatically affected by the force of the earthquake, completing the poem with a view to the future.

*Hope*

*I feel the soft soil beneath my feet*

*The clear blue sky above my head*

*The water has never tasted so sweet*

*I feel the sudden shaking*

*The noise sounds like thunderous feet*

*All I can see is the disaster it is making*

*What is this?*

*Why is it happening?*

*All I know is my heart...is gone*

*My lungs are pounding more than ever*

*I have never been so afraid*

*Will this madness ever stop?*

*Why?*

*What have we done...to deserve this fate?*

*It has stopped*

*I feel...*

*Hope*

(Anon, 2013)

The poem has a picturesque form. She chose this particular font and emphasised the strength of her final word with larger font. The result is feminine, delicate, insightful and optimistic, characteristics I know to be possessed by this girl.

There is honour in celebration. I devoted myself as best I could to empathic and insightful communications. Despite my efforts for appreciation of their words, some students felt words were not enough and used drawings to further elaborate, such as for the poem below. This strategy for artistic expression I have used when I believed words were insufficient for depths of meaning I wished to convey. I have felt that sometimes when writing poetry or prose, the writers' absence may be overcome with the inclusion of illustrations, the writing and illustration forming a compatible path for meaning-making.

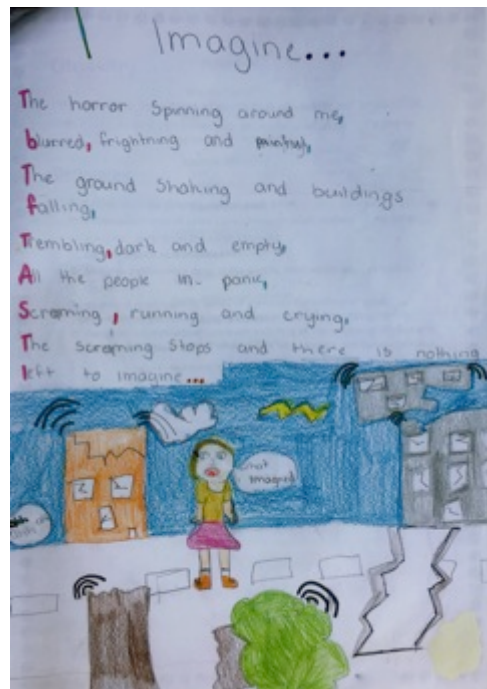


Figure 7a: *Imagine*

At times I found myself encouraging them to embellish their phrases, reassuring, pushing, cajoling, teasing, prompting and supporting. Sometimes I was to rein them in from too much obfuscating. I worked with my own self-consciousness to supply and support as much as they needed. 'Bubble-writing' and strong colours satisfied this girl's path to meaning-making.

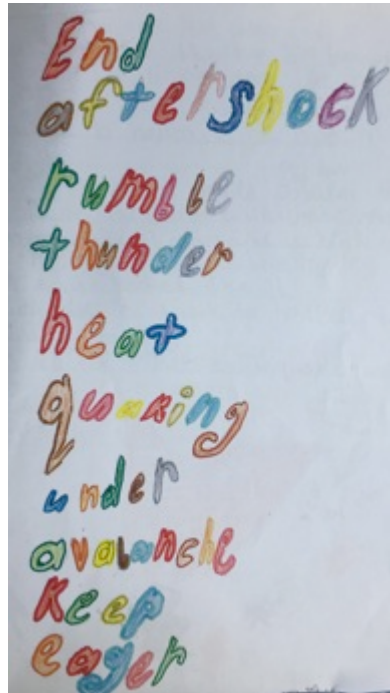


Figure 7b: *End*

Sometimes the students were disrespectful of themselves, their peers and me and we were forced into compromise. One boy caused rupture for me when he alleged a lack of empathy and compassion from me for him. A brilliant boy, expelled from three schools, he did at this particular time rise to the task and recorded brilliance through his poem. Daily I had watched and perceived aspects of his nature as he rampaged, with cleverness and subversion, around the school. I noticed his organisational, mobilising initiatives and willingly followed directives in school-ground inter-changes and imagined such skills in a military context. With as much diplomacy and tact as I could muster in the face of his suspicion, I encouraged him to frame his work with soldiering and Spartan mythology.

### **Spartan Soldier**

Crushed town,

As if Hercules had hurled giant boulders off Mt. Olympus.

Crouched and splintered buildings mixed with fragments of rock and gashes in

the ground.



Devastated people crying and wailing at lost friends, family, and possessions.

No one voice stood out it was just as mass of undistinguishable pain.

My friend in the militia left for battle a week ago on the island of Crete.

So I won't find him here.

But I find his wife and children crying outside their ruined house.

I will provide food and shelter for his family until he returns.

She is very grateful for my kindness.

The Children are fond of me as me and my friend often spend the day together.

In the coming months the town is rebuilt.

And returned to the happy place of my childhood.

About a week later my friend returns from battle, victorious,

But he will be called on to fight again soon.

(Anon, 2013)

In his poem, he excelled. It is as if he touched his own humanity with skill, insight and comprehension of possibilities for the scenes he was creating.

Some students used the letters of words to fuel their efforts, creating acrostic poems. This procedure offered a beginning point for the less confident writers. They expressed perceptions using descriptive language. Their class teacher and I wished to lead them to questioning of their word choices, which could possibly lead to self-questioning as they grew more conscious of the validity of their own ways for expression. The poem on the red paper uses "earthquake" as its impulse, while the grey poem includes "big waves" and "earthquake". The first is highly charged, "quivering" to an end. The second is filled with scientific terminology relating to the natural event, the words standing alone like sandstone cliffs defining shorelines.

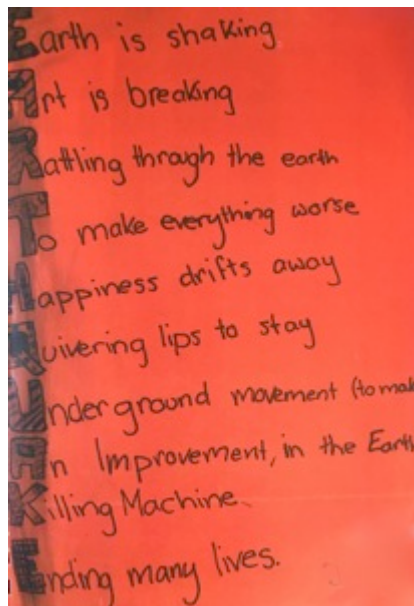


Figure 7c: *Earth is Shaking*

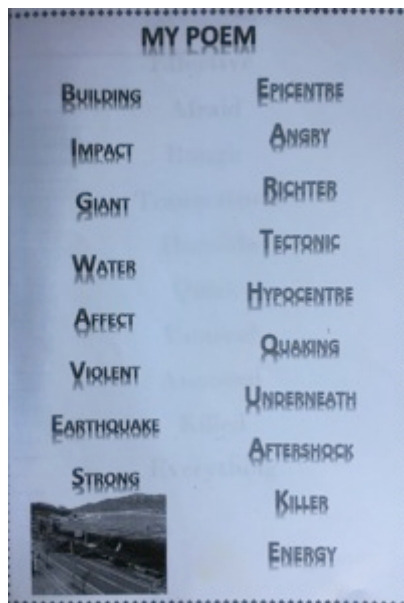


Figure 7d: *My Poem*

Both poems are evocative, although complexly different in their impulse. The students employed vocabulary with which each was individually familiar and comfortable. Their meanings are kindled with voices from vastly different temperaments, but are both satisfyingly reflective. I marvel at the

words and celebrate individualities within a unified purpose of poetry with these young people.

### **Enrapt and enfolded**

I muse whether the journey with these students was fuelled with my search to comprehend freedom. I remember allowing all their suggestions, but I did ignore or redirect those I deemed shallow, prejudiced or lacking empathy.

I pondered on students within in this class, employing all my perceptions, intuitions, developed skills and abilities of that time. I have questioned whether my efforts for understanding the students' perceptions and for eliciting their responses subverted any freedom for authentic expression. As I interrogated the recorded narrative that initiated this chapter, I recognised myself as an agent of action in the circle of understanding. The students' engagement existed as reflection of my process of distancing via artistic foci. Their tacit knowing, sometimes uncovered, was a source for connections we forged. The next poem, I believe, displayed the empathic nature of a student and her ability to delve into the implications of emotional trauma. As before, I have preserved misspellings as I wonder at the mystery of mis-takes.

#### Broken

My blood feels cold.

Too scared to move.

Too scared to think.

Buildings falling.

People running and screaming.

The shaking will never end.

People stumbling in the rubble.

Nothing left.

Hope fading.  
Scared faces, young and old.  
A broken town.  
Broken hearts.  
Broken people.  
Everything broken.  
Slowly rebuilding...

(Anon, 2013)

This young girl relied on repetition and brevity to communicate her conception of such an event. As her “blood feels cold” I am entranced and imagine veins falling like trees in a body racked like the earth in its quaking. I as teacher stood between her and her words, in the *sfumato* (blurrings), where I sought comprehension of her whilst she extended her space beyond my penumbra, to her *soglia* of creativity. I craved bright colours beyond my own *soglia* for this scenario, where colour represented mysteries and pleasures beyond the known and predictable as I strove to take the students there, enveloped in my care as teacher. “The problem is to reveal an intelligence to itself” (Rancière, 2011, p. 28), and I claimed a place as an enlightener for these students. I wonder if in this I was arrogant, or inspired?

Joseph Jacotot, the inspiration for Rancière’s, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, was a highly respected French professor who was forced into exile during political unrest in France. Consequently, in 1818 he found himself in Louvain, in the Flemish province of Belgium, speaking only French in a Flemish university. Non-French speaking students wished to access his renowned teaching and Jacotot complied.

To do so, the minimal link of a *thing in common* had to be established between himself and them. At that time a bilingual edition of *Télémaque* was being published in Brussels. The thing in common had been found, and Telemachus made his way into the life of Joseph Jacotot. He had the book delivered to the students and asked them,

through an interpreter, to learn the French text with the help of the translation. When they had made it through the first half of the book, he had them repeat what they had learned over and over, and then told them to read through the rest of the book until they could recite it...the experiment exceeded his expectations. (Rancière, 2011, p. 2)

Jacotot applied his own imagination to his educational approach. His ignorance of particulars, such as the Flemish language, led him to freedom and discovery as he embraced his ignorance and created the new. Jacotot used his ignorance by thinking imaginatively, creatively, expansively, as he tried to attain his goal of student inspiration and academic effectiveness. His story inspired my intellectual journey with my students as I questioned my teaching effectiveness. I have aimed to enhance and expand students' thinking, setting them tasks linking with curriculum and academic demands of the classroom at that time. I had goals to attain for both the students and myself. I embraced needs while striving towards authenticity of content presentation.

Rancière's exploration of Jacotot's "ignorant schoolmaster" as one who is free, who can function authentically within his own meaning-making, offered me ways within my blurrings towards clarity. I have placed myself as ignorant and then have drawn from this unknowing-ness. In this I felt offered opportunities for imaginings, and from here into freedom of ideas, perhaps towards self-understanding—but how do I navigate through potentials of self-deceptions, that may perhaps surface in this unsuppressed imaginative freedom? Rancière commented,

There are two fundamental lies: the one that proclaims, "I am telling the truth", and the one that states, "I cannot say". The reasonable being who reflects on himself knows the emptiness of these two propositions. The first fact is the impossibility of not knowing oneself. The individual cannot lie to himself; he can only forget himself. "I can't" is thus a sentence of self-forgetfulness, a sentence from which the reasonable individual has withdrawn... "Know yourself" no

longer means, in the Platonic manner, know where your good lies. It means come back to yourself, to what you know to be unmistakeable in you. Your humility is nothing but the proud fear of stumbling in front of others. Stumbling is nothing; the wrong is in diverging from, leaving one's path, no longer paying attention to what one says, forgetting what one is. So follow *your* path. This principle of veracity is at the heart of the emancipation experience.

(Rancière, 1991, p. 57)

I have stumbled in front of others, displaying my vulnerability and wonder if I am already free in the manner described by Rancière, and perhaps even possess some humility. As Lawn said, "...we are always part of what we are seeking to understand" (2012, p. 52). I believe I know my own processes intimately through deep contemplation, and still things are hidden if I am unaware, that is, ignorant, of questions to ask myself to bring these enigmas to light—I may not even perceive of my need to ask a question, if ignorance is absence of knowing that which you do not know.

I recognised the care my colleague teacher had for me. We laughed, shared and commiserated. She was scrupulous in her formations of each group and so promises for each student's inclusion were kept. I wonder, was student enthusiasm based on the relationship they witnessed between their trusted teacher and myself, their desire to evade other classwork, their relationship with me, or their acceptance of the process through which I was taking them? I know that each day with this class I felt as a swimmer, buoyed by the water yet free to move as I wished. As a swimmer, the medium in which I swim is the same for all swimmers, but the manner in which I respond to the water is my own, dependent on the impulses surrounding me. Likewise, within this class, I moved into my task with sensual delight. The pressures were subtle and gentle there. I felt authentic in my aims and validated in procedure.

Did my own personality contribute to the relationships? Could personality be a valid factor in the teacher-student interchange and could it have carried possibilities for authenticity in relationships, or was it haunted by the enigma of charisma and associated charm? Was my enthusiasm for my task, in this atmosphere of empathy and kindness, washing and cleansing my own and others' transformation?

I felt determination and inspiration as I attempted engagement with the students. I felt a flowing of my own transformation as I witnessed their struggles and their triumphs. Unity in task and meaning-making could be witnessed in students' eyes, posture and words. Could it be that I was the in-between-ness for these students, the enigma that could elicit responses from them that both surprised and delighted? Could it be that I was bringing change as I experienced change? I review and reflect again, my events in focus, spiralling into meaning-making, up and back, round and through, my inquiries looping and linking thoughts and impressions. Again and again I attempt a hermeneutics of demystification, questioning with increasing intensity as I interrogate my narrative.

Meaning is not something that can just be scooped up from the spoils and layers of debris of daily living. Meaning is already implicated in the mystery of prereflective reflection of seeing, hearing, touching, being touched, and being-in-touch with the world, and the enigma of reflecting on the phenomenology of all this.

(van Manen, 2014, loc. 563/11093)

The unknowns that form the mysteries and characterise the hermeneutics of suspicion—also named demystification (Josselson, 2004)—are fascinating to me. I am seduced by their apparent unknowability and strive for comprehension.

### **Revelations in the floating**

At times, perhaps, my integrity was clouded in 'second natures', actions that

became so natural as to be done without thinking, which is why I continue to question my own veracity. Could this kind of ‘thought-less-ness’ be lack of presence, or lack of mindfulness? If within *chiaroscuro* I shift my awareness to the word ‘murkiness’, I perceive it in reference to gloom, hard to see through, obscure, unclear, difficult to understand or dishonest. Murkiness can contain surprise in its obscurity of forms within its darkness. It may also carry the possibility of soiling, making something unclean, with its pervasion of a space. If I consider unfinished as incomplete, not finally treated, not finally processed, does unfinishedness fall into the realms of obscurity, where absence of clarity and consciousness inhibit reformation and revolution?

As teacher, I chose respect, to students and to myself. I was mindful of discernment, whether towards the students or myself. I worked deeply to comprehend the space the students created both individually and as a group and tried to recognise any of my own failings in perception. By watching, listening, sensing and contemplating, I attempted immersion in their needs and their prior knowledge and used this information to form our path together. Is this a phenomenological reality for my own understandings? I continue to feel such yearning to know why the world can be as it is. Could my own curiosity concerning the way things seem to be form a track for my virtuous engagement with students that might hold promise for them—and for me? If so, do I possess the type of curiosity explored by Freire?

...ingenuous “unarmed” curiosity, which is associated with common sense knowledge, is the same curiosity that, as it develops its critical possibilities through a more rigorous methodological approximation of the known object, becomes epistemological curiosity. (Freire, 2001, p. 37)

Rancière and Freire seem bonded in their concepts of ignorance and of ingenuousness. Rancière celebrated the act of reflection as part of the passage through ignorance.

The consciousness of emancipation is above all the inventory of the ignorant one’s intellectual capabilities...He



must reflect on his abilities and the manner in which he acquired them...it is a question of observing, comparing, and combining, of making and noticing how one has done it.

(Rancière, 2014, p. 36)

Whilst Rancière said this of ignorance, Freire (2001) was referring to 'ingenuous' as "unarmed curiosity". Both concepts require a rigorous working through of daily interaction in the world, observing and establishing a set of our own parameters by which to live. Freire implied that such parameters changed with time and experience. He acknowledged our beginnings, our past, our historicity, as we forge our ways. I as human began in innocence of possibilities, until I delved into manners in which I lived as a mindful individual, with "epistemological curiosity" (Freire, 2001, p. 37).

I have looked to the meaning of 'ingenuous' to enlighten my task towards further self-understanding. Some people have used words like naïvety, innocence and gullibility to describe me, others have used dreamy, day-dreamer, impractical, intellectual, imaginative, unrealistic, idealistic. Now, with this past, I have searched for the meaning of 'ingenuous' to apply in my current work and found its origins in Indo-European and Latin, referring to being freeborn, honourable, frank and virtuous, unreserved, unrestrained, candid and sincere (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2016). These origins bring relief to me as I remember the disparagement with which ingenuous was previously applied, with heavy reliance on secondary meanings (Dictionary.com, 2016), including artless, innocent and naïve. I ache towards emulation of the original meanings and seek my origins there. Now I am freed to work from my ingenuousness which may be bound in ignorance as Rancière explained it, as I spiral towards a deeper path of understanding of self and others.

As I absorb my meanings and through them adapt to my self-discernment as an effective inspirer and communicator, I watch my process and consider other possibilities. I imagine my encasement within interchanges, locked into viewing in a particular way, eliminating other ways from my consciousness.

The light and dark contrasts of *chiaroscuro* allow obscuring of that which might be perceived, for in self-judgement, confusion and insecurity, I might ignore joyful potentialities. However, in this third narrative I chose to celebrate every spark and I sensed my meaning-making correspondingly sparkle.

Once a focus is attained in *chiaroscuro*, whatever it may be, then *sfumato* (blurrings) definitions blur, sometimes less discernible in umbra and penumbra. In this manner, presences and absences with the students might be difficult to capture, unavailable to me within a confusion of smudges as I struggle with recognition of manifolds. However, my *soglia* in this third narrative was a step from a basis of clarity, not despair, as I recognised not only the students' strengths, but my own. I noticed a melding that was productive, then faithfully followed. Art became for me a "more direct expression of the moral" (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 991/8818) as I explored companionably with the students. I felt some satisfaction in my pursuit of the liberation of words from the students, but I always question my choices, for that is my way for meaning-making in this world, spiralling in to expose all that is, or is not, within me. I grasp the experience in recollection and apply my external understandings, based on prior experiences yet melded with the new, to view all as a whole. In this I might be attaining an *Erlebnis*, as expressed by Gadamer,

If something is called or considered an *Erlebnis*, that means it is rounded into the unity of a significant whole...An experience is no longer just something which flows past quickly in the stream of conscious life: it is meant as a unity and thus attains a new mode of being one...something unforgettable and irreplaceable.

(1975/2006, loc. 1187/8818)

Could I be included in "the unity of a significant whole", where the whole is my experience with the students, and so claim wholeness in the experience? As a being with a composite of ever-increasing impulses and events, held in my memory, sometimes remembered, sometimes forgotten, was I exploring

the “unforgettable and irreplaceable” as imaged by my interchanges with the students and my colleague? How do I detect my meaning-making? I draw again on metaphor as I spiral into self-discernment in terms of this narrative.

If I imagined this narrative as clay, I would picture it firstly from the natural attitude, as an unformed lump within which existed possibilities for interpretation. With isolation of this situation from the constant stream of life, the unity in wholeness would become a summary of interactions and choices, just as clay might offer forth opportunities for expression. When isolated from the whole, deeper meanings would be discerned, allowing space for ethical balance, which could include self-forgiveness and my striving towards ideas of finishedness, through interrogation of my sense of unfinishedness. My desired outcomes of movement beyond the *soglia*, into a stronger understanding of my self and the world, self-as-world and world-as-self would thus be brought to me. If pressures and prods were to be well chosen and accepted within the enactment of the class situation, satisfying form might result and I would reflect and remember my students’ delight with their processes and final poems.

I remember hours with these students and smile fondly in recollection, re-imagining their initial cheekiness and tactlessness, then respectful good humour. Inhibition was replaced with open expression, where every word was valued and heard, extreme judgements tempered by me as teacher and by their peers, as they read, looked and listened. This was teaching success. I recall Sokolowski,

...the categorial, which is discrete and distinctly identifiable, is a further heightening or elevation of the perceptual, which is continuous and has blurred boundaries...I would claim that the categorial forming, the elevation into logic, is the achievement not of a single mind but of one mind working with another, of one person working with another, and doing so in public.

(2008, p. 61)

The isolation of this narrative occurred within the continuous flow of existence. In the beginning I intended the event, distinguishing it from others. I conceived of the initial format, but accompanied by my supportive colleague and students' willingness, "in public", I aimed for "elevation into logic", in their company, in the unity obtained between us.

Perhaps the categorial, as this event, could summarise my intentionalities, which flavoured my focus in *chiaroscuro*, as well as existing as my intentionality. I poured my inspiration, energy and my love into the event. Did it then become a symbol for me of sweet attainment made visible? I planned and organised based on my understandings at the time, surreptitiously gleaning communications from students and subsequently using these as the basis of our sessions together. Consequently, within the class, my intentionality seemed understood by teacher and class. A reciprocal relationship of support, inspiration and expansion enriched my educational life. Jean Grondin's said, "Gadamer explains that every interpretation is elaborated on the basis of an 'anticipation of perfection' recognised by the thing to be understood" (2003, p. 81). I see "the thing to be understood" in different forms, as an interchange, or art creation. I desired this interchange between self and other during this classroom event. Can I, in my process towards understanding, contain the "anticipation of perfection" that exists if I act in the appropriate way—if I stop at the most tactful time? I believe the reciprocal nature of communication is necessary to achieve my outcome—my meaning-making.

### **Sensing the forming**

Perhaps tact, too, is a reciprocal act. Perhaps when one has an intention, tact can only exist if allowed by the other. Dialogue between the class teacher and I felt authentic as well as tactful. Perhaps tact can seem tact-less to those outside of the tact interchange, for they are not included in the understandings already achieved by those in the relationship of tact. When a receiver responds and absorbs words' impact, then in subsequent

interactions modifies words and behaviour, I believe this displays acknowledgement of the veracity of comments within the willing protagonists' tact-circle. As I included at the end of a quote in Chapter 1, "tact helps one to preserve distance. It avoids the offensive, the intrusive, the violation of the intimate sphere of the person" (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 562/8818). I wonder does this imply that yearning for unity with an-other is tactless, whether movement in word or action towards another is tactless if the other is not openly reciprocating? If this is so, where does courage and conviction lie, when a sense of the good is present for one but not openly acknowledged by the other? I surmise whether, if we all were tact-filled, this would lead to polite, mutual disconnection—how then would dialogue ensue, if all maintained distance?

While I grapple with this idea, imagining a world of polite disassociations, I am struck by further comment from Gadamer, where "The mark of good taste is being able to stand back from ourselves and our private preferences" (1975/2006, loc. 816/8818). This sits more comfortably with my perceptions of my intersubjectivity, as existing with the teacher and the students. I stand in silent contemplation of my self, as Gadamer's words seem to infer, imagining my self as outside of the event. Can I extricate meaning without overt entanglement, within my self or with the other as we navigate intersubjectivity? Gadamer might be referring to what Bohm expressed as "suspending assumptions" (Bohm, 2004, p. 22), which might lead to discernment of self and others. In the preface to Bohm's book, Peter Senge said,

If we separate ourselves from whatever is within the whole, we cannot take part in it — and we return to abstracting, judging and defending: "I am not like that person," or "he is bad and I am good," or "she does not see what is happening and I do."...There are no "good guys" and "bad guys" separate from ourselves.

(Bohm, 2004, p. xiii)

I view my relentless questioning of my self and others as a means for gaining unity, for ripping self-judgement and judgement of others out into the open and transforming it into tactful engagement with my world. Could tact be synonymous with “good taste”? If I consider good taste as suspension of opinions and assumptions, a drawing back from myself, then an in-betweenness might exist for me, allowing space for peaceful contemplation, space for acceptance of the other, whoever that may be. I wonder if there is a place for tact-less-ness and if there is, could it transform, ambiguously, into tact, if used at the right time, right place, for the right reason? The students’ tact ebbed and flowed in each session and I immersed my self in their responses, drawing from my understandings to throw buoyancy aids their way when heaviness, as negative self-judgements and peer judgements, threatened their creativity.

As I continue the interrogation of my opinions towards self-discernment, I am aware of my *soglia* in the present possessing difference with the *soglia* of my past. Through this process, my mean, my balance, might glow softly, as crescent moon on water, offering solace in its curve, where a haven balancing graciousness and disregard, humility and pride, courage and cowardice, might offer me its promise. As with clay, where I observed a beginning, apprehending clay’s smoothness as it offered its perfection in its malleability, sensing its breath in my hands as it sunk into the curves and angles of my fingers, I have witnessed and lived this class experience.

I allude again to my clay metaphor to elaborate my understandings of relationships. Clay, like relationships, collects impurities, grit and fibres, some tiny, some visible and tangible, brought by external impulses. In clay, grit becomes firmly embedded, while fibres form delicate ridges along which divisions can be made, randomly tracing their path through density. Both grit and fibres are difficult to extract once embedded, for clay clings and contains. The *chiaroscuro* becomes solidified in its divisions, with intruders almost unresolvable—they cannot be overcome, diminished, or eradicated without extreme measures, such as forcing the whole piece through a fine gauge sieve,

or rolling it out, piece by piece, until each impurity is found and removed with tools. Patience, determination, dedication are qualities required to ensure the removal. Temporal and spatial concerns must be surmounted. No amount of blurring (moving, smudging, rolling, pummelling) can eliminate the fine textures now existing—the texture has been compromised. So, too, might interrelations be compromised between individuals.

As external pressures mount, surface changes to clay might now become visible, for as a shape is exposed, so are fibres, so fine, so elusive, they cannot always be removed. So they might remain, to be burnt off in the kiln, imposing their own manipulation of the clay. The grit, however, will not burn off and the resultant texture must be consciously incorporated into a final product. Prior to the firing process, coaxing fingers must move the clay, either celebrating, or minimising, lumps, perhaps digging out those large enough, but leaving forever any tiny impurities. If the ceramic shape has been constructed firmly, it will survive kiln-heat, but if spaces are present within the form, fissures allowing air movement will be heated and consequently expanded. With unplanned expansion comes destruction—parts break away or the entire form may explode. There is no certainty in the firing, but the creator's efforts always focus on her best outcome. Thus I view relationships when under pressure.

Joy exists in an element of surprise, for outcomes from firing are never assured—heat does its work and clay responds as it can. The creator cannot know outcomes until the kiln-heat has subsided, the kiln opened and the product viewed. She can use all known techniques and understandings to form a piece, but the end result is still based on faith in the final process. All expectations can be accounted for yet there remains the will of the thing, even when inanimate, which exists as an object of substance and air. This exists for relationships, too, where total control is impossible. Perhaps it is always the intangible, like the air, which has the final say.

## Tides and Currents

Tacit knowing continues to fascinate me. I am enthralled by its acknowledgement within the philosophical world. I am mesmerised by the opinions offered by Gadamer, Polanyi and Bohm as they explore the phenomenon. Their words come as comets across a sky reflecting night-sea. Mysterious and unknowable, the tacit seems to bring magic into my existence. For me, Bohm's word-tide ebbed with indistinct, tantalising forms, glimpsed briefly before full exposure. Tacit was said to be "a kind of knowledge you've got, without which you could do nothing. It's a continuation from the past of something that you have learned" (Bohm, 2004, p. 60). He based some of his understandings on the work of Polanyi, who explored the extent of the concept in his book, *The Tacit Dimension*. Polanyi commented that, fragile and profound,

Tacit knowing is shown to account (1) for a valid knowledge of a problem, (2) for the scientist's capacity to pursue it, guided by his sense of approaching its solution, and (3) for a valid anticipation of the yet indeterminate implications of the discovery arrived at in the end.

(2009, p. 24)

Could I consider my explorations as part of a scientific process, involving tacit knowing, tempered and predicted by my sense of my right path, anticipating my perception as a reality that is valid for the situation experienced in this classroom? I have written of my feelings and referred to their propensity for expression in my physical body. Are these true expressions of my reality, or impressions of possible realities, based on my past realities, present feelings or past feelings, with past tempering and tampering with present? I have felt safety and optimism in the daily unfolding of this classroom interchange. Bohm discussed concepts of feeling and "felts" and suggested that,

...thoughts and felts are one process; they are not two. They both come from the memory...memory also effects the physical body...You can produce states of stress in the body from memories of states of stress... (2002, p. 61)



I consequently perceive my third narrative as a continuum of strength and knowing-ness. In recollection I remember how I interacted during the first and second narratives, harbouring states of stress within my body for both these occasions from the body memory of past pains, and now question—can I eliminate stress with the act of forgiveness, which I might now have moved towards through the third narrative, as a result of a genuine encounter with mutual empathy and creativity?

I look to the word ‘forgiveness’ as meaning the release of anger or resentment towards someone, from a word of Germanic roots, *forġiefan*. It combines ‘for’ and ‘give’ and I am interested in the effect of “for-” (Oxford Dictionary of English 2006), with that prefix “denoting prohibition, abstention, neglect, renunciation or used as an intensifier” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006). I have found it interesting that the Oxford Dictionary’s meanings of the English ‘for’ as an independent word referring to supporting, affecting, possessing, representing, exchanging, comparing, indicating time, distance or event. The possibilities for ‘give’ are even more numerous. The “free transfer, the allowance of another to have or experience, the provision, the performance of something, the yield or result, the validation, the statement of naming or doing, the flexibility of a thing or attitude, the revelation of a secret or truth, the cessation of a response”—all describe aspects of this word (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2006).

If these two words and meanings are bonded, what occurs? I believe it then implies a degree of intimacy is necessary between protagonists, with connection beyond a passing gesture. It also seems necessary that at least one person in such an interchange view a mutual occurrence with serious intention, but it does not imply that both protagonists feel or are aware of this need. I have experienced passing exchanges that have resulted in great anxiety for me, where forgiving might be a result of my reflection and then letting go and there seemed no consciousness from the other of their impact upon me—but then, I did not ask them. I wondered and imagined, I re-imagined and questioned my suppositions and my conclusions. To me, it has

appeared that, as Emmanuel Levinas said, “Reflection brings to the surface the old stones of the foundations and mixes them with things of the moment” (Levinas, 2002, p. 155). Cycles of reflection on events might bring me revelations. They might bring misinterpretations. How do I discern the unreal from the real?

I have remained in reflection whilst interrogating my memories, recording remembering. I have torn myself apart, the actions of the world fueling my own self-promising within these memories. If I meditate on meanings I have discerned for myself of forgiveness, where I have formed and named my meaning, I must firstly forgive myself for promises not kept to myself prior to my extension to “Thou” (Buber, 2011). I then wonder—if I could achieve such self-forgiveness, would there still be a need to forgive another—would the other have anything to be forgiven for, when my own internal life formulated my responses? Or do all involved in an interchange, whether unconscious or conscious, share responsibility and need for forgiveness?

In the formation of my meaning-making, I have continued to name my foci in *chiaroscuro*, bringing to the fore that to which I have been drawn. From pain I have emerged in joy. In naming I have sensed potentialities for knowing and now, as I slip into thesis summary, which is its naming as an entity, a wholeness of its being, I acknowledge intentionalities framed by my exploration in naming and resolving. My questioning continues to spiral, simultaneously enclosing and revealing between my finishedness and unfinishedness and I look outward to discern my place within the whole-as-being-in-the-world, connected as living human being.

## Chapter 7 Towards attainment of the whole

It is early autumn. The water retains its tinges of summer warmth.

The fog is so dense I can only see the pole marker when the light signals. I swim towards that light, its intermittence no hindrance to my progress. I swim with varying strokes, in varying modes—quickly, forcefully, pushing at the water, curving it beneath me, scooping it, then slower, gently, floating quietly towards my goal, then swimming without arms, kicking my legs, straightening and forcing my body onwards.

At last I reach the marker, round it, make my way back to the jetty. On turning, I am confused. The fog remains a deep blanket on and above the water. The lights I see on the land—or are they on boats—are unfamiliar. I turn towards the moon, its brilliance still glowing through fog and cloud. One light sits beneath it. I swim.

Shadows form before me, above me, anchored but not where they are expected. I swim. Then suddenly the shadows make sense, the moon releases me and I turn towards the true destination. The lights become jetty and shed lights. The shadows become tall pines that line the road approaching the jetty. The jetty gradually manifests and I walk from the water. (Miller, 2014)

I believe my intellectual journey resembles this swim, this day. My indistinct goal, sometimes clearer, has always been positioned before me. In my past I could neither explain nor describe my goal, yet something seemed ever-present, beckoning as I made my way through living. I wonder now where I exist—in finishedness, or unfinishedness, or in both?

From a four year old consciously questioning the effect of actions and words in my protected existence, I remember moving into recognition of the subtleties existing in relationships around me. Later, surrounded by the

unfamiliar in another country, where segregation of humanity was presented in apartheid, my imaginative world beckoned and I followed willingly—reading, watching and thinking. A later family tragedy when I was eleven years old—the death through illness of our mother—increased my retraction, and more imagining and observation without overt engagement with others, ensued. I returned then to my birthplace, prepubescent and melancholic, with fractured and fragmented self-perception and world-perception.

Gradually my own version of acceptance, symbolism and suffering has evolved. I have focussed on that which seemed beyond, past my *soglia*, my threshold. Each time I have used this word *soglia* I have felt a sense of revelation for myself, of wonder as to its power over me, and especially when I recite the trilogy to myself—*chiaroscuro*, *sfumato*, *soglia*—I have felt poetic in my search for words expressing my understandings. Metaphors of clay and the heron have delighted and inspired me, whilst sea and swimming have enraptured me as I relate effects on my body to my everyday thinking and living.

In water I move, in air I move. The air gives little resistance, but in water I battle force, even on pristine days. Yet it seems in water my movement is fluid, supported—gentleness in the midst of power. I can move forward, sometimes faster, sometimes barely moving, but still there is movement, tangible and constant. I am within forces, usually choosing their role in my quest, flowing and surging on tide and wave, sometimes swimming into them, fleeing up and over the wave as it moves in, around, under, over me, then onto the next wave as it forms and rushes to join others. At times the waves come against my side. I must then ride the swell and discount their direction, to press on towards my goal. With clay, force is mine as I move its shape and at all times it remains its true nature—it is clay, it is not changed in its essence. In water I change my part and am like this clay, with water moving and shaping my moves as I am forced and moulded, buffeted, sometimes soothed, as I am held in this element. I may be pummelled and thrown, but I remain myself, I

remain this body, I remain this self, I do not become other, I become more than I was. The essence of self—the clay, the body, immersed as it is in otherness, informs my meaning-making. (Miller, 2014)

I believe I am buffeted, not only by physical waves when in the sea, but by my own thoughts arising within me. As I think, I might focus on a thought and I then become the one thought. At that moment of unity, it is all I am—I am nothing else and all other thoughts are eliminated. Then, that one thought might fade then flee as connections are made with other thoughts. It is then merged—it is present, but distant, it is part, but no longer all, that I am. It supported in its initial presence, but receded as I moved to another point. How to shape a path through so many thoughts?

My path has been formed through listening, but I have listened not only with my ears—I have listened with my eyes, where my ‘eye-listening’ refers not only to watching the world but to simultaneously hearing my concept formation. This eye-listening is an internal movement of my tacit understandings, of my eidetic intuitions (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 177-184). My hearing and watching seem inseparable to me as I evaluate the world around me, aiming for discernment but often beginning with judgements that exclude more than they can identify, in *chiaroscuro*. Still, I remain aware of much—resting arm, flickering eye, shifting posture, gesticulating hand—I watch and listen as people move together and apart in their interactions with others or with me. I see and hear narrowing of eyes, set of mouth, bend of head. I watch modes of walking, noting placement of feet and angle of body.

I watch and listen as faces move in speech, as people meet each other and meet themselves, hidden within the other. It seems I perceive their struggle in efforts to “...understand each other not only in this or that respect, but in all the essential things that unite human beings” (Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 2930/8818), for I exist heavily within this space. I close my eyes and ears and withdraw and attempt escape from that which it seems I cannot fully

understand, but often my escape is fruitless, for the un-understandable follows me and I must confront it in another place, at another time, with other people.

My listening has been accompanied by questioning. I have questioned my family's opinions, my friends' and my mentors'—but not always openly. I have listened then contemplated in my questioning, this questioning contemplation often a wrestling, writhing beast that threatened my balance. The beast wreaked havoc internally, in my private world. Those whom I questioned knew little of my battles, for I have not been explicit in my examinations, holding them in my centre, trying to make sense for myself, aiming to keep peace with protagonists. Peace did erupt at times into battle, but generally only when I felt ready, armed, conscious and present. This readiness did not diminish my pain in conflict, but it did minimise the element of surprise—for me, at least!

From imaginations and conflicts I have been lead further into inspiration. The first two of my narratives have dealt with conflict and a type of resolution, taking the form of self-understanding and acceptance of the other. The final narrative explored creativity, openness and self-discernment. A sense of unfinishedness in this remains for me, as I wonder whether there can be such a thing as a complete conclusion as I remain open to a world facilitating my way for meaning-making. I am aware in hindsight of that which does not reveal itself immediately to me, always returning—if I do not watch and hear the first time I am conscious of a situation, it becomes louder, then louder in various forms of repetition, until I cannot avoid contact and must struggle for comprehension. When I have found mindful connection, I have used past visions to bring a degree of peace and completion to my present. From these sources I have formed my self and looked then into the future with anticipation.

I have referred to self-discernment as a means towards self and world comprehension, deciding that openness requires conscious release from

judgement, which then allows me to focus on my chosen path. Self-discernment with its openness to self, would function as a channel for my self-comprehension. Such openness would then be compatible with formation of my self-appropriate and ultimately, world-appropriate, concepts, this capacity relying fundamentally on perceptions already present for me as listener, watcher, sensor. Growth and change could then be possible, with focus-in-discernment flexible and bringing light to my self and to my world.

### **Streaming onwards**

It is mid-autumn.

Sea is cold. To enter is a promise of deeper cold, but if sustained, my body adjusts and the water is accepted. The swim is energetic and vigorous. The sun has risen and clouds of pastels flume across a pure sky. I am now warmer in the water. Wind gusts, and my shoulders seek protection in waves as my arms pull through.

The feelings and thoughts within are replaced by awareness of that which is with-out. I am a part of the sea and although speaking intermittently to a fellow swimmer, my head chattering onwards, there are minutes of inner silence and outer movement. At these times I am conscious of the force and feel of this water. For a fraction of time, nothing else exists but this. In this fraction I am lost to myself. I am the water, it becomes all that I am—it overwhelms and overcomes my sense of self. In its place I sense unity, calm, present, past, future as one.

(Miller, 2014)

I wonder whether swimming experiences are fragments of finishedness, instances of coherence, as wellbeing and connectedness flooded me with tranquility, even just for a moment. I am seeking my clarity in a space beyond my *soglia*, as I am led by flow of thought. As I contemplate, I have sought further illumination of my perceptions and understandings from

Goethe's *Fairytale*.

Aspects of my journey seem analogous with that of a character from Goethe's story, the Green Snake, who, finding and eating gold coins forcibly discarded by the Ferryman, journeyed out from her rock cleft in search of more. She was ecstatic in her fear, for on swallowing the coins she attained a sublime physical glow of which she had once been foretold. Acquisition of this glow had remained a mystery to her—once miraculously attained, she wished for its continuation, and felt sure that a regular supply of gold was required.

In vain she wandered through the lonely wilderness; but her hope grew stronger when she came upon a plain and saw a glow like her own in the distance. "I've found my complement after all!" she cried, and hurried to the place. She noticed no difficulty as she crawled through swamp and reed, though she preferred to live on dry mountain meadows and in high rocky fissures, savouring spicy herbs and quenching her thirst with fine dew and fresh spring water. But she would have accepted any undertaking for the sake of the coveted gold and the glorious light.

(Goethe, 1987, p. 3)

Like the Green Snake, in philosophical thought I have striven to leave the natural attitude and see the *soglia*, beyond which I yearn for grace. I have desired to break with my habitual thought, to embrace time and movement and thereby to understand my past. This could indicate a degree of finishedness for me, which, as a degree and not the whole, is unfinishedness—in comprehension of my past.

Like the Green Snake, I have chosen clarity along a path fraught with confusion, desperate to capture in my imagination my true nature. In my process of creation, I have written words, read them, then moved to other things wending along my path. In time I have returned to these written words and questioned my success in communication, then claimed my own



glowing nature, with my gold as my words, and my slithering over rocks and through crevices as my re-reading, re-remembering, rephrasing, and re-imagining. I believe my continual questioning came from veracity in my authenticity.

In this way of being, I have found that when I re-read, my words have at times seemed less coherent—I have felt I have not understood fully what they mean, although they were my words, part of my consciousness, at another time. I have then struggled to comprehend. Then, suddenly, meaning is made as my mind shifts and changes—the words open, I have seen their flow and then understood as my thinking incorporated meaning from my past, becoming one with my words on the page. Once expressed, it is as if my words are no longer mine, as if they exist by themselves, neither needing me nor cleaving to me, freed and embodied in themselves. I strive for unity with my language meaning. This is my own hermeneutic path, my own meaning-making struggle as I clamber around, over, through, my perceptions-as-words.

This strange sensation towards comprehension occurs often. I read all types of text and reach out for the meaning, as if equipped with tentacles or feelers which sense and absorb the words in their written bed. Resting, minding their own business, they are then thrust into highlights—illuminated as I, too, strive for illumination. I drift on tides of words, flowing the way given on the page, surrendering to that by which I am transported, for if I do not surrender, I will be closed to the meaning, closed to the way of the waves, then harden, calcify and sink deeper into darkness of insecurity and fear.

### **Foci and imaginings**

I have regularly felt as if I freeze in one state, despite the inevitability of difference and in this freeze-state space, for a time, I have felt in control,

believing in the correctness of my thoughts and following understandings gained from them—if I do not believe, I am left on my *soglia*, in my freeze-state, unsure, unknowing and confused, unable to step beyond into the new, tension fermenting as I sit between my past and my possibilities. I have questioned all that I have formed and all by which I have been formed. I remember then that a path from unknowing might firstly be attained through quietness, which exists at my threshold, before my step beyond. If my thoughts are stilled, a way can be cleared. Listening whilst suspending judgement (Bohm, 2006), stopping before moving forward, my *soglia* can be revealed and the next step then made, strong and sure, leading onward, not downward.

I imagine my listening accompanied by peace, self-judgement put aside by self-discernment, with words then heard in their truth at that time—right hearing, right meaning, right time, right space, where I could access this space, this ‘rightness’, a space beyond the *soglia* into understanding and grace. Bohm commented that lack of consciousness concerning the manner in which we create perceptions might lead to misrepresentations within the social environment (2004, p. 64). An uncluttered mind, that is, one that is not filled with unresolved input, might present an opportunity to accept words of another, to allow the words to sit, then to set them free towards meanings to which they aspire. Bohm asserted that without consciousness of self we cannot make progress within the social sphere—we would continue to judge and be judged. He expressed this consciousness as the awareness of our own thoughts and our own prejudices, followed by willingness to act on these. It is in acting on our own thoughts that leads to self-understanding (ibid.).

In this realm of thought, feeling and awareness of self, I recognise that sensations within my body remain of the physical effects of my first two narrated lived experiences. I remember and feel that tension in my lungs, that lifting of my shoulders, that throbbing of my heart, that breath catching

in my throat. I remember and feel the desire to run, to turn from the memory and reclaim myself, as feet free the muscle memory of my thoughts. Time may have passed, yet impressions have remained and I have struggled to master my attachments to particular ways of thinking so that I might withdraw from my pain. As I circle through my deliberations, I wonder if Gadamer would acknowledge such a process, or if he would expect analysis before comprehension and engagement of feeling life, to attain a hermeneutic circle. I have discovered these words of his to embalm my thoughts.

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.

(Gadamer, 1975/2006, loc. 4167/8818)

Thus could an ever-striving mind gain understanding of feelings embodied in words, as it “projects a meaning for the text as a whole...constantly revised” with commitment to gaining meaning whilst incorporating feeling, thought and action. My bonds with my world could be imaged in the hermeneutic relationship existing between myself as writer, and the world of my reader. According to Gunter Figal (2002), Gadamer claimed that, “The relationship of the text and the interpreter is always a “conversation”; the logic of which is the “logic of question and answer” (Figal, 2002, p. 102).

If I, as writer, inhabit a conversation with my reader, I cannot escape the relationship. The relationship is the naming and the doing, for I am involved and creating while the reader, as she reads, does the same. We are completely linked. There can be no division between us, even if our concepts differ. We are engaged in a dialogue and this is where meaning might be found.

I have striven for meaning amidst thoughts of incompleteness on a path planned and meticulously followed, at times leading to a diminishing of creativity, a solidifying of ideas, like already fired clay set forever into a form that is unchanged—but what if solidified ideas were broken apart, just as a clay pot can be smashed? Within “Colossal”, an online arts blog, through an article entitled “Kintsugi: The Art of Broken Pieces”, Christopher Jobson stunningly illustrated a Japanese ceramic technique *kintsugi*, golden seams, that reconstitutes broken ceramics

...with a special lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum.

The philosophy behind the technique is to recognise the history of the object and to visibly incorporate the repair into the new piece instead of disguising it. The process usually results in something more beautiful than the original.

(Jobson, 2014)

The original piece is made for its own beauty. No thought is given to other possibilities of becoming. Likewise, in this art of mending ceramics, Blake Gopnik was in awe of this form of repair. He said in his Washington Post gallery review that when breakage meets such mending, beauty can result, “taking on the look of a deliberate incursion of radically free abstraction into an object that was made to an utterly different system” (Gopnik, 2009). This thesis has been for me in many ways like *kintsugi*, for I have smashed my perceptions and re-seamed them into a deeper awareness of my being in this world, in more beauty, more truthfulness, more presence. The re-creative urges of my thesis to mend my stripped down perceptions, traditions and language, my deliberate smashing and repair of them, construe enduring mystery in a writing of wisdom, from an imagining towards finishedness in unfinishedness.

### **Mind/body sea sensuality**

It is winter. The water is very cold.

I run into the water's edge. My body is hot and aches with just-completed exercise. My face is coloured, my sweat quickly dried in the cold air.

It is night, the rain is strengthening and I am about to swim. The air is cold and wet and the lights laugh at me. They show rain as spears, water as beaten steel, boat-ramp as scarred skin. I laugh with the lights, wondering why, in blackness and winter, I run to the sea. With headlights on the water, I enter constant surging. So cold, my body surges with the waves, my skin contracting then expanding as it melts into the water. I laugh again, the rain-as-spears not as it seems—it is gentle, teasing, encompassing. My hands, feet and face protest as salty water enters my mouth. My centre warms, my limbs contract and I immediately turn back to the ramp, then walk out to a car with engine still running, promises of fire and food minutes away.

This fierce cold reassures me. It is clean, unambiguous. It is present. It links with my spring, summer and autumn water. It is a culmination and a continuation. The sea-rolls form and their oscillation speeds the way, surge into roars, till my mind screams for release. My body stores, yearning for peace.

The water draws me from the dark. All senses are engaged as winter wet envelopes me. I smell, I feel, I taste, I see, I hear the sea. All manifolds seem discernible. I do not crouch, for it calls me to the present. I choose to enter this swirling cold and emerge invigorated, joyful.

(Miller, 2014)

The vigorous, intense engagement of my self with my environment is accompanied by my fears. If I remember that I am within all and all is within me, unfinished but encompassed by promises, I sooth my mental complications, find freedom in and from, extremes. My *soglia* is in-betweenness, a space after and before, a place of transition. I slip into reflection through poetry, suspending thoughts and dwell briefly in imagination, ideas

combining in metaphor.

### **Voids**

There is a cloud hanging over the edge of the sea.

It pants and slips

endlessly

into the void of truth,

the void of hope.

It slips and it glides

with no signs of slowing

I watch as the air fills with the sounds of the birds finding solace far above  
our sweet grounds,

as trees whisper care.

I rest in the way

whilst I wait and I wait and

I stop.

(Miller, 2013)

I write of the now-as-passed and I try to capture it forever in words. The events are embodied as parts to wholes. I have spoken of swimming, of water, of moulding, of clay, of herons and within each expressing my past is contained, specifics remembered as I write of flowing and moulding and being, my focus shifted and a beam illuminated the whole in parts. Poetry and prose rescue me from my density of life and display patterns, weaving space for living possibilities. I am reminded by Bohm that, “In actuality, the whole world is shades merging into one” (2006, p. 10).

### **Foci and blurrings**

Bohm discussed the path of light as described scientifically, as either coherent or incoherent.

Ordinary light is called “incoherent”, which means it is going in all sorts of directions, and the light waves are not in phase with each other so they don’t build up. But a laser produces a very intense beam which is coherent. The light waves build up strength because they are all going in the same direction. This beam can do all sorts of things the ordinary light cannot. (Bohm, 2006, pp. 15-16)

I see connections with the task I am trying to achieve, with my metaphors of *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato* (shadowings) and *soglia*. If my focus in *chiaroscuro* is as definite as a laser beam, then my intentions may be crystalline in their clarity. With greater clarity, come the clearer perceptions of possibilities within the *sfumato* (blurrings, shadowings), for the umbra, the centre of the shadow, is deeper, allowing more breadth for the penumbra. With more penumbra, the potentialities for a threshold are increased. With this increase, there are more choices for freedom. This freedom may take many forms. Frankl said,

Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibility. In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility. (2006, p. 132)

I believe Frankl meant that greater scope is unfolded within the *sfumato* (shadowings) when the whole image of lived experience, enfolding freedom and responsibility, is allowed to combine to bring forth understandings, leading to right action, as expressed by Aristotle and onward into good action, as elaborated by Bohm.

Incoherence means that your intentions and your results do not agree. Your action is not in agreement with what you expect. You have contradiction, confusion, and you have self-deception in order to cover it up. Some incoherence is inevitable because knowledge is not perfect. All knowledge is limited, because it is an abstraction from the whole. It consists only of what you have learnt to this point...

On the other hand, we sense coherence as order, beauty, harmony...Coherence includes the entire process of the mind - which includes the tacit processes of thought.

(Bohm, 2006, pp. 88-90)

Right action may lead ultimately to good action, where good action is that which is appropriate to the needs of particular parameters, rather than generalisations, and then becomes coherence. If I had attained coherence in my first narrative, within the classroom of children, considering the parameters, it is possible that ruptures would have resolved and all would have moved on into a less stressful place. If I had maintained coherence from the beginning in interchanges with the man in my second narrative, I may have perceived the differences between him and myself with greater discernment and consequently avoided the dramatic outcome of union intervention. My focus in both cases was fuzzy, frayed and unable to sustain itself. My hope is that through these interrogations I have attained deeper understandings for my continued path. I journey onwards, unfinished and yearning for tranquillity. It would seem that direct personal engagement with impulses that surround daily, but without judgment could be my path of perception, interaction and self-censorship—thought control leading to an emptiness that can be filled only by thoughts allowed through my self-created filter. Perhaps this is a form of finishedness, integrated into a mind-world.

### **Entanglement before freedom**

I cannot separate my writing from my thinking, they are entwined and reciprocal, like waves bringing and retrieving to and from the shore. I pose questions to myself and recall my strange sensation towards comprehension. There seems to be a tension between that which is yearned for and that which is already achieved. I have wondered if self-understanding towards world understanding might transcend anxiety in my journey. I have endeavoured to bring together my pieces of experience and forge something



satisfying. I have used my past, I have not left it behind, forgotten and discarded. Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer and others have elaborated on historicity, that the past of the person forms the person of the present and the future—and then there is the embodied thought based on past experiences of Polanyi, Bohm and Johnson. It is to Frankl I return. He expressed his manner of being in the world in response to his past and said,

What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of a potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him. (2006, p. 109)

He survived a concentration camp as a Jew and lost everyone he loved. Yet he was determined to survive, repeatedly reminding himself of the book he still wished to write. This desire sustained him. This was his context, his narrative. If I apply the *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato* (shadows) and the *soglia* to his narrative, I might say that the *chiaroscuro* was the judgement that surrounded him, placing him into the camp as darkness prevailed. The *sfumato* (shadowing) may be the blurrings of his existence and resultant understandings as he tried to make sense of his experiences within the camp and the stretches of moralities. His *soglia* could be the point of decision he attained when seeing death and choosing life.

Frankl's attitude sustained him. He did not negate his past once he was freed. He acknowledged his path, for it was part of him. He did not allow it to hinder his will, instead he moved into his future, determined to bring to the world ideas that had sustained him during trauma. He brought meaning to his life and aimed to help others to find theirs. His compassion and sense of humanity brought the colour beyond his *soglia*. Frankl's is my chosen way.

Nestled amongst the thoughts of distant past, recently past and present great thinkers, ideas as pillows have sustained and nurtured me. I have explored various ways to express my meanings. My everyday life has thus become more meaningful, deemed worthy of consideration by me as I

become aware of ways of thought presented by these thinkers—calm encompasses me, for through their thoughts, I have seen the validity of my own concerns, my own existence. I have seen my events and potential for meaning-making glowing for me.

By demystifying my scenarios, I have explored mysteries and paradoxically allowed my awareness to extend to other mysteries, unfolding and then enfolding mystery after mystery. I have referred in Chapter 5 to a hermeneutics of demystification (Josselson, 2004) as possible means for my withdrawal before connection, of disenchantment towards awe. This path is my path, where my questioning would lead initially to disenchantment, thereby creating a void to be filled within the self, leading to a yearning to fill the void, then onto the search for meaning and ultimately to attainment of the whole, in whatever form this takes for me as an individual. This path could mean resumption of enchantment, in a form more unifying for me as a human being, as it transcends division—a path of reclamation of mystery, via demystification. Words from Jaspers resonate for me as he said, “Communication then is the aim of philosophy, and in communication all its other aims are ultimately rooted: awareness of being, illumination through love, attainment of peace” (Jaspers, 1954, p. 27).

### *Amazonka in the Mountains*

As I draw this written work into my alchemical golden sphere of transformation and meaning-making, I look to Kandinsky. I perceive encapsulation of my journey in his painting, *Amazonka in the Mountains*, and have applied my methodology of *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato*, encompassing umbra and penumbra, and *soglia* towards such comprehension. I acknowledge a tradition of artistic critique available concerning this artwork, but I have not referred to them for support, preferring to form my own understandings and to subsequently attain further enlightenment as to my path—Zhuangzi’s often trodden path—towards my own meaning-making. My writing concerning this painting follows Gadamer’s approach, where, “It is in the

words of the poem and not what someone has said about it” (Gadamer, 1992, p.76), as I replace “poem” with “painting”.

This is a painting of colour contrasts, sharp delineations and commanding imagery. Amazonka sits comfortably upon a rearing white horse, crop in hand, in complete control despite the possibilities for danger, if we consider the rearing posture of the horse. Her surrounds frame her with carefully contained colour, blurring of hues and shades within boundaries. The background forms seem to support her precarious position, celebrating her power and encouraging movement beyond that which is shown. The horse’s rearing gives promise to the next step, a step into the unknown, a step from the *soglia*.

The colour green predominates, her long dress, the trees, clouds, hill and sky all tinted with varying shades. The green is itself shaded with other tints, *sfumato* (blurrings, shadings) in pockets within the whole. Likewise, the centre of the sun is darkened, forming an umbra, whilst a penumbra, a shadow of the shadow, surrounds this before reaching once again into discernable colour. Spears of warmth launch from the sun’s edge and pierce a deep blueblack sky, reaching into the right side of the picture and unifying the sun with the horse and Amazonka’s hat. This white hat draws the eye to the snow-peaks in the distance, lofty heights perhaps implying lofty thinking.

Strange clouds and vegetation surround her, her poise unimpeded amidst the clamour of shape and colour. She sits in centred glory, her connectedness to her world reflected in colour and form. She looks obliquely at the horse with an air of grace and humility, her presence affirmed and assured. She is in control, moving with the horse, acknowledging its power while maintaining perfect balance.



Figure 8: *Amazonka in the Mountains* by Wassily Kandinsky (1918)

She holds the reins in her right hand, the crop in her left. I perceive no fear in either horse or woman—they exist together, a unity without anxiety. They connect with their eyes, her head tilted to her right, the horse's curved from the left, a unity of Yin and Yang, female force and male force, in balance.

The tabloid could be on a stage, it is framed so carefully on all sides, stage wings on each side with trees (or curtains?) drawn apart, revealing the scene below a scalloped edging. The jagged, mountain-like forms, reminiscent of footlights, illuminate from the foreground, the spear-like sunrays and far

peaks completing a shaped trilogy. The triumphant pose seems also to contain sweetness, for as the scene is revealed, neither horse nor woman assert domination, pink cheeks of innocence adorning the woman's face beneath her large eyes as the horse gazes towards her. Despite imminence of movement, evident from the horse's sustained pose, there is an absence of trepidation in either figure. Complete acknowledgement of the other seems to cradle them in safety into the unknown, beyond the frame. Whilst peace emanates from the picture, it seems to contain anticipation for the next event, allowing the space for surprise and therefore of the new.

I clamber towards completion of this work, mindful of graciousness. My climb has been long, as I have explored possibilities for understanding, surging from inspirational mentors, writers and philosophers, artists. These I have accompanied by potentialities revealed by my family, friends, colleagues and students. In my unexpected, unusual way, I hope to have created here something that justifies their gifts to me, to have attained graciousness, which might stay with me every time I attempt to understand anew.

### **Heron's wait and Heron's way**

The culmination of a philosophical examination of life meanings, expressly, the ethical nature of action in the world, is the ontological turn, as explored by Figal (2002, pp. 102-125). I believe elaborations, exposures, analyses and continued queries in this work have led me to a degree of fulfilment for me, in this life. The ontological journey rests with its ability to give a result, a measure by which I could stand. I sense that fulfilment, then, is a more appropriate term for that which I am attempting to achieve and wonder if fulfilment is my truth beyond the *soglia*, the name and the verb of my goal, rather than finishedness.

The word 'fulfilment' could express the meanings to which I am reaching in my explorations. I have questioned unfinishedness and finishedness and

they seem to me so inextricably linked that I can no longer deal with them separately. I conclude that for me they exist as a unity, one and the same, for they indicate degrees of perception that are open to individual meanings, which celebrate differences in each—unfinishedness to one person may seem finishedness to another. Perceptions for me are phenomenological, dependent upon the awareness of the *chiaroscuro*, the *sfumato* (shadowings), incorporating the umbra and penumbra and the space along the *soglia*, which is chosen by an individual for their next movement beyond. My perceptions are hermeneutic in the assimilation of impulses given to me from the environment, whether artistic or due to lived experiences. All this has led me to one plea—of authenticity of self.

To say that a person is authentic is to say that his or her actions truly express what lies at their origin, that is, the dispositions, feelings, desires, and convictions that motivate them. Built into this conception of authenticity is a distinction between what is really going on within me – the emotions, core beliefs, and bedrock desires that make me the person I am – and the outer avowals and actions that make up my being in the public world.

(Guignon, 2008, p. 278)

I have exposed as much of myself as I am aware, as a means of achieving my authenticity. Like broken ceramics, I have fragmented and crushed my self. The veins of gold in the mending take the form of my word havens and my reconnecting, as the space between my smashed pieces has been re-formed in my 'soulful space'.

The notion of 'soulful space' wishes to indicate a different kind of freedom - a 'spaciousness' in which vulnerability is not avoided, but rather, embraced. Soulful space is the mixing of vulnerability and the kind of freedom that embodies a willingness to 'wear' and 'move' within the vulnerabilities of this human realm. (Todres, 2004, p. 9)

I have presented myself as vulnerable in the world and to the world. This has led to my freedom, a freedom formed in awareness of my unfinishedness—which may be my finishedness—both of which may actually be my fulfillment.

This is Heron's waiting and it is her way. This is Heron preparing for her flight.



Figure 9: *Heron's Way* by Caroline Miller ©2015

*Heron's Way* is a large painting. The centre is a space of white and blueness, an impression of a heron and her reflection/shadow surrounded by a riot of earth and fire shades. I have been critical of the middle space. One day though, around the edges, where the colours mash and play, I saw what I had previously not seen. The colours had formed to create shapes, where before I saw only two. This day, between spaces of lightness and darkness, I saw more. The more I looked, the more I saw. Forms were melding, yet clambering for attention, for they were present. Now I have seen them, I return and immediately I perceive them again. What caused this change for me? Why did I then, on that day, after a week or two of looking at this painting, see these forms within? This seeing brings me to think—what else exists in this painting of which I am as yet unaware? Could there be more surprises waiting?

My technique involved layers of acrylic paint, mixed with white and water to allow the colours and shades to be revealed even if obscured. I wished for manifestation of surprises and employed this method to allow this space, for the unpredicted, the mysterious. I formed the possibilities consciously but could not completely control the effects of the colour placement when using this technique. Once formed, the painting yielded secrets to me, meanings elusive to me in their mysteries, but I continue in joy as pictorial revelations both settle and excite my inspiration. I see another form and wonder why it is clear to me, whether an other would see it. I withdraw and ponder. I enjoy the thought provoked by mystery and I relax into this revelry. It remains an enigma, despite my focus, but I am at ease, for it seems less important to understand, than to perceive and imagine. One mystery I have found with this painting is that each time it is seen by someone, they proclaim a fondness for it immediately. I focus on self-discernment and gradually my self-rejections fade.

### *Heron's flight*

I have looked to my scenarios and seen possibilities. I have revisited them



over time. I have felt responsibility and endured my own interrogations of my being, accompanied by explorations of possibilities of the being of the other. I could be perfectly imperfect in my responsible-ness, for in my striving for clarity, for meaning, I have created and continue to create opportunities for my own freedom. I own that, if fulfilment encapsulates the paradox of myself as finished/unfinished, I could, indeed, be fulfilled.

I continue to encounter new expressions for understanding, towards a transcendental spiral of brightness above the waves, drawing me from the unfurling, fraying, entangled, swirling, endless motion of the shadowed depths. I see now that no thing can come till I am open to that thing, for my openness demands readiness. This readiness demands my trust. Trust demands compassion, for the self and for the other. Compassion demands love. These seem to be forms and processes through which I must necessarily pass. It is a continual spiral of knowing. I cannot know when I attain a compassionate nature, for the compassion seems a thing presented to the world, perceived by others with more clarity than by the one considered compassionate. As Buber said, “For no *thing* is a ready-made part of an experience only in the strength, acting and being acted upon, of what is over against men, is anything made accessible” (1958/1986, loc. 424/1740).

If I see Buber’s words and sense the meaning for this, then my state is at ease. I cannot bear the “I-Thou” relationship without experiencing the isolation of the “I-It”. I cannot live authentically without breathing in the world, taking responsibility, then breathing it out. I cannot be human without unfolding myself into the world, then enfolding that which I understand, what is presented to me, in my comprehension. Each time I engage in a relation with a thing, whether it be animate or inanimate, I give myself an opportunity to find meaning. To find connection between myself and an other is a glory and a tragedy, for this space can last for only as long as there is the need on either side. If I am perceived by an other as compassionate, it is through reflection of their image that I am given vision.

In shadow, where my self is unclear but exists as an entity in space, with penumbral extensions forming endless potentialities for my self-perception, I must be open to the particular in order to account for it. If I look for identification as compassionate, it may not be evident, for in the searching is the exclusion of that which I do not wish to see. There may exist my grief of ignorance. Yet I remain dedicated to a path of authenticity, despite the pain.

I have been as honest as I could in all my interrogations. I have explored my knowings and my shadows and brought them to the focus whilst maintaining consciousness of the continued shadows beyond the light focus. Here I have offered myself as authentic being. In grief then celebration I have continued my connections with my world, courage an imperative. A pledge for authentic expression has led me to this path, along which exist aspects of finishedness/unfinishedness within the fulfilment of my being.

Beyond my *soglia*, into fulfilment, I am buoyed by gentle waves of hermeneutic comprehension. There I float, relish, break free, soar and love.



Figure 10: *Heron's Flight* by Caroline Miller © 2015

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# Appendix

## Correspondence

### Miller, Caroline M (DoE)

---

**From:** Krakow Info <krakow-info@krakow-info.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 20 August 2015 8:33 PM  
**To:** Miller, Caroline M (DoE)  
**Subject:** Re: Permission for use of an artistic image in PhD

Hello Caroline,  
thank you for your interest in our website. In the case of Leonardo the permission isn't required. Good luck with your dissertation!  
All the best  
Marek Strzala  
Krakow Info

**From:** [Miller, Caroline M \(DoE\)](#)  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 20, 2015 1:56 AM  
**To:** [host@krakow-info.com](mailto:host@krakow-info.com)  
**Subject:** Permission for use of an artistic image in PhD

Dear Marek,

I am currently compiling my PhD in Philosophy and wish to utilise an image from the Krakow Info website of *Lady with an Ermine* by Leonardo. It figures briefly in my dissertation.

I am a PhD candidate with Curtin University, Western Australia, whose copyright laws I have read and which state it unnecessary to ask for copyright permission for artwork included in a yet to be assessed Doctoral work.

However, on reading through your website details, I noticed that permission from you may be required. Consequently, in my desire to follow correct procedure, I appreciate your consideration of this request and await your reply.

Sincerely,



Caroline Miller  
Teacher  
Blackmans Bay Primary School  
177 Kosivb Avenue  
Blackmans Bay TAS  
Tasmania  
Australia  
ph: 0362296637

**RE: Query concerning paper- Phenomenology- Beyond the Shadows**

Secretariat WCP 2013 [secretariat@wcp2013.gr]

Sent: Friday, 18 September 2015 9:13 PM

To: Miller, Caroline M (DoE)

Dear Ms. Miller.

We apologize for our delayed reply due to the summer vacation of the Secretariat.  
Your paper will not be included in the WCP 2013 Proceedings as you asked to.

Kind Regards  
The Secretariat  
Anna

---

Secretariat WCP 2013

**From:** Miller, Caroline M (DoE) [mailto:caroline.miller@education.tas.gov.au]

**Sent:** Saturday, August 01, 2015 10:54 AM

**To:** Secretariat@wcp2013.gr

**Subject:** Query concerning paper- Phenomenology- Beyond the Shadows

Dear Anna,

Please could you confirm the withdrawal (if necessary) of my paper. I cannot be included in any publications currently, due to the imminent completion of my PhD and this paper's inclusion in my thesis.

Thank you so much,  
Caroline Miller

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