UNSEEN LANDSCAPES OF ADULT EDUCATION: CREATIVE ARTS, WELL-BEING AND WELL-BECOMING IN LATER LIFE

by

Jane Ruth Evershed

Canterbury Christ Church University

Thesis submitted
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

2018

Abstract

Creative arts education is integral to the diverse, extramural, formally taught and non-accredited landscapes of Adult Education.[1] Traditionally popular with adults in later life, it is correlated with improvements in subjective well-being (Hughes and Adriaanse, 2017), health (Humphrey *et al.*, 2011) and social inclusion (Feinstein *et al.*, 2008). However, UK government support for arts curricula is in decline (Hughes *et al.*, 2016), despite the rising demographics for older age groups (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2018). Funding for remaining programmes is increasingly rationalised through perceived improvements to well-being (Hughes *et al.*, 2016) and the attainment of objective and functional learning outcomes[2] (Schuller, 2017).

This thesis explores the relationships of three women in later life with creative arts education. The interpretive bricolage methodology draws together their experiences and considers the impacts of rationalising education exclusively through objective criteria. The research material is analysed using writing-as-inquiry and emergent interpretations are refined in iterative dialogues between researcher and participants. Thus, meaning is made in a 'continuing realignment of life events and life possibilities' (Rolling, 2010, p.157). The analysis is (re)presented as a series of evocative narratives, interwoven with the reflexive and autoethnographic positioning of the researcher. This process seeks to 'fracture the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.744).

The research highlights the participants' perceptions of motivational factors, barriers and constraints and explores aspects of personal meaning-making, spirituality and transformation. It also illustrates the importance of 'place' in fostering collaborative learning and curiosity and questions fixed notions of well-being. The latter is reconceptualised as 'well-becoming' to acknowledge its fluid and transient qualities. The women's experiences are set against a prevailing culture of accountability and lie beyond the immediate gaze of policymakers. Therefore, the research assists in promoting more sustainable and context-appropriate practice by exploring some of the otherwise 'unseen' landscapes of Adult Education in later life.

---

[1] Funded education is provided by several institutions including the Workers' Educational Association, university extramural departments and Adult Education Services. To protect the anonymity of the agencies concerned, the generic term 'Adult Education' is retained throughout.

[2] National funding targets require students to achieve at least eighty percent of their course learning outcomes and providers to report on subjective well-being indicators e.g. levels of confidence.

Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my grateful thanks to ‘Ginny’, ‘Diane’ and ‘Fay’ for their kindness and patience throughout the research. I also extend my profound appreciation to my supervisors, Dr. Wilma Fraser and Professor Linden West for their inspirational guidance and generous support.

Eternal gratitude is also owed to many friends and colleagues; particularly to Mist, Indie and Neo for their gentle and timely reminders, to Mic and Chris for their legendary proof-reading skills and to Ali for waiting so patiently for that which I promised. And to David, for his keen insight, unwavering love and untiring ability to make everything seem right. I could not have done this without you.

Artwork Permissions

Untitled (Green Silver), Jackson Pollock. (1912-1956). Guggenheim Museum, New York. Downloaded from https://www.guggenheim.org/ (Accessed: 16 July 2017). This image may be reproduced free for scholarly publications within the permits allowed by the Images for Academic Publishing (IAP) license (Figure 1).

Rydal Water. James Priddey. (1916-1980). Photograph of artwork held in private collection of author. No additional permissions required (Figure 2).

Rook’s song, *Janus at the table*, *Gaps (with pebbles)*, *Golden fruit on a winter tree*. Reproduced with the kind permission of the participating artists (Figures 3, 4, 6, 7).

The Toilet of Venus (The Rokeby Venus). Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). The National Gallery, London. Downloaded from https://theartuk.org (12 June 2018). This image may be reproduced for non-commercial research or private study purposes, and other UK exceptions to copyright permitted to users based in the United Kingdom under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, as amended and revised (Figure 5).

Contents

Chapter 4 (continued)

List of figures

Prologue

It was one of those cold, dank mid-December mornings where fine drizzle suspended itself on breeze-less air. Inky puddles lurked in the black tarmac, defenceless against passing tyres which repeatedly hurled them towards the pavements. Surely, no-one would want to come to class today. Surely no adult given any kind of choice would happily rise from their warm duvet and make their way to the damp and badly heated education centre.

I parked some streets away, weighing up whether I should make one trip or two with my paints, canvas, books and laptop. I was in good time, so I left the paperwork and trudged in. I met Jean on the way, struggling to see through her rain-speckled glasses. Her breath condensed as she scurried between the lines of traffic and waited as I forced the swollen outer door open with my shoulder. I blinked at the harsh fluorescent light and stood holding the door for her to pass through.

After exchanging a rueful shrug with Sue on reception, I turned left to the art studio. The door was already open and as I entered the room eleven eager faces turned towards me with warm smiles. Everyone, I noticed, except Pru.[3] She had fallen over a garden gnome about a fortnight ago; she was almost eighty, it was perfectly understandable. But as I turned, there she was, pushing a precariously balanced canvas and several tubes of paint on her walker towards me. 'Hello, pet,' she said with a twinkle in her eye, 'nice weather for ducks!' and it suddenly dawned on me why I do what I do.

[3] Names used throughout the thesis have been altered to preserve confidentiality and anonymity.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Landscapes of Adult Education

> The landscapes I have in mind are not part of an unseen world…they belong to a world that lies visibly about us…unseen merely because they are not perceived…[and] in that way they can be regarded as 'invisible' (Nash, 1938, quoted in Sillars, 2011, p.11).

The shifting landscapes of Adult Education in the UK have a rich tradition and history[4] and are currently undergoing further change with the planned transfer of Adult Education Budgets to local authorities in September 2018 (Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), 2018). Decisions to reassign fiscal responsibility are presented as opportunities for institutions to facilitate more responsive provision aimed at the specific needs of local communities. The majority of the funding for Adult Education will target accredited work-based programmes. The remainder will be directed firstly towards supporting adults living in disadvantaged communities to improve personal skills in preparation for employment or to support their children's learning. Secondly, it will fund those programmes considered to reduce welfare and health budgets (*ibid*.)

While providers of work-based education will report back to the ESFA on the achievement of qualification and skill targets, non-accredited community provision will be evidenced in terms of the wider benefits of engaging in community education. This will include evidencing improvements to well-being in terms of, for example, levels of confidence and self-esteem reported by the participants (Association of Colleges, 2016). Currently, this subjective information is collected from student self-assessment surveys and Individual Learner Records and used to demonstrate the achievement of individual learning outcomes by adult learners (Department for Education, Training and Skills, 2018). However, under the new scheme, and alongside videos and podcasts of older learners describing the benefits of education, agencies will also 'be required to have in place robust data analytics to demonstrate impact and accountability' (Hughes and Adriaanse, 2017, p.33). A cross-provider approach for capturing data is recommended to rationalise the measurement of subjective well-being more 'objectively' (*ibid*.). Although not

[4] A wealth of literature is available concerning the history of Adult Education, its Christian and Socialist antecedents and its much contested contemporary landscape (see e.g. Field, 2006; Fieldhouse, 1998; Holford and Jarvis, 2005). Although I am aware of the demise of its overall traditions (Tuckett, 2017), a reprise of its complex interrelations and historical accounts lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

specifically stated, it is likely that the data will be aggregated to allow comparisons to be made between different providers and communities.

Adding to the complexity of the landscape is an overall decline in the number of adults participating in community-based education since 2009 (Egglestone *et al*., 2018, Hughes *et al.*, 2016). The reduction in older adult participation rates is particularly significant, especially in the creative arts, where older age groups traditionally constitute a large share of the enrolments (All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), 2017). The fall in numbers is surprising as the demographics for these age groups have risen sharply; those over sixty-five now account for almost twenty percent of the overall UK population (ONS, 2018). Schmitt and Lahroodi contend that the decline in older-age enrolments is due to biological ageing, where curiosity and the desire to engage in education 'wanes with maturity' (2008, p.144). However, others suggest that older adults continue to aspire to participate in education post-retirement (Age UK, 2015; Humphrey *et al.*, 2011) and that the reducing numbers are more likely due to funding restrictions and subsequent class closures (APPG, 2017; Hughes *et al*., 2016).[5]

Fiscal restraints do appear to have adversely affected the provision of 'broader programmes of adult education, notably local authority and university extramural departments' (Schuller, 2016, p.1). These programmes include creative arts curricula and comprise, for example, painting, sculpture, ceramics and textiles courses. They are often associated with providing significant improvements to subjective well-being across all age groups (APPG, 2017; Hughes and Adriaanse, 2017). For some, the privileging of education for the workplace by the ESFA leads not only to a 'grossly lopsided approach' (Schuller, 2016, p.1) where considerations of health and well-being are 'consistently overlooked' (APPG, 2017, p.50) but also impacts disproportionally on those in later life. Reducing education provision for these curricula inadvertently marginalises many older adults from its wider benefits and disregards the value of non-accredited education for personal interest (Hughes *et al*., 2016; Schuller, 2017).

Contemporary studies of educational engagement for different age groups are not uncommon. They include research into the perceived motivations and barriers to

[5] This is evidenced by the increasing membership of the University of the Third Age (U3A) (2018) which offers lectures, events and social activities based on voluntary skill-sharing of its members, but does not offer regular and more formal programmes of teaching.

education across different adult age groups (e.g. Egglestone *et al*., 2018; Spielhofer *et al*., 2010), the need to re-train older learners for the workplace (e.g. Hyde and Phillipson, 2014; Schuller and Watson, 2009) and the value of education in championing social justice and equality for older adults (Age UK, 2015). Others consider the cognitive and emotional beneficial effects of education on mental health and longevity (Mestheneos and Withnall, 2016) and the wider social and personal benefits offered by Adult Education (APPG, 2017; Schuller, 2017). However, there appears to be a significant gap in the literature which specifically explores the field of formally taught, non-accredited creative arts programmes for older adults in community-based Adult Education. This is perhaps partly due to a 'widespread belief that learning by adults beyond paid work is not productive and therefore of very little interest or economic value' (Kimberley *et al.*, 2016, p.510). Articulations of any educational benefits lying beyond the agreed rubrics of what counts as education remain 'unseen' by the metrics of accountability.

At this point it is perhaps pertinent to declare a personal interest in the territory of Adult Education. My own career as an educator and academic is closely linked to its provision. I am also a student and practising artist and these perspectives will become particularly relevant in the articulation of the thesis as it unfolds. However, for now the prologue offers an insight into some of the intricate and complex issues of everyday educational life for older students. Adults like Pru will eventually stop attending classes. When they do, it is often assumed that they have become too old, too frail or too unwilling to make the effort anymore. It is of no great mystery that many older students find it more difficult to attend classes, but the deficit is assumed to lie with them. Therefore, my research not only asks why someone like Pru should defy convention and persevere with her education into later life, but also ascertains perceptions of extrinsic barriers. It is in these terms that I reveal the backdrop situating both the title and exegesis of my research and having summarised the context, I will continue by explaining more of the form and shape which it takes.

Methodology and research questions

I begin by explaining my use of an interpretive bricolage methodology to explore some of the everyday educational experiences of creative art students born prior to 1957. The participants are either recent students or are currently attending creative art programmes provided by Adult Education, which in this context refers to formally taught unaccredited provision for personal development. The research

interprets the complex meanings attributed to Adult Education by older adults and highlights implications for current policy. It expands understandings of what it means to continue with education into later life and provides valuable insights which may assist in developing more sustainable and context-appropriate practice. It also raises important issues for future research. I explain more of the bricolage methodology in Chapter 2, but there are two important principles associated with my use of the term. The first is that this is an interpretive endeavour, where meaning is made through social interaction and where as a researcher, I make virtue of my own immersion in the process. In doing so, bricolage inherently mirrors the 'messiness' often associated with social research. I accept that:

> Social life is messy, uncertain and emotional. If our desire is to research social life, then we must embrace a research… [methodology] that, to the best of its/our ability, acknowledges and accommodates mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion (Adams *et al.*, 2015, p.9).

The second principle acknowledges that every bricolage is different; its fluid quality defies distinct form at the beginning of its process. Appropriate choices of method with which to assemble, analyse and ultimately (re)present the research material only emerged in response to the interpretation and analysis of the assembled material. As different directions of travel unfolded I continually refined earlier interpretations as new insights emerged from my reflexive positioning. To some, these explicit re-workings may at first glance appear repetitious. However, I argue that my revisiting of particular aspects forms an integral part of my interpretive bricolage and always offers something new. Reappearances of particular aspects are 'justified by an understanding of the complexity of the object of inquiry and the demands such complications place on the research act' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p.320).

I conceptualised bricolage as an imaginary space in which I could suspend the research material and defer my immediate judgement of it. In this form I was able to spend time to reflexively analyse its many facets and acknowledge the uncertainty and ambiguity of my interpretations. It was only through repeated reflexive iterations that different insights and possibilities gradually emerged to guide additional phases of the research. Thus, the form and the content of the research became inseparable. As one flowed into the other, alternate perspectives and understandings were illuminated by balancing precise analysis with spontaneous and non-linear interpretations. All aspects of the research process remained open to the possibility of change, including the questions upon which the thesis initially rested.

Initially I conceived bricolage as a means of considering two research questions:

1. What motivates adults to continue with their education into later life?
2. What factors do older adults perceive as preventing or constraining their access?

However, consistent with the unfolding and organic inquiry of bricolage, supplementary questions arose as the research developed. I make explicit the naissance of many of these additional queries in Chapters 5 to 9, where I make virtue of changes in direction, unpredictability and uncertainty (Lather, 2007). However, one area of interest which repeatedly arose and which I incorporated into my research was:

3. How do adults consider education in terms of well-being in later life?

This 'questioning is an integral part of understanding the unfolding lives and perspectives of others…[where] generating and refining questions are critical to the shaping of qualitative study' (Agee, 2009, p.431). Consideration of this additional question prompted my review of some of the concepts and policies currently connecting notions of well-being with Adult Education.

Adult Education and well-being

Consideration of this additional question prompted my review of some of the literature currently connecting notions of subjective well-being with Adult Education. The literature notes the positive impacts that the continuation of education throughout life can have on subjective feelings of well-being (e.g. Feinstein *et al.*, 2008; Hughes *et al*., 2016). These benefits may be articulated through theoretical frameworks which include 'active aging' (Phillipson and Ogg, 2010), 'quality of life' (Jamieson, 2007), 'healthy aging' (Narushima, 2008) and 'mental capital' (Kirkwood *et al.*, 2010). Further research correlates subjective well-being with improved levels of confidence, self-esteem and socialisation, all of which are considered important to emotional and cognitive resiliency in later life (Lavretsky, 2014). Many models of well-being rely on the maintenance of a balance between 'life challenges', such as bereavement or unemployment, with 'resources' which include education and financial security (e.g. Cummins, 2010; Dodge *et al.*, 2012). Attempts have also been made to quantify the perceived benefits of education to the UK economy in terms of savings to health and social care budgets (e.g. Age UK, 2015; Feinstein *et al.*, 2003; Kirkwood *et al*, 2010). Yet others draw attention to the benefits of arts education on mental and physical well-being (APPG, 2017).

While the general consensus of the literature is that the 'attainment' of subjective well-being is desirable, there is also intense interest in being able to define and measure it. For example, Diener (2009) seeks to represent subjective well-being through 'scientific' measures of 'life satisfaction' while De Neve *et al.*, (2013) advocates the use of 'happiness' scales. Since 2010, UK public policy on society, health and education has been informed by the measurement of subjective well-being (Bache and Rearden, 2013).[6] The ONS gathers statistics on 'quality of life indicators' from a variety of national data sources including those relating to e.g. employment, longevity and educational attainment. These indicators are then combined with responses to more subjective survey questions concerning respondents' perceptions of 'happiness' and 'satisfaction' with family life (ONS, 2016).

Against this backdrop, Adult Education providers are similarly tasked with measuring subjective well-being and achievement of individual learning outcomes in their programmes. This is particularly the case where education curricula are largely considered as programmes for personal development and do not lead directly to a qualification, e.g. creative arts. For many Adult Education providers, collating subjective well-being data is necessary to 'demonstrate impact and accountability' (Hughes and Adriaanse, 2017, p.33) and to rationalise funding (ESFA, 2018). However, there is a danger that measuring subjective well-being against pre-defined 'objective' indicators empties it of meaning. Invariably, the markers employed require cognitive articulations of personally affective, 'felt' meanings of education and only report on those topics which are of interest to agencies rather than to the students themselves. Therefore, there are 'limitations to well-being statistics… [and it is] unlikely that human happiness can be understood without, in part, listening to what human beings say' (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2004, p.1360). My inquiry focuses on doing just that. It 'listens' to what older learners have to say about their educational experiences and the wider social and personal benefits they might articulate. It extends the knowledge of what it means to participate in Adult Education in later life and assists in understanding more about the nature of the associations made between Adult Education and subjective well-being.

[6] For a more detailed review of the political discourses concerning how well-being is constructed in British politics see e.g. Bache and Rearden (2013).

Taking ownership

As the bricolage expanded, interviews, observations, detailed field notes and participant discussions, based around aspects of their art practice, emerged as appropriate methods for assembling the research material. The processes of combining and layering these methods and materials are described further in Chapter 2 and Appendix 5. However, as they evolved, I also found that I needed to find a way to question my familiarity with the landscape. Inspiration arrived as I spent more time with the transcripts and became deeply immersed in the fields of creative art and the broader landscapes of Adult Education. I came to understand how my personal narratives, situated and shaped by my life history, impacted on how I might interpret the material. It became imperative to interrogate my positionality through a process of reflexive questioning.

Readers will by now be aware of my use of the first person. Through it I take explicit ownership of my reflexive position within the research. Rather than eliminating myself from the process I make a virtue of it. I purposefully situate myself in the evocative landscapes of Adult Education to make meaning and to question my own inherent beliefs, practices and experiences. In doing so I demonstrate 'the process of figuring out what to do' (Adams *et al.*, 2015, p.2), a recurrent characteristic of bricolage methodology. This process ultimately informed my decision to move away from 'writing up' the research material in favour of 'writing into' it (Pelias, 2011, p.660). I used a method of writing-as-inquiry (Chapter 3) to fold back my assumptions, gain fresh perspectives and to support more nuanced 'authentic insider interpretation[s]' (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003, p.42). Writing in my research journals inspired both my use of evocative autoethnography to develop richer meaning-making and my (re)presentation of the material in narrative form (Chapters 5 to 9).

Embarking on metaphor

At this stage it may prove helpful to pause and stress that this introductory chapter is written with the benefit of hindsight. The fluid quality of bricolage defies knowledge of any distinct form in advance of its unfolding, emerging as it does in response to the on-going research process. Its spatial, non-linear and provisional nature has proved challenging to capture on a two-dimensional page and confine in discrete chapters. Therefore, although I expand further on my choice of methodology in Chapter 2, I feel it may be relevant at this point to offer the reader a coherent metaphor for the overall construction of the thesis.

It may be reassuring to think of its exegesis as a sunburst, or as a set of ripples radiating from a pebble dropped into a tranquil pool. Broadly my writing has emanated from an interpretive core of assembled materials. However, I struggled to locate a singular metaphor to fully articulate the irregularities in the shape of those interpretations; the disparate directions and differential speeds of travel and how ideas have come, gone and returned again. None seemed able to fully evoke the riot of accompanying emotions; the periods of close scrutiny and the distance required; the sudden noise of activity and abrupt stillness of contemplation; the stop, start and smooth flow resulting from contradictions and indecisiveness inherent in research which coalesces the present with the past and future. The closest I have come is an 'action painting' performed by Jackson Pollock (Figure 1).

Figure 1: *Untitled (green silver),* Jackson Pollock, (c.1949).

In his abstract expressions he moved beyond the trope of brush and easel to drip paint upon canvases laid horizontally upon the floor; the canvas becoming an extension of himself as he painted it into existence. I feel his mark-making portrays some of the complexity involved in my iterative processing and presentation of the research. It suggests how I have made meaning through the folding and unfolding of compounded materials that swirl through time and space. It illustrates how unexpected glimpses and suprising insights have emerged from the apparent chaos, through my interrogations of both distinctive lines and the spaces between them. Thus, in my own small way, I feel that I too have painted my way into the research

process, not as an actor playing a part, or as an observer looking on, but as an essential, active and participatory component. My thesis became my canvas. Upon it I displayed my own personal 'process of storying stories…[which] explores individuals' understandings of their experience in the context of their everyday lives' (McCormack, 2004, p.220).

My use of Pollock's metaphor also explains the absence of a discrete literature review. Mindful of the emergent nature of bricolage I feel it is more authentic to introduce and reference salient literature as and when it arises, rather than forming boundaries between theory, analysis and practice. Therefore, I elected to interlay theoretical perspectives within the text and to augment its depth and richness with pertinent footnotes. This approach also proved invaluable in rendering my negotiation of ethical dilemmas explicit. Such considerations are inherent in all research, but it is the degree to which a researcher chooses to make them apparent that validates interpretive research (Dennis, 2010; Sikes, 2010).

In Chapter 4, I explain the specific ethical considerations I undertook. My approach involved careful consideration of each situation and context as it arose, particularly in the portrayals of my parents whom I can disguise but cannot offer complete anonymity to. In addition, I navigated a number of editorial decisions regarding how I might eventually (re)present the research material as a series of evocative autoethnographic narratives. The interactive and participatory model of my inquiry recognises that ethically I am intrinsically bound within its exposition alongside the participants. Therefore, I consider it appropriate to be overt with regards to my ethical deliberations and reflexive positioning. The participants made decisions about what they wanted to relate and how they related it. In making meaning and writing their stories and my own, I endeavoured to (re)present the material with thoughtful verisimilitude. My aim throughout has been to (re)present lives as respectfully as possible. The narratives materialise in Chapters 5 to 9 and bring to life some of the tacit and generally unseen perceptions of older adults engaging in extramural creative arts classes. As Reid and West (2015, p.1) contend:

> Narratives…are central to our ways of making sense of the world, of ourselves, and of the interactions between the two; between history and biography, between cultures and particular lives, and between the narrator and her audience.

My aim in these chapters is to display something of the embodied experiences of Adult Education through evocative writing (Pelias, 2004). The narratives follow on

from each other, mirroring the 'snowball' method of identifying participants to take part in the study (Chapter 2). They form my contextualised (re)presentations of the participants' stories and seek to highlight more of the holistic meanings of their experiences (Formenti, 2015). They also make explicit my own intersubjectivity and how I made my way towards my (re)interpretations as a way of highlighting some of the tacit and nuanced complexities of continuing education in later life. In doing so, I attempt to bring 'emotion and subjectivity into human sciences' (Bochner and Ellis, 2004, p.15) and illustrate some of the processes of social change which shape the ways in which Adult Education is articulated and valued. I explore how the participants' associate education with their own ideas of well-being and how they embody these understandings in their everyday lives.

An imaginative approach is central to my arts-based practice and to complement my overall metaphor of action painting I also employ portraiture as a metaphorical organiser to guide the reader through the narratives. This decision acknowledges the organic relationship between myself and the subject of my inquiry. It also connects to the way I have chosen to articulate that association (Chapter 4).

> Portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural contexts…[they convey] the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p.3).

Portraiture mirrors my field of inquiry and autoethnographically situates me in the complex and familiar landscapes of Adult Education alongside the participants. My self-portraits expose some of the shifting ground as I negotiate between different times and experiences of working-class childhood, academic, researcher and participant. They embody my familiar understandings of education and forge them anew, inviting 'listeners, readers and viewers to enter the perspective of the person who is telling their own story' (Riessman, 2008, cited in Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010, p.3). Thus:

> in its embrace of complexity, the bricolage constructs a far more active role for humans both in shaping reality and in creating the research processes and narratives that represent it (Kincheloe, 2005, p.325).

Parts of my personal narrative recalled through the interpretive process have at times proved difficult, but by interrogating my 'truths' and sharing them with others I have come to recognise particular aspects of my academic journey as transformative.

Transformation

A review of the literature on transformation suggests that although the notion is widely assimilated across multiple disciplines (Kegan, 2000) there are considerable differences concerning both its theoretical framing and the way in which it manifests (Meyer *et al.*, 2010). Views diverge from the central premise that 'much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context…in which they are embedded' (Mezirow, 2000, p.3). Transformations arise when these habituated perceptions become disrupted. However, it is the nature of the disruption and how ensuing transformation unfolds that appears open to contrasting interpretations.

Cranton and Taylor (2012) define transformative education as 'a deep shift in perspective' (p.3) which occurs through 'a process of examining, questioning and revising' (p.5) normative practices. For Mezirow (2000) this process requires rational and critical reflection on the discordant perspectives as they arise during life experiences. However, Brookfield advocates actively 'hunting the assumptions that frame our judgements and actions' (2017, p.21) to illuminate and transform the hegemonic power relationships which frame education practices. Thus, transformation not only concerns the (re)interpretation of existing knowledge, but also questions how that new knowledge is constructed (Kegan, 2000).

For others, transformations are generated not only through rational and cognitive processes, but also through affective criticality formed from notions of 'felt-reality' and 'spirituality' (Hunt, 2016). By interconnecting all three aspects, valid meanings are more likely to arise through processes of critical transformation 'that dramatically and permanently alter our way of being in the world' (O'Sullivan, 2012, p.175). West (2014) points to the use of life-writing and auto/biographical narrative as a means of illuminating such transformational moments through interconnectivity and complexity in lived experiences. He challenges those who would bracket out emotion, the unconscious and collaborative learning from such considerations. It is these embodied, emotional and spiritual notions of transformation which necessarily incorporate tentative fluidity that I acknowledge in my analysis and (re)presented narratives. Here:

> the notion of process is valued, as it emphasizes the artist/researcher as situated in a constant state of becoming - possibilities of what might be guide our movements, yet the ephemeral and shifting nature of the possible cultivates endless possible paths that might be forged (Guyotte and Sochacka, 2016, p.7).

Becoming

Ancona *et al.* (2001) list five notions of time, the clock, seasons, the life cycle and predictable and unpredictable event time. Thus, a two-hour weekly class during the autumn term is a predictable and seasonal event in the life cycle of older adults, punctuated by unpredictable periods, perhaps a sudden cause for celebration. The Ancient Greeks considered Chronos as the personification of this quantitative and linear advancement of time, however they were also prepared and attentive for the appearance of Kairos.[7] Kairos was regarded as the embodiment of the "right time', the time when circumstances presented opportunity for change, for a re-visioning, for a turning away from a previous course of action' (Fraser, 2018, p.70). Kairos has a qualitative nature, imbued with understandings of dynamic unpredictability.

In describing kairotic instances as 'moments of *being*', Fraser (*ibid.*, p.50) describes the sense of stillness that Kairos can engender, where time appears to hold still to offer new possibilities and ways of thinking. But even when seemingly rooted to the spot, the tireless march of Chronos continues and Kairos inevitably must surrender. The fleeting and transitory 'moments of being' move on as part of a continual process of *becoming*. I consider becoming not as an individual event with distinct beginning and end, but as a continual, dynamic unfolding of space and time. It is a process imbued with traces of place and individual social and cultural experiences and acknowledges both Kairos and Chronos in its shaping.

At different points in the research process both I and the participants describe times where Chronos gives way to Kairos, when time folds back and disrupts temporal linearity. It is difficult to fully articulate the sense of intense interconnectivity I felt at these times, where orchestrated synchronicity surrendered to sudden and multiple shifts of time and place. They were often accompanied by a sense of vibrant spirituality where becoming invites possibilities for change and for meanings to be re-made. Citing Swinton (2014), Hunt suggests that:

> spirituality helps us to pay a different kind of attention to the world…the kind of attention that draw[s] our gaze towards aspects of being human…that are vital, but often overlooked (2016, p.37).

I use the term 'spirituality' in my inquiry to describe some of the fleeting moments of embodied knowing that I have implicitly felt during the research process. These insights arose unsolicited from the deeply reflexive nature of my inquiry as I probed

[7] In the context of this thesis Kairos is considered as the brother of Chronos.

the overlaps between my life history, culture and educational experiences. Hunt asserts that reflection and spirituality are not only connected but are also 'likely to affect the nature and purpose of one's practical actions…(a fusing of private and public knowledge) that prompt our actions' (2016, p.45). Undoubtedly my concerns for education and my affinity with the natural environment manifested in my selections of research topic and methodology and my ways of making meaning. These in turn have led me to question the fixed nature of long-held understandings, some of which have proved personally transformative. However, spirituality is by definition without material form[8] and, in the context of my research, the nature of its continual becoming defies absolute rational explanation. My analysis in Chapters 5 to 9 illustrates how meanings may be formed through spiritual processes which are always provisional and never complete.

Reflexivity and (re)presenting stories

The narratives in Chapters 5 to 9 and the transformative elements they describe, were generated through an embodiment of 'I' and my 'personal allegiance' (Peilas, 2018, p.92) to evocative autoethnography as a means of surprising and (re)presenting my everyday understandings (Chapter 3). They arose through a process of writing-as-inquiry and gradually emerged as my reflexive gaze exposed new personal insights. By disrupting my familiarity with Adult Education and the ways in which I interpreted, analysed and (re)presented it, I wrote myself into 'articulate presence…tentatively appearing as a possibility among many' (Pelias, 2011, p.660). Whereas reflection examined what I knew, reflexivity explored the cultural and social influences which underpinned that knowledge and questioned how I knew what I knew (Meyer *et al*., 2010). I recognised the centrality of reflexivity by adopting first-person narration as a means of acknowledging my authorship of the participants' stories. In doing so I was obligated to tell my version as honestly as possible without claiming it to be the only 'truth' available.

> Truth in this sense isn't about nailing down what actually happened or a mirror of reality, but a question of how a narrative can be an honest construction of one person's experience, a potential lesson for living (Pelias, 2018, p.7).

[8] The Oxford English Dictionary (2018) defines spirituality as 'the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things'. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com /definition/spirituality (Accessed: 20 September 2018).

Notions of 'becoming' informed the way that I wrote the participants' narratives by regarding the interview transcripts as being in continual interplay with the richly detailed and emerging bricolage of materials. The process involved a multi-dimensional analysis of the research material and the (re)storying of the participants' experiences of education to draw out significant interpretations which could be easily overlooked by other processes (Clough, 2002). My close attention to the situated environment in which the participants performed their everyday practices granted me access to tacit knowing and I took great care to make meaning *with* the participants rather than *about* them. My continued contact with the participants beyond the initial interviews meant that I was able to discuss emerging interpretations as they arose. Thus, the narratives became more than a simple re-telling of the stories told.

Forming conclusions

Although each of the narratives in Chapters 5 to 9 may be considered in isolation, they are also retold as part of the much broader landscape of Adult Education. The final chapter provides a personal commentary on the meanings and (re)interpretations which resonated most with me. However, mindful that where 'researchers narrate the story and often identify themes or categories that emerge from the story' (Clough, 2002, p.332), it is impossible to assume that the reader will arrive at identical conclusions. They will bring their own unique interior life history and experiences to the process, for 'interpretation is always an intersubjective as well as experientially shaped process' (Reid and West, 2015, p.7). In that spirit, I also draw together the motivations, barriers and expressions of well-being perceived by the participants, illuminated by their experiences and perceptions. The summary provides specific examples of current practice which are directly relevant to those involved in the planning and policy making of curricula for older adults.

However, 'people are products of the times in which they are living; lives moulded by policies, structures, prevailing beliefs and attitudes' (Harnett, 2010, p.165). Currently it is objective accountability and modelling which appears to determine what counts as Adult Education (Biesta, 2016; ESFA, 2018; Gielen and De Bruyne, 2012) and therefore, much of its subjective value lies hidden by the objective metrics which shape its contemporary meaning. As fiscal restraint threatens its viability, this opportune research articulates some of those 'unseen landscapes' and exposes the significance of Adult Education in fostering curiosity, self-development and potential transformations.

The interpretive narratives seek to highlight commonalities and differences between the experiences of the participants, without an attendant need to essentialise them into states of universality (Reid and West, 2015). In doing so, they convey more about the deep personal connections made by the participants between their education and perceptions of physical and mental well-being. These connections shape-shift through time and space and have led me to reconsider well-being not as a series of discrete events, but as a dynamic process of fluid and continual well-becomings.

From this point, readers may decide to proceed conventionally through the thesis. However, others may wish to begin with the narratives at Chapter 5 and there are advantages to both. The former guides the reader through the theoretical and practical aspects of the methodology (Chapter 2), selection of methods (Chapters 2 and 3) and specific ethical and editorial decisions involved (Chapter 4). Thus, the reader will be 'fully equipped' to read the narratives with the background ready-sketched; they will be able to 'recognise' and link the stories to the methodological framework. The latter follows more accurately the way in which the thesis evolved. The narratives came first, each unfolding from the fresh immediacy of the research material, and the remainder gradually expanded both outwards from this central core and between that which emerged. This second path may initially raise questions in the mind of the reader regarding the methodology and ethical stance but may be considered with the benefit of hindsight when the remaining chapters are read. Both options reflect the inherent processes of interpretive research and will inevitably involve a degree of negotiation and iteration as themes occur and reoccur. Either way, when read together the chapters form a creative endeavour offering the reader rare access to some of the rich and vibrant 'unseen' landscapes of Adult Education in later life.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents and critically evaluates the overarching qualitative and interpretive bricolage methodology framing my research. Generically, qualitative research situates a researcher within the context of their inquiry, where they endeavour to interpret and represent their observations in terms of the meanings people attribute to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). However, this implies that 'qualitative research is difficult to define as it means different things at different times in different contexts' (Sikes, 2002, p.xi) and an interpretive bricolage is no exception. Therefore, in this chapter I first consider my use of the term 'interpretive' and second; explain how I used bricolage as a theoretical and reflexive analytical space in which to expand my inquiries. I explore how I combined bricolage and interpretive principles to guide my selection of interviews, field notes and observations as primary methods of assembling the research material. I also provide a rationale for incorporating images of participants' art work within the thesis.

In the latter part of the chapter, I discuss the specific ethical challenges arising from my methodological choices, together with a (re)consideration of my reflexive positioning from Chapter 1. However, I return repeatedly to these and other aspects of my inquiry throughout. For example, I consider the ethical decisions I made during my analysis in Chapter 4 but subsequently (re)open their discussion in the narrative chapters. These reprises are indicative of the inherent difficulty of describing an iterative and non-linear methodology in linear form. With that in mind, I stress that any appearance of undeviating certainty in my methodological process has formed only from hindsight. As will become explicit, my overall research approach incorporated a sense of continual re-bound between the pre-suppositions of my methodology, (re)interpretations and decisions regarding my selection of appropriate method. Various aspects of the bricolage gradually unfolded from a fluid, unpredictable and often 'messy' process which incorporated numerous changes of direction, each requiring careful consideration. Many of these processes and decisions are explored in the succeeding chapters, but first I turn to the overarching methodological framework which specifically shaped my form of interpretive bricolage.

An interpretive bricolage

Every research design encompasses inherent assumptions and limitations (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) for 'each one rests on the choices that researchers make when they enact their own ontological and epistemological pre-suppositions' (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.5). Informed by my long association with Adult Education, teaching and studying both creative art and computer technology, I recognise that I can never take an entirely neutral stance. How I perceive Adult Education is central to my interpretation of it. My values and beliefs recognise the importance of complex social interactions and experiences in constructing interpretive meaning. Therefore, my intersubjective exploration of the 'external' landscapes of Adult Education necessarily demands a reciprocal and deeply reflexive (re)appraisal of my own 'internal' terrain.

These beliefs informed my choice of using an interpretive methodology to complement my inquiries into the field of creative arts education and older learners. Complex interpretive inquiry 'privileges local, situated knowledge and situated knowers' (*ibid*., pp.5-6), but also suggests that 'no single method can grasp all the subtle variations in on-going human experience' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.21). From the outset I considered the use of multiple methods as part of an interpretive inquiry and initially considered interviews, focus groups and observations. However, I was also aware of the potential difficulties of fixing these methods in advance without considering how the yet-to-be-identified participants may prefer to communicate their experiences (Mann, 2011). With that in mind, I was keen to maintain fluidity and openness in my choice of method and found this a central consideration of bricolage methodology.

Bricolage was originally conceived by Lévi-Strauss as a metaphor to explain how rational meaning-making and social interaction is pieced together from disparate elements of life-history and experiences (Johnson, 2012). Therefore, in contrast to the application of pre-conceived methods, bricolage requires researchers to be 'adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p.17). The tools and methods they employ 'represent a set of actual and possible relations; they are 'operators' but they can be used for any operations of the same type' (*ibid.*, p.18). Thus, the overall design and the methods employed in bricolage research are situationally determined. They emerge as adaptations to circumstances which occur during the research process and are shaped as much by the researcher's gender and

personal history as the life experiences of the participants involved in the research. The result is a reflexive montage which combines:

> multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study [and] is best understood…as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.5).

Thus, every bricolage may be considered unique. Conceptually I considered mine as a theoretical space in which to suspend my immediate and definitive judgements of the research material. The ambiguity of this porous and temporal space between research activities disrupted my tendency to follow a linear and relatively straightforward pattern of methodology-method-data-analysis-conclusion. It assisted in keeping my inquiry open to subsequent (re)interpretations as I 'juggle[d] around trying to keep as many ideas in the air at once' (Cohen, 1997, p.380) and supported a more holistic approach to my analysis.

As I gradually stuttered through differing juxtapositions of material and methods, I felt moments of interconnectivity coalesce and my subsequent directions of travel and choices of appropriate method were rooted in these moments. Bricolage, therefore, may be considered as a 'reflexive collage...a set of fluid interconnected images and representations' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013, p.11) of the research inquiry at any one time. It has neither rigid shape nor content and is only revealed in the interaction between contexts, researchers and participants. Its methodological fluidity encourages the researcher to bring nuanced, inductive and contextualised notions together to form a 'collage of meaning' (Kinn *et al.*, 2013, p.1285) where each iteration interacts and seeps into the next. Just as I might carefully consider collage to display an assemblage of different forms within the same art work, bricolage overlays complex meanings within the same study in order to express its different aspects. Its appropriation of different methods is 'endlessly creative and interpretive' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013, p.30) and it provided me with opportunities to explore my field of inquiry from multiple perspectives.

The deployment of multiple methods which blend approaches from differing research paradigms, can sometimes be accused of superficiality and incoherence (Schnelker, 2006). However, though I employed multiple methods as part of my inquiry, I consistently exercised them within the same overarching interpretive paradigm. Thus, I constructed my bricolage through a 'pluralism of method, but not methodological pluralism' (Pole and Morrison, 2003, p.8). A second challenge aimed

at bricolage methodology is that in resisting pre-determination and embracing impermanence it can become too messy and slippery to assess (McLaren, 2001). I feel that at the core of this difficulty is a tension between differing philosophical discourses. An interpretive bricolage challenges reductionist forms of knowing, where knowledge can be assigned to discrete disciplinary categories (Kincheloe, 2001). It embraces a worldview where human research is far from fixed and certain by acknowledging that participants may have different things to say in different ways. Thus, it can be argued that:

> we may need to use different tools of analysis; for if we continue to use the same, dominant analytical methods, we may quite simply end up retelling the same, dominant stories (Kaomea, 2016, p.99).

My experience of bricolage was that any tendency towards the messiness described by McLaren was offset by its potential to allow participants to relate their personal experiences in different ways. The process was undoubtedly complex, and at times ambiguous and uncertain, but the constant, dynamic and reflexive (re)cycling of ideas and interpretations was entirely consistent with my ethical positioning. It involved 'a form of position-taking which includes a constant review of differing perspectives of the experience of fieldwork, a constant dialogue and interaction with…[the] research site' (Dennis, 2010, p.124). Many of the most salient changes of direction I have made explicit in the narrative chapters. These passages illustrate how my interpretive meaning making 'juxtaposes with - and subtly shifts - the meanings taken from previous content…it necessitates a continuing realignment of life events and life possibilities' (Rolling, 2010, p.157). I used these new interpretations to guide subsequent choices of method and directions of travel. However, as I began to understand more about what bricolage entailed I found it posed a paradox; for if appropriate methods only emerged *from* the field of inquiry, what method should I select to begin the bricolage *before* I had made my way into it?

Entering the field

Eventually, I decided to begin with semi-structured interviews, though as discussed later in this Chapter, I subsequently switched to a more unstructured process. Interviews presented the most likely opportunity for 'expanding rather than controlling variables' (Holliday, 2007, p.28). The next step was to negotiate a way of gaining access to participants and I took the pragmatic approach of contacting an education provider that I already knew well. I gained written permission from the institution to observe a series of creative art classes and to interview students

(Appendix 1). The observations provided me with opportunities to (re)immerse myself in the subject and culture I was studying and to introduce myself to potential participants. As the research continued, I found the first volunteer was able to introduce me to a second who had recently left the education establishment. She in turn acquainted me with a third potential participant who had recently joined a different art class. This 'snowball' method of forming a research group proved 'an effective technique to build…a sample, especially when used in a small-scale research project' (Denscombe, 2007, pp.18-19).

As I entered the research field I was aware that in contrast to the broader, large-scale studies recently conducted (e.g. Egglestone *et al*., 2018; Hughes and Adriaanse, 2017), my deep exploration of Adult Education would necessarily involve a much smaller number of participants. Intricate (re)interpretations of life experiences rely upon the depth and nuanced richness of the research material (Mann, 2011), and after my first participant interview (Chapter 5) I began to fully appreciate what that might entail. It became clear that my privileged position as a researcher had narrowed the topics for discussion too far. I recognised that the future success of my inquiry would rest upon the quality of my relationship with the participants.

> It is through relationships between the portraitist and the actors, that access is sought and given, connections made, contracts of reciprocity and responsibility (both formal and informal) developed, trust built, intimacy negotiated, data collected, and knowledge constructed (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p.135).

However, it can also be argued that participants bring agendas to research situations and that researcher vulnerability must also be considered (Raheim *et al.*, 2016). It required effort on both sides to gradually negotiate and sustain the participant/researcher relationships to a degree where authentic and intricate communications were established. My subsequent contact with the participants involved rigorous consideration of the appropriate balance between openness/closeness/distance/separateness in the researcher-participant relationship.

For some, research at this scale may lack validity (Chapter 4) and generalisability to other settings, but I disagree. Research at this scale is intense and rigorous. I was able to spend longer periods of time with each participant and to assemble more finely detailed information than larger, more impersonal, studies might. My inquiry highlights the contextualised, lived experiences of those in later-life education and creates knowledge relating to the meaning of those experiences. The proximity

offered by the inquiry to the participants' introspections also means that 'we see similarities but also differences, wholes yet particular and distinct patterning' (Reid and West, 2015, p.9). Therefore, my inquiry highlighted aspects of Adult Education which may be echoed in other situations, without suggesting a propensity for universality.

I offer specific instances of how the researcher-participant relationships developed, along with pen portraits of the three women involved, in Chapter 5. However, it is perhaps also pertinent to note here that two were retired and one was employed, two were active students and one had recently not enrolled. Their ages ranged between sixty-two and eighty-eight at the time the research commenced. Two weeks prior to their initial interviews I provided each with a copy of the research guidance notes (Appendix 2) and consent form (Appendix 3). I felt this provided them with sufficient time to carefully consider whether they wished to take part or not. However, one of the participants subsequently spoke of her difficulties with reading in her interview and I became conscious that I needed to assure myself that her consent had been informed. Therefore, at the end of the discussion I verbally restated the contents of the consent form and asked if she could reconfirm her agreement.

Prior to that disclosure, I conducted an hour-long semi-structured interview with the first participant at her education centre (Appendix 4). I recorded our conversation and all the subsequent interviews using a digital voice recorder fitted with an external microphone. I judged that interviewing students in their familiar surroundings would be conducive to the process and minimise their travel expenses. Interviews of this nature are often used in interpretive research and are frequently credited with the ability to capture and authentically engage with dialogue (Holstein and Gubrium, 2012). However, Mann argues that 'there is also a worry that these voices can become de-contexualised, taking attention away from the interactional context and the role and contribution of the interviewer' (2011, pp.10-11). Indeed, as I read the first interview transcript, I felt something of the disconnection he describes.

First forays in analysis

Before the first interview, I started to use journal entries to record my progress, but my writing became considerably more reflexive as I questioned my feelings of detachment with the pilot interview (Chapter 5). My success with writing-as-inquiry to explore assumptions and aspects of power encouraged me to continue writing as a way of reflexively analysing my position during the remainder of the research

(Chapter 3). As Richardson acknowledges, 'the research self is not separable from the lived self. Who we are and what we can be, what we can study, and how we can write' (2003, p.197) are indivisible. Ultimately, considerations of Richardson's words became central to my analysis of the research material through a series of autoethnographic lenses (Chapter 5). Through my initial explorations of the interview process I recognised how meaning-making was predicated on my own immersion in the ethnographic field of Adult Education. I was positioned as an academic researcher and an artist studying the social world of other artists and I would need to incorporate reflexive and iterative examinations of my position as both an insider and an outsider. Denzin and Lincoln argue that 'every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community that configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act' (2005, p.21). Being a white, 'middle class', British female in her late fifties perhaps situated me as a fairly typical teacher, teacher educator and academic, but cultural and community perspectives from my 'working class' childhood and younger adulthood persist.

One of my personal interests, undeniably predicated on my upbringing, is the subject of inclusive education and its affiliation with the question of access to education. Furthermore, my career has spanned further, higher, community and prison education and I have been a student for most of my life. These contextualised experiences position me as an insider who comprehends much of the history and language of Adult Education in terms of its political and social understandings. However, as a teacher, academic and researcher I am also positioned as an outsider. Both considerations impact on the complex ways that participants relate their stories and how I interpret them. Therefore, in my analysis I assumed a more informal and unstructured interview style in future encounters which followed more closely 'the major concerns or points of view of the respondent…considered as the best means of securing personal and private concerns' (Wimpenny and Gass, 2000, p.1497).

A subtle change of method

My subsequent interviews assumed a more unstructured style. My opening question simply asked if the participant would like to tell me something about their experiences of Adult Education and what they thought of those experiences. This adaptation allowed and encouraged the participants to relate their experiences in more inclusive ways. In addition, I invited participants to suggest a preference for their interview venues, actively involving them in both how and where they

articulated their stories. In doing so, I was attempting to relinquish some of the researcher's control in the process and to redress some of the issues of power implicit in conducting interviews (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Merrill and West, 2009). I also became more active in the way I recorded my field notes. By synchronising my wristwatch with the duration of the recording displayed on the digital voice recorder, I found I could make specific connections between the recordings, my emerging thoughts and ethnographic observations (Appendix 5). This process proved very successful; in the familiar interview surroundings of their choosing, the participant discussions and ethnographic features of their lived lives became richly detailed. By adopting 'an ethical practice of co-operation, an expression of reciprocity…central to our understanding of both the practice and value of collaborative writing' (Speedy and Wyatt, 2014, p.61),[9] I came to regard myself as a collaborative agent in the interpretive process (Lomax, 2000). So, when the participants used their own artwork to describe their thoughts and feelings I was able to readily incorporate their expressions into the process. As the nature of the researcher/participant relationships evolved I recognised how meaning developed collaboratively and incorporated a sense of dynamic becoming which later proved significant in my choice of autoethnography as a means of (re)presenting the research material and my part in its iterative interpretation (Chapter 3).

Once transcribed, I returned a copy of the interview to each participant. This procedure is in line with ethical guidelines which attempt to ensure that participants are aware of the interview content. It provided opportunities for supposed inaccuracies to be raised or sections to be omitted or expanded upon, particularly with regards to disclosure, confidentiality and anonymity. I transcribed the recordings verbatim and took care to replicate the speech patterns, accents and idiosyncrasies of the participants as closely as possible. Although this raised some ethical questions (Chapter 4), I felt this was important when striving for verisimilitude, for a likeness which refers directly to the authentic interview. My inclusion of genuine dialect in the transcripts was positively received by all.

---

[9] While recognising the participant/researcher reciprocity in assembling the research material, the process has affinity to, rather than follows, the co-operative approach advocated by Heron (1996). 'Co-operative inquiry involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it' (*ibid.*, p.1). In my inquiry the participant and researcher do not directly inquire together about the same experience and the participant neither keeps their own records nor contributes directly to the selection of method or processes of writing through the research material.

After the participants agreed the content of the transcripts, I annotated each with my contemporaneous field notes made during the interviews. I used the timestamps as a point of reference to add layers of ethnographic detail concerning the interview location, its surroundings and what was passing at the time. I recombined the transcripts with additional descriptions of body language and gesture, flavour, sights and sounds and supplemented them with my own emerging observations and insights. Appendix 5 'displays' how these processes came together holistically so that 'the local accomplishment of the interview is explicitly acknowledged and thus becomes a topic for analysis' (Mann, 2011, p.8). Just as I might appropriate a work of art to understand more about its original construction and intention, I began to think of the collaged transcripts as more than a simple facsimile of the spoken interview. Their analysis guided further dialogue with each participant and provided opportunities for me to share and explore emerging meanings by text, email and telephone. In this way, each iteration provided additional material for subsequent analysis which added clarity, depth and breadth to the research process.

Meaning-making and art practice

The rich layers of the research material were further enhanced as each participant spontaneously referred to examples of art in their interviews to express specific aspects of their educational experiences. Holding the interviews in locations chosen by the participants meant the participants had ready access to their own art. It encouraged them to move and act in familiar ways and provided me with unique access to the customary ethnographic details of their usual practices. As 'Ginny' sketched in her studio, as 'Fay' walked in her familiar landscape and as 'Diane' took a break in the 'art gallery' she had created for herself, I was able to pay close attention to 'the invisible and unspoken elements of everyday life [which] emerge as research knowledge' (Pink and Morgan, 2013, p.353). Pink suggests that encounters like these 'invite us to explore the unspoken and ongoingness of activity in the world as it is performed and experienced' (2013, p.28).

Art often transcends conventional language or writing (Battistini, 2002) and for many practising artists the physical act of making art is considered as an embodiment of thought. Art can both evoke and express visceral and powerful narratives, 'inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies, as well as with definitions of history, time, space, place, reality and truth' (Pink, 2013, p.1). I felt it was important to recognise these moments in my

(re)presentation of the analysis and decided to incorporate photographs of the art discussed by the participants into the thesis. I felt the images both underscored the emergent nature of interpretive meaning-making and would better assist the reader to visualise important aspects of the interview process. The images provide explicit examples of how the participants felt able to express meaning through a medium other than the spoken or written word, embodying thought and transcending language where words alone are not enough (Todres, 2007).

A question of ethics

Ethical considerations are entwined with my inquiry. However, one particular aspect concerned the question of how my interpretations might inadvertently misshape the delicate material. As a researcher:

> there is sensitivity in revealing people's lives…we are in a privileged position to look at them, to analyse and critique…Narratives however are always 'half someone else's'…and questions ultimately may be asked concerning who owns and constructs the narrative (Harnett, 2010, p.168).

Although the participant's consent form provided me with permission to interpret the material from my own perspective (Appendix 3) I remained alert to the possibilities for misrepresentation. On balance, I felt that not sharing my initial interpretations with each of the participants would risk destabilising the trust and rapport we had built together. Therefore, I revealed my initial analysis with each early in the process. The responses proved very positive and generated further opportunities for additional meaning, insights and (re)interpretations to be made. My continual interweaving of ethical responsibilities continued to inform my research and in due course was central to my decision to write and (re)present their stories in narrative form alongside aspects of my own autoethnography. Chapter 3 describes in more detail how I reached those decisions.

Chapter 3: An adventure with writing and theory

Introduction

In line with the methodological framing of bricolage, I delayed making any firm choices of method for analysing and (re)presenting the material until after my first (semi-structured) interview. I experimented briefly with grounded theory, coding and theming the first transcript with a view to presenting it as a case study (Birks and Mills, 2011). However, as my methods for assembling the materials shifted (Chapter 2), my views on how to analyse and (re)present them also moved. Rather than aggregating the rich material into progressively coarser fragments, I sought a means of better honouring its inherent vitality. Inspired by the adaptability of bricolage, I turned to writing-as-inquiry. It was through this process that I came to understand more fully how my educational biography is constructed by those of others (Merrill and West, 2009). I also realised that I had already started along this path earlier in my research, but had not fully recognised its potential as a method of inquiry.

Writing-as-inquiry

Writing-as-inquiry is grounded in interpretive research. It seeks 'to provide insight that befits the complexity of human lives' (Josselson, 2006, p.4) and is both, 'a way of finding out about yourself and your topic…[and] a way of "knowing" - a method of discovery and analysis' (Richardson, 2003, p.499). I was inspired by the first of Richardson's assertions to begin writing a journal about my personal experiences of education. I also found it a useful space in which to explore different research methods and my entries went some way towards explaining my reasons for adapting them. My initial writings were spontaneous reflections and observations triggered by my autobiography and the rapidly growing research material. But as I continued, I found myself returning to particular entries which initiated further phases of writing. Incrementally, my writing became 'both creative and analytic' (Richardson, 2003, p.510) and as my reflections folded back into themselves I gradually exposed more of my personal assumptions and predilections. Celia Hunt[10] describes this mode of reflexive writing as a combination of active intention and periods of 'relaxed, low level intentionality, the 'listening' mode that is open to the bodily-felt sense of inner and outer worlds' (2013, p.134).

---

[10] In the thesis I have referenced the work of both Celia and Cheryl Hunt. To distinguish between them in the text I have appended Celia's name where appropriate.

I eventually integrated some of the more pivotal entries that I made into the (re)presentation of the research material (Chapters 5 to 9), but it is perhaps pertinent here for me to provide an example. I wrote the following passage at a time when I was actively working through my reasons for deciding to research creative art taught in community venues.

> The 2016 exhibition *Everything but the Kitchen Sink* at The Jerwood Gallery in Hastings showcases local artist Bratby's ability to celebrate and express the importance of domestic objects and rituals in everyday life. The title is taken from one of his paintings of 'a very ordinary kitchen, lived in by a very ordinary family...a kitchen in which ordinary people cook their ordinary food, and doubtless live their ordinary lives' (Sylvester, 1954, p.62). Some paintings belong to major art institutions, but many items are crowd-sourced from the local community and include newspaper clippings, photographs, items of furniture, letters, ceramics, clothing and postcards, all of which relate to his life. These everyday items are juxtaposed with the valuable artwork and reflect the values expressed by Bratby himself that 'ordinary'[11] people always have something to say. Even after its initial staging, the exhibition still evolves as people add more items; a bricolage of memories - a photo of Bratby in the pub, his sketch of someone's garden. The retrospective has taken on a life of its own and with each new addition come new understandings of everyday life. It is this sense of sparkling 'ordinariness' that snatches at my imagination. It reminds me of the 'ordinary' people who come together each week to make art at [Adult Education] and how, from this seeming 'ordinariness' leap vibrant conversations and inspirational works of art. The reasons for choosing my research subject and study group have suddenly coalesced. I realise I am interested in exploring the taken-for-granted and ordinary rituals of Adult Education and how those who take part perceive its importance in their everyday lives (Research Journal I).

Slowly, recognition dawned that 'I' was a common thread running through the research process, it would be my interpretations in interaction with others that would shape it from conception to presentation. My autobiography was inextricably entwined with its interpretation and I would assert and impinge on its evolution as surely as I determine the composition and perspective of my paintings. In this way writing-as-inquiry 'not only questions the work; the work also questions the one who understands. The circularity of the interpretive process lies in the movement of questioning and being questioned' (Murray, 1978, pp.107-108).

---

[11] I am aware that the term 'ordinary' may be conceived as pejorative. However, here I use it in the sense of John Updike's wish of 'giving the mundane its beautiful due' (2004, forward) or Rose Hilton's desire to paint 'The Beauty of Ordinary Things' (Lambirth, 2008, title page). Both evoke the hinterland between everyday familiarity and spirituality which can transform the 'ordinary' into 'extraordinary'.

Richardson's second point, concerning writing-as-inquiry as a means of 'discovery and analysis', crystallised as I continued to free-write, gradually finding out what I wanted to say in the process. This 'methodology of getting lost' (Lather, 2007, p.4), of not knowing what I would write until I had written it, evoked personal recollections and deepened my interpretive understandings of the research material. My journal became a place where multiple times and places converged as I positioned myself within the research as both 'knower and teller' (Richardson, 2003, p.511).

So when my thoughts returned once again to the thorny issue of how I might analyse the rapidly accumulating 'thick' and rich, descriptive research material (Geertz, 1973), I realised I was already doing so. By combining autobiography and ethnography *autoethnographically*, I had found my method of 'discovery *and* analysis'. But almost immediately other challenges unfolded. The first related to how I might (re)present any autoethnographic analysis in a form that would still offer opportunities for subsequent (re)interpretation. The second concerned how I might negotiate the wealth of ethical implications which would undoubtedly arise in the process (Chapter 4).

Autoethnography

> So there I lie on the plateau, under me the central core of fire from which was thrust this grumbling grinding mass of plutonic rock, over me blue air and between the fire of the rock and the fire of the sun, scree, soil and water...wind, rain and snow - the total mountain. Slowly, I have made my way in (Shepherd, 2011, p.105).

The term autoethnography is widely appropriated (Denzin, 2006), but invariably involves the reflexive positioning of the researcher self, as both insider and outsider of the research group. For most autoethnographers it is this that characterises it as a form of interpretive inquiry (Chang, 2008). Practises include theoretically objective processes (Anderson, 2006) and wholly subjective modes (Bochner and Ellis, 2016), but many other variants lie in between. The diversity of form offers the researcher flexibility in the ways that they come to analytically write (graphy) about their personal experiences (auto) and understand cultural practices (ethno) (Ellis *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon the researcher to explain their individual autoethnographic process as its distinctive nature renders uniform definition impractical (Denzin, 2006).

Also, given these variances of definition, it is perhaps unsurprising that, as a research method, autoethnography may be considered as lacking in neutrality and impersonal distance (Delamont, 2009). Others point to potential issues associated with 'narcissism' or 'self-indulgence' (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008), or dispute the 'truth' of emergent narratives told in different ways (Madison, 2006). My research approach is predicated on the reflexive meanings made and (re)made between the researcher, the participants and the field of inquiry. It considers autoethnography as a 'self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self and others in social contexts' (Spry, 2001, p.710), and focuses on being 'self-reflexive but not self-obsessed' (Denzin, 2006, p.421). I have remained mindful of the need for this balance in my thesis. My inclusion of personal reflections, and the ways my perspectives have altered in the process, adds depth and context to the research without becoming solipsistic.

Autoethnography is also confronted on grounds of insufficient 'validity' (Anderson, 2006) in terms of its verifiability, replicability and reliability. For those who practise autoethnography, these triadic notions of validity are deconstructed by the iterative, deeply reflexive and analytical nature of their writing from multiple perspectives (Richardson, 1997). Validity becomes a much broader question of reflexive rigour through an engagement with a range of theoretical perspectives. Autoethnographic narrative writing is not simply a witnessing of lives. It is an ongoing, ethical, intersubjective, intellectual and emotional (re)presentation of lived experiences. Its validity lies in its verisimilitude, in its 'potential to engage the reader, imaginatively, in the story' (Reid and West, 2015, p.10) and in the ways that a narrator's personal experiences are inevitably reflected. Therefore:

> narratives may be better judged by aesthetic standards, by their emotive force or their capacity to engage the reader emotionally in the story being told, by their verisimilitude rather than their verifiability and by criteria of authenticity or integrity concerned with how far stories are true to the lives they portray (Booth, 1996, p.37).

The 'rise of autoethnography' (Bochner and Ellis, 2016, p.44) allows for many different forms of the analytic (re)presentation of life experiences including those akin to plays, novels and poetry. For some, rigour, breadth and depth of these interpretive endeavours are best demonstrated through the overt discussion of the frameworks and formats by which the autoethnographic narratives are edited and constructed (Anderson, 2006; Holstein and Gubrium, 2012). My specific response to these considerations is provided in Chapter 4, but first I consider how Anderson

(2006) draws attention to other indicators by which to judge the success, or otherwise, of autoethnographic research. These characteristics demand that researchers must be full members of the group under study, should be committed to theoretical analysis and analytic reflexivity and make their dialogues with participants manifest in any (re)presentations.

In reply, I consider that as an artist researching other practising artists in the field of Adult Education, of which I have been both teacher and student for over thirty years, I am a full member of the field in which I study. Throughout the analysis and (re)presentation of the research material (Chapters 5 to 9), I actively express my own thoughts and doubts, deeply entwined as they are with the (re)interpreted narratives of the participants. I am explicit in my negotiations of positionality and ethical considerations and the ways in which they have shaped, deepened and expanded my on-going interpretations. I embed trustworthiness by questioning the context, content and 'voice' of the research material (Drake, 2010) and by making these interventions overt. I also seek integrity by making my own assumptions of the research process explicit (Brookfield, 2017). All aspects are informed by deep reflexivity desirous of making 'the familiar strange, and the strange familiar' (Clough, 2002, p.8).

My adopted autoethnographic approach combines elements of both theoretical analysis and subjective evocation. On the one hand I engage the 'evocative, reflexive, embodied, partial and partisan' (Pelias, 2011, p.659) in an emotionally engaging and subjective (re)presentation. On the other, I combine theoretical engagement within the analysis, making myself 'visible, active and reflexively engaged' (Anderson, 2006, p.383) within the composition.

> As critical ethnographers, we do not hide our selfhood and subjectivity, transparency is not an issue, nor do we make ourselves the primary subject of our own study. Instead, we are critical and self-reflexive of how we think about our positionality and the implications of our thoughts and judgments. We don't stop at our mirror reflections but recognize the resonances that ripple and expand to a thinking about thinking (a metasignification) that inherently takes our contemplations and meanings further out, beyond our own mirrored gaze (Madison, 2006, p.322).

The process of writing evocative autoethnographically has necessarily involved 'a balancing act between form and content' (Speedy, 2008, p. 139). I have negotiated the twin challenges of assimilating narrative understanding, not from 'facts' or 'data' but from situated interpretations without knowing what I will write until I have done so; for it was only as I wrote through the material that understandings unfolded. The narratives I present in Chapters 5 to 9 provide evidence of the insecurity of tenure of

the not-yet-fully understood and the ambiguous nature of working with the past, the present and the future.

Pelias asserts the legitimacy of this form of research, where knowledge about the subject deepens through the act of writing:

> Writers come to realize what they believe in the process of writing, in the act of finding the language that crystallizes their thoughts and sentiments. It is a process of "writing into" rather than "writing up" a subject. When writing *up* a subject, writers know what they wish to say before the composition process begins. When writing *into* a subject, writers discover what they know through writing. It is a process of using language to look at, lean into, and lend oneself to an experience under consideration (2011, p.660, original emphasis).

The emergent methodological determination championed by bricolage complements this rationale. Together they justify my use of autoethnography as a way 'to make sense and create meaning out of difficult and complex questions that cannot be answered in straightforward or linear tellings' (Rasberry, 2001, p.1). The more I came to understand the participants' lives, the more I came to understand myself; the better I understood myself, the better I understood their lives and ways of living and learning. The resulting narratives illustrate my hand in the process and the interconnections between the participants' stories of Adult Education and my own experiences. They trace the development of my (re)interpretive meaning-making and understandings which unfolded during the inquiry, 'part of the representational processes in which…[the participants] are engaging and are part of the story they are telling' (Atkinson *et al.*, 2003, p.62). My immersion in the process embodies ways of knowing (Todres, 2007) and acknowledges a 'surplus of meaning over the cold lexical qualities which language usually demonstrates in the research report' (Clough, 2002, p.83).

I chose to begin this section on autoethnography with an excerpt from *The Living Mountain* (Shepherd, 2011). I feel the prose invites the reader to engage all their senses; to imagine how they might, feel, hear and see 'through' and 'into' the mountain. This embodied expression mirrors my own experiences of slowly and gradually writing *through* and *into* the research material. I believe it telling that Shepherd only came to write and know about the mountain slowly, by making her way *into* it rather than climbing *upon* it. Her writing shuns accurate but dispassionate descriptions of the mountain and illustrates how, as in all creative arts, form and content, process and product are inseparably connected (Ellis *et al.*, 2011). What I needed was to find a similar way to write *with* the research material, to lean into it

rather than walk *over* it; to find a way of resisting the need to plan in advance what I was going to say (Lomax, 2000). In the best traditions of landscape artists, I may 'know' the terrain having walked it for many years, but trusted that new observations and insights would unfold as I travelled through it.

In (re)presenting the assembled research material using evocative autoethnography, my aim was to 'examine and analyse context, culture, and self-other interactions in reflexive and introspective stories…[describing] thoughts, feelings, bodies, motives and experiences' (Bochner and Ellis, 2016, p.164). I wished to express more of the meaning which emerges from the process, endeavouring to illuminate the 'felt-sense' of the 'shape, themes and variations' (Todres, 2007, p. 74) unfolding from the inquiry. At the same time, I did not wish to replace a cold and dispassionate account of Adult Education with a fully fictional narrative. What I felt I needed was:

> some degree of balance or harmony between communicating the 'texture' and 'structure' of human phenomena. One can err in either extreme: in attending excessively to the structural dimensions, one can over-generalise and become too distant and abstract, thus losing texture and intuitive presence; or in attending excessively to the textural dimensions, one can become overly poetic where the intuitive presence of the phenomena is palpable but where its meaning is left implicit, without reflection (*ibid*., p.47).

Chapters 5 to 9, are my attempts at achieving that balance, in the full knowledge that all research is partial (Pelias, 2011) and that my (re)interpretations are no exception. They (re)present the research material as a series of autoethnographic and evocative narratives rather than a set of discrete individual accounts. They are formed by interweaving the interview transcripts with my contemporaneous field notes and subsequent reflexive writings to immerse the reader in the participants' experiences of Adult Education (Appendix 5). However, the authoring of the narratives also involved numerous and sometimes difficult editorial and ethical challenges and the next chapter rationalises some of the explicit decisions I took in their construction.

Chapter 4: Editorial and ethical considerations

Introduction

In Chapter 2 I explained the ethical considerations which underpinned both my methods of gaining access to participants and for assembling the research material. However, further ethical decisions were needed as I (re)interpreted and (re)presented the material to create coherent narratives. It is these decisions that I consider in this chapter and in doing so make explicit the editorial and ethical frameworks supporting my (re)presentation of the research material. As discussed in Chapter 3, this process acts to validate the use of narratives as a means of (re)presentation (Josselson, 2006; Sikes, 2010) in an interpretive inquiry where 'conventional measures of good research such as reliability, replicability and verifiability are meaningless in relation to such rich narrative dynamics' (Reid and West, 2015, p.10). Their validity lies instead in their capacity to evoke a 'real' sense of the complexity of the lives of those participating alongside the foregrounding of the reflexivity and ethical positioning of the researcher as they interpret the material (e.g. Fraser, 2018).

My narrative (re)presentations in Chapters 5 to 9 chronicle and interpret lives through a series of theoretical lenses. They invite emotional and intellectual reconsideration by the reader and provide a 'real' sense of the lived experiences of older adults as they engage in education. However, to do so I made a series of specific ethical and stylistic decisions in writing the narratives and feel that these are a central part of the overall research process. These considerations included my appropriation of suitable metaphors, use of participants' authentic accents, grammar and speech patterns, chronological disruption of the material, changes in tense and pronoun and the order and selection of the research material. These decisions were (and remain) complex, but I will attempt to clarify each in turn.

The hand of the artist: positioning and reflexivity

Throughout the analysis and (re)presentation of the material, I combined a range of primary and secondary sources including interview recordings and transcripts, field notes and reflexive writing. My aim was to draw the reader into the social milieu of Adult Education with evocative and emotionally engaging autoethnographic narratives. In accordance with my methodological approach, I enriched the text by layering the 'voices' of the participants with elements of personal reflexive interrogation. In doing so, I drew upon specific events and times from my past to question, inform and illustrate the interpretive meanings exposed by the stories. I

share and explore a selection of these personal memories in the narratives which were summoned by contemporaneous situations during the collection of the material or directly proceeding from it. They form the basis of the narrative self-portraits in Chapters 5 to 9 which paint pictures of my interior self as I make meaning with the other participants in the research. They act to deepen my reflexive understandings of the situations described because in autoethnographic storytelling 'it is the depth of reflection that makes or breaks it' (Gornick, 2008, p. 9).

However, although any autoethnographic account necessitates the need for stories about the self, I am also mindful of the balance required between a 'methodological focus on self' and 'self-indulgent introspection' (Chang, 2008, p.54). Therefore, although I appear in the text, I neither centre myself in what I am attempting to articulate, nor position myself as a dispassionate bystander. I argue that integrating private and social experiences is legitimised by the integrity with which I have striven to interrogate my own interpretations in the hope of revealing certain truths which may find resonance with others (Ellis, 2009).

I am also mindful that personal recollections are unavoidably subject to revisions of hindsight, imposed by an older self on a younger 'I'. The distortions in time may render my personal stories partial and historically situated, but throughout I have striven to relate the remembered images, spoken words and feelings, as truthfully as my memory and their transformation into written form will allow. In doing so, their articulation brings me closer to them and re-opens their familiarity to (re)evaluation and personal transformation. As Hunt observes, evocative autoethnography 'enables us to 'wonder about ourselves', to locate that wonder within our social contexts and to share our embodied experiences with others' (2009, p.3).

When reading the narratives, I ask the reader to suspend any expectation of a chronologically linear telling. Instead, I invite them to dive into the evocative depths of the narratives and perhaps even find themselves there. My aim is to share more of the narrative's 'felt-sense' (Todres, 2007) through the reader's active and inter-subjective involvement and to 'illuminate the social context of individual lives' (Sparkes, 2003, p.3). Throughout, my ambition is to broaden the potentiality for meaning-making by consciously allowing the source materials to rub against each other. In doing so I hope to show moments of synchronicity where theoretical perspectives and the research material synthesise and deepen understandings.

However, this is a two-way process, reliant upon my ability to find a way of making my active participation in the research process explicit.

Writing the image: employing metaphor

Mauthner suggests that one way of resolving this issue is to find 'a suitable language for describing this private and hidden world' (2002, p.6). I turned to my familiarity with art practice to find my 'suitable language' in the form of metaphorical language. I was inspired by Hunt's assertion that 'metaphor, can provide a vital and much neglected link between the personal and often idiosyncratic world of 'felt-reality' and the 'propositional' world' (2006, pp.315-316) of language.[12] Thus metaphors may be considered as primary forms of knowing through which embodied feelings may be translated into language (Celia Hunt and Sampson, 2006).

Lomax describes the process of 'writing the image into classical theoretical text...as an adventure with both writing and theory' (2000, p.xi). I echoed her words in the title of Chapter 3 and they are manifest in my writing as I enter the thesis as both reflexive narrator and active participant. As I grappled with the growing assemblage of material I was prompted by Cixous' portrayal of her life as a writer, as if 'covered by an infinite number of strata, layers, sheets of paper' (1986, p.88), to write:

> I 'see' Cixous' 'sheets of paper'. I can feel their paper tracery; torn edged, crisply lined, creased, smoothed, softened by continual touch. I shuffle their gossamer leaves and as they come to rest they overlie. Ink transfers, one to another. I glance at my own biography, suspended in the folds of other times and places and glimpse the lives of others through their translucent veils. And gradually, piece by piece, the strata deepen and expand, warming and cushioning me as they swell my papery nest (Research Journal II).

My journals became a place to explore my unfolding understandings as different times and places coalesced. In an interview, Cixous (2007) explains the importance of this symbiotic relationship between time and place in her writing and how she comes to:

> write like a painter...the archive of my own writing is also at work in my writing...it is behind and around me...other painters and writers always accompany me...a huge dialogue...a perpetual exchange.

My autoethnography appropriates aspects of Cixous' metaphor by painting images of my explorations of the Adult Education landscape which say both "I am here' and 'I was there" (Celia Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p.114). Therefore, in considering the

[12] Here Hunt (2006) refers to Heron's (1996) 'ways of knowing' where the felt-sense of experiences (experiential) may be mediated through imagery and metaphor (presentational) and/or articulated by propositional language.

present, it is always understood in terms of the past. This eternal movement between past and present is inherent in my understandings of becoming (Chapter 1). Although now a mature adult, part of me is still child *and* young woman *and* artist *and* ecologist *and* daughter *and* teacher *and* sister *and* student *and* academic *and* researcher, *and, and, and*… Thus, as I write and make interpretive meaning I do so from a complex plurality of spaces and times. Becoming suggests that I exist with 'a plurality of I's [which] acknowledge each other's existence' (Stiegler, cited in Speedy and Wyatt, 2014, p.61). It is a mode of thinking which considers 'knowing' *with* time and place; somewhere *between* past and present.

Painting movement: chronological disruption

In the narratives I suggest these shifts of perspective as chronological disruptions using 'flash-backs' and 'flash-forwards'. Likewise, my use of 'montage' mirrors the juxtapositioning of multiple storylines; 'repetition' amplifies meaning; 'freeze-frames' temporarily suspend elements of narrative action; 'long-takes' slow and stretch significant moments. I include evocative and descriptive prose to provide a rich sense of the time and place of the interviews and to make manifest the ethnographic details of bodily gestures, which communicate much in the absence of language (Modell, 2006). As I folded and (re)folded the material, I found myself leaning into 'the conventional critical/creative binary divide' (Knights and Thurgar-Dawson, 2006, p.8) which more traditionally 'separate[s] social science from literature' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.744).

Structure and collage: more on metaphor

Inspired, I wrote the narratives as a series of distinctive and characteristic individual 'portraits' starting with Ginny in Chapter 5. Each set of portraits is prefigured by a contextualised 'pen portrait' and a 'first sketch' which provides specific ethnographic details of the interview location. However, as I listened again to the interview recordings and became more familiar with my field notes, I caught sight of many of my own experiences of education. Using writing-as-inquiry, I began to explore these areas in my reflexive writing (Richardson, 2003) and realised that by painting the participants' portraits I was also painting myself. My writing journal became the source of my own series of 'self-portraits' for Chapter 6.

Following Ginny's interview in Chapter 7, I understood more about the collaborative nature of interpretive meaning making and wrote this, and subsequent narrative chapters (Chapters 8-9), by collaging my 'self-portraits' with theirs. My reflexive

interplays are sourced directly from my writing journals and contemporaneous theoretical research notes, though it is perhaps important to reiterate that they were written without any intentional outline plot or schema in mind. Thus, the resulting complexity in the different narrative layers explicitly acknowledges my positionality and provides an approach through which specific theoretical understandings may be articulated (Anderson, 2006).

Gestural mark-making: maintaining individuality

Each of the narrative chapters (Chapters 5 to 9) is written in a style which highlights the participants' individual personalities by retaining authentic mannerisms and modes of speech. The success or otherwise of a painted portrait is often judged according to its outward resemblance to the sitter. However, the most successful go beyond mere visual representation and evoke a sense of the character and humanity of the person depicted. Therefore, in contrast to the academic language used elsewhere in the thesis, I chose to transfer the original accents, language and grammar from the interviews to the (re)presented narratives.

I was able to follow a relatively conventional conversational pattern by using the interview transcripts as the base line with the exception of Diane's narrative in Chapter 8. Her narrative presented additional ethical challenges with regards to the ordering and redaction of her research material to provide narrative coherence for the reader. I wanted to (re)present Diane's mode of speech in a way that would do justice to her individual expression, which communicated as much meaning as her words. However, I was concerned that my respectful efforts to include her accent and delivery may cause difficulties. When I provided her with a copy of her transcript I stressed, as I did with the other participants, the importance of including authentic phrasing and accents. Diane took almost two weeks to reply to my email containing her transcript, but when she eventually did she was very positive about it. When I asked her later about my representation of her interview material she said 'I'm proud of 'ow I speak' and did not ask me to make any changes.

Texture, tone and colour: pronouns and tenses

Stylistically, I wrote the narratives using a fusion of first and third person, flipping between the past, present and future. The shifts in pronoun are used as a literary device to incorporate and interrogate different voices and narrative strands. First-person writing is a rubric of autoethnography and brings 'emotion and subjectivity into human sciences' (Bochner and Ellis, 2016, p.15). It encourages the reader to

empathise with the tone and tenor of the material and to engage affectively in their own participative meaning-making as the narratives unfold. Thus, it invites both researcher and reader to 'make their hearts skip a beat' (Bochner, 2012, p.162), 'to think *and* to feel' (Bochner and Ellis, 2016, p.55) as they write/read their own stories as part of another's.

The deliberate changes in tense are linked to my earlier discussions of chronological disruption in the research material. My aim is/was to relate the participants' lives as on-going events as new (re)interpreted connections form through my biography. It echoes and expands my notion of being 'both here and there' (Celia Hunt and Sampson, 2006). I use the present tense to comment on unfolding events and provide a sense of my contemporaneous thoughts, uncertain of what is yet to come. I use the past tense to provide distance, as a narrator thinking and writing about the events sometime later. Hence, the reader 'is invited into the author's world, evoked to a feeling level about the events being described, and stimulated to use what they learn there to reflect on…their own lives' (Ellis and Bochner, 2003, p.213). This toing-and-froing through time and space recognises my moments of hesitancy and doubt in interpretive meaning-making, and acts to keep the material fresh and alive, a work still in the process of becoming.

Pentimenti[13]: ambiguity and indecision

As the portraits continued to build, I assimilated many moments of indecision into the under-painted layers but also deliberately exposed some on the (temporarily) finished surface of the text, in the style of an artist incorporating *pentimenti* into their work. I arrived at this place by engaging in critical dialogue with the assembled materials and reflexively positioning myself within their recounting, deliberately leaving behind traces of my writing process. I took this decision because I considered that doubt, hesitation and ambiguity are important aspects of meaning-making (Clough, 2002). In my view, eradicating all my messy under painting would project a sanitised and inauthentic view of the processes involved. *Pentimenti* act as reminders of the non-linear, complex and collaborative aspects of my interpretive endeavours and make explicit how I interrogated my own assumptions in specific moments of uncertainty.

[13] Pentimenti are alterations or traces of previous workings which remain in the composition and demonstrate how an artist has changed her mind during the process of painting e.g. *J.W.I. in her room*, by Kanevsky. Image available at: http://www.dolbychadwickgallery.com/artists/alex-kanevsky/images/2301 (Accessed: 10 January 2018).

Composition and perspective: what to include and exclude

A further series of editorial decisions which occupied me during the analysis and writing phases, concerned the ethical challenges of deciding what to keep, what to omit and what to anonymise. I quickly found that detailed ethnographic and interpretive material accumulates at great speed and a great number of decisions were needed to establish narrative coherence in a readable format. As with any analysis, some parts of the material found their way into the text immediately, some I returned to later and other areas remain undisclosed. The division of the material in this way involved careful dialogue with the participants.

However, as I continued, two specific dilemmas arose. The first concerned whether to omit, or otherwise alter, the participants' disclosures of physical and/or mental health issues revealed during the interviews. After a great deal of thought, my choices were informed by the participant's acceptance of their interview transcript, ever mindful of the invisible power relationships between interviewer and interviewee. I therefore omitted some aspects of the material and edited other parts to maintain confidentiality. However, others are openly discussed. For example, one participant was very explicit in her interview about her dyslexia and does not regard it as 'something to be ashamed about'. However, for reasons that will become clearer in Chapter 8, I have not included an image of Diane's ceramic bowl around which she forms a significant part of her narrative. Its absence speaks volumes, perhaps more than its presence might. She politely, but firmly, declined my request to photograph it and I felt that ethically I should not repeat my request. However, along with Ginny, she was not so reticent about including details of periods of serious depression in her life. Both felt these times had been difficult periods in their lives, but were quite clear that they regarded them as times of new beginnings in which Adult Education played a meaningful part. Fay was also explicit about the stimulus that her serious illness and subsequent recovery played in her decision to return to education. She felt very strongly that it should remain part of her story.

The second ethical dilemma which required considerable negotiation, arose from my decision to incorporate some pertinent biographical details derived from my memories of my parents' lives. I considered them 'a powerful and natural resource to be used to understand others' life histories...essential to telling stories' (West, 1996, p.19). However, it is unavoidable in autobiographical work to afford complete anonymity for family members and my decision to include them as part of my

history was not undertaken lightly. I had no specific intention of including them in the research from the outset; my father passed away almost a decade ago and my mother's advanced dementia made it impossible for her to consent to be a participant. However, they appeared in my thoughts anyway, both during the interviews and as I wrote into and through the material, in my attempts to demonstrate the assumptions and particular ways of knowing which underpinned my own notions of education.

We necessarily share many years of history together and I found myself unable to separate substantial and significant parts of my life from theirs. Therefore, after careful consideration of the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (2018) and based upon many examples within the autoethnographic literature (Ellis, 2009; O'Reilly and Abbey, 2000; Rich, 1976; Tullis, 2014), I decided to include my memories of them. I feel this is a crucial point. Although my parents figure in my writing, they can do so only through me, through my partial, one-sided accounts of their words and actions. The memories are mine, and I relate them as truthfully as I can recall them and to some extent perhaps this circumnavigates the potential issue of providing a version of events which my parents may dispute or reject. However, the remembrances are very much of a particular time and place and are not included to invite judgement or criticism in their absence. It was what it was, and with distance my parents were probably as loving as their own circumstances could offer. My recollections are vital to my analytical process and act to deepen reflexive understandings, turning them inwards so I may contemplate the how and why of my own actions (Madison, 2006). The intensity of thought required for their expression has at times proved difficult, but their explication has fashioned moments of significant personal transformation. To omit my parents from my reflexive understandings would perhaps only have raised a different series of ethical considerations regarding the integrity of my research.

Materials and media: notes on narrative framework and format

As I slowly made my way into the narrative I began to collage some of my personal recollections with the difficult beginnings of the first interview (Chapter 5). To distinguish the different layers more easily, I decided to adhere to traditional literary forms and place all the material taken directly from the interview transcripts or subsequent discussions within single quotation marks. I italicised specific words or phrases to mirror any emphasis made by a participant and included images of their

artwork at appropriate points in the narratives. These act as points of reference around which the participants articulated important aspects of their conversations.

Much of the narrative remains unedited and is generally presented in the order in which it was related. As explained earlier, my choice of which text to include was made to provide a readable commentary and followed the transcripts as closely as possible. I incorporated additional material from subsequent contact with the participants to add clarity and detail in some areas and I merged the participants' responses with the narrative where appropriate. Where I redacted dialogue, or altered it for the purposes of confidentiality, I have striven not to de-contextualise that which remained. The places and activities described mirror the situations and locale of each interview. Their context provided me with opportunities to make contemporaneous field notes from which I was later able to develop the narrative environments. The people encountered in the narratives and the events and experiences I depict are genuine.

I employ occasional footnotes as a means of adding clarity to points of artistic or colloquial use of language and to signpost the reader to salient theoretical points that I may have expanded upon elsewhere. I am encouraged by Richardson's argument that as a literary device footnotes may be considered as 'a place for secondary arguments, novel conjectures, and related ideas' (1997, p.43). Used in this way they can either be read alongside the narrative or later, to maintain the flow of the prose. Likewise, I interspersed the narratives with a series of 'asides' which juxtapose the interview material with contemporaneous ethnographic details and my own commentary and autoethnographic details. When these personal recollections, unspoken, inward thoughts, insights and reflections occur within a narrative portrait of another, I display them in italics, to distinguish them from the participant's speech. Those headed as self-portraits are plainly my own reflexive considerations and therefore do not require a change of font. All occurred either as part of the on-going collaborative process, either during an interview or later arising from my immersion with the material. Included in the composition are changes of mind that mirror my working process. They provide a flavour of my creativity where I was uncertain of the way forward or was questioning decisions already made. In exposing them I display some of the raw under painting that structures and supports the narratives rather than displaying them as seemingly-slick and perfect final products. My reflexive studies form an integral part of the whole. They speak of the

complexity of interpretive meaning-making and demonstrate some of the unpredictability that can be involved with this kind of inquiry.

These reflexive passages also act as a reminder of the iterative nature of my methodological approach. Although related as an episodic story, the reader will be aware of considerable shifts in time and place, including my considerations and recollections of events before, after and during the interviews. This is in keeping with the cyclical and iterative movements associated with interpretive meaning-making that moves through time. In the text I have attempted to make the time to which these elements relate transparent, becoming part of its overall layering and interconnectedness. It is perhaps self-evident that the process of writing-as-inquiry also gave rise to considerably more reflexive material than I could possibly exhibit. My selection from it has involved a great deal of complex and gradual self-negotiation through multiple ethical and academic decisions. However, the material endures and, in testament to its rich complexity, I acknowledge that the unfolding of its interpretive meaning will continue. It is almost certain that the narratives I display in Chapters 5 to 9 will not be the final or only versions.

Additionally, and in keeping with my overall methodology, I chose to interweave the narratives with aspects of theory and my reflexive endeavours. I am aware that for some, this may truncate the flow of the narrative. However, I suggest that presenting the analysis, underpinning literature and theory together, with the research material reflects more openly the genesis of the narratives. I combined my imagination and creativity to (re)interpret the different senses of Adult Education perceived by the participants. The essence and verisimilitude of their rich accounts hold fast in my re-tellings. Interweaving my own autoethnography into the narratives added complexity to the richly layered stories. By doing so, I attempt to evoke in the reader a deep sense of the place that Adult Education inhabits using what Pelias (2004) describes as a ‘heartfelt methodology’ (see also Fraser, 2015, 2018). As Ellis (1995) asserts, the multi-layered, intertextual and intersubjective nature of autoethnographic writing integrates personal and social experiences. It invites the reader to take an active role in intimate conversations by encouraging them to make their own interpretive connections in the knowledge that ‘stories are the truths that won’t stand still’ (Pelias, 2004, p.171).

As the narratives unfold, some of my justifications for making these decisions are related and interrogated through my journal entries as I began to write and (re)write through the material as a method of inquiry.

> But I am aware of the clock ticking. I have suspended the moment of first commitment to the page for long enough, a blank canvas both inviting and terrifying, but where to begin? Will this thesis not start with an abstract, summarising that which is at the end? If so, the start is not the beginning and as I am not yet at the end, I must be starting somewhere in the slippery middle and between things before I have even begun. I find myself within a temporal and spatial fold of my own making, cycling forwards and backwards through space and time and fragments of thought, attempting to allow the material to determine what needs to be said and how to say it...*a writing of becomings* (Research Journal III).

Chapter 5: Ginny

Pen portrait: Ginny

Ginny[14] says she has 'lost count' of the number of creative art courses she has taken over the years. Born in the late nineteen twenties, most of her early childhood was spent moving between cities and towns in the south of England, following her father's itinerant job. Her mother was involved in the women's suffrage movement and instilled a sense of independent thinking in her young daughter from an early age. At the outbreak of the Second World War she happened to be settled in a school where the majority of the children's parents lived and worked abroad. She continued her education with them during the 'Blitz', removing to the countryside with the rest of her classmates as the school 'upped sticks' and moved *en masse*. The curriculum was progressive for the time and she relished the outdoors and freedom of living in a rural environment which brought her opportunities to study nature and art.

Leaving school at sixteen, she worked as a personal assistant in a variety of companies before opening her own business. She continued to work after becoming a single parent and as the children left home she completed a master's degree as a mature student. Now in her late eighties, she lives independently in a small rural village and regularly attends weekly art classes some twenty miles distant, although she is finding it increasingly difficult to access them. I first met Ginny at one of these classes where she volunteered to be interviewed.

The narrative begins in Ginny's studio, at the beginning of our second interview together. As I wait for her, I recall our difficult first interview which led to changes in my interview method (Chapter 2). It was also somewhere at this stage that I began to understand more about how I might come to (re)present and interrogate the research material. As discussed in Chapter 4, I remind the reader that the text presented in single quotes is sourced directly from interviews and subsequent conversations. The interspersed italicised text and the autoethnographic self-portraits, express moments of emergent reflexive knowing. These arose either during the interview process, or later from my immersion with the material. They highlight the iterative and on-going processes inherent in my research.

[14] In accordance with ethical guidelines, I reiterate that all names and places have been altered or omitted for the purposes of anonymity and confidentially.

Portrait of Ginny: First sketches

I watch spellbound as a sunray travels tortoise-like across the chaotic wall of overlapping and torn magazine cuttings. Images and posters jostle for position alongside faded and new postcards, sketches, lists, colour charts and gallery flyers. Half-finished paintings lean drunkenly on the work surfaces, propped haphazardly amongst the plywood figures and clay tiles.

One book. One toy. One thing at a time. Either/Or.

A sickly-sweet smell of paint and brush cleaner wafts on a light breeze from the open window along with something indefinable that I can't quite place. Ginny stands slightly stooped at the far end of the shed she uses as her studio, resplendent in a splattered shirt that might once have been green, and a pair of custard yellow trousers. As she busies herself 'making a bit of room' on the table, I find my thoughts drifting back to the weeks leading up to our first interview together.

At the start of term, I agreed with the management team of an Adult Education institution that I could observe some art classes at their new learning centre and ask for research volunteers.[15] There were twelve students in the first class, mostly over sixty and all women, and I could remember nervously handing out copies of the information sheet[16], keen to appear suitably professional and academic. Afterwards, I sat at the back of the class and watched them work, slipping unconsciously into the role of observer and assessor, ingrained from years of being a teacher educator.[17] As the students filed out, Ginny was the only one to show any interest in being interviewed.

But that was for the future. The 'me-that-had-been-then' sat in silence, listening to the various conversations between the students as they painted. The relative merits of the different studios at the old and new centres were clearly important. I heard how Sylvia and Beryl had not re-enrolled due to the rise in the car park charges and how the trudge to the new centre with paints and canvas was now too far for Enid. They laughed at the impossibility of rising from the 'funky' beanbags which had replaced the chairs in the common room and joked about the 'swanky' apartments built on the site of the old centre being haunted by the enduring smell of oil-paint and turpentine.

---

[15] See Appendix 1.

[16] See Appendix 2.

[17] I was involved in Initial Teacher Education for almost fifteen years.

Sitting there, I could remember the place they were describing well, having spent many hours observing lessons in its light-filled space. I could recall the pungent aroma of paint, the heavy wooden easels and the paint-spattered floor; the impromptu gallery of students' work stuck to the walls and the half-finished paintings drying on over-laden racks. The sink had been an artwork itself, positioned beneath shelves groaning with still-life paraphernalia which waited patiently for rainy days and winter evenings. The dressing gown used by the life model hung on the back of the door, frayed from where it constantly caught as the door opened and closed.

The new studio where I sat listening to the students was very different; a masterpiece of modern multipurpose learning, permeated only by the smell of soup and toasted sandwiches drifting across from the franchised café.[18] The layout was designed for every activity. It had sliding partitions and blank white walls so that in other incarnations it could be used to teach mathematics, English and French. Stuck to the centre of one of them was a large laminated sign which read 'Do not stick anything on these walls' and its unintended irony made me smile. At one end, the blinds were drawn against the glare of the sun. At the other, deep shadows reigned. A couple of the students had brought in lamps to clamp to their easels. Others traversed the room with their paintings to see them better. I remember wondering if the lighting that ran the length of the room was broken, when suddenly, it had sprung into life.

'Blast it!' Joan cried, as the shadows and planes of her careful composition suddenly shunted sideways. She made the others laugh and it relieved the tension. I later discovered the lighting was on an automatic timer and programmed as part of an 'integrated facilities package' (IFP) to make 'efficient use of the building environment'.[19] The life model, Tracey, arrived, chatty and upbeat. She made light of the salary difficulties she was facing now that Adult Education had outsourced its life models to a temping agency. The tutor was glad to see her. What used to involve a simple phone call to book a model directly had become an administrative nightmare. It had taken several aborted attempts to organise.[20] But a while later, with Tracey in her final pose and the students quietly concentrating on their sketches, the IFP made its presence known once more.

---

[18] Built as part of a private sector initiative to combine services onto a single site and then leased back.

[19] Information taken from a poster located in the corridor outside the classroom.

[20] New guidelines mean that casual staff are recruited and paid through a temping agency rather than directly by the education establishment.

Detecting no movement, it first dimmed and then switched the lights off completely. Almost as one, the students danced and waved their arms at the ceiling, as if in deference to some deity of light. 'Ah, we seem to have docked with the mothership!' Tracey joked, as the lights returned to a full and penetrating glare, but with concentration lost and twenty minutes to go, the students decided it was pointless to continue. They began to tidy away, keen to avoid another 'ticking off' from the administrator for leaving the 'maths room' 'unfit for purpose'. It was then, during the ensuing chaos that Ginny had approached to say she might be interested in joining my research and we had arranged to meet again the following week at the centre.

A difficult beginning

The ringing of a phone splits the air and my thoughts swerve to the present. Ginny moves across to answer it and waves at a couple of high stools sitting in front of the patio windows as she goes. I take one and test a suspicious looking blob of paint for firmness. Pleased with my decision to wear my painting jeans, I settle down to wait and my thoughts return to our first interview together.

Throughout the interview, Ginny politely replied to each of my questions with interest. Eager to gather relevant empirical evidence I asked a series of semi-structured interview questions: 'What are your perceptions of Adult Education?', 'Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to attend?', 'Which aspects of the classes do you find most interesting?' She replied to each, explaining how she got breathless on the climb to the centre, how she found driving difficult in the winter months and how the rise in course fees was not matched by a rise in her pension. She mentioned the importance of maintaining social contact and how the classes helped her to feel less isolated and improved her confidence. By the end I was already condensing her responses into themes and thinking that I could compare each of her points with those raised by the next participant.

At home I eagerly transcribed the interview, concentrating hard to make an exact verbatim copy. But in the quietness of reflection, it became increasingly difficult for me to dispel the feeling that Ginny's responses concealed much more than they revealed. As I read and re-read the transcript I became conscious of the seeming lack of emotion in her replies. I replayed the recording repeatedly, gradually becoming aware of the generality of her descriptions that communicated little of the particular. I also became concerned about my position in the process, particularly my apparent desire to control the interview, to bring it back to the point, *my* point, whenever the

conversation seemed in danger of wandering. It was as if we were cast in a play, in the moulds of academic and student; playing a part, yet playing apart.

I began to think differently about interviewing after reading Todres (2007) and his arguments for including descriptive and aesthetic textures as explicit modes of analysis and presentation in qualitative texts. Drawing on the previous work of Gendlin, he emphasised the importance of recognising the 'felt-sense' of the interview process which can otherwise 'become easily lost in our efforts to generalise' (p.8).

> [This] 'felt-sense' refers to a way of knowing that is not just 'logical' but also 'responsive', that is, awake to the bodily evocative dimensions that makes words personally relevant and workable (Gendlin, 1981, cited in Todres, 2007, p.31).

It was this 'felt-sense' of my interview with Ginny that was lacking. I realised that I needed to find a way of accessing, communicating and displaying more of the aesthetic texture and emotion of the interview process itself. Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests that qualitative descriptions of interviews should have the ability to transmit a bodily sense of being-there. This includes aspects of language and structure which communicate the mood of a situation or experience and evoke feelings of empathy in the reader. For Hillman (1981) it is also important that the writer should bring their interpretive contributions to the text and make it clear that what is presented is not the only interpretation (e.g. Clough, 2002). With a rush of self-realisation, I recognised that I had been so intent on the mechanical reproduction of the recording that I had reduced the interview to an accurate, but lifeless, transcript, largely deficient of the vibrant nuance and texture I had witnessed.

And I knew then that I had to contact Ginny again.

Ginny's voice brings me back to the present. She is asking if I'd like a cup of something, she is making coffee, 'but if I would prefer tea?' Fishing around in my bag for my digital recorder, I raise my head and smile my appreciation. 'Thanks, coffee's fine', I say. As she leaves the room I absently check that the machine is working and as I do my thoughts begin wander once more without deliberate intention to a particular period of my childhood.

Chapter 6: Made in Sheffield

Self-portrait I

I was made in Sheffield at the beginning of the sixties, forged, as my father would say, by the hard work and grime of generations of miners and steelworkers. I was born in the front bedroom, too quick for the midwife to be called in time, and lived in the same council terrace with my brothers and parents until I was eighteen. As a child, life was relentless, dull and predictable. It centred on school, homework and keeping quiet and out of the way, while Dad slowly and painstakingly completed his maths degree with the Open University.[21] We were a family of scientists and mathematicians (as Dad would boast to anyone whether they asked or not) and back then I knew no better. However, in 1972 we acquired a full set of the Encyclopaedia Britannica and that summer my world shifted.

It was the holidays, so Mum was at work and, Dad, being a teacher, was at home[22]. The days dragged. As usual my brother, Mike, and I were reading and trying to behave while Peter played chess when a knock on the front door heralded something unusual. Excited, I peered over my book as Dad opened the living room window.[23] It was a 'knocker', a door-to-door salesman, and I heard him tell Dad about a new educational publication called an encyclopaedia. Normally Dad would have given anybody that called short shrift and sometimes even a swear word or two. But today Dad asked if anyone else on the estate had bought a copy and when he found that no-one had, he invited the man in an the tedium of the day was miraculously broken.

I watched in fascination as the salesman removed some sample books from his briefcase and talked to Dad about the advantages they could provide for his three sons. 'I'm not a boy!', I'd declared indignantly, though to be fair, with the same haircut as my brothers and wearing Peter's hand-me-downs the poor man could easily be forgiven. Ignoring my outburst Dad placed an order, choosing the most expensive edition with black leather bindings, embossed titles and gold leaf edges; a

---

[21] Initially entitled 'University of the Air' the Open University responded to the publication of the Taylor Report (1963). This highlighted the degree of continuing exclusion from higher education of lower income groups, and the growing need to retrain workers as employment patterns shifted away from manufacturing and heavy industry. The University opened for student admissions in 1971. http://www.mcs.open.ac.uk/80256EE9006B7FB0/(httpAssets)/F4D49088F191D0BF80256F870042AB9D/$file/History+of+the+Open+University.pdf (Accessed: 12 January 2017).

[22] Perhaps not an indicator usually associated with a 'working class' upbringing, but this was how I experienced my childhood.

[23] As a child we never opened the door to anyone. Kynaston (2009) suggests this was normalised behaviour prevalent in working class homes of the period.

man on a mission to prove his education and worth. I seem to recall they cost about a hundred pounds, the price of a second-hand car at the time. On her return from work, Mum, laden down with four bags of shopping and half an hour late due to the bus breaking down, had been livid. She'd wanted Dad to buy a car for many years[24] and if she'd been home when the salesman called, the 'cyclo' would never have entered our lives. The blistering silence between them had continued for weeks.

As the payments were made, the volumes began to arrive. They were large and weighty and smelled strongly of printing ink. They shut with erudite thuds and the pages crinkled as they turned. At first, they lived on Dad's desk in the living room, but they soon took up too much space and were consigned to the bedroom I shared with Mike. I would read passages to him each night, the gilding glinting in the light of the torch. We would argue in whispers over which section to read next. My brother wanted to begin at Aardvark and continue straight on alphabetically, whereas I, on finding out it was the name of an insectivorous animal that lived in Africa, yearned to look up other insectivores and find out exactly how far it was from Sheffield to Africa. This was not just a work of reference. It grandly aspired to explain and organise *omne scibile*, the sum of all human knowledge, into twenty-four equal-sized volumes. This irked Mike no end. He felt there should be twenty-six for a start, one for each letter of the alphabet and I would tease him about having to make up enough 'Z'-words to fill an entire volume of their own and deciding which 'B'-words should be removed from the English language to make them fit. In my head I would begin to do just that, imagining new creatures and new worlds that would begin with a 'Z', while Mike spent his time reading all the 'A's before starting on the 'B's.

One book. One toy. One thing at a time. Either/Or.

I hear myself sigh and look around the studio. Ginny is not yet back, and it had only been a few minutes anyway. As I continued to wait I thought about our first interview and wondered why I had approached it the way I had. Why had I felt the need to control it so much? And as I gaze through the window, another memory surfaces seemingly from nowhere and begins to replay.

---

[24] No-one owned a car on our estate apart from the taxi driver. Public transport in Sheffield at that time was frequent and inexpensive.

Becoming-woman I

From the look on her face I could tell the time was not right, but at seventeen, time was running out. Dad was upstairs and I had to speak now. We were standing by the sink in the cramped kitchen and Mum's hands were immersed in the cooling water.

'I want to go to University.' The words tumbled from my lips almost incoherent despite hours of rehearsal.

'Well, y'can't, y'father says'. Her words came out in that matter-of-fact way of hers, her lips formed into that straight line I knew so well, like a minus sign fulfilling its negative purpose.

'But I have to go to Leicester or my life is over!' I felt tears of injustice pricking and tightening my throat.

'F'cryin' out loud, Janey! I've told y'a million times 'bout exaggeratin'. Y'life's not over. Y' NOT goin'- that's final!' and Mum made a jerking, slicing movement with her hand that sent a shower of soapy suds flying. Normally the irony of her own exaggeration would have made me laugh, but today it just made me mad. This was Mum in stubborn mode, her posh 'telephone voice' that added neat and tidy endings to each word had vanished.[25]

'But Mike's going to go to Oxford, Peter's gone to Hull, why not!?'

'They're doin' proper subjects, not airy fairy stuff and what kind of a jumped up place is Leicester anyway? What's wrong with Sheffield?' Mum emphasised proper with a capital P and a roll of the first r. I should not have replied, but these were desperate times.

'Leicester's a city, and Sheffield doesn't do ecology', I replied.

'Never heard of it!' Mum huffed and her breath condensed in the cold air.

'What Leicester or ecology?' I muttered, and she gave me that look; the one that said I was skating on very thin ice.

'And 'sides what will y'live on' she said triumphantly, submerging the same already-clean plate over and over into the bowl, 'y'll like as not end up like our Bernadette 'avin to take in washin' and do for people like Mrs. Flanagan. Our sort

---

[25] As a child, my parents wanted me to elongate the short vowels of my Yorkshire accent, end all words 'properly' and not drop my 'H's. How else would I be able to obtain a 'nice clean job' in an office?

don't go to university, love', she finally added, adopting a slightly more conciliatory tone. I remember wondering briefly what 'our sort' was.[26]

'I'll get a grant', I said.

'Y'shouldn't borrow' Mum said sternly and although I knew her words didn't ask for a reply, this was my last ditch attempt to sell education to a woman who had none and no time for it.

'It's not a loan, I just have to pay for my food and rent'.[27]

'Well it's not goin' to 'appen, Janey. I work, y'Dad works and the boys are costin' us a fortune. Why don't y'try nursin'. Money's regular. Settle down. The shifts'll come in 'andy when you have y'kids. Besides, whose gonna look after y'Dad 'n' me?' And at last, there it was. The usually unspoken truth. I was a girl and girls don't go to university. My role in life was already determined.

One toy. One book. Either/Or. No place for 'and', and no place for becoming-woman. I glanced at Mum. She was waiting for me to say something. But time was compressing further, my mind already racing to a time before I was born.

Portrait of the artist's mother I

My mother was born in the downstairs of a back-to-back terrace in Sheffield between the wars. She was white and poor and the youngest of five girls. Her father had died in her infancy and my grandmother, priding herself on keeping the family together, lived on the piecework she and her older daughters could make to pay the rent each week. She made football studs for hour, after hour, hunched double by the tiny and scrupulously clean, window while her oldest daughter placed hand-wrapped toffees in golden tissue and lilac boxes. They had neither the time nor the inclination to access education.

The family lurched from week to week and day to day, enduring the ever-present fear of eviction. The grinding poverty and social conventions of the time meant my mother left school at twelve, two years before the unenforceable compulsory school leaving age dictated by the 1918 Fisher's Act. Her own mother was not literate and

---

[26] White collar aspirations were perhaps a reaction to the poverty my parents endured as children raised as they were in large working class families. As a clerk and a teacher my parents had both 'made it' and they did not wish to see their children 'lowering themselves' to manual labour.

[27] In the 1970s student grants to fund university tuition did not need to be repaid. They proved significant in encouraging young people from less well-off families to attend higher education (Kynaston, 2009).

relied on others. Mum took employment in a variety of shops, where her skill with numbers was valued, especially when it came to counting ration coupons. A strong work ethic coursed through her veins and when she wasn't working or keeping house for her mother and sisters, she attended the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel and did the cleaning there. Trust and optimism were not words you associated with Mum. She was intensely self-reliant; all she possessed were a few clothes and her labour. At eighteen she married my father, seven years older than her and freshly back from National Service.

'Y'Father was quite the catch, just back from the war with a teachin' certificate to boot. Not bad lookin' I suppose. Wanted lodgin's and Mother said I were onto a good deal marryin' 'im', Mum had once told me in a rare moment of reflection.

And still Mum was still standing there, drying her hands and waiting for me to reply.

They moved to a council estate in the fifties, seeking a new life away from the dirt, overcrowding and outdoor plumbing. With transport links yet to be built and Dad's unsociability, Mum lost touch with her sisters. She was dislocated from everything she knew. She rushed everywhere, trying to find out what to do about getting a doctor, or finding a school for her own children, who by now were making an appearance. She returned to work as soon as she could. She was the only mother I knew that worked. Earning regular money of her own was important to her.

'Mother said I were onto a good deal marryin' 'im'. Mum's words echoed once more through time and space. She hardly ever mentioned the past unless prompted, so it must have been important. What had she been trying to say?

As I sat in Ginny's studio, I glimpsed the unspoken question through a fissure in time as if gently caught upon a suspended thread of spider's silk. I held my breath and tentatively reached out and, in that moment, felt what had been asked of me. To stay at home and look after my parents. To let sleeping dogs lie. To respect my father's prejudices and my mother's lack of imagination. My father's hang-ups. My mother's hang-ups. The daughter's hang-ups. Framed by generations of can't, don't, won't, shouldn't, couldn't. The negativity spilling forth, each generation layering more and more myths upon the next. The ghosts of others' pasts staring into my present.

Portrait of the artist's father

Dad was born two roads across and down from where several years later my Mum would enter the world. The youngest of seven children he was the only one to pass,

the grammar school test at eleven. His Dad worked as a furnaceman at the steelworks and by all accounts spent the rest of his time in The Duke's Head. Money was always short and there was certainly none for a grammar school uniform, so Dad left school and started 'on the windas', carrying buckets of water for his Uncle Jack. He was called up towards the end of the war and spent his National Service in India. He was eventually discharged with a teaching certificate, met mum and married her. As far as I know, he never spoke to his family again. He was a difficult man to get to know.

I was still at Primary school when 'we' started his degree with the OU.[28] I say 'we' because although it was Dad's name that eventually appeared on the certificate it took over all our lives. There was a constant need for silence and an ever-present curling fear in the pit of my stomach in case he was disturbed. Then there were the innumerable television and radio broadcasts in the early hours of the morning. Even now, the opening jingle retains the power to transport me back to the damp smell of his books and papers, all kept in strict order on his huge desk. It occupied most of the living room in which we all sat every day and each night. It took over ten years of relentless study, two heart attacks and the final and complete alienation from his wife and family for him to eventually achieve his degree. The breach was never fully reconciled and during that time Mum came to utterly resent education as she worked long hours to help pay his course fees, while he never helped her once with the housework. There were frequent rows and long silences between them.

Portrait of the artist's mother II

As children we didn't have many toys; a cricket bat, a football, a toy fire engine, some poster paints, a doll, some Airfix models of soldiers and a few 'Matchbox' cars. We frequented the library to get what Dad described as Mum's 'trashy novels' and our reading books. Mum liked the library. I think it was her escape from the humdrum routine. I liked it too. It was an opportunity to be away from the confines of the living room and the constant gaze of my father and brothers for a while. The vibrancy of the dust jackets and the chance to sneak-read excerpts from the 'forbidden' adult section was exciting. The books were kept with the toys in the cupboard under the stairs at home, but we only ever played with *one book, one toy, one thing at a time, either/or*. One thing always had to be put away before another

[28] Dad was in one of the first student intakes at the Open University (OU) when it opened in 1971. Over ten years he gradually accumulated sufficient credits from his correspondence courses and annual summer schools until he gained a First Class Honours Degree in Mathematics.

came out. Mum constantly asked whether we had finished what we were doing so she could tidy things up and cross them from her list of things to do. Living in one room was fraught with difficulties. The paints I loved so much disappeared one day; Mum couldn't stand the mess.

Mum had a penchant for 'maungy' green, a hue she once knowingly claimed to lie between 'sludgy' and 'bottle'. But in deference to Dad the house was a symphony of beige and mushroom with accents of taupe and magnolia. This was minimalism, but not in a stylish, trendy, Conran, sixties kind of way. It was more like a 'family that can't afford a toaster' kind of way.[29] A single picture of *Rydal Water* in the Lake District was the only relief. It hung on the chimney breast above the blocked off fireplace in the living room. For a long time, I had no idea what or where Rydal Water was, but I would gaze at the picture for hours. Even in drab, muted blues, greens and purples it screamed against the dreary expanse of my colourless life.

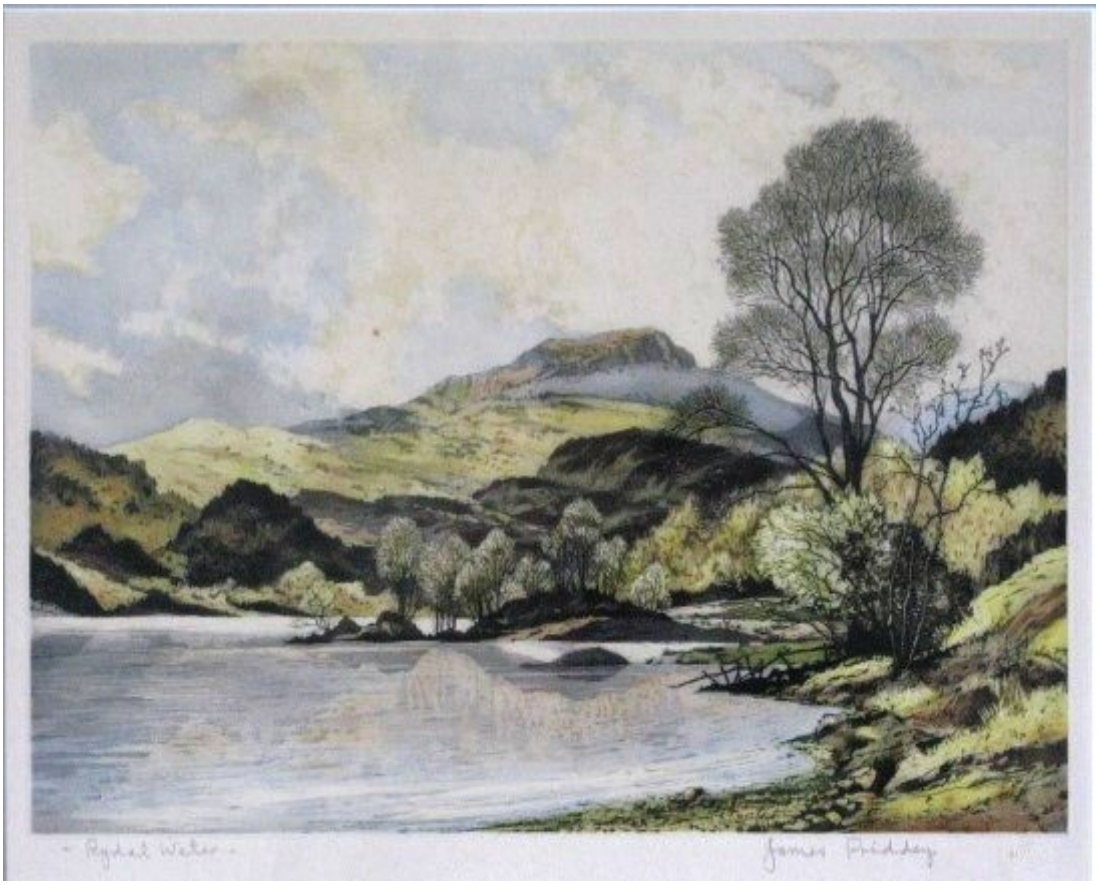


Figure 2: *Rydal Water*, James Priddey, (c.1968).

[29] Kynaston (2009) implies that this was probably the norm in working class households at the time. However, both my parents were employed and could probably have afforded some luxuries.

Self-portrait II

When Mike started school, Mum returned to work. As she gradually extended her hours I took over getting him ready for school, preparing his breakfast and packing his school bag. By secondary school it was my responsibility to ensure he caught the school bus and completed his homework. We went to a large comprehensive on the other side of Sheffield that Dad said was a good one for maths and science and if they could get me in, then Mike would be able to follow.[30] It was here that I mixed with children from different ethnic backgrounds and mainly 'middle class' families. I was grateful for Mum's lessons on how to 'speak properly'. There was usually lots of school homework and once finished, there was always more that Dad could provide. I loved art and back then it was a compulsory subject at 'O' level. I spent many lunchtimes in the art room with a couple of others doing our homework while Mrs. Carmichael, the art teacher, did her marking. It was impossible for me to paint at home. Dad saw himself as a progressive and rational man. Science and maths ruled, and he deemed them the only 'proper' subjects to study; disparaging anyone's tendency towards what he thought of as 'soft' subjects. Art and literature were worrisome to him, with their blurry distinctions and suspiciously slippery ways.

But then at fifteen, thanks to Mrs Carmichael, I managed to get a reader's ticket for the Central Library and by default access to the amazing, upper floors of the City Art Gallery. It was packed with Victorian taxidermy, ancient artefacts and outstanding paintings and sculptures.[31] At the foot of the polished stone staircase was a huge canvas of an almost life-size highland cow and calf by Sydney Cooper. Here I could wander between the galleries and travel from Africa to Asia, through ancient Egypt, visit the 1951 Great Exhibition and explore the pelagic sea. I felt sad for the stuffed animals, for the passing of a life, but at the same time I was somehow weirdly attracted to their silken fur and beautiful feathers. I would avidly read the classifications of each and imagine what it would be like to live as an albatross or a polar bear. Whenever I could I would sneak off to the gallery's warm, musty cocoon, to read and sketch my way through the catalogues.

---

[30] Following the Education Act (1975) Sheffield replaced selective schools with mixed comprehensives as a means of improving social equality in the education system. They offered a wide-ranging curriculum, including practical subjects and vocational learning. http://www.nationalarchives. gov.uk /cabinetpapers/themes/voluntary-comprehensive-schools.htm (Accessed 1 October 2017).

[31] With hindsight, I recognise the significance of the free, open access public spaces of Sheffield's art galleries, museums, parks and libraries on my education at the time.

By then I had added the laundry, ironing and preparing the evening meal to my list of duties. The boys didn't have any, though Mike would help when Dad wasn't looking. To my father, educating women was a waste of time. He would often rail against the 'mouthy women teachers' in the staff room who would voice opinions about things that apparently 'they had no idea about'. Women were supposed to stay at home and look after their husbands and children. He was jealous and mistrustful of Mum working, and although the money helped to pay his university fees it was a point of continual friction between them.[32] I was at a loss to explain Mum's refusal to stand up to his bullying and I resented her powerlessness. And I feared becoming like her.

Whenever they started to argue I would try to sneak out, enraged with Dad for his obstinate ways and infuriated with Mum for being unable to change him. Breathing heavily, heart pounding, I would race down the gennel[33] and skid around the bin sheds, gravel scraping as I went. I would push through the gap in the chain-link fence and tiptoe through the mud and muck to the old stream bed with its overgrown thickets and strange quiet. Here, in this largely forgotten place, lying beyond the sight of the terraced rows of human progress, I would gaze at the sky and dream of possibilities. Once I saw a kingfisher flashing by, a jewel of brightest orange and azure and it took many weeks of poring through the cyclo to discover its name.

Self-portrait III

It was one of those long warm and sultry days in June, when the air was thick, and the light would drag on long into the evening, when someone threw an open bottle of ink at the teacher. No-one knew for sure who'd thrown it, or at least they weren't telling, so I sat in the buzzing heat with the rest of the class in my first after-school detention. My desk was at the back, next to the large curtainless windows which overlooked the school gates. For thirty minutes I watched as a large hoverfly with enormous eyes, drowsily beat itself against the closed window, over and over. I knew it would only live a few short days and that it wouldn't ever escape, but I willed it on anyway, over and over, bash, bash, bash; a hoverfly in class detention.

---

[32] Dad's attitude to working women was not unusual for the time. However, in apparent contradiction, Mum reinforced it with her own daughter. Rich (1976) explains this by noting that motherhood and womanhood are not equivalent states. 'Consequently, mothers who identify with the institution of motherhood and fail to question it often raise daughters to conform to these same patriarchal structures' (O'Reilly and Abbey, 2000, p.7).

[33] A Yorkshire colloquialism for an alley running between or at the back a row of terraced of houses.

The school bus came and went and from my second storey lookout I saw Mike's brief backward glance back down the queue. I knew what that look meant. It meant I would miss the bus and have to go into and back out of town. It meant I wouldn't be home to make Dad his home-coming cup of tea. It meant the breakfast plates would still be in the sink and his shirt for the following day would lay unironed. It meant the vegetables wouldn't be peeled, which meant Mum, weary from work, wouldn't put tea on the table until gone six-thirty. It meant the shouting would begin and the name-calling would start. The worn-out argument would play through; how useless and ignorant and 'slapdash' Mum was and what did she think the neighbours would think of him allowing his wife to go out to work? And in the morning, it would mean that the bruises on her soft cheek would be my doing, as surely as if I had put them there myself. *Over and over, bash, bash, bash*.

My days were regimented and full and it had been a long time since I had stopped and thought of the future. As I continued to watch the futility of the hoverfly's efforts, I felt a calm centre grow within me. I put aside my indignation at the unfairness of life and recognised the impotence of blaming others. Like the hoverfly, my only means of escape would be to turn around and head for the door. And in that moment I knew that I too had to do just that, turn around, leave home and refuse the path chosen by others. Education would be my plan of escape. and with detention over, I made my way to the stairs and the thrum of the sixth form careers in the hall below. I hesitated for only the merest of seconds before 'attaching' myself to a family with several children in tow. I was on my way to army recruitment when I saw a poster advertising a degree in ecology. It had a picture of a kingfisher and, in the background, I swear, an image of *Rydal Water* (or something very like it). Before I knew it, the form requesting a 'prospectus' (whatever that was) was complete. I quickly double-checked the spelling of Leicester, but uncertain of how to pronounce it, I hung around for a while until I was sure. Then I casually dropped the form back onto the table and waited for the-man-from-Leicester to finally notice it and add it to his clipboard. Satisfied, I left to face the music, nervous that I wouldn't be accepted, little realising that I already had a head start in my application process, coming as I did from a council estate on the 'wrong side of town'.[34]

---

[34] The Sex Discrimination Act (1975) brought increased awareness of equal opportunities for women into the workplace and higher education and led to positive action to encourage women, especially those from socially disadvantaged areas, to continue their education post-18 (Stevens, 2004).

Mum's lips remained flat and unmoving. I look down at her red hands and at her poor swollen feet, misshapen from years of standing in line; waiting for buses, waiting for children, waiting for her life to begin and all in shoes that were too tight and too old.

Much later, the becoming-woman of the present would recognise my awakening to the notion of femininity as a signifier of difference, but the becoming-woman I was then said nothing more. She turned with tears blurring her vision and left her Mother standing alone by the kitchen sink. The becoming-woman of the present recognizes the particular uniqueness of social circumstances which condition identity. But the becoming-woman of the past knew only of her undoing, of her need to let go of the frame which circumstances had placed around her and to seek a different way.

Becoming-woman II

The following year I packed a few clothes into Pete's old rucksack ready to leave and went to gather my train ticket from the mantelpiece. As I reached out, I caught sight of my reflection in the painting above the fireplace and I lost myself in *Rydal Water*. I stood on the peak looking down and heard the lament of the wind and the mournful cry of the buzzard. I stood on the path and looked up at the sun-splashed hillsides slowly turning purple and mauve and orange and sky. Exhausted, I no longer wanted to be found each day where I was expected to be found. I no longer wanted to be taken apart each day and re-made in the same way, stripped back and reassembled again and again in the same way. I had acted out long enough inside the four corners of this existence. Bordered in cream card, all four sides hemming me in, left, right, top, bottom, squashed flat by the cold, unyielding glass. I was 'becoming-woman'.

Dad and my brothers were nowhere to be found, but I can still see the look in my Mum's hard eyes, burning and shiny and bright. She made no move to hug me or wish me well. I almost gave in, but there was to be no more history following the same well-trodden path. The glass reflected that which I was leaving behind. The place where I was born. I wondered fleetingly how the hollow space of my absence would be filled. Perhaps not an absence, just a disappearance; a missing to be remarked upon or not. I glanced at *Rydal Water* one last time and it looked back at me. What did it see? Would *it* mourn my absence? But I had been contained for long enough. I was 'becoming-woman'. I stood and walked to the door, closing it softly behind me. As I moved down the front path, I dragged each determined foot, one in front of the other, and I did not look back. I passed the gennel, with its gap in the

fence, and no longer felt the need to venture into that place with its array of sparkling possibilities, for I was already pursuing one of my own. I was 'becoming-woman', the binary of girl-woman dissolving.

Portrait of Ginny I

To any onlooker glancing through the studio window it might have seemed that I was simply sitting and waiting for Ginny's return. But my thoughts had been in flux, leaping forwards and back through time and space. I was summoned back by a twig tapping against the window and I noticed a rook sitting in the lee of the patio doors. I was about to investigate when Ginny re-entered, carrying two brightly painted mugs and a plate of home-baked jam tarts fresh from the oven, something she said she did most days. I stood and as I took the tray from her I asked about the rook.

'Ah', she said, in answer to my question, 'that's Rook, he particularly likes cheese.' She smiled at the bird and shook her head. 'Would you mind if I sketch him while we talk?' and without waiting for a reply, she began to sift through some of the accumulated detritus that always seems to reside in artist's studios. And as she searched for her sketchbook I thought back to our earlier encounter and my concerns about our first interview together.

Self-portrait IV

I began my ecology degree at Leicester when oil production from the North Sea was in its infancy.[35] Within a few years, the Esso-Bernicia storage facility ruptured in storm force winds off the Shetland coast and the environmental damage to the natural world, fishing and tourist industries proved far reaching. Much was done to try to contain the spill, but the winter winds and waves hampered operations. By the following spring, pollution had spread over many miles and threatened the coastlines of Scotland, the Faroes and Iceland. In its wake came university research funding to assess the environmental damage and explore ways of ameliorating future accidental oil spills. I eventually spent four consecutive summers and two winters working with the research teams in Shetland, glad of an excuse not to go home. The team I was assigned to provided environmental impact data for the cost benefit analysis teams, responsible for determining the overall 'cost' of the incident.

I rapidly found my ability with statistics and an unexpected aptitude with newly emerging computer technology beneficial when making the objective, rational

[35] Extraction North Sea oil became commercially and politically viable following the 1973 oil crisis.

deductions required for surveying a range of different species and habitats. Logic came easily to me, the concept of *Either/Or* was hardly new. I quickly became adept at recording, examining, dissecting, identifying, classifying, comparing and analysing survey material. But beneath the thin veneer of objectivity, my heart was breaking. That first summer was the worst, as I dragged thousands of dead and dying seabirds, otters, seals and porpoises from the sucking, stinking, rancid slicks which washed ashore with every tide. I dutifully recorded the toll on sand eel shoals and counted the numbers of starving seabird chicks as they died in their nests in their thousands; all data to factor in to the overall cost.

In subsequent summers, while I continued to scour the beaches after each high tide, I was also tasked with analysing some of the human impacts. I spoke with the tourist board, members of the local community, crofters, lobster catchers and representatives from the fishing and salmon industries. Initially, a crofter might describe the disaster in terms of the number of sheep they had lost on the foreshore or a fisherman might speak in terms of how far he now had to travel to get to clear water. These were the things that could be counted and added into the analysis relatively easily. But as I continued to live among the people of Shetland, I became aware of the number of families forced from the Islands to seek employment on the mainland and the impact this had on the local school, local businesses and the elderly. I heard people speak of their grief at the devastation of a natural world which they had inherited from generations of nurturing and a deep knowledge of the sea. Many described the fine balance between ‘man’ and nature and how the consequences of the oil disaster had abruptly altered the way they lived their lives forever. As I continued to listen, I began to comprehend more of the human consequences in deeper and more meaningful ways and felt this subjective material should also be considered alongside the objective data. But none made it to the final report, redacted by those who only sought the hard facts that could be easily measured and costed.

My time on Shetland taught me that significant aspects of human life are not always immediately apparent and that much exists beyond the scope of simple metrics. It also taught me about hope, human compassion and resilience as the Islanders gathered to support each other and to celebrate the gradual return of the wildlife. I learned that I should pay attention to the intricate interconnections that link and hold life together. After graduating, I remained mindful of my lesson, reinforced by the

lives and experiences of the people I met who encouraged me to look beyond the shadows cast by the need to assess, evaluate, moderate and grade.

Another beginning

And yet, in that first interview with Ginny I had posed a series of objective enquiries designed to 'semi-structure' and guide my interviews (Appendix 4). With hindsight, I recognised how my assumptions and linear thinking had restricted Ginny to articulate her thoughts through a particular and somewhat restrictive format. I was annoyed with myself. The disembodied voice of my father's rational explanations of the world and the refrain of hypothesis and deduction from my science education had taken me unawares. I had asked Ginny to reduce her wealth of educational experiences to a series of simplistic responses which I had assumed would remain fixed over time.

McGilchrist suggests that the propensity for these kinds of sequential and linear thoughts is allied to the left hemisphere of the brain:

> but however much the left hemisphere sees progress as a straight line, it is rarely so...This is in keeping with its phenomenological world being one of getting, of utility - of always having an end in view...Its progress is unidirectional, ever onward and outwards...towards its goal (2012, p.446).

Through his metaphor, he presents a case for a re-evaluation of the power of the creative mind as a primary mode of human knowing, with which critical reason, he later argues, should be balanced. He contends that the divorcing of imaginative and intuitive powers from dominant rationality privileges more quantifiable conceptual and theoretical models of understanding at the expense of interpretive engagements.

I vividly recall sitting in my own studio after reading McGilchrist and thinking about my first interview with Ginny. I remember how, in the cocooning warmth of that quiet space, other ideas had emerged, perspectives had changed and elusive possibilities had unfolded. I could balance my analytical skill *with* other ways of thinking. I could make a virtue of the transitional moments I would likely encounter during my research and I was encouraged to continue on to times and places as yet unknown and try again.

And I was beginning to think that Ginny must have known.

In the weeks that followed I started to research alternative interview techniques and was just beginning to consider how I might approach Ginny again when I received an unexpected email from her, which read:

‘Sending you a photo of my latest work. Do give me a ring if you would like to talk about it for your research.’ And attached to the email was an image of a strange two headed figure seated at a table (Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Janus at the table*, Ginny, (2016).

And so, there we were, a couple of weeks later, sitting in Ginny’s studio, drinking coffee, eating jam tarts and watching a rook through the window.

Yes, Ginny had definitely known.

Chapter 7: Ginny reprised

Portrait of Ginny II

Ginny found her sketch book and leaned over to pluck a piece of charcoal, as thick as her thumb, from the table. As she moved, the rook stood to shake its feathers, and then settled again as she sat down facing the window. I watched the play of light on her face and then picked up my own pad and pushed my childhood thoughts away.

'Now, what was it you wanted to ask?' And I knew I was being given another chance; my next question would hold a significance far beyond the simple words I was about to utter. I had learned my lesson. In that suspended time between question and reply I hear the gentle tapping of the twig once more and feel a draught brush by. I smell the aroma of the coffee and taste the sweetness of jam upon my tongue.

I take a breath and say, 'I was wondering if you'd like to tell me about your art class?' I watch Ginny's hand halt for the briefest of seconds, charcoal poised a hairsbreadth from the paper. Then, with a momentary smile, she resumes her sketch of the rook. She appears to have come to a decision.

'I was at the doctor's the other day, dodgy heart apparently', and in the slight pause that follows a tiny part of me instantly worries where the conversation might be going and that I might be making a terrible mistake.

'I was early, you see. They had some of those awful leaflets...terribly patronising, all about old age, you know the idea...keep in contact with people...try not to isolate yourself, try keep fit classes and coffee mornings, you know the kind of thing. And I thought, well, I suppose in a nutshell that's why I go [to classes].'

I wait in case there is more that Ginny wants to say and as I mull her words over, I notice the rook beginning to stretch, first one wing and then the other.

'But you see, I don't just make art with my hands, you know physically. It keeps you fit standing at your easel, bending about. People think you just sit there and paint. I spend a lot of time thinking too. Quite invisible to anyone looking on. I'm exhausted sometimes by all the thinking. No, it's more than just socialising. I could go to the community centre or the local shop if I just want to talk about the weather. At the class I can be kind of anonymous so I can try out different things, work out problems...be adventurous, be bold, take risks.'

And she pauses, her eyes intent on the rook.

‘But it’s so much more than that isn’t it? More than having a chat about the state of the weather or the price of a loaf of bread.’

Through the window I see rook stop in mid-stretch and begin to strut to-and-fro, each leg-lift syncopated with a forward thrust of his off-white face.

‘You see I have a large family. They all live very close by, always there if I need them. They keep popping over to see I’m all right. Checking I have everything I need. I’m very lucky...but it can be so wearing, stifling. Smothering even. Everyone seems to think they can know your business!

‘I’m a very independent sort of person. Always was, had to be. Was born in the ‘twenties, was in my thirties by the ‘sixties. The liberation that brought was astonishing. Taken for granted now. I lived through the war, the rationing, ran my own businesses, looked after my own finances, lived in many places. I can do my computer and I’ve got opinions about things!’ Squinting hard at the rook, a determined flourish of charcoal accentuates her final words.

‘That’s why I need those classes. It’s about being together with other artists. Helps you think about things you’ve not thought about in a long time, or never thought before, or to join things up in different ways. Stretches your thinking in different ways, challenges me, keeps my mind active.’

I feel the anticipation of an idea attempting to surface, its seed fizzes gently in my head. Simultaneously, an inner voice demands to know what the concept is, to dissect and analyse it, to pronounce. But this time I am ready for the words of my father echoing down from the long past. I push them away. All I want to do for now is to start to think, to allow nascent thought to slip in-between. I feel no urgency to pick up the offered idea, no need to run with it to some pre-determined goal. It is not yet an object for study and I leave it to flutter on the edges of my mind.

‘Of course, there are lots of reasons not to go, physically I mean. Like driving in the dark and not having parking and the cost and all that wretched form-filling - all petty things really. One at a time they’re nothing, but when you put them together...’

Ginny’s voice trails away and we sit together in the companionable silence which softly falls between us. Rook faces the window and begins to shuffle sideways, a few paces to the right, then a few to the left.

And then, Ginny appears to change the subject.

‘Do you know that piece from Ovid about water being stronger than rock?’ and I shake my head, surprised by her question.

‘Meant to be a puzzle I think. Goes something like ‘Which is harder, rock or water?’ and of course you’re supposed to think the answer’s rock, but then it goes on. Even granite can be eroded by the slow drip of water.[36]

‘It’s about perseverance. You see, at the moment I can deal with the physical side of getting to class, though I have to admit it’s getting harder. But I have to persevere, not thinking, not being mentally active, that’s what really scares me. And of course, it’s a safe place.’

‘Safe?’ I prompt gently.

‘Well yes, I am eighty-eight!’ She smiles and turns briefly towards me.

‘It’s warm and dry and there are people around. Gets me away from the small village where I live. Somewhere to discuss things with people who have different lives and points of view. Tried yoga once and French, but they’re like copying something that has already invented rather than creating something new.’

Rook abandons his sideways shuffle as a ray of sunshine enters the top corner of the window. It reflects a prism of light onto the stones outside and he pounces, stabbing his beak at the small patch of illuminated ground.

‘You see, the art class lets me, well, collaborate, I suppose you might call it. We get into some wonderful conversations and it can get quite heated. Sometimes we agree to disagree, but it’s all about ideas that can find their way into your art or life. No-one bears any grudges and besides, the tutor is always there to moderate and lighten the mood, refocus us if needs be.’

The feeling that something important is happening returns, a little more urgently than before, but still just out of reach. I try not to think about it as I listen to Ginny and hope that by looking in another direction it will continue to approach near enough for me to turn my face towards it. I continue to sit patiently in Ginny’s light filled studio and watch her as she draws Rook. I learned from our first interview not to presume to know what she will say next. It will only be much later, as I write

---

[36] Quid magis est saxo durum, quid mollius unda? Dura tamen molli saxa cavantur aqua. What is harder than rock, what gentle waves? Yet hard rock is hollowed by soft water. Ovid (43AD-18BC) *Ars amatoria*, Liber I, pp.475-476). Written as advice to a rejected lover.

through the interview material, that I will understand the limiting effect that assumptions bring to the unfolding of a narrative; for if 'I take back what you say to what I presume to already know... [and] seize what you say before it is said' (Lomax, 2004, p.8), I may hear, but will be unable to listen.

But back then, as I watch Ginny so intent on the activity in front of her, I suddenly find myself standing in front of Rydal Water, back in the cold, joyless front room of my becoming. But now it is Kairos[37] *who smiles back at me from the reflection in the glass. I look down at the clenched paleness of my youthful fingers and feel the sting of unshed tears. I see my mother taking the words from my mouth and hearing only that which she had already heard. She had already decided that what I was about to say would have no value, for she believed her world was already known to her. She may have heard my words, but she was not listening and by not listening, she had silenced me. As the image of Kairos winks out, a pain in my chest makes me realise that I am holding my breath. I look up and allow the air to escape voicelessly from my burning lungs and I return to the studio. In sudden need of something sweet, I reach forward and help myself to another jam tart as she continues.*

'I think many of us at the class are curious about things. I mean obviously, we're all going because we love art, something we have in common, wanting to express ourselves perhaps? But it isn't just that. That's just the surface, you see you can't see the important bit that lies deep inside, invisible, you know?'

Ginny's words seem to invite a reply. Around the sticky remnants of the jam tart I find myself asking: 'What's important, what's invisible?' and then let the questions hang in the air between us, worrying again in case I had over-directed the conversation.

'Oh, I don't know, we talk about all sorts of things while we paint - lots of dreaming and wondering and being curious. It's really important to keep the mind going, but it's not on show. It's really important for my mind to let go of my body sometimes, just let it sit and think for itself for a while without having to analyse it and unpick it all.'

Then almost in the same breath something else seems to occur to her and I find myself intrigued by the twists and turns in her conversation.

---

[37] Here I use Kairos as an embodied form of kairotic time.

‘And then we have to fill out those awful forms about what we’re supposed to learn and tick off what we’ve achieved. I mean, so much of it can’t be said to be my work alone. I know they have to do it for funding, but why?’[38]

I think about her words. Rook seems to have lost interest in the sunlit patch and is now peering through the window, turning his head first one way and then the next.

‘It’s just about reaching a point where you say your work’s finished, that’s what seems to count, having something to show. But the end of one painting is just a step onto the next. Your curiosity carries you on. To the powers that be, reaching the end’s what counts, but the getting there is important too. That’s what’s invisible.’

She pauses slightly and I feel the full weight of her gaze fix upon me, ‘Except, of course, to those who take the time to look for it.’

I see Ginny turn back to her sketchbook, but there is suddenly so much to think about. As I try to make sense of her words, out of the blue I hear myself say, ‘evidence of process’.

For the briefest of moments, I wonder whether the words were still inside my head, but as Ginny turns to look at me, I realise I must have spoken them aloud.

‘Ah, so you are listening!’ she teases. ‘Tell me more!’ and I find myself hesitating. I am supposed to be researching what *Ginny* thinks about Adult Education. And then I think about her earlier words. Was I also not part of the process, a subjective part of the same study? Perhaps there was something I could say after all.

‘I’m trying not to put words into your mouth,’ I say carefully, feeling my way, ‘but I was wondering about two things.’

‘Just two?’ Her smile deepens the creases around her eyes.

‘For now,’ I say. ‘Firstly, you mentioned collaboration’ and I see Ginny nod and lean towards me.

As I prepare to go on to my second point, more questions that had been building suddenly flash into focus. I begin to wonder whether what Ginny was describing were expressions of ‘well-being’ and if they were, what had she seen or

---

[38] The majority of Adult Education classes are partially or wholly financially supported by local and national government. Institutions are obliged to evidence learning has occurred to meet the requirements of the funding process.

heard or felt to set them in motion? I hastily scribble 'well-being???' in my notebook while Ginny sits listening with her head slightly tilted to the left, inviting me to continue.

'I was wondering why we pay so much attention to the 'start' and 'end' of learning, when the process leading up to and after the 'start' and 'end' are so often ignored.'

Ginny nods sharply and raising her left hand she points her index finger skywards.

'Yes - exactly that! It isn't all in a nice, neat straight line is it? That's why I like learning with others. You have no idea what will spring up later or from where. It creeps up on you from all sorts of directions. Often you have no idea where it comes from or where it might lead. Sometimes you don't even realise it's there!'

And suddenly I feel the approach of Kairos through the folding of time and space. In the future, I will read of the 'monumental importance' which Stengers places on collaborative learning spaces and 'the debt owed to the thoughts of others which enable you to progress further with your own thoughts' (1997, p.136). But then, sitting in Ginny's studio and listening to her, I contemplate how much of education is thought of as an 'event' with a discrete beginning and end. How 'personal' learning is valued as if it is something that we can individually claim to 'own' and how the dominant narratives surrounding the value of education silence any that cannot be easily attributed, classified and measured.

'And what do you think 'it' is?' I ask Ginny, suddenly realising that I am enjoying myself.

Rook's song

'Well, I don't know the answer for everyone, but I was lucky. My parents sent me to a rather progressive school where we didn't do separate subjects like maths or English or art. We did art *and* maths *and* literature together.'

I feel the corner of my mouth twitch in a wistful smile as I hear a whisper of my mother's mantra. Either/Or. One thing or the other. She and Ginny were the same age and yet their lives were so very different.

‘We didn’t even know we were learning most of the time. We’d try out little ideas, fail a lot of the time too, but it didn’t seem to matter. No-one made a fuss as long as everyone was having a go. You just got on with it somehow. It was the same during the war and in the rationing and when [my husband] left us.’

A thought occurs that what Ginny was describing, might be termed ‘resilience’ and I jot the word down next to ‘well-being’ and ‘invisible’, expanding my list of ideas to think about later. But by then Ginny’s gaze is fixed upon me once more.

‘That’s what those leaflets [at the doctor’s] should say. What I call well-being can’t be had by going to keep fit once a week, or by taking a certain kind of pill. They might help, but really well-being is in here and in here.’

As she speaks, Ginny taps her temple with the first two fingers of her left hand and then her chest with the flat of her hand.

‘You have to think *and* feel well-being. It’s out of sight and hidden from view most of the time, though I think it comes out through art sometimes.’ As she pauses and presses her lips together.

‘My children and grandchildren are always talking about using their *heads*, learning skills and facts and getting qualifications. But *thinking* is about using the heart *and* mind *together*, about being connected to nature and what else is happening around us. Having the time and space to be creative at [Adult Education] helps me think and see things from different viewpoints, helps me to keep being curious and interested about things. And then that leads on to more and more. It keeps me going.’

I wait, thinking she has more to say more, but after glancing at the windows, she turns the subject abruptly. ‘So, that was your first point, what was the second?

I search around trying to find it again, my mind still half-thinking about what I had just heard. It is a relief when I manage to find it again.

‘The importance placed by education on the end product.’

‘Ah, yes, but it’s tied up with the first isn’t it? Like collaboration, all the process goes unnoticed and gets ignored. It’s one of the reasons I dislike going [to classes], all that emphasis on evidence and all those aims to say what we’ll learn next. Pointless in my opinion.’ As she speaks she waves her hands dismissively in the air and I notice that Rook has alighted on the side-rail of an old wooden ladder and is busy preening.

‘If we already know what’s going to happen that’s what we tend to do, we don’t seem to be able to just find out on the way. I mean, I probably haven’t thought about Ovid in over seventy years and yet there he is now, and I can see something in it about persevering. I suppose that was the lesson I was supposed to learn back then, but it was just words at the time. Can see it now though!’

Smiling, she turns back to the window, apparently deep in thought.

We sit for a while and listen to the tapping of the twig once more. Preening over, Rook starts to bob and side-step his way along the ladder-rail, his wings all a-quiver. Ginny follows his dance with small movements of her hands as she feels his progress along the rail. There appears to be a kind of continual affectivity unfolding between them; a transformation of bird and woman.

And in this becoming-world, I suddenly understand that I am witnessing a collaborative act; Ginny with Rook and Rook with Ginny. Lomax characterises the transformative ability of collaboration as having the ‘power to affect each other and enter into composition and make something happen…which belong[s] to neither’ (2004, p.20). I see how impossible it is to attribute ideas or thoughts to individuals, for how can they claim unique possession or the rights of ownership? All thinking, no matter how apparently unique, is built upon that of others. And then, fast on the heels of that thought, I realise that I too am part of the collaborative endeavour between Ginny and Rook; a transformative plurality of becomings, each with the ability to affect the other. Ginny and Rook and me; a relationship invisible to all except, what was it Ginny said earlier? - ‘those that take the time to look for it’.

Rook opens his beak and Ginny speaks. ‘Ah yes, cheese!’

I watch her stand and take a cube of cheese from her shirt pocket. She limps slightly from sitting too long and moves across to the open fanlight next to the glass doors. A gentle breeze ruffles the feathers on Rook’s neck as he sits motionless and observes her progress with an interested eye. Then, in balletic synchrony, Ginny drops the cheese to the sill and Rook thrusts himself skywards. Airborne, he strains to scoop the morsel from the ledge and pushes off, twisting away in mid-air as an azure hue strikes from his back as precious as any sapphire. I watch spellbound as he lands in a nearby oak and calls out to a passing party of jackdaws.

‘But,’ Ginny says, returning to her seat by the window and acting as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, ‘all that does is encourage people to rush, to get to

the end. They don't enjoy how they got there. They set off already knowing what something'll look like. Sometimes that works for me, but mostly it doesn't. I get bored if I know what it'll look like beforehand. But it is difficult.'

And I hear myself asking her about what she finds difficult.

'It's just so hard to find a good class these days. Lots of places are closing down. Costs are going up and there's fewer places I can get to. There are private courses, lots of them. I've tried some, some are worthwhile, but they do tend to be rather tame and somewhat, well, *predictable*.' I watch as Ginny rolls her eyes and shakes her head.

'At [Adult Education] you get some really good tuition. Lots of critiques and discussions. People that really know their onions, so to speak.'

Then in another sudden change of direction she says. 'You see it's not always been easy. I was left with the children when they were quite young. [My husband] couldn't help it…got ill and couldn't cope and I couldn't help him. Over time I stopped going to classes. I was so tired.'

There is silence as she stares distractedly through the window, her lips compressed and slightly twisted to one side. As the minutes pass I wonder whether I should try to turn the subject. But after a few more seconds she continues.

'I was in [city] then, had my own shop and was too busy to see it coming. Had to sell. I'd hang around the house for hours. Then I was in the library and there was this art group. I remember watching from behind the bookshelves for ages. I went back the next week and the tutor asked if I wanted to join in for a few minutes. Gave me some paper and I must have borrowed a pencil from someone. Didn't do much, just sat really and then gradually it all came back. It felt so good to be creating something new. I started to get to know some of the other women. It was all very ordinary, but it was a lifesaver, has been ever since. That's why although I'm at the point of giving up, I know I still need to go.'

Ginny glances at the windows again but they are still devoid of Rook and it is impossible to discern him in the twiggy oak, even though he is probably still there.

'And what else might you do if not a class?' I ask, suddenly curious to know.

'Well, I could do a correspondence course. Thought about that, but then you're on your own, aren't you? Quite impersonal I think. I can make art at home or read or

watch a programme or go to a gallery. I'm interested in many things, but somehow they aren't the same. There's always something else you can be doing, like housework, or lying in bed, or shopping. But I make time for art most days. I'm incessantly curious and the class satisfies it…but at the same time it also feeds it.'

Rook returns and this time Ginny slides the large window open to offer him two more morsels direct from her outstretched hand. After swallowing each of them whole, he seems content to settle down and shelter from the wind once more and part of me wonders how cheese might taste to a Rook. Ginny returns to her sketchbook, but before she sits I ask her about what she is working on at the moment and see her face brighten as she replies.

'Ah, that would be Janus!' And then she winks and makes me laugh as she raises both her arms and slowly turns her head first left and then right, in mimicry of the image in her email. 'Come and see!'

She waves her arm in the direction of another table and as I move over to it I see it is heaped with some handmade clay tiles, a series of maquettes and various sketches. In the centre is Janus, propped on an upturned yoghurt pot and as intriguing as his photograph. He is positioned at a table with a paintbrush in one hand and a palette in the other; his two heads facing in opposite directions.

Janus at the table

Ginny explains how she based him on one of the 'Labours of the Months', which referred to the twelve commonplace rural activities that occurred during a medieval agricultural year. Her research found that he symbolised a time of looking both forwards to the year to come and backwards to that which has just passed. She had translated the cycle onto a series of clay tiles and made some pipe-cleaner models to help visualise how each figure could be rendered.

'You see Janus is not just sitting at any old table. That's *my* table where I make *my* work.' She was excited and animated, and it was wonderful to see.

'It's a time of new beginnings and changes in my life, like my past moving into my future, the passing of my youth, all that time working as a single mother and into old age. Looking back on my education and my art, it's always been there – that's why I have him sitting at a table, always learning, never finished and looking into the future. It's so important to keep thinking ahead and it's so exciting to think that there could be so many new things to think about.'

As she speaks she gently plucks Janus from the table and lays him onto her open palm. Bringing him to eyelevel, she turns and steadies herself on the back of a chair and then returns to the table by the window.

Momentarily I find myself left behind, rooted to the spot by the thought of my mother's need to finish and close and tidy away and Ginny's talk of the excitement of leaving things open to new ideas and new possibilities.

'There comes a time' she says, gently placing Janus on the table by the window, 'I guess around sixty, when you realise that life really is finite. Not that I'm sad or depressed or anything about it, but it's significant I think.' And she turns Janus to face the window where Rook is still sheltering.

'Like Janus, you look back from life's experience and you see what's what, then you look forward and see less time in front of you. And you think, 'shall I give up or do something?' For me, I keep my heart and mind going with education and art. It doesn't really show, but I know it's there, I can feel it inside.

'As children we were told that if we worked hard enough we were in for a leisurely retirement. I've been lucky, but times are changing. My children don't value education in the same way as I do, they don't seem to have the time unless it's to do with their career. They're too busy making money and spending it to care maybe. The education I do just doesn't seem to count to them or the government. What was it Einstein said - Not everything matters can be counted.[39] But then, I didn't expect to still be here at my age, still curious and with so much that I want to do. I expect that will be my epitaph. Here lies Ginny, she still has much to do!'

I feel Ginny might be growing tired. She has been speaking for much of the morning and as she stares off into the distance deep in thought, I make to close my notebook. Smiling, she looks across and then down at her watch and declares, 'Well, what an unexpected morning!'

I move to thank her and start to gather my belongings together before we make our way to the door, As we step through we are greeted by Rook, two-stepping and scattering the sunshine in oil-slick rainbows. But as Ginny raises her outstretched palms to reveal her empty hands, he hops away a few feet, picks up an acorn and carefully drops it at her feet.

---

[39] Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted (Einstein, no date, quoted in Avieson, 2008, p.1).

As he retreats to his twiggy perch, Ginny bends to gather his offering and I see it is a struggle for her to rise again. But as she straightens we exchange a smile and she slips the acorn into her shirt pocket as we make our way over to the car.

Then, just as I am about to set off, Ginny remembers something and stuffs her hand back into her pocket. I see her arthritic fingers moving awkwardly around the acorn through the thin fabric of her shirt, until she finally locates what she's looking for. She leans over and posts a slip of bright green paper through the open car window. I take it from her and under the grease of a cheesy thumbprint I can just make out an email address and mobile number.

'Knew there was something' she says. 'Do you know Diane? Hasn't been to class for a while. Interesting woman. Said she wouldn't mind a word. That's her email anyway. Keep in touch and safe journey home!' And then she raises her hand in farewell as I drive away. In my rear mirror I see her glancing up at Rook's oak before she turns back to the studio and pulls the door closed behind her.

Figure 4: *Rook's song*, Ginny, (2017).

Chapter 8: Diane

Pen portrait: Diane

Diane left school at fifteen without any recognised qualifications, married at eighteen and started her family soon after. She describes herself as a 'typical working-class woman' working in a variety of temporary, low paid jobs and spending many years caring for children, parents and grandparents. She says she has always been 'a little bit creative' and has drawn, painted and sculpted as means of 'making sense of things' from a very young age. She attended art classes at Adult Education as her family grew up and was encouraged by her grandfather to negotiate and resist the persistent inequality often associated with aspects of her social and cultural inheritance. Bursting with intelligence, curiosity and self-doubt she remains positive with a restless curiosity and an appetite for movement and education.

In her fifties, she began a degree in fine art, recommended to her by her Adult Education tutor. Despite the barriers she encountered, including her alienation from members of her family and community, periods of hardship and depression and difficulties associated with dyslexia, she continues to persevere in the hope of completing it. She places great importance on Adult Education as a means of sustaining her until that time. Now in her mid-sixties, Diane is one of a small, but significant number of women, who found their state pension age unexpectedly extended just before she was due to retire.[40] She now works in a nearby coffee shop, rejecting a role of main carer for her baby grand-daughter and elderly mother-in-law, determined to keep the possibility of completing her degree alive. It is here that I first meet Diane and she begins her story.

Portrait of Diane: First sketches

I pass the cars of morning shoppers filling the central parking areas and park down the hill with the rail commuters. The ticket machine gobbles almost all my change and I fervently wish I had set out earlier as I walk back to the precinct. Luckily, I make out the coffee shop's brightly lit and steamy windows almost immediately on the other side of the road. As I negotiate the traffic I find I have arrived just on time.

---

[40] The Pensions Act (2007) raised the state pension age for women in the UK from 60 to 65. An amendment in 2014 brought forward the planned changes and raised the pensionable age still further. The process significantly disadvantaged half a million women born in 1953 and 1954 who, with little notice, found their pensionable age rise from 60 to 66 shortly before their planned retirement. https://www.saga.co.uk (Accessed 1 November 2017).

‘Dreggs’ is part of a large franchise, perfectly placed on the High Street between a phone shop and payday loan emporium. Converted from a former chapel, its once-austere facade now sports an illuminated sign in cerulean blue; expensive coffee and sausage rolls are its new religion. As I push open the heavy oak door I stand for a few seconds to allow my eyes to adjust to the harsh glare, my ears and throat flinching at the noise and pungent aromas of freshly ground coffee mixed with sickly-sweet milk. A soundtrack of Doris Day singing *Que Sera Sera* wrestles against the general hubbub of voices and the deafening thuds of spent coffee grounds hitting the waste bin.[41]

On my way to the back of the short queue I pass a thimble-sized trophy awarded to ‘Jay’ for assembling three, two-shot ristrettos in as many minutes. I look around, in the hopes of identifying Diane in the crowded room, but my gaze arrests on a woman at the head of the line. She is dressed from head to foot in mismatching red; ruby hat, crimson lips, long burgundy coat, scarlet nails and alizarin boots. Her imperious demand for a ‘cinnamon tall-top, skinny, latte’ and a ‘babyccino’ easily carries towards me. But just as I am considering what a coffee shop might be doing selling a small pair of trousers, a light touch on my arm makes me turn. And there is Diane, petite and blonde and wearing a large and infectious smile.

‘Hello’ she shouts, over the sudden noise of the steam jets, ‘Jane by any chance?’ I nod and return her smile. ‘Great! Saw you was carryin’ that straw bag like you said. Right on time. It’s this way.’[42] She coughs sharply, a deep smoker’s hack, and points somewhere vaguely towards the back of the high-ceilinged room.

‘Just off for my break now, Jay’ she bellows, waving at the man behind the slick marble counter. As we pass by, I see the woman-in-red’s order is still in progress, but her voluminous coat sleeve is already dragging in the sugar as she extends her arm over the counter in her hurry to pay.

‘That’s cool!’ he replies, ignoring the woman’s proffered note waving in front of him. As I walk past and glance down at the coffee he is making, I sincerely hope that for his sake it isn’t.

---

[41] I felt misgivings about interviewing Diane within the confines of the establishment where she worked. Although this was a public place and, with the closure of her local learning centre, one that Diane had suggested for our meeting, I was concerned she may feel inhibited by the presence of her employer and customers. However, in the event, this did not present as an issue.

[42] See Chapter 4 for further information regarding editorial decisions pertinent to the (re)presentation of Diane’s narrative and speech patterns.

I follow Diane's white t-shirted back, emblazoned with TRAINEE BARISTA, closely, feeling a little like Alice following the White Rabbit. We deftly weave past another barista clearing tables, tack around a double buggy and a couple of toddlers in high chairs and plough on between the garrulous customers. As we approach the far wall, I notice an inconspicuous low door, almost as high as it is wide. To its right hangs an overlarge and ornate mirror which initially distracts my eye from the small gold and blue STAFF ONLY sign.

Diane yanks hard on the door and holds it open, waiting for me to pass by. As I move forward, ducking my head and murmuring my thanks, I catch sight of her name badge. At one point it had clearly said 'DIE'. The final vowel had since been attacked with white correction fluid, but the ghost of its presence was still visible close-up. And she sees me looking and puffs out her cheeks.

'They do that 'ere, you know, shorten our names. They think it's trendy. I'm DI, Jason's JAY, Emma's EM and so on. I mean, let's face it, it takes a whole lifetime to say DI-ANE! Still, it's not that bad, you should see 'ow they shortened Louise!'

She starts laughing and is still giggling as the door slowly closes on itself, instantaneously muffling the clatter and chatter of cups and voices. The reprieve is sweet rapture, but Diane continues to shout.

'Everywhere seems to want quick fixes these days. A text 'ere, email there, a bullet point or two. I only just got a mobile. Didn't need one 'til I started workin' 'ere 'cos they text you to say when they want you by six that mornin' and then you know if you're needed or not.'

A fleeting thought brushes by as I think about her remarks concerning the need for speed and brevity in our lives, but Diane is still speaking.

'Thank God fer that!' As she speaks she removes a pair of neon earplugs and drops them into the pocket of her knee length skirt. As she does the deep gravel in her voice returns to a more normal volume.

'Been 'ere a year now, made this place me own.' Diane gestures around the space. 'Used to be where the vicar got dressed 'parently. Was gonna be a bookies. That went next door in the end, but they left that in.' Following her glance I realise, rather disconcertingly, I could still see the coffee shop through what I had taken to be a mirror from the other side.

‘Oh! That’s really weird!’ I hear myself say and then notice the woman-in-red has taken a seat nearby. I watch as she decapitates the milky foam from her oversized mug and adds it to the contents of a diminutive teacup sitting on the tray beside her.

‘Yeah, a bit odd innit? But you get all sorts! Won’t be disturbed in ‘ere. The others all sit out there in their breaks. Don’t know ‘ow they can stand it, but I suppose they’re used to ‘avin’ noise about ‘em. Me, I like peace and quiet.

‘Mind you, we only ‘ave a few of hours and then I’ll be back on. Not worth me goin’ ‘ome, what wiv the bus fare, that’d be an hour’s wage gone! Split shift, zero-hours contract y’see.’

I feel Diane’s words fall heavily upon me. My irritation at the expense of the car park now seeming foolish and petty and I dive into my bag to pull out my notebook and recording equipment in an effort to cover my discomfort.

‘Anyway, I’ll just get us some water. Back in a minute!’ And she bustles from the room in a sudden flurry of energy.

Self-portrait V

As Diane leaves, the sudden change in noise level is almost shocking. And as I hover over my compact digital recording machine my mind becomes seized by an image from my childhood. I see Dad hunched over his suitcase-sized, state of the art, chrome and grey Grundig on which he religiously recorded his OU programmes.[43] I hear the heavy clunk of the buttons as he sends the large, brown tapes into a slow, spooling spin and the thin hiss of the tape leader which always preceded the broadcast jingle. I can taste the faintly sick, metallic tang of apprehension in my throat as the precise accent of the disembodied announcer punctuates the perma-silence of my youth.

And here I am, more than forty years later, repeating those same actions, recording material for my own education and listening to it over and over again in the silence of my study. In my mind’s eye I see the glimmer of the clear, still surface of *Rydal Water* ruffled by a slight breeze. The unexpected and elusive thought agitates my long-held understandings and invites me to view parts of my personal history from a very different perspective.

---

[43] The Open University took advantage of ‘new’ technology to transmit programmes via radio and television for home recording.

Portrait of Diane I

Diane is back and asking if I would like some water. I notice she doesn't make eye contact for very long and her eyes dart swiftly away from me as a sudden thought occurs to her. 'Or coffee? Only we 'ave to pay for 'ot drinks.'

Diane directs her gaze to the floor and I hear the hesitation in her voice. My own eyes travel towards the menu above Jay's head as he adds marshmallows to two of his latest creations. Whatever they were, two hot drinks would likely cost Diane another hour's pay and I am quick to shake my head.

'Water will be great, thanks.' I watch Diane's shoulders relax before she disappears beyond the hemisphere of light cast by the single wall fitting and reappears again with some paper cups.

'Ginny says you're a potter,' I say by way of introducing my research, opening my notepad and adding the date at the top of a new page.

Diane looks up with a fleeting smile and then quickly down again. 'Well, that depends. I were...still am...don't actually make anythin' now, not since they shut the class, so pr'aps not, just think I am.'

She looks at me sideways, then jerks her eyes up and away, but not before I see the confusion and doubt in such sharp contrast to her effervescent and confident greeting in the coffee shop beyond. 'Why don't you tell me about it?' I ask.

Diane continues to stand in the light looking down at her hands and I wonder if she has heard. I am thinking through how to rephrase my question, when she moves and places the water on a low table next to two faux-leather armchairs. Both sport bulging hernias of bright yellow foam and as we wordlessly agree to sit, I notice hers also has a wonky leg. Diane's feet don't quite reach the floor.

'I were born in fifty-four, and just as I thought I were retirin' they were sayin' I 'ad to carry on wiv work.' As she speaks she leans forward and lifts a book up from the table. She begins to smooth its dark blue cover with the flat of her palm and my eyes are drawn to its rounded and frayed corners.

'Didn't know nothin' 'bout it. Were a real shock. I 'ad it all planned. Was gonna finish my degree. I'll still do it, just gotta wait.' She nodded emphatically with a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes and I scribble a note in the margin of my journal to follow up with some research on recent pension legislation.

‘Didn’t always work in a coffee shop. Oh gosh, fifteen, the ice cream factory. Left school ‘cos Mum and Dad split. I were a bright student, always gettin’ good reports. Then, the sky fell in after Dad ran off and that was that. Don’t remember bein’ at school after that to be honest.’

As she speaks, Diane continues to stroke the book on her lap, her insistent cough punctuates the space between us and mingles with the erratic bursts of steam and rhythmic tri-phased thuds of baristas knocking out the grounds from the counter beyond.

‘Got as far as ‘O’ levels, but Mum, said ‘No, we won’t be doing that!’ and I left school wivvout ‘em ‘cos she’d already ‘ad a job lined up for me in the ice cream factory. I ‘ad to do what I were told, but I kept askin’ to go to art college. And then, I ‘ad the accident and the factory didn’t keep me long after that’.

I wonder again about the particular circumstances that led to my feeling able to stand against my parents and continue my education, when Diane had felt otherwise. If my own father had left home, would I have felt able to leave my mother to cope on her own? But Diane is still speaking, and her voice is brightening a little.

‘Then it were a youth trainin’ scheme. But the man I did my placement wiv exploited me. I weren’t paid much and ended up doin’ the window dressin’, doin’ ‘is publicity, baby-sittin’ ‘is kids. Didn’t get paid for my designs and my drawin’s...I’d always done that, anywhere I went I ended up drawin’ somethin’ for whoever I worked for. Never got paid. Then it come up to the year and ‘e didn’t want me ‘cos ‘e would ‘ave to pay proper wages. Just like now though innit? All them kids what ‘ave to do internships for nothin’ and their parents ‘avin to sub ‘em.’

As Diane leans forward to take a sip of water from her paper cup I jot down some more notes, aware that we have moved a long way from her initial considerations of whether she considers herself a potter or not. But the temporary and transient nature of Diane’s working life seems important to her and linked to her need for education. Parts of her narrative seem well rehearsed and she delivers them in rapid succession. At other times she seems to be working it out as she speaks and I suddenly get the impression that she isn’t listened to very much. But by then Diane was already somewhere else in her story. I sit back in my chair determined to hear what she wants to relate and all the while her fingers continue to pluck at the corners of the book on her lap.

‘Then I worked wiv Gran. She’d come fruit pickin’ from London in the war and stayed on workin’ for the pottery. ‘er and Grandad lived on the common in the old Nissen huts and when they cleared it we got a council place. We all ended up livin’ there. She taught me ‘ow to decorate the pots. ‘er Dad, my Great Grandad, ‘ad been on the barges and knew ‘ow to paint all them flowers and that’.

I felt my mind struggle with the swerves in Diane’s story, parts of which seemed well-advanced even though we had only just begun. Then she slid slightly forward until her outstretched toes touched the ground and for the first time raised her eyes to look directly into mine, a question forming, a decision being made.

‘Wanna see?’ I hear her eagerness, tempered by a slight tremor on the final syllable of her inquiry. Fixing me with her intense blue gaze, she sits motionless, lips parted, already preparing to change the subject at my slightest objection.

I have no idea what it is that Diane wants to show me, but it seems somehow connected to the book she is now gripping with hard, white knuckles. I feel curious and find myself nodding, my lifting brows signalling interest. I was rewarded by the look of pure joy sparkling in Diane’s eyes as she slid to the edge of the chair, her feet now flat to the floor. I imitated her, slipping my own notebook from my lap, better able to see hers which now bridged the space between us. I notice distractedly that her cough has temporarily abated.

I hear the book creak softly as it opens. The first page reveals a watercolour and ink cherub; it’s pink chubby flesh wobbling on the page. Then a succession of full-feathered horses, baskets of juicy, ripe fruit and bouquets of fat, pink roses appear. The discordant din of Jay’s efforts from beyond the glass become increasingly distant as each new image is revealed.

‘See, this were Great Grandad’s pattern book when ‘e were a bargee up and down the Thames. Used to make an ‘extra bob or two’ [money] on the side paintin’ tole[44], you know, things like metal trays and buckets what ‘e got from tradin’. Always black they were, and then ‘e’d paint on top of it. And these are Gran’s.’

A different hand had taken over, more delicate; a row of houses with smoke billowing from chimneys, a small dog playing with a child and a hoop.

---

[44] Bargee: an employee on a river barge, transporting freight along inland waterways and Tole: an abbreviation of Toleware which was fashionable in the Victorian period.

‘She took over, then Mum and then me. At one time we all did the paintin’ at the pottery together. Piecework. Didn’t get paid much. Women did paintin’, men did throwin’. They got paid regular. See, we was exploited even back then! We knew the patterns and colours and who done what. We was supposed to make ‘em all the same, but Rene always did ‘er cherubs wiv a belly button and May did ‘ers wiv a little kiss curl. It fitted in round the kids when they was small’.

Diane’s voice is briefly overwhelmed by a fit of coughing. As she sips some water and I wait for it to pass, my gaze travels through the looking-glass. I stare as the woman-in-red offers the tiny cup to the eager pink tongue of a small dog concealed in her coat sleeve. As I search the room for the reaction of others, Doris Day interrupts with more questions for her mother about being pretty or rich and I realise that the music is set to auto-replay.

‘I were the only one in the family what were good at school, but we’ve always been ‘ard workin’ and creative. Y’see, I get it all the way back to Great Grandad at least. That’s got to count for something ain’t it?’ Diane’s question doesn’t seem to require an answer. For the moment she is preoccupied, continuing to gently turn the pages of the book which she takes back to her lap. I bend to pick mine up from the table again and re-open it to today’s date.

‘And you know I were lookin’ at the *Rokeby Venus*[45] that Grandad ‘ad a go at paintin’ and I used to think ‘Cor ‘ow’d ‘e learn to do that?’ Grandad always encouraged me in art, even when I were little.

‘Say, ‘draw me this,’ ‘e’d go and I’d go ‘I can’t draw that’ and ‘e’d go ‘Shut your eyes. Can you see it?’ ‘Yeah’, I’d say and ‘e’d go, ‘Draw what you see wiv your eyes shut.’ And I used to draw it. Say it were a dog, well, it probably wouldn’t have been able to walk very far in all honesty, but Grandad would say ‘That’s what you’ve got to do, just keep goin’ and don’t let others put you off’.

‘I think I were about twenty-three when I signed up for art college first time round. I were like a ship in full sail then, really enjoyed it, but I only got about nine weeks in the end ‘cos they shut the playgroup and I couldn’t get my daughter looked after anymore.’

---

[45] The Rokeby Venus (Velázquez, 1647-51) depicts Venus lying on a bed and looking into a mirror held by her son, Cupid (Figure 5).

Diane's voice trails off as another bout of coughing erupts and I look down at my notepad. Over the years I have become quite practised at making notes as others speak, honed by long meetings and observing teaching practice. I use words and pictures, often annotating them with circles and squares and add arrows and asterisks for emphasis. I make them into little maps which help me to connect ideas together. But as I glance at the map I am now attempting, I see only a series of apparently random jottings with very little in the way of a straightforward and linear telling.

In my mind's eye I watch Kairos waving as he steps up beside Chronos. They stand together, side-by-side as I weigh up whether to attempt to re-focus the interview into some kind of rational order or allow Diane to continue telling her story in her own way and on her own terms. But unstructured interviewing holds the promise of gathering such rich material (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) and I decide to leave Diane to sail where she would and feel the warmth of Kairos's smile.

Then, just as I think I am beginning to sense something of Diane's pride in her artistic ancestry and the importance of her grandfather in her ambitions to obtain a degree in art, I feel something else teeter on the edge of conscious thought. And suddenly my mind catches up with what Diane said about her having to fit education in around children.

'So, you had a family of your own by then?' I venture.

'Oh, yeah. I'd 'ad three by then, all under five. So that was that. My mother-in-law were glad I were out 'cos she'd already booked out what I were supposed to be doin', pushin' 'er about in 'er chair and looking after 'er. Got depression for about ten years after that. I were sayin' to my 'usband, 'If I don't change I'm gonna kill myself. I can't do this anymore'. Bit dramatic maybe, but the way I were livin', it were killin' me anyway.'

I wonder at the strength of feeling accompanying Diane's sudden disclosure of these particular experiences and I write ETHICS!!!!!? in my notebook next to the timestamp.[46] As I do, Dianes voice flows on unabated.

'And when I started my degree people in the street didn't want to know me anymore. They discommunicated [*sic*] me. Even my brothers don't talk to me anymore and my mother-in-law said some bad things about me bein' disloyal and

[46] See Chapter 3 for further information on ethical considerations leading to the retention of material regarding periods of physical and mental ill health.

gettin' too 'igh and mighty. Well, we fell out and never made it up. She'll be eighty-four now. But I 'ad to escape my circumstances wivin' the family. I were under a regime, it were all set out, 'ow I were goin' to live, runnin' round everyone else. I know it might sound selfish, but I 'ad to do it or I don't think I'd still be 'ere. I still live in the same street but I'm glad I'm out of it, but it makes you sad you know?'

In the thick cocooning warmth of the café I hear Mum's voice. 'Our sort don't go to University. Try nursin'. Settle down, 'ave kids. Look after y'Dad 'n me.'

'At Uni they said I were dyslexic. Didn't even know, but should 'av cottoned on. Statistics was pretty bad, but my IQ was top 7%. Couldn't do no writin' so, that's when I went and I did that class [literacy] at Adult Education. Still can't write, 'ate it, but it 'elped get my readin' sorted. See, I 'adn't got vocabulary. I knew what I were experiencin' in my thoughts, but I needed the language what went wiv it. I got a lot of self-growth out of it. I always thought that I'd got something wrong, 'til then, always felt like I 'adn't got the world right.

'I mean, I saw Gran so frustrated because she loved 'er job and she so wanted to stay at work but you couldn't once you got married. You think of all the women who must 'ave 'ad that frustration when there were no outlet for their intelligence and that sort of enquirin' mind. I think there's a lot of savvy women who are interested in – beyond – you know, they have their sphere and that's it. They don't really move outside it. They get pinned down if you know what I mean?'

Portrait of the artist's mother III

As Diane took a sip of water and pushed herself back into her chair, my thoughts drifted to my mother's difficulty with writing. I recalled her random mix of upper and lower-case characters, strange abbreviations and emphatic underlining, the words that started with a letter and then dissipated into a single line. And for the first time I wondered if she too might have been dyslexic. And the more I thought about it, the more other ideas started to unravel. I thought about her desperation to cling to her white-collar office job and her talent with figures and I thought about the self-worth she must have felt in being able to earn a wage of her own.

As Diane absently flicks through the pages of her book, my gaze settles on my faint reflection in the mirror. And I feel a penny drop. Mum had used me and work to escape her own destiny as a poor, uneducated, working class girl in the same way that I had used education to escape. I saw how she must have struggled to be her own

person in the only way she knew how, that she was fallible and human. But my mother's insecurities had made me secure enough to grow into something other than her. I saw how my ideas of 'freedom' offered by a university education could be conceived as a threat to her own. And suddenly older decisions that had once seemed so sound began to appear unaccountably dense. I finally saw the hard, shiny, burning look Mum had given me that day as I left for university for what it was. *She had felt betrayed.*

Portrait of Diane II

The slam of a door brings me back to the present.

'Yeah, but it weren't no bed of roses at uni either. Enjoyed the learnin' but there weren't many my age and I did find I isolated myself a lot. Preferred to work quietly, goin' to the studio on my own on days when no-one else were in and I'd sit there for ages wiv my books. I wouldn't 'ave been able to do that at 'ome - too many people findin' me other jobs to do. It were selfish maybe.'

'Your way of managing it?'

'Yeah, it were definitely escape. But I've got a completely different attitude now. I stick up for myself more. I'm braver 'cos I lost a lot of confidence and education 'elped me get a bit of that back. Now I can't be persuaded. It made a difference 'bout the way I see other people and the way they talk and listen to you.'

In the distance the wail of a siren interrupts our conversation and the noises of the coffee shop intrude. I take a deep breath and glance at Diane, just in time to see the animated light within her dim as she replaces her book on the table.

'See I painted the *Rokeby Venus* like Grandad did, well a transcription[47] anyway when I were at university. They say it's a picture of Venus in an erotic pose, but all she's doin' is lying on a bed wiv her back to you and lookin' in a mirror 'eld up by 'er son, Cupid. But if you look at 'er face in the mirror she can't actually see 'erself. What she's lookin' at is the painter. I reckon Velázquez is sayin' that 'e knows 'e's exploitin' the female figure, but that she knows it too, but because she 'as a child what's holdin' a mirror up to 'er, she knows she 'as to accept 'er situation.

---

[47] One purpose of transcription is to create a replica of an art work to gain insights as to the techniques used, how the original artist might have constructed it and how it might have developed and changed through the process of its construction. Transcription allows another artist to understand a work of art more deeply than they might through observation alone.

Figure 5: *The Toilet of Venus (Rokeby Venus),* Diego Velázquez, (1647-51).

'My daughter's all right, got a law degree now, but my son's been thinkin' wiv another part of 'is anatomy. See 'e thinks I should stay at 'ome and look after my granddaughter. Nurseries are all full and that new thing what's comin' in, where you get thirty hours free, still means you 'ave to top it up and they can't afford it.'[48]

I find my curiosity piqued by Diane's comparison of gender politics in the twenty-first century and those of a working-class woman modelling for a picture in seventeenth century Spain. I am intrigued by her response and recognise something of my own mother's struggle to work and the power discourses at play as women continue to juggle poorly paid employment with the need to work family-friendly hours.

'See when my 'usband knew I wanted to do a degree, 'e decided to do one, only 'e did 'is in three years straight 'cos I were the one left to look after the kids and sort the shoppin' and the 'ousework while 'e studied. I love the kids and my grandkid to bits, but I've been there, done that. Doin' free childcare ain't for me. I want to get back to my education. My daughter-in-law thinks I'm bein' selfish, but I think it's 'er what's like that. So I took myself off to do more classes.'

[48] The UK national government policy regarding free preschool childcare places for up to thirty hours per week commences in September 2018.

‘Where did you go?’

‘Just up the road ‘ere. Saw a pottery class advertised and thought ‘what’s sauce for the gander’. I reckoned I could throw pots as good as any of the blokes what worked at the pottery.

‘Love it. Loved it. Took a long time. My shoulders and ‘ands ached from it. Worked out when to be firm and when to be gentle. Finesse! That’s a word you wouldn’t ‘ave ‘eard me say before I went back [to education].’

As she speaks Diane turns to sit squarely in her chair, holds her hands out in front and mimes the act of throwing a pot on a wheel.

‘These things take time. Patience. You ‘ave to learn by doin’, not by talkin’ or writin’, but ‘avin’ a go and learnin’ the feel of it. And then we could ‘ave a go at all the glazes and different decoratin’ techniques. Was in my element.’

‘What happened?’

‘Closed the place didn’t they. Row of offices now. Said they couldn’t find anywhere to move the kiln to, said it were too expensive to move.’

Diane drums the fingers of her right hand against her knee. As I watch her head shaking sadly from side to side, I hear the insistent return of the sirens. While we wait for them to pass my mind shifts to the clean and tidy modern purpose-built centre where I had first met Ginny. There was nowhere for lorries delivering clay to unload, or for a kiln and dustbins full of liquid glaze to be stored or used.

‘It were a full class, waitin’ list as well. Bet they wish they’d kept it open after that programme on TV ‘bout throwin’ pots. The place could ‘ave been a goldmine.’

‘So what did you do?’

‘Got on my bike didn’t I!’

Portrait of Diane III

‘Started at college, part-time. You ‘ad to do a qualification though, you couldn’t just do it. An NVQ[49] in ceramics. Told ‘em ‘bout bein’ dyslexic and everythin’ and they said they could ‘elp and I were real excited.’

‘How was it?’

[49] National Vocational Qualification.

‘Well for a start they asked me to write down everythin’ I knew about pottery. Saw the support advisor and she ‘elped me get it all down like I wanted it to sound. I were real proud of it. Then I got it back two weeks later and they asked me to just make it into bullet points. Apparently, that’s all I needed for the portfolio. Imagine, all that experience in five bullet points! Believe me, I were not an ‘appy bunny. Then they wanted me to learn to use the wheel and I said I could do that already, but they weren’t ready to go on to glazin’ until the following term so they kept me makin’ identical pots over and over again.’

Diane’s sigh starts off another fit of coughing which eventually passes after we have some more water.

‘Colleges aren’t really geared up for older people like me, or anyone wiv any experience or anyone what has an inklin’ as to what to do already. See that?’ As she speaks she jerks her head up and backwards to someplace beyond the area of light before she jumps up and disappears into the gloom.

I narrow my eyes to see into the shadows, but I can see nothing but darkness. As Diane moves things around out of sight, she begins to hum the notes of a familiar melody that I can’t quite place. As she steps from the shadows the tune stops.

‘That’ she says triumphantly, ‘is a squat vase of baluster form wiv a flared rim.’ As she spoke she mimicked someone speaking with Received Pronunciation, emphasising the ‘r’ of rim and reminding me of Mum’s posh telephone voice.

‘Sounds great dunnit! But it’s B-O-R-I-N-G.’ She thrusts the vase towards me, exaggerating each letter as she says it and then collapses into a great barking laugh that ends with another coughing fit.

I take the cream vase from her and turn it between my hands. I can see her point. It is perfectly symmetrical and smooth, the glaze is flat, uniform and even. It feels surprisingly light and apart from the skill that I knew must have gone into making it, it fails to excite me.

‘That’s what they wanted me to do. Technical stuff. Over and over again. I only lasted a term. I keep it ‘ere as a reminder, out of the grandkid’s way.’

She retrieves the vase from me. ‘So, what kind of thing were you making before, when you were at Adult Education?’ I say, almost afraid to ask.

‘Ah’, she says and turns sharply with a determined swish of her skirt. She picks up the tune where she left off and this time she reappears from the gloom cupping a large bowl between both hands.

‘I were makin’ a series ‘bout the four elements, y’know, like air, earth, fire, water and ‘ow important they are in the environment. Did loads of research. We was plannin’ an exhibition ‘bout climate change. This one’s water,’ and she began to rub her thumbs over bowl’s surface.

I watch as Diane raises her head and moves towards me, her mouth curving in invitation. Then, just as her arms begin to extend, her eyes suddenly drop from mine to the bowl and I feel unsure of what to do next. Her stillness is disconcerting. The fleeting moments which follow seem to last a lifetime and I feel the importance of the moment. Even Diane seems surprised by her next words.

‘Never shown this to anyone before.’

Her hesitancy is palpable as she wavers between passing the bowl to me and keeping it to herself. Then I see the corner of her mouth lift and I know she is about to make a joke, a quip to deflect the awkwardness of her unexpected revelation.

‘I ‘ope you don’t take that out of context when you type it up from that tape!’ she blurts and a twinkle returns to her eye. The difficulty of the moment passes and she offers the bowl to me.

Our fingers touch briefly at the moment of exchange. It fits perfectly between my hands, its heft and size are pleasing and balanced. I wonder how long it took to make and how many processes had been involved.

‘Last thing I did before the centre closed. Done part by wheel, part by ‘and.’

The body sparkles in oxidised green, the inside pools in kingfisher blue. There are rivulets of thick cream glaze curling about the rim. Interior striations spiral in eddies, swinging over and round and a sgraffitoed whale looms from the underglaze, its tail flippering over the edge and breaking the boundary between inside and out. The blowhole is pierced and a raised plume of slip, hints at froth and foam.

I find myself gently rolling the pot between my hands; hard and soft, smooth and rough. Tracing a fingertip over the outline of the whale I begin to understand that it was made both quickly and slowly. As its music unfolds I discover it has a warmth, the fey and fickle glazes contrasting starkly with the cold safety of the plain, cream

vase. It works both close-up and at a distance; an allegory of dripping, flowing, and surging water. However, it is not technically perfect. There is evidence of crazing and pitting in the thick cream glaze and a deep firing crack where the variations in the thickness of clay had dried at different speeds.

As Diane continues to hover close by, she guides me through her thoughts and the processes leading to its creation. She dwells on how she will alter things at its next recasting. The bowl appears to carry an accretion of personal meaning with the ability to act as a portal to a significant place in time. I am flattered that Diane feels able to share it with me.[50]

'I should never 'ave put all of it in the one bowl really. Knew it would be a problem, but knowin' the place was closin' back-footed me. And I were right in the end and I never got to make the others.'

I glance up and feel the connection between us. The bowl speaks of her determination to unfold as much of her life as she could on her own terms. It speaks of her thirst for education as she seeks out and absorbs knowledge wherever and whenever. It speaks of Adult Education as a place that fostered and assuaged her curiosity and creativity.

Self-portrait VI

And with that thought came others, concerning the spatial dimensions inherent in learning, where each layer builds layer upon layer. And I knew that this was something that my research was teaching me; I was not interested in *thin*, what I wanted was more of this ethnographic and narrative thickness.[51]

As I learnt to spend time with the research material I began to understand the importance of re-examining earlier interpretations. I came to appreciate the rich, deep and nuanced meanings embedded in its thick layers and to acknowledge the influence of kairotic becomings in chronological meaning-making, for all meaning-making is made with time. 'Slicing and dicing' the kind of quantitative data I collected in my youth would only allow me to report on preconceived ideas. Once collected and analysed the information would be held up as an exemplar throughout time. What I was learning to do was to turn and look again. By metaphorically

---

[50] Diane declined my request to photograph her work, promising instead to send me a picture of the bowl in its final iteration. See Chapter 4 concerning ethical considerations regarding this decision.

[51] Geertz defines ethnography as 'an elaborate venture in…'thick description" (1973, p.6).

moving closer to the materials on my easel *and at the same time* stepping back from them, I can keep them 'alive', 'in play' and open to subsequent (re)interpretations (Cohen, 1997). This openness corresponds to the theoretical frameworks of bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001) and supports more complex, fluid and holistic modes of analysis (Formenti, 2015). However, the complex pleats of these perceptions did not fully unfold until I became engrossed in the processes of writing into and through the material (Pelias, 2011). As I sat listening to Diane in the coffee shop, my internalisation of this knowledge was still in its infancy, perhaps influenced and guided by Ginny's earlier reminder that all time is relative.

Portrait of Diane IV

'Loved the wheel don't get me wrong. Loved the rhythm of it. I'm like in a different space in my 'ead when I pot. I can laugh at myself, think about stuff or not, forget my troubles, or work through 'em. [Adult Education] came along just when I needed it. Kept my 'ead on straight, if you know what I mean. Stops you dwellin' and gives you back your space. Couldn't wait to get back each week. It were like I 'ad to do it.

'You 'ad to pay for each glaze mind. Experimental they called it at college, but I left before that. See I'm quite a curious person, always interested in lots of different things. Was never one to start at the beginnin', I were always 'alf way through stuff before I even knew it. What if I put this wiv this? That wiv that? 'ow long should I dry it for, how long for firin'? What temperature? What type of clay? Which glaze? It's not about an idea in a straight line. And it don't end really, 'cos although you make one, you're already thinkin' through to the next and the one after that too.'

Echoes of my journeys through the gilded pages of the Encyclopaedia Britannica set my pulse racing. Either/Or. One thing or the other.

'Everythin' these days 'as to be tied up to doin' a qualification or employment or gettin' a skill wiv readin' and writin'. And it's all got to be quick and easy, and clean and tidy, like little bullet points what describe your life. It's difficult to find a place where you can experiment wiv things, try stuff out wivout someone sayin' to move on, make it quicker, easier, cheaper. But for someone like me, 'ow to make a decent latte's 'bout the only employment trainin' I need. My career ain't goin' nowhere else at my age.'

Diane returns to her seat and tops up her water, happy now for me to spend time with her bowl. I glance involuntarily over its rim at the woman-in-red, but find

she has gone. Only her chromatic resonance remains and I watch disappointedly as a man wearing a smart dull grey suit slides deftly into her place.

'It's like a pack of cards, is that it? When they all blow over?' Diane was asking.

I bring myself back through the looking glass to offer a reply, 'A *house* of cards maybe?'

'Yeah, that's it! An '*ouse* of cards!' she repeated. See it's all built on thinkin' that all of us can get employed wivout using our 'ands, gettin' 'em dirty. What 'appens to all those people what used to work on the land, make pottery, make clothes, look after 'orses? Y'know? There's precious little jobs makin' things these days. People want an office job. They all get told at school they need to use their brains and not their 'ands. Think they've failed if they don't get no qualifications, but it's just that the qualifications they're takin' ain't the right ones for them.

'I reckon we got the way we did usin' our 'ands *and* brains. That's 'ow we used tools and imagined 'ow they could be used. Now they seem separate somehow and everyone goes on wiv it. And then we end up just copyin' what everyone else does. Where's the invention in that? People aren't curious 'bout things, they just sit there and take it for granted like its normal. Don't seem to question it.'

Three thuds of spent coffee hit the bin.

'D'ya 'ear that? That's Jay doin' what 'e's been told. You 'ave to knock the grounds out three times. If I does it twice or four times maybe, I get told off. It's not the barista way! Every one of them coffees 'as got to be identical. Well, who made up that rule I'd like to know. Like there's only one way to make coffee! It's 'cos they're too busy doin' what they think they 'av to do that stops 'em from thinkin' anythin' else. 'What if?' just don't figure into it. And then you get people just learnin' the same stuff over and over again.'

Portrait of Diane V

I turn the pot upside down and look for her mark; the moment when ownership is let go and others begin to layer an object with meanings of their own. But it isn't there and its absence speaks volumes. I look up and see Diane watching me.

'Never signed it. See, if I signed it, it were like admittin' it were my last piece, but in my 'ead I didn't want it to be, so I refused to sign it, so it's not finished, so that

means there's goin' to be more, don't it?' her words tumble out one after the other in their haste to be heard. I can see she is upset and unable to sit, she pushes herself out of her chair and makes her excuses.

'Just need to grab a quick ciggie. I'm cuttin' down. Only ten a day now. I'll leave the door open, only it can get a bit stuffy in 'ere. Back soon.' And with that she is gone. As she leaves, the final note of *Que Sera Sera* begins to fade and I place the bowl on the low table and sit back to take stock.

With the door open, the words of the next track carry unimpeded towards me and as it plays through, I recognise it as the source of Diane's hummed reprise. But it is the words, spoken in lyrical cadence, that grab at my attention and I search around, puzzled by its familiarity.

> A free bird leaps on the back of the wind
> and floats downstream till the current ends
> and dips his wings in the orange sun rays
> and dares to claim the sky.

And then its significance smacks into my mind as I recall a book of poems by Maya Angelou (1983, p.16).

Self-portrait VII

For the fifth time in as many minutes Mum asks me where Janey is. I'm in the cramped cupboard under the stairs, where long ago my brothers and I kept our library books and toys. I take a deep breath and say that she's at school and would be home soon, the white lie feeding my guilt anew. There was no point in trying to explain that I was Jane, that this woman in her early fifties, sitting cross legged in the play cupboard, *was* her daughter.

I try to distract her with my brother's old bear and she seems satisfied for the moment, engaging it in polite conversation as she takes it to the window. Nearly done, I continue adding to the rubbish sack beside me when I spy a book, overprinted in bands of red and purple and pink, slipping awkwardly behind the shelves. I fish it out; an old library book by the look of things and still in its plastic dust jacket. I open the cover and see the Sheffield City Libraries stamp and the due back date frozen in 1983. It's a book of poems by Maya Anjelou and the end of a tatty bus ticket protrudes from *Caged Bird*. As I turn to it I see my name also, written in the top margin in Mum's distinctive capitals, complete with full stop and double underline;

the blue biro pressing so hard into the page that it had torn it and left an impression upon the next.

‘Keepin’ that fer our Janey fer when she gets back.’ Mum’s voice is suddenly close, standing in the doorway, holding the teddy by its leg and blocking the light. I ask her why the book is important, but she wanders back to the window and never answers. I’m in a hurry and throw the book into the rubbish and stand, trying not to hit my head in the confined space. But then, as I begin to tie the sack, I impulsively rescue the book and drop it into my handbag. Several years later the book now languishes somewhere on a bookshelf of my own and I am suddenly very keen to reacquaint myself with it.

Portrait of Diane VI

Through the looking glass I watch Diane return with a woman who she introduces to me as Fay. She goes to a weekly painting class somewhere near the coast and says she is interested in being part of my research. I give her a spare copy of the information sheet and agree to give her a call the following week to see if she has any questions. As Fay departs, I check Diane’s face for signs that she is happy to continue with the interview.

‘I ‘ope you don’t mind, only I saw ‘er in the queue and we got chattin’ ‘bout your research. She’s just filled in one of them forms you get askin’ ‘ow ‘er course could be improved, but it were all tick boxes and there was nowhere to write anythin’ of your own, so I said she should try talkin’ to you’.

I assure Diane that I will contact Fay as promised and thank her as we return to our seats once more. We talk for a few minutes about nothing in particular and I sit back and listen. I had learned the importance of letting go and allowing time from Ginny. Then I ask Diane what she does now that the pottery class has closed.

‘Nothin’.’ The clear directness of her reply drops between us like a cold stone into a deep well. I immediately kick myself, but then Diane looks sideways at me as though a sudden thought occurs and she raises a hand to her forehead.

‘But I still make pots up ‘ere’, and with that her smile returns. ‘D’ya reckon that makes me potty in the ‘ead?’ We laugh together at her joke, and our former easiness returns.

‘My ‘ead’s like a palace, where I can put all the stuff that I’m goin’ to make. I’m interested in anythin’ what can get my curiosity goin’.’

A time of endings but also perhaps a place of new beginnings.

'See I know people think I ain't educated. They see where I live and 'ow I talk. People make assumptions. Well, I ain't educated, least not like they mean. See, I'm no shape shifter, I don't blend in. Stick out like a sore thumb, I do. But I do listen and I do see things what 'appen. At the moment I'm watchin' Nietzsche lectures on YouTube. Inquisitive, that's what my teacher at the [Adult Education] centre said I am, got 'im to write it down so I could look it up. 'e's right. I'm always thievin' bits 'ere and there and tuckin' 'em away for later. No real pattern to it. Just curious and you got to laugh at yourself!'

She picks the bowl up from the table and I witness her pleasure as she draws her fingertips across its surface. 'Curiosity killed the cat, my Gran used to say, but it gets my whole body thinkin' see', she purrs and I feel her whole body smile.

'Plenty like me what likes to make things and be creative. There's loads of us what could be makin' stuff you know, who want to let our curiosity out, invent new stuff usin' our 'ands. Idle 'ands is work for the devil! From the Enlightenment is it?' and I nod encouragingly, recognising the proverb as one of my mother's favourites.

As we finish the interview and Diane prepares to return to work, I find myself intrigued by the perplexing and intricate folds of time and space in her experiences. I also think of the ethical challenges ahead which will be posed by the sifting, selection and interpretation of so much material.

But as Doris seemed so keen to remind me yet again, 'what will be, will be' and all that was for the future. For now, Diane is walking with me back to the entrance where I pause to button my coat before stepping out onto the street. I look behind me as I head off and find her standing on tiptoes at the door, silhouetted by golden light and beaming like a Cheshire Cat.

'Thanks for listenin' and don't forget about Fay!' Her voice carries over the heads of the passers-by and I raise my hand in acknowledgement as I turn down the hill, gently humming to myself.

Chapter 9: Fay

Pen portrait: Fay

Fay describes herself as a 'localist', someone having never travelled far and often preferring solitude to crowds. Her German father remained in Britain after the war, married her British mother and instilled in her an early love for nature and an outdoor life. Now in her early seventies, Fay has begun to reacquaint herself with the natural world, rekindled by her interest in art education. Her retirement from teaching 'collided' with a diagnosis of cancer. Following treatment, she completed a master's in Fine Art 'for fun' but found the experience mentally and physically restricting.

After several 'false starts', her next sustained foray into education involved a series of art days run by an Adult Education provider. Here, she 'finds space and time to think and draw' between the busy demands of grandchildren and caring for her elderly mother and 'never travels far' from home. Frequently returning to places she already knows well, she has developed a degree of intimacy with her local environment and often paints outdoors with others in her class. It was at one of these sessions where I caught up with her and we set off to draw *en plein air* for the day.

Portrait of Fay: First sketches

I bumped into Fay's class quite literally in a small lay-by at the foot of the Downs. I was busy looking along the narrow footway between road and ditch when a large knapsack wearing a small man barged past. 'Jim' apologised enthusiastically as he went by, muttering something about reaching the top and making the most of the morning light. He waved his hand somewhere behind him in reply when I asked whether Fay was around, then hitched up his high-viz rucksack and rapidly disappeared up the footpath.

Fay herself came into view a few minutes later, sporting a large straw hat and an old-fashioned pair of binoculars. She introduced me to Martin, her course tutor, before he also hurried away up the path. She appeared to be the oldest in the group but seemed eager to start the climb, so I quickly secured my recorder to the back of my sketchbook using a bulldog clip, and we set off together. Up ahead, I could see the hills and Jim's bobbing backpack.

It turned out to be another difficult beginning. To begin with, Fay appeared generally hesitant, either from a natural reserve, or perhaps from being unused to company. Although we chatted amiably as we walked along, the more I asked about

her education, the less she seemed to say. There were frequent pauses in the conversation that initially felt a little awkward, but I knew from my interactions with Ginny and Diane the value of being patient.

Portrait of Fay I

By now, we are walking along a relatively straight stretch of gently rising path where large flints, exposed from the chalk by weather and passing feet, glint in the sunshine. We stop occasionally for Fay to use her binoculars and to relate some of the history of the escarpment and ridge. It is clear she knows the surrounding landscape intimately and as I talk about the ecology of the area, she describes the impact of changing agricultural practices. And suddenly, seamlessly, almost in the same breath, she begins to speak of her diagnosis and treatment for cancer.

'It was all so sudden. Bowling along nicely and then wham! Like when I was made redundant, but with a helping of mortality thrown in. I knew I wouldn't be going back to teaching whichever way it turned out. I'd barely got out of the consulting room before I knew what I wanted to do with whatever time I had left. I decided to do a master's. Didn't wait, waiting didn't seem like a good idea.'

Glad at Fay's apparent change of heart, I decide to let her dictate the pace of both the ascent and the conversation. She seems a woman of relatively few words, but when she does speak, her conversation seems to be a crystallisation of long and deep thought.

'First op went ok, then I started the master's, but all they wanted me to do [at university] was make art about cancer, you know, labelled me as a 'survivor' with a story to tell. The tutors kept saying how it was an 'epiphany'. But it wasn't. No, my transformation came much later, after I joined Adult Education last year. But of course, I didn't know that then.'

Epiphany? Transformation? My curiosity buzzes for details. What? When? How? But as I take a breath in preparation to ask, Fay stops once more to polish the lenses of her sensible-looking glasses and stares off into the distance. At the last moment I sense the inappropriateness of asking such questions so early on and chase them down with a long pull from my water bottle.

I distract myself by turning my attention to the tiny dot of a skylark singing overhead, just audible above the now distant traffic. Purple and green spots gather on

my inner eyelids when I close them against the sun. And eventually I hear Fay restart her story from where she had left off.

'Had to stay in hospital after my second op. I was so bored. Longed to be out in the fresh air, but you know, physically.' The tiny lift and fall of her shoulders speaks volumes.

The day gets hotter as we slowly gain height and it takes a while before Fay picks up the thread of the conversation once more.

'Had too much time on my hands. If you're not careful you can get into some quite dark places. Loved drawing as a child, always dabbled, but both my parents' education was disrupted by war and they were always ambitious. I wanted to go to art college, really wanted to go, but Mum was convinced I'd never get a job. She's got no time for painting. It's something for when you're sick or have nothing else to do. And because there's always something else to do, it never gets done.

And then, lying there on the ward I remember thinking 'well, its official! I *am* sick and there really *isn't* anything else to do!' and I just picked up a pencil and started drawing again. It was such a relief. Odd really. I'd been teaching kids about well-being in PSHE[52] for years at school, but when it came down to it, my own well-being was nothing like what I'd taught. It was like I'd found my curiosity again.'

The path begins to widen as it crosses a farm track, deeply inscribed with hard, sgraffitti-like ruts. The shade of a gorse thicket off to one side beckons to us, and we move in wordless agreement to sit upon the track's raised edge and rest our feet in the nearest furrow. As I tilt my head back to take a drink, I feel the cool passage of the breeze and hear the erratic crack of gorse pods splitting in the sunshine.

And a curious thought tugs at the periphery of my concrete thought and I hear myself ask, 'You say you *found* your curiosity again? Does that mean that you feel you *lost* it somewhere?'

I sit back and wonder if Fay will choose to answer. But as she carefully replaces the top of her water bottle, she dips her head and glances over the top of her glasses at me. 'Mmm, now that's an interesting point isn't it!' she says.

---

[52] Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a non-statutory curriculum subject.

Another silence stretches as she bends forward to examine a group of water smoothed pebbles lying at her feet. They seem alien to the natural chalk and flint geology of the area and I ponder on this until she continues.

'Perhaps I never really *lost* it, perhaps it's been sitting there buried, waiting for me to acknowledge it again. Or perhaps I was too busy to notice its absence.' And I see the ghost of her smile for the first time. She leans over again, and this time pulls out two sketch books from her bag. Selecting the smaller one, she places the other between us and I ask her permission to open it.

'Went to a Catholic Grammar as a child. The other girls were from really well-off families. I never fitted in, never really felt quite in the right place. Struggled a lot except with art and English and curiosity was definitely not part of the curriculum. Lots of rote learning, quite prim and proper. Lots of scripture and feeling guilty about things. Art was very restricted. It was all heads down, avert your eyes, girls!'

I hear the hard chink of a discarded pebble hitting the path and Fay, deep in thought, selects another, and gently rubs its surface with her thumb. My own thoughts drift languorously in the heat towards the open book in my study, calling attention to 'the perennial suspicion of curiosity in the West…[and its associations with] overstepping the bounds of human inquiry' (Torchia, 2013, p.19).[53]

And suddenly I want to know what it is about curiosity that engenders such excitement in some and such crossness in others. Dad was always cross if I didn't follow an exact mathematical proof or jumped through two steps at once. He liked a plan. Right or wrong. Truth or lie. Black or white. Artists and their tricky, reckless, curious ways weren't to be trusted to follow the rules or do things the 'right way'.

Self-portrait VIII

Time compresses and I watch a seven-year-old me sitting at the heavy, black Formica table. Its hulk is crammed against the same kitchen wall, where the times tables are displayed in constant reminder of the 'facts of life'. I am colouring in the outline of a robin, torn from some kind of newspaper supplement and silently reciting my three times table; two for her wings and one for her beak makes three, two for her wings, one for her beak makes six. I imagine the bird flicking and

[53] Torchia (2013) explores the notion of curiosity in the writings of St. Augustine and how from it arises an appetite for 'the restless mind' to question received knowledge and religious doctrine.

bobbing with each repetition. As I reach fifteen, Dad puts his head round the door to demand tea and his eyes alight on my picture.

'What on earth y' doin, Janey? That's a robin. Should be red not blue!'

'Leave 'er be. She's not doin' any 'arm. I'll bring yer tea in when it's ready.'

I hear Mum's hurried tones negating the need for me to reply, but curious and oblivious to the adult interplay, I ask why the robin can't be blue and Dad's attention swings back to the table.

'I've told ya, robins are red. Yer goin' to ruin it.'

But I see myself continuing, careful to keep inside the thick black line. Dad did not like me to cross the line.

'P'rhaps it's in the winter and she's cold', I wonder aloud.

'Don't be daft. It's summer! Besides robins don't get cold. They're red in winter and they're red in summer. They're always bleedin' red!'

And still I lumber on, head down and feeling my waxy fingers slip as I stubbornly press the blue crayon down even harder.

'Well, p'rhaps she's blue 'cos she's sad!' I reply and hear the soft pop of Mum's mouth as it opens wordlessly.

'What on earth are y'on about? Such bleedin' nonsense! Y'get that from yer Mother's side. Go on get out of 'ere!' and I feel the metallic tang of fear.

I abandon the table sharply as Dad snatches up the robin and tears her into tiny pieces. As he slams the door behind him, he tosses the fragments into the backdraught leaving Mum and I to stand and watch the sad, blue robin slowly drifting to the floor in the wintery air, like snow in summer.

Five threes are fifteen; a lesson on curiosity well learned.

Gaps (with pebbles)

Still deep in thought, I almost miss Fay's next words.

'In childhood there's always an element of whether you're naturally curious or not, but if you are I've seen how school can educate it out of you. Too much directed stuff and precious little time for imagination and creativity. I remember at work I'd wander off and educate myself, but it was always such a struggle to find the time and

energy. People think teachers have lots of spare time with the holidays and finishing at three. They don't see the hours of planning and support, all the marking and meetings. I let work suck up too many hours and left myself with precious little time for much else.'

I watch Fay shaping and reshaping her own personal landscape as she arranges and rearranges the pebbles at her feet.

'Then there's the extracurricular, like music and art. They get pushed to the edges, not mainstream anymore. I regret not nurturing art enough during my working life. Should have kept it up. Then when I retired or needed it I could have just increased the time I spent with it, rather than thinking I had to do art through a qualification like a master's degree I could have just done it and not taken such a huge misstep.'

For the moment, Fay seems satisfied with her arrangement of stones and begins a quick sketch, but a few minutes later, I glance across and see she is drawing the pebbles by sketching the spaces in-between.

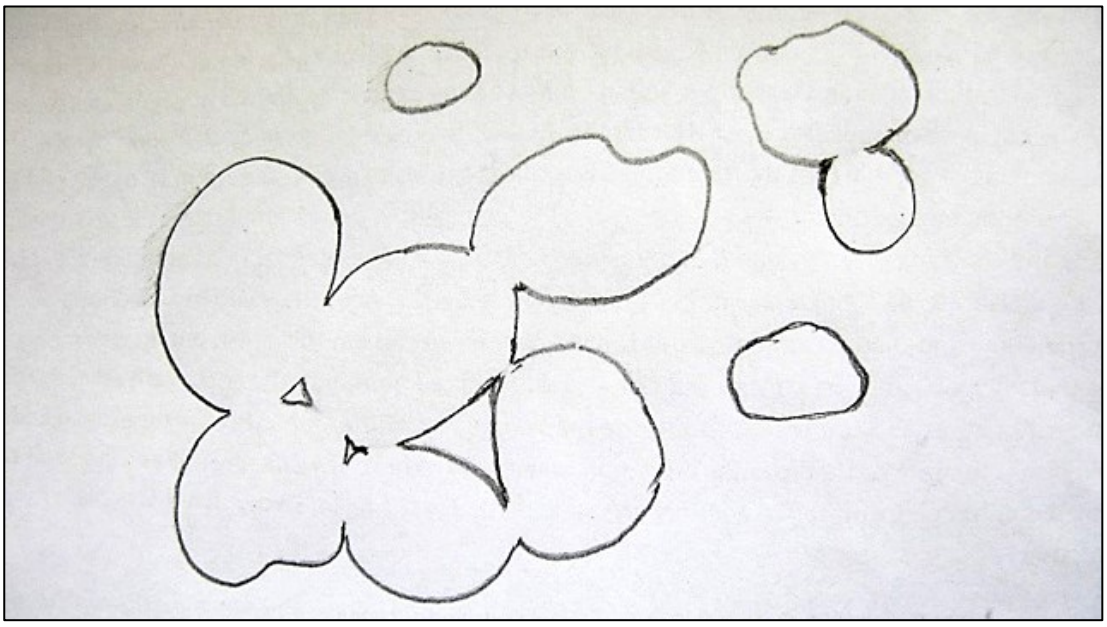


Figure 6: *Gaps (with pebbles)*, Fay, (2017).

And a sudden thought occurs as we sit in silence by the side of the track. In art the negative space between things is used to distinguish the objects in a composition from each other. In western traditions, these gaps in-between things are often dismissed as unimportant. However, in eastern art forms they are considered as equally important as the objects themselves and are integral to the overall

composition. As I listen to Fay, I begin to recognise the importance of the quiet intervals between her words. They appear to be an integral part of her natural composition and an important aspect of her inner landscape. And as my awareness increases of the importance of the unsaid, I become even more acutely attuned to the unspoken ethnographic details of our conversation and surroundings. I feel I might learn much by listening to the gaps that frame our words.

And as this thought moves through my mind, I continue to unfold the pages of Fay's sketchbook. As each page turns, intricate close studies of the natural world appear, their unusual perspectives making familiar subjects seem strange and uncanny. Then, out of the blue, my fingers check as a very different image appears. A gaunt woman in a hospital gown stares intently out, her outstretched arm is hooked to an intravenous drip and she gestures towards a dark, leafless tree bearing fruit.

'Ah', Fay says, glancing over, her voice suddenly animated. 'That's *Golden Fruit on a Winter Tree.*'

Figure 7: *Golden fruit on a winter tree*, Fay, (2015).

Golden fruit on a winter tree

'It's about my intention to live my life rather than let it happen around me. Never got around to adding the gold, but that's how I see it. It's about late flowering, late fruiting. I may be reaching winter, but there are still many things to look forward to.'

I watch as Fay prods the pebbles with the toe of her boot as she speaks.

'That's what doing this kind of [Adult] education means for me. The more I do, the more I can keep my imagination attentive and curious and the more I do that, the more positive I feel about things. When I was ill, contemplating my own death, it was like looking down a telescope. The end seemed very close. But now I can look down it the other way and the end seems so much further away. Makes you realise how much there is still to learn, right here on your doorstep.' I sit quietly, waiting as she adds another pebble to the growing pile by her feet.

'You asked me earlier about losing my curiosity. Perhaps rather than finding it I should have said that I began listening to it again.'

A welcome breeze gently lifts the page bearing the winter tree and makes the 'golden' fruit appear to sway.

'Yes,' she nods, 'That's it. All I needed to do was *notice* it again, give myself *permission*.'

As she finishes her sentence, she stands and stretches out her back. We pack away the sketchbooks and resume our upward amble along the path, beckoned on by occasional glimpses of Jim's dayglow backpack.

Portrait of Fay II

We continue for a while, briefly stopping to observe a party of iridescent beetles and to admire the soundscape of the wind in the green-eared corn. And a question that has been gradually forming makes me ask Fay why she chose to join this particular class.

'Well, it's local. That's important. I don't want to go far. Some evening classes begin around six so they're designed for people who live and work locally. There's lots that commute who can't make that time or people like me that are busy with family. And the buses, such as they are, stop around six from the village so I have to drive. Transport's an issue, even though [the class] is in the town centre. Car parking's expensive too. It all adds to the cost of the course.'

I am struck by Fay's responses which were generally echoed by larger-scale surveys on well-being and access to education across different age groups (Age UK, 2015; APPG, 2017; Egglestone et al., 2018; Hughes et al., 2016; Spielhofer et al., 2010)[54]*. But as Fay continues to consider the question, more nuanced thoughts begin to surface.*

'It was so difficult to find a class I liked. Lots are for beginners with learning outcomes like, 'how to create five different marks' or how to paint 'the right way'. It tends to be 'this is what I'm saying about how you should draw. This is what I'm saying about how you should paint.' She sniffs sharply, and the action seems to sum up her feelings about objective learning criteria which rely upon the belief that there is only one way to paint.

'Relying on things like that gives a false sense of what you actually learn. [Objective] outcomes like that are just the obvious things that you can easily see, the ones that are easy to pick off and happen to fit with whatever the 'flavour of the month' is. It's quite lazy really. A lot of people think art's an easy ride because you can't easily prove all the thinking and the decisions and the imagination and creativity that have gone into it. Most of it is hidden beneath the surface and doesn't seems to count.

'It's impossible to see all the thinking that goes into art or the attempts you start and throw away. The art exhibitions and galleries only exhibit the final piece. How you get there isn't visible and even the artists sometimes struggle to explain it themselves. That's what makes those silly learning outcomes so flimsy.

'Maybe it's a hangover from my school days where we were taught to accept everything in good faith, unquestionably. Or maybe it's from when I was teaching the national curriculum to children that were already ahead or weren't ready for that part yet because they were learning in a different order or about different things. Either way, it irritates me no end!'

An emotion that I didn't readily associate with Fay, so it must have really annoyed her.

'Anyway, it took quite a while to find a class that suited. I didn't need teaching as such, just someone who knew a lot about art and could say 'look at this person or

[54] Barriers and constraints to participation in education are widely reported as issues of finance, transport, course availability, confidence/self-esteem and accessibility to learning activities.

that person', or 'what about this?' Martin can tell if you want an opinion and he'll be honest about it. He's good at tailoring his comments. That's something I never got at [the university]. There, they don't value your opinions or experience. And there was no time for individual feedback. Well, there *is* individual feedback, but it's not given in an *individualistic* way, if that makes sense? Here I can be creative and thoughtful, and still have a group of people and a tutor who support me without trying to walk all over me. It's the right class for me at this point in my life.

'Then there was that survey I did just before we met at Diane's coffee shop, remember?' and I nod, still thinking about what I had just heard.

'They wanted me to say why I went to classes and put them in order of importance. Then they gave me a list of things I could choose from. Ridiculous! It was as if they were only interested in finding out about things that were important to them rather than what I actually might think.

'And how can you rank those things anyway? One minute it's one thing, another time it's something different. How can you describe education and the well-being you get from it as a list of separate things? For me, they're like nature, all joined up. But we seem to have lost that somewhere along the line.'

My thoughts flip to the inadequacies of measuring educational progress solely through the achievement of discrete and observable outcomes and the impossibility of 'capturing' what Fay seemed to be describing as interconnectivity, for 'how can one preserve the time when something is in the process of making itself?' (Lomax, 2004, p.31). And my mind moves on to the differences between 'connected' and 'separated' knowledge (Belenky and Stanton, 2000)[55] and how contemporary education often appears couched in terms of the former, while educational success is measured using the latter.

'Ironic really, because before I joined [Adult Education] I felt community art was less valuable than doing a university course because you don't get a qualification or a certificate. And I was so wrong to think that.

---

[55] Here I adopt and extend the principles of 'women's ways of knowing' (Belenky and Stanton, 2000) to illustrate how adults may alter their frames of reference by differentiating between 'connected' and 'separated knowledge'. The former emphasises the relevancy of relational contexts and experiential interconnectivity in the development of knowledge, while the latter primacies the learning of factual evidence and the acquisition of techniques and skills.

‘And I know it’s difficult, having to ‘prove’ that we’ve all learnt something every term for funding, but curiosity, creativity, well-being, whatever you want to call them, are all infinite. The more you learn the more you realise how much more there is. The more progress you make, the more you realise how little you’ve made. It makes box-ticking ridiculous. The more energy we spend trying to control and label things, the more we fail to see the importance of linking it all together.’

Self-portrait IX

Fay’s long spate of talking seems to have tired her. She stands for a while by a kissing-gate to admire the view while I think about the scrutiny placed on art education by a “fundamentalism of measurability’ rendering values such as ‘experimental thinking’ and ‘failure’ difficult to legitimise or honour’’ (Gielen and De Bruyne, 2012, p.5). I recognise the importance of the way that society values Adult Education in determining and shaping that which survives. And yet for Fay, Diane and Ginny, Adult Education is clearly as fundamental to their notions of well-being as other sectors of education directed towards employment-based qualifications or skills.

And as Fay stoops to retie her lace, something unknown makes me glance to the left and I find myself staring directly into the golden eyes of an *Athena noctua*[56] perching on the fence just a few feet away. I watch it bob up and down before silently melting into the air and I realise that if I had not witnessed its company, its presence would never have been counted and its absence would have gone unremarked. High above, a buzzard keens as it spirals effortlessly on an invisible up draught. I fail to locate it against the brightness of the sky, but I know that both it and the thermal it rides are there. Its presence invites my thoughts to return to *Rydal Water*. I see my mother’s need to control her surroundings, too busy and too tired to look beyond the immediate needs of her work and family.

I see her ignoring the things that she couldn’t immediately see. I hear her ask again whether we have finished what we were learning or doing, so she could cross whatever it was from her list. *One thing at a time. Either/Or*. I glance down the valley and see the human hands that control the environment and the distinct contrast between the uniformity of the cultivated fields and the diversity of life that clings to the marginal lands in-between.

---

[56] Little owl.

Portrait of Fay III

Fay straightens and sets off again, oblivious to the unfolding events and my racing thoughts. And in an abrupt change of subject she suddenly asks whether I am staying for the 'crit' at the end of the day and seems pleased when I say I am.

We gradually approach an area where the stretches of relentless rape and cereal cede to steeper sections of sheep-grazed pasture. Shortly after two joggers pass us on the narrow track, sweating and straining up the hill. We step aside and call out a greeting, but they fail to acknowledge us. Several more overtake us in quick succession, all tuned-in to their iPods and seemingly oblivious to their surroundings. I shake my head slightly in incomprehension as they pass by, but then feel wrong to do so, because perhaps we all seek our own version of well-being in different ways. I ask Fay what she thinks might be calling them to race so keenly to the top. She continues to walk on, but not before I hear her mutter something about 'the primeval appeal of the ice cream van' and I wonder if she is teasing me.

As we climb, the appearance of the joggers makes me wonder at their competitive spirit. And I consider Biesta's (2016) contention that the language of conquest is indelibly ingrained in the everyday grammar of contemporary education. Goals, progress, achievement; the target driven, heads-down ethos of the flag-planter seems in such stark contrast to Fay's quiet ramblings as she slowly comes to know the intricacies of her local parish. I begin to think of Fay as someone who is deeply connected to her environment, an outward reflection of her becoming landscape.

We reach a long shave of residual ancient woodland that flanks each side of the hollow path. Ahead, Fay turns and calls back that it's time for lunch and then dives away into the trees. As far as I can see, there is nothing to mark her way, but I follow-on, unwilling to be left behind. And after several minutes of tripping and pushing through undergrowth, I find myself standing in leafshade on the edge of a dell. We are surrounded on three sides by a chalk and flint outcrop and on the fourth by a breath-taking view of the blazing valley beyond. I grin at Fay and we scramble down to sit with our backs to the chalk to eat our lunch. And as I gaze across the scene, my inner ecologist distractedly begins to label the scene. *Crategeus monogyna*, *Brassica napus*, *Thymus polytrichus*,[57] *Alauda arvensis*. Skylark!

[57] Hawthorn, rapeseed, wild thyme.

The contrast between the small brown bird bursting from the ground and its remarkable song resonates with the yet-to-be-asked question concerning Fay's self-confessed 'transformation'. Maybe now is the time.

'I was wondering about something you mentioned earlier, something about a transformation?' I was half expecting silence, but after only the briefest of pauses Fay replies.

'Mmm. I've been thinking about that. You see, I was always quite ambitious at work. Always busy, doing extra activities for the children. Never had time to look at things close up. Always on my way to somewhere else.'

She selects a pencil and begins to sharpen it.

'But being ill like that kind of broke the habit and then finding a way back into art changed things dramatically. I seem to be able to see things differently or for the first time, rather than hurrying on past them. There's something about observing things close-at-hand. I don't feel the need to head straight for the top anymore. There are so many different ways to reach places and the direct route isn't always the best option. Perhaps it's quicker, but it's not necessarily better.

'I've also realised late in life that the top is only one of many places and the summit isn't always where you think it is anyway. Life doesn't need to be a straight line or a competition all the time. But to realise that I had to slow down a bit, take a while, learn to enjoy what's around me rather than always be on the move. Listen to what my body was saying to me. With these classes, I can feel my mind *breathe*.'

Fay pauses in the act of sharpening her pencil. As she stares off towards the treeline, my thoughts coalesce around notions of spirituality in the critical processes of transformation. I make a note in my sketchbook, eager to hear more of Fay's thoughts on the subject.

'I found it with teaching. Always such a race to reach what we think of as the top, but we miss so much on the way that would broaden the base so to speak, things that would help children as they get older to cope better. 'Then you can still be happy coming second or third or opting out even, as long as it's for positive reasons. That way you make decisions with your feelings as well as with your spreadsheet of pros and cons. I've learned to be more honest with myself and take more notice of how things affect each other, like nature where everything's connected.

‘You can be content with your choices, but you can’t stay still because everything around you is changing, you need to adapt. But through it is a kind of thread of being able to stand back and think through it, while being honest about your feelings. That way I don’t need to *analyse* whether I’m content, I just am. I guess that’s what’s in my [intravenous] line in *Winter Fruits* – the elixir of how to live well.’

Self-portrait X

Later, when I analyse the research material from this part of our journey, I recognise more clearly the connections that Fay seems to be making between her transformative experience and her sense of ‘spirituality’ as a mode of critical thought.[58] For Hunt (2016), meanings that arise from the spiritual embodiment or ‘felt-reality’ of private interconnections, whether articulated or not, often inform our actions.[59]

However, the ‘me-that-was-then’, continues to sit in the torpid afternoon heat. Tiny details of the landscape assail my senses and I am struck by the spiritual quality of Fay’s words. My mind grows slowly limpid as I listen to the comforting chirr of partridge and stare at a rock levitating in the heat haze and at the still-singing lark as it appears to treble in size. As I look sideways on, I find I can see a double-exposure of both bird and stone imposed one upon the other. I slit my eyes to see if I can see past or through the illusion and find I cannot. When I turn to fix my gaze directly upon it, its nature alters, and its fugitive presence eludes capture.

Then, as my body seems to melt further into the landscape I catch a glimpse of how fixed notions of well-being may be re-imagined as processes of elusive, evocative and emotional responses which, as Fay pointed out, ‘can’t stay still because everything around you is changing’. Perhaps not well-*being* but well-*becoming*; a superimposition of fluid and dynamic opportunities which adapt through time and place, its elusive forms and appearances transfigured by direct witness and the desire to pin it down. An emerging thought which merited later attention, for Fay was speaking once more.

---

[58] In later discussions with Fay she acknowledged the importance of incorporating ‘the body and the senses’ in her decision process, though she did not accept the use of the term ‘spirituality’ due to its religious implications informed, she suggested, by her experiences of a catholic education.

[59] See Chapter 1 regarding my personal understandings of spirituality.

Portrait of Fay IV

'There don't seem to be many places left where you can do art and get taught about it as a subject. There's a lot of courses, but often it's just people getting together socially, lots of lectures and *talking* about art. Interesting, but it isn't *doing*. It was very difficult to find an affordable class with a good tutor that's local. There's lots [of courses] about keeping up with the kids, you know, maths and English. Good for those that want it. But art classes seem to be closing everywhere.

'For me, it's the *doing* that's important. I had weeks lying about in bed or sitting on the sofa, desperate to do something. It's so good to have something regular each week, otherwise looking after my grandchildren and Mum will take up all my time. I'm just so glad the classes were here when I needed them.

'When I'm here I work out things without having to think about them directly and I know it isn't for everyone. My husband's one for the computer. I'm no Luddite, but I need more than sitting in a room on my own. Painting gives me a real sense of freedom, especially when we come out here'.

The skylark ends its song. As it parachutes to earth I notice once more the undifferentiated monoculture spreading out below in contrast with the edgy, diversification of the 'wasteland' in which I sit with Fay. And as I do, my mind absently connects Adult Education with the drab plumage of the skylark, pushed to the margins, unseen by those who fail to hear her remarkable song.

And my thoughts mingle with Fay's mention of freedom and leap unexpectedly to the final verse of Caged Bird, with its tatty bookmark and biroed message.

> *The caged bird sings with a fearful trill*
> *of things unknown but longed for still*
> *and his tune is heard on the distant hill*
> *for the caged bird sings of freedom (Angelou, 1983, p.17).*

Self-portrait XI

I glimpse Mum with the hindsight of history, sideways-on through the eyes of the 'caged bird'. I recognise her fears 'of the things unknown' as I left home that day to seek my own version of 'freedom'. The date stamp in the book suggested she'd borrowed it the same year it was published. It was also the same year I graduated from Leicester. She had kept it safe for my return but had never offered it to me. I

will never know for certain why. Was it because she wanted to tell me something? Regret at our falling out? To let me know that she finally understood why I had left?

Sitting on the chalky outcrop several years after finding the book, I choose to think so. And suddenly something I didn't realise I was carrying lets go. I feel it release from me like the brown-paper kite my brother and I once made and then set free. And in my mind's eye, high above *Rydal Water*, an islet of sunlight suddenly appears from which beams forth a scintillating ray of dazzling brightness. Now in my late fifties, I am perhaps only just beginning to understand how deeply my own becoming travels with me and how my own gradual transformation is gently evolving.

Portrait of Fay V

I am brought back to the present by the jangling of Fay's mobile phone. She smiles ruefully and apologises for the tune. Something her grandchildren have installed and she has no idea how to change. A text from Martin checking in to make sure all is well. I smile back and feel an abrupt change in the wind. I look up to dark clouds rolling towards us across the landscape. As I hastily exchange the batteries in my recorder, Fay packs our few possessions and we move quickly back onto the path.

We manage another half hour before the first splats of rain hit the exposed track and we make for a stand of stunted hawthorn, bent and shaped by decades of exposure to the weather. And as we sit huddled beneath Fay's blanket in the lowering rain, she suddenly asks if I've heard of Greenberg[60].

'The twentieth century art critic, Clement?'

'Mmmm. He was one who decided what was in vogue or not back then. What art was. Like Saatchi, or Lamberty now. None of them actually make things themselves, they just decide what art is and how much it costs. Just like someone else decides what education is, what's important and how much should be spent on it.'

I look out on the vista below, traversed by the unwavering lines of progress made by tractor, fence, ditch and pylon. In the distance I see the rows of lights on the motorway below, designed to move humankind directly and efficiently to their required destination. I think of the way education systems mould learning into regular shapes and sizes, similarly designed to effectively capture and evaluate

[60] Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) was an influential American art critic and essayist who promoted modern mid-twentieth century art, including that of Jackson Pollock and other abstract expressionists.

progression and achievement and of the imprint of human control as society wrestles with deciding what to do about education and well-being in an ageing population.

'Trouble is these classes aren't exactly glamorous are they? They don't really sound that exciting, not something that grabs the headlines. You know, 'part-of-the-furniture'. Easily ignored. Then when it comes to budget cuts, they quietly slip away. Only the subjects that are 'flavour of the month' with the 'big-wigs' stay and you end up with just their idea of education.'

And abruptly I wonder how and where people like Fay and Diane and Ginny and me will find spaces to practise our curiosity and imagination in the future and whether our collective memories of Adult Education will be enough to keep it alive. And I feel a sudden chill despite the warmth.

Portrait of Fay VI

Gradually the rain eases, sending the sky into shifting shades as the air becomes alive with insects and swallows. I had failed noticed to notice their absence earlier and am struck by the speed with which things can change. As we reach the final stretch of path I can make out the other students clustering in a group near the top, but we take a breather before attempting the final ascent.

'My generation didn't expect a long retirement. Perhaps it will be different for younger people. Perhaps learning throughout life is more familiar to them. There are fewer jobs for life – even teaching's uncertain these days. But most of what they do seems to be for their careers, rather than education for the sake of it.

'Then you retire and what then? You wonder how you're going to keep active when you have no hobbies and no skills other than those related to work, no new spaces to think in, nothing new to make or create or be curious about. Or maybe they think they'll never retire - entirely possible with the economy these days.

'Whichever way, this kind of education isn't considered particularly important. The local authorities have so many other things to account for; disabilities, social services, health, whatever. I don't think older people are high on the list. Mum says her generation had it best despite the war, full employment, free education, free health. Perhaps there's a feeling that older people have had their fair share. You know, if you want to learn something 'cough up' or find out. Why should we lay on education for people that have had it so good? But that ignores how health, education, employment and well-being all join up, how they all rely on each other.

You know yourself from ecology how things interrelate, even things that at first don't seem at all connected.'

As we climb the final stretch I think about the interconnections and interdependence of ecosystems and the relative merits of diversifying and specialising in the fragmented landscapes of both Adult Education and the natural world.

At the top, I notice an ice cream van parked in the lay-by and turn to smile at Fay just as Jim asks her about her achievements of the day. Catching my eye, she replies how she'd seen river washed gravel, possibly from a Pleistocene chalk and mud flow, and pondered on the relationship between education and well-being as we get older. But we can both tell that Jim is not really listening. The exchange reminds me of Patrick Kavanagh's claim that:

> Parochialism and provincialism are opposites. The provincial has no mind of his own; he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis – towards which his eyes are turned – has to say on any subject…The parochial mentality, on the other hand is never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish (1967, p.282).

I stay to listen to the supportive group critique before Martin offers me a lift back to my car with some of the others. But it is a beautiful late afternoon and I feel I need more time to think. I say goodbye to Fay, thanking her and promising to be in touch soon. But as I turn away I find I am still thinking about her meditative thoughts concerning the importance of the natural world and our relationships with it.

Self-portrait XII

As I descend, I stop for a while by the kissing-gate, surprised by what I have learned about myself and how my own becoming has developed in relation to, and with, the becomings of others. I reflect on Fay's contentment with the lowlands where 'the eye sees what it didn't see before, or sees in a new way what it had already seen' (Shepherd, 2011, p.xix). I wonder if funding for Adult Education may be considered less important because of its implied pejorative associations with insularity and smallness. I think of Ginny and Diane and Fay and me, each with our own personal parishes. And I imagine the diaphanous boundaries of each expanding outwards towards those of the other's, giving lie to such negative associations.

My thoughts return to Bratby's exhibition and his celebrations of the taken-for-granted in commonplace domestic life. And I think of the joys that Fay and Ginny find in the quiet rituals of Adult Education and the ease with which their

achievements are overshadowed by the pageantry of the summit seekers and the importance of perhaps celebrating both. For how society conceives and measures the relationship between education and well-being will undoubtedly determine both their natures.

Further down the path, I find the traces of our passage into the dell have been erased by the recent rain, but I spend a while walking in the hollow lane anyway. I think about the landscape of the arts in Adult Education, drawn by its geography and composed by the breadth and depth of its curricula. My awareness builds as I consider how it is only through human interaction moving through the landscape of Adult Education that it becomes associated with meaning. After all, it was here that Fay described education as somewhere that allows her mind to breathe.

Later, as I keep company with Fay's land art, I notice once more the significance of the negative spaces. Perhaps it is in these gaps, between our preoccupation with order and a desire to pin things down, that curiosity and imagination, so indispensable to all the participants, can thrive. I recall my earlier considerations of spirituality in my re-imagining of well-*being* as well-*becoming.* Perhaps it is in the gaps *between* specific times and places, where meanings of well-becoming and its articulations as well-being may be continually made and re-made.

As I make my way on the final part of my return journey, I take a final backwards glance at the gorse by the farm track and think about the ways that societal distinctions and delineations influence the framing of Adult Education and our concepts of well-being. The characteristics of their relationships are perhaps quantitatively well made. But inherent within such notions lies a consideration of well-being as a series of discrete events and behaviours which overshadow affective and regenerative processes implicit in their establishment. And it strikes me that it is the 'invisibility' of these processes to the metrics by which they are accounted for that Diane and Fay and Ginny express as problematic.

By the time I reach my car it is almost dark, but as I prepare to pull out from the layby I realise how much I enjoyed my day on the hillside with Fay. As I drive away I feel a bubble of anticipated pleasure at the thought of transcribing the material and hope I can do some justice to all that I have learned.

Chapter 10: Drawing conclusions

Introduction

In this chapter, I draw together recurring themes and personal insights, from the research to illustrate the lived experiences of older adults participating in Adult Education. In doing so, I do not claim to provide a finite conclusion to a process that will continue beyond the immediate boundaries of my inquiry, or submit that the understandings I provide are the only versions. Citing Clough, Sikes (2002, p.xii) suggests that each of the narratives may 'speak for themselves', however they are also retold as part of a much broader landscape. Therefore, although not providing an entire map, they signpost some of the 'common ground of the literary and ethnographic project' (Clough, 2002, p.12). They offer meaningful perceptions of the terrain walked everyday by adults in later life.

What I offer, is a personal commentary on the motivational factors, barriers and constraints expressed by the participants as they attempt to access Adult Education, alongside my own personal considerations of the purposes of education. This process involves drawing upon the stories of lived experiences as a means of extending knowing by communicating meaningful and tacit understandings of Adult Education practice (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). However, I am also mindful of the intersubjective demands placed on the reader by this kind of inquiry. The narratives 'will speak differently to different people' (Clough, 2002, p.18) and the reader will necessarily interpret them through their own experiential lenses. Therefore, my interpretations will almost certainly evoke different interpretations of the experiences described (Ellis, 2004).

In accordance with my methodology, I embrace this openness and the possibility of future (re)interpretation. The topics I have selected are not proposed as a representational set of understandings and experiences. I am not suggesting that all older learners form a group which coheres in any direct sense; I am aware of the tensions inherent with generalising from the particular. Any differences or similarities between participants and/or pertinent issues are cited as indications only, as possible directions from which further analysis and meaning could proceed. My intention is to initiate and expand debate concerning the purposes of Adult Education by offering insights into the lived experiences and situational contexts of what it means to those who engage in learning in later life.

In my commentary I 'lean' once more into the research material (Pelias, 2011) with my reflexively expanded personal history and experiences. Metaphorically I step back from my easel to consider the narrative portraits together. The distance this provides offers a broader frame of reference which, paradoxically, allows me closer inspection of the spaces *between* them. In that double-movement, I focus my gaze both at and beyond the individual picture planes and towards new horizons from where I may turn and look back. From these multiple perspectives I find myself not only looking *upon* and *into* the complex landscapes of Adult Education, but also looking *out*. In doing so I explore the research material once more and ask '"what it means" and "what its significance" is' (Ollerenshaw and Cresswell, 2002, p.342).

In the introduction, I described my inquiries as an exploration of the complex Adult Education creative arts landscapes inhabited by older adults. My stated aim was to illuminate specific age-related educational barriers and attitudinal motivations through the insights of the participants. However, as the research unfolded, my intentions were supplemented by three further considerations. First, the degree of methodological reflexivity I adopted in articulating the participants' concerns encouraged me to question aspects of my own educational life history. These reassessments encouraged me to reconsider many characteristics of what I once regarded as familiar ground. Certain aspects, explicit in the narratives, have proved personally transformative, but it is not my intention to dwell on them further at this stage. Additionally, several associations between Adult Education and participants' perceptions of subjective well-being have emerged. I became interested not only in exploring perceptions of how and why older students might access Adult Education, but also in hearing how they might connect education with perceptions of well-being. Finally, I came to consider how the participants articulated subjective well-being as a dynamic and fluid process which I have termed 'well-becoming'.

I will return to notions of well-being and 'well-becoming', but I begin by highlighting a selection of perceived barriers and motivators which strike me as significant. They include considerations of infrastructure, social interaction, curiosity, physical and mental health, socio-economics, accountability, subjective well-being and opportunities for transformation. They will be of direct relevance to those involved in the planning and policy making of curricula for older adults and those interested in widening educational opportunities. To assist my discussion, I have curated them into galleried themes of Place and Space, Mind and Body, Time

and Motion and Well-being and Well-becoming. I must stress, however, that these headings only indicate possible framings of permeable activity. I offer them in the knowledge that the reader will wander between them and that discussions of each will overlap and intersect.

Place and space

A theme which recurs in the narrative analysis is the perceived importance of spaces and places in Adult Education. These terms are often used interchangeably, but in art and architecture, they hold specific meanings (MacKenzie, 2004). The former encompasses technical descriptions of volume, distance, perspective, horizon and proximity. The latter communicates more of the inherent personal and shared social meanings that individuals and groups attribute to particular environments. Places evoke a sense of identity, familiarity and belonging through which everyday human activities are mediated by past experience (Covery *et al.*, 2012).

Embodied in the research material is a degree of nostalgia for the permanence of the designated art workshop at Ginny's old centre, despite its somewhat dilapidated state. It was an environment imbued with community ownership, rituals, customs and a sense of shared history. Its description contrasts sharply with the more flexible layouts of the new spaces, which seem to pose significant difficulties for the participants in their attempts to access education. Despite these challenges, both Fay and Ginny continue to consider Adult Education as 'safe'. They consider the pedagogic approaches and ethos of the lecturers as supportive of community and social integration alongside individual needs and desires.

Teaching pedagogy can be highly influential in how and why older adults access education (e.g. Bélanger, 2011). The participants appear to value their tutors' abilities to navigate the difficulties of learning criteria and infrastructure and provide sufficient opportunities to foster social interaction, playful curiosity, individual modes of learning and safe places for it to happen. However, these pedagogic attributes require an investment of time and effort and although prized by the research participants, they remain largely hidden by the broad brushstrokes used to evaluate the quality and success of teaching. Learning together in familiar locations appears to be a significant motivator for both Ginny and Fay to engage in education. In contrast, the passive barriers inherent in the design and location of Ginny's new centre appear to have prevented several older students from re-enrolling. The spaces have insufficient drying room, easels and storage. Consequently, students either need

to be capable of regularly carrying artwork and equipment on public transport or to and from parking areas. Therefore, while relocating education venues to town centres might initially appear advantageous, poor public transport and a lack of nearby and affordable parking can act as considerable barriers. Seemingly minor and inconsequential matters such as inappropriate seating and the absence of student common areas in which to socialise can coincide to deter all but the most committed student.

The accommodation for specialist art equipment seems in even more short supply, as dedicated rooms for craft-based arts, including kilns and workbenches are considered uneconomic, despite being in almost permanent use. Diane's pottery class was excised from the curriculum when her centre closed as there was nowhere for the kiln in her new centre. She has been unable to find a suitable class since. Making art in sanitised, clean spaces, where lighting is difficult to adjust and where equipment requires assembling and dismantling every session, can also inhibit artistic expression. Painting gives way to drawing, large scale studies are rarely attempted and the use of 'messy' mediums with extended drying times is precluded. 'Active' art gives way to more sedentary pursuits. And yet, all the participants described how important the physical act of *doing* and *making* art is to them.

These circumstances can arise when educational space becomes valued as a commodity rather than part of a wider social system (Abbs, 2003; Tuckett, 2017). Non-accredited education for personal development in particular appears to be contracting as 'leisure and contemplation…have no value…because none of these activities is governed by the motivation for profit' (O'Sullivan, 2005, p.69). Any curricula or practices which fail to fit the narrow and closed definitions of the purposes of education can then alienated. The once-rich and familiar arts terrain, integral to the broader landscapes of Adult Education, flattens and fragments depleted of its intimate community identities, safe familiarisations and shared cultural meanings. Consequently, older adults, who constitute the majority of the students in personal development classes (Hughes *et al.*, 2016), become inadvertently and disproportionately impacted upon as educational opportunities contract. As the landscapes diminish, it becomes increasingly difficult for older adults, like Diane, to find alternatives or for others to adapt to changes of venue and community (Schmitt and Lahroodi, 2008). And yet the causes of their absence are unseen, unrecognised by the metrics that describe and account for student retention.

Mind and body

So far, I have illustrated some of the adverse impacts that unsuitable infrastructure and environments can place on education in later life. However, I am also interested in factors which might motivate older adults to continue with their education. One theme which appears significant in this respect, is the value that the participants seem to place upon opportunities for social interaction and exploring creative curiosity as a means of nurturing personal well-being.

All the participants explicitly refer to significant periods of ill-health during their lives and the perceived benefits of engaging in practical art classes in terms of their physical and mental well-being. They attribute these positive impacts to educational practices which encourage the blending of physical activity with opportunities for active collaboration and socialisation with other artists. The hybridising and reassembling of ideas developed from these collective endeavours appears to be significant in stimulating critical reasoning.

For example, both Ginny and Fay place significance on knowledge which expands through these affective and 'spiritual' processes, where knowledge cannot be attributed to a single moment or person. They highlight the importance of education as a site of curiosity and inquiry as they make art and actively seek out other artists with whom to collaborate. Fay describes how walking, painting and conversation engage her curiosity and help to keep her physically active. She 'feels the breathing of her mind' as she slowly makes her way through the landscapes she paints and draws. Ginny enjoys meeting people from different backgrounds to talk and paint, where she feels her 'mind can let go of her body'. She views education as a means of stimulating her creativity and providing her with a specific purpose for 'getting out and about'. Diane portrays her class as somewhere that she felt able to focus her curiosity and explore her family's history with the arts and enjoy the tactile experience and bodily effort required to make ceramics. She continues 'to make art in her head' as she attempts to renegotiate her way back into education.

This blending of kinaesthetic activity *with* cognition *and* affectivity is a theme to which the participants repeatedly return. They appear to construct knowledge and exercise their critical thinking in partnership with others and through the physical act of making art. Thus, the importance of Adult Education that interconnects mind and body, emerges as a significant feature in considerations of well-being and motivation as the participants make *and* think *and* are curious about art. The confidence and

feelings of self-esteem that these interconnections convey appear central to their articulations and processing of their experiences. Accordingly, Adult Education may be considered as a fulcrum of understanding upon which older adults contextualise and make meaning in their lives.

The participants additionally describe curiosity as integral to their connections of mind and body. Curiosity is frequently linked to creativity and playfulness and 'is often considered the foundation of learning' (Smith, 2011, p.161). Although its manifestations are diverse they can be self-perpetuating if nurtured (Roman and Kay, 2007). Fay describes how art and its attendant curiosity was considered a 'guilty pleasure' in her childhood; something for when there was nothing else to do. Both she and Diane explain how they need to remain firm about setting aside time from their responsibilities as carers. Ginny also has to insist to her kindly, but 'sometimes over-caring', family, that even as she approaches her nineties she still needs to attend her class to actively foster her curiosity. What is clear is that the participants consider Adult Education as a time and place where they can 'indulge' their curiosity as a means of coping with the stresses of everyday life and is critical to their sense of well-being.

The inherent complexity and latency of curiosity renders it difficult to comprehend and grasp as a singular construct. The participants each describe their own views of curiosity and how it manifests. Fay describes in her interviews how she first 'lost', then 'found' and eventually 'started listening to' her curiosity. This volatile tendency to dormancy and resurgence is perhaps what makes curiosity so difficult, if not impossible, to teach directly. However, with effort from both teacher and student, curiosity may be fostered through appropriate pedagogic practices which include collaborative and creative problem solving and specific individual and peer critiques (Roman and Kay, 2007). Examples of appropriate and inappropriate teaching interventions which the participants relate are highlighted in the narratives. However, the participants also value the interdependency of collaborative learning and curiosity in supporting their notions of well-being. The mutable and intangible nature of their relationship and its connection of mind and body are impossible to accurately quantify. The same qualities which engender its potentiality in education also resist and repel concerted efforts to condense and essentialise it. Its potency lies invisible to the normative and comparative metrics employed as means of gauging educational value.

Time and motion

My discussions so far have considered the significance of infrastructure on educational opportunities and important factors which appear to motivate older adults to continue in education. At this point I return to the prologue and extend my exploration of the 'data culture' which currently dominates the provision of Adult Education (Biesta, 2016; Gielen and De Bruyne, 2012). In the process, I explore the prevalence of objective learning criteria and particular aspects of socio-economics which shape the participants' attempts to continue their education. The appetite for quantifying, assessing and evaluating learning affects almost all Adult Education provision, including the non-accredited creative art curriculum at the centre of my research. Educational value and correlated funding is gauged and awarded according to the successful achievement of pre-determined learning outcomes. However, these are arguably best suited to areas of education where more discrete and separated knowledge is valued, for example in the accreditation of skills-based qualifications for employment (Abbs, 2003; Tuckett, 2017). Objective criteria necessarily 'emphasise uncontroversial facts and objective skills if they are to be easily gradable, and thus their use tends to crowd out the teaching of…creative activities' (Schmitt and Lahroodi, 2008, p.148).

This premise is underscored by the participants who perceive active social interaction in the company of other artists, collaborative learning, exploring curiosity and finding appropriate spaces to practise creative art as increasingly 'difficult to legitimise or honour' (Gielen and De Bruyne, 2012, p.5). These kinds of educational experiences and processes lie beyond the frames of what can be easily observed and validated. They fail to value those practices which require more time and patience to unfold. And yet taking time to creatively explore and make new meanings is something that Fay and Ginny describe as essential in fostering critical thinking and potential transformations. The participants return frequently to unequivocal disapproval of pre-scripted outcomes as a means of measuring and accounting for their education. They perceive targets and objective learning outcomes as demeaning and devaluing of their expansive and explorative creative practices.

Diane appears particularly frustrated by their use as a method of measuring and defining her educational success. Her only option since the closure of her class has been to enrol on a vocational course. This offered a qualification but severely restricted her ability to engage her curiosity. She clearly felt that the attendant criteria

by which she was judged left her no space for exploring her already well-developed skills and creativity. It is only through her persistence and confidence formed from her past experiences of Adult Education, that she sustains her hopes of continuing her education. Likewise, Ginny describes how objective outcomes 'trivialise' her experiences and cites their inability to assess a lifetime of collaborative practice which she perceives as having no obvious beginning, middle or end. For Fay, the practice restricts both her curiosity and opportunities for unplanned learning where achievement is often declared as the pinnacle of success. However, she describes how the pressures of time and the 'race to the summit' can make curiosity, exploration, active socialisation and changes in direction appear 'a waste of time' and 'indulgent'.

These insights suggest non-linear and unplanned journeys, where different paths are embedded in future success, are equally valid ways of knowing. Racing directly to a known destination only acts to deaden curiosity and strangle inquiry (Roman and Kay, 2007), restricting learning to already well-trodden paths. Ginny and Fay also argue that education should accommodate time for thinking and processing which is not correlated with idleness. Although regarded as normative in professional art practices, places to think and imagine in education are all too easy to condemn as 'unnecessary or futile' (Torchia, 2013, p.17). In these unseen places that lie between things, dormant thoughts may be nurtured by curiosity and imagination. Perhaps like the joggers in Fay's narrative, by being so intent on the summit, opportunities and other forms of success can easily slip by unseen. Thus, curiosity and exploration only become praiseworthy when directed towards a known end, which raises questions concerning who decides what is useful knowledge and what is not.

A final subject raised by the participants that I feel is important to discuss at this point, surrounds perceptions of socio-economic well-being. Diane is forthcoming about the delays to her planned transition into retirement caused by the rise in her pension age. She exemplifies how pressure to remain economically active for longer may impact negatively on the time available for older adults to continue with education that is not linked directly to the workplace. In Diane's case her 'patchy' pension arrangements and 'portfolio' of careers concerns her. She recognises that she is at risk of financial hardship in her retirement. Meanwhile, Ginny and Fay, who have been in full employment for much of their lives, have witnessed a degree of

upward social mobility and feel they can continue to enjoy education in retirement. They believe that Adult Education provides extremely good value for money.

It is clear from these different positions that societal assumptions regarding retirement being a time for leisure is undergoing a period of rapid revision. All the participants were explicit about different intergenerational pressures on the time they have available for education. The aging demographic and reducing social mobility of younger adults, means there is increasing pressure to care for elderly relatives and grandchildren. For Diane it also means providing financial and emotional support to her adult children returning home following marital breakdowns and unemployment.

All were raised in different eras of equality of opportunity for women. In Ginny's case women's suffrage was very much at the forefront of her young life through her mother's active involvement with the cause. As a single parent, that hard-won equality meant taking responsibility for her own children while working in her own businesses. She resists much of the pressure to look after her grandchildren and great-grandchildren now, at the risk of being thought of as 'selfish' and 'uncaring'. Fay has to make a deliberate choice to allow herself time for education away from her caring responsibilities for the sake of her own well-being. These decisions all directly impact on the time the participants feel they have available for education, but each aspires to continue despite the difficulties they describe. However, there are also many other older adults who perhaps do not, or cannot, prioritise education in this way due to socio-economic changes. This may account at least in part, for the overall decline in the number of adults participating in non-accredited Adult Education since 2009 (APPG, 2017; Egglestone *et al*., 2018; Hughes *et al*, 2016).

Working towards well-becoming

> Well-*becoming* is a diverse and fluid process which cannot be categorised or arranged along any systematic continua. Nor can it be distributed evenly or in advance of its coming to presence. It is made and remade, ever expanding, folding back through and between landscapes of contextualised meaning. It speaks not of '*being'*, of that which is already known, but departs as it arrives, signalling at history and all the while beckoning towards unspecified futures. It is a *becoming*… (Research Journal IV).

In the introduction I highlighted some of the theoretical concepts in the contemporary literature concerning well-being and the positive correlations made between it and opportunities to pursue creative art in Adult Education (APPG, 2017). Much of the literature conceptualises well-being as a single-point of equilibrium

which is tipped out of balance at various times by life challenges and returned to a state of equilibrium by an individual's resources and resiliency (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Lavretsky, 2014). These understandings of well-being focus on the quantitative measurement of specific well-being criteria to determine the efficacy educative solutions and resources targeted at improving prospects for employment (ESFA, 2018; Forgeard *et al*., 2011; Hughes and Adriaanse, 2017).

My inquiry suggests that these fixed notions of well-being, and the ways they are used to account for Adult Education, fail to recognise many aspects of education valued by the research participants. Continuing to learn in their later life clearly offers them substantial and complex benefits, which cannot be articulated solely around employment and qualifications, or represented by a single point of equilibrium which see-saws through time. Their associations of education and well-being lie in multiple domains and operate inter-connectedly with others. Therefore, the value of education to well-being appears to depend less on the event itself than the opportunities it provides for making meaning, dealing with challenges and sharing those experiences with others. These articulations of well-being are much broader and more complex than the current literature and objective regimens suggest.

The feelings evoked during my exploration of the complex landscape of Adult Education have become part of my inner parish. Like Nan Shepherd (2011), my intense concentration on the particular and the affective intensity of the process have transformed my understandings of educational life and opened new ways of seeing the world. In the 'half-glanced, looked-at-sideways' moments, where language becomes inadequate, embodiments of what learning means dwell and momentarily coalesce. In these spaces, invisible to the normative metrics of education, lies more of what Belenky and Stanton (2000) may term 'connected' knowledge. Here, there are mutual exchanges of ideas rather than impositions of the already known. They are places where curiosity, resiliency and agency may be fostered and nurtured in the company of others and which support and sustain hope for the future.

The analysis challenges the 'achievement' of well-being as if it were a fixed commodity or destination and re-draws it as a continuous process of well-becoming; a concept that cannot be reduced to measurement by means of universal models. Well-becoming incorporates the idea that individual lives and their attendant meanings and emotions are in perpetual transition; a process of constant adaptation, constant mistake, destruction and renewal. My notion of well-becoming evolved

through close-at-hand scrutiny of the landscape where 'everyday' Adult Education operates. It recognises more of the felt-reality of participants' experiences and values the interconnections and transitions *between* them. The participants describe how education is felt and lived, through the deep connections and integration of mind and body, a kind of spirituality that provides a deep sense of belonging to Adult Education as community of practice, a place of creativity, imagination and transformation. Viewed in this way, the places and communities associated with Adult Education are more familial than institutional, where participants value their sometimes messy and unrefined qualities with a sense of warmth and a feeling of ownership. In these places the 'mind can breathe'. They are places for interconnectivity and transformation, where Adult Education becomes part of everyday lived experiences in a continual process made with time, rather than an event with a discrete beginning and end.

The circumstances in which this can happen are created by a coming together of people, places and processes, through the love of an activity which embodies creativity and curiosity. Thus, well-becoming does not seek closure but 'articulate[s] a different…'way of being'…that is less concerned with representing the real than it is with living it out in different ways' (Osberg *et al.*, 2008, p.214). Focusing only on the end of a successful course of study should not, as Fay eloquently describes, be the only part which should command attention. I argue that what happens before, during and after have significance, but that these aspects are unobserved and unvalued by the current objective measurements of success. Well-becoming is a way of thinking that embraces life where 'decisions are always changing because people and circumstances keep changing' (Belenky and Stanton, 2000, p.79). Well-becoming in this sense is not something which can be readily taught or learned. It is not a discrete set of skills or knowledge, but something that needs to be lived and nurtured. Its tacit and embodied qualities render it almost impossible to directly evidence. And therein lies a difficulty. The private, subjective and contextualised nature of well-becoming is difficult for individuals to articulate, particularly through the language and metrics that others use to shape Adult Education. Therefore, the challenge of making well-becoming part of the landscape of the future is unlikely to be achieved without a reshaping of the normative notions concerning the purposes of education in later life.

Finishing touches

In the introduction I identified a significant gap in the literature concerning the perceived value of formally taught, non-accredited creative arts programmes for older adults in the contracting landscapes of Adult Education. I described my inquiry as an exploration of the motivations, barriers and constraints felt by the research participants in their everyday practices. However, the flexibility of bricolage has also enabled me to illustrate other aspects of the participants' inner lives that they feel are important to their continuing education. Firstly, venue closures and curriculum constraints in Adult Education impact disproportionally on older adults. Older age groups constitute a large share of the enrolments in creative art classes (APPG, 2017; Hughes *et al*, 2016) and losing access to art education in later life has profound repercussions not only for the participants themselves, but also for wider society.

Secondly, the narratives express a significant disparity between the ways the participants think and feel about Adult Education and the ways that it is rationalised by others. The circumscribed metrics which assess its value only partially capture their lived experiences. Much of the importance they place on curiosity, social interconnectivity, personal understandings of physical and mental health and opportunities for transformation is discounted. In neglecting these tacit and subjective motivators, the metrics used to inform Adult Education funding decisions fail to account for the phenomena they are designed to capture. Without regard to aspects of education that are most meaningful to the participants, the 'functional discourse which makes the educational status quo appear as the only conceivable reality' (Abbs, 2003, p.3) will continue to rationalise the decline of creative arts education.

Finally, my inquiry proposes a broadening of the static notions of well-being, to include more fluid considerations of well-becoming. Well-becoming acknowledges that different things are important at different times to different people. Its fluidity offers the potential for considering educational success in the creative arts, and other non-accredited programmes, as personally relevant and subject to change. This mutability is not to be confused with capriciousness or inconsistency, rather it should be considered as a more flexible and adaptable response to life's experiences. It offers the potential to reconsider the success of education in later life in terms of what is most important to those who participate in it. Thus, older adults engaging in education may be empowered and entrusted with deciding what is most important to

them and what should count as Adult Education. However, any such democratisation will undoubtedly require a shift in mind-set to cast aside the suspicions engendered by more pluralistic and participatory understandings of what constitutes Adult Education. The challenge will then become how to best enact change, before the precarious and 'unseen' landscapes of creative arts education in later life disappear altogether. But that I feel is the start of another inquiry that I may have already unknowingly begun.

Epilogue

Even now, despite all that I have learned I know that the process 'is not yet complete, for knowing another is endless…the thing to be known grows with the knowing' (Shepherd, 2011, p.108). *Rydal Water* gazes down at me from the wall, having travelled with me from my childhood home; a companion of my whole life. As I regard its surface, my adult face is reflected back, superimposed upon the earlier portraits of my remembered childhood. Who is this woman/girl? I revel in the ambiguity, in the stories told and those which are still to relate. And I feel Chronos falter as Kairos briefly touches the reins of time.

My education is a patchwork quilt of such memories, squares, triangles, circles and rectangles; some sharp and clear, some bright and new. Some are faded from time; others are worn by touch. Many were gifted, embroidered with names, but others are not. Most fit neatly together, but there are also gaps in-between. Knowledge lost to memory and time. The quilt continues to grow and holding it all together are the threads of kindness, perseverance, misunderstanding, pain and love. As I fold and refold it, knowledge crosses between the shapes. Some might say I am a self-made woman. I would say I am a product of my times. My experiences make me who I am and my educational quilt warms and cushions me. I am my educational biography.

Reference List

Abbs, P. (2003) *Against the flow*. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

Adams, T., Holman-Jones, S. and Ellis, C. (2015) *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

AGE UK (2015) *Agenda for later life*. Available at: http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/policy/agenda_for_later_life_2015_full_report.pdf?dtrk=true (Accessed: 30 June 2017).

Agee, J. (2009) 'Developing qualitative research questions: A reflexive process', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(4), pp.431-447.

All-Party Parliamentary Group (2017) *Creative health: The arts for health and wellbeing inquiry report.* Available at: http://artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg/inquiry (Accessed: 14 August 2017).

Ancona, D., Okhuyen, G. and Perlow, L. (2001) 'Taking time to integrate temporal research', *Academy of Management Review*, 26(4), pp.512-529.

Anderson, L. (2006) 'Analytic autoethnography', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), pp.373-395.

Angelou, M. (1983) *Shaker, why don't you sing?* New York: Random House.

Association of Colleges (2016) *The adult education budget - A significant reform*. Available at: https://www.aoc.co.uk/news/the-adult-education-budget-significant-reform (Accessed: 5 July 2017).

Atkinson, P., Coffey, A. and Delamont, S. (2003) *Key themes in qualitative research: Continuities and change*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Avieson, B. (2008) 'Writing - A methodology for the new millennium', *TEXT: The Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, 12(2), Available at: http://www.textjournal.com.au/oct08/avieson.htm (Accessed: 15 December 2017).

Bache, I. and Rearden, L. (2013) 'An idea whose time has come? Explaining the rise of well-being in British politics', *Political Studies*, 61(4), pp.898-914.

Bathmaker, A. and Harnett, P. (eds.) (2010) *Exploring learning, identity and power through life history and narrative research*. Routledge: London.

Battistini, M. (2002) *Symbols and allegories in art*. Translated by S. Sartarelli. John Paul Getty Museum: Los Angeles.

Bélanger, P. (2011) *Theories in adult learning and education*. Leverkusen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Belenky, M. and Stanton, A. (2000) 'Inequality, development and connected knowing', in Mezirow, J. and Associates (eds.) *Learning as Transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, pp.71-102.

Biesta, G. (2016) *The beautiful risk of education*. *Interventions, education, philosophy, and culture.* Oxford: Routledge.

Birks, M. and Mills, J. (2011) *Grounded theory: A practical guide*. London: Sage Publications.

Blanchflower, D. and Oswald, A. (2004) 'Well-being over time in Britain and the USA', *Journal of Public Economics*, 88(7/8), pp.1359-1386.

Bochner, A. (2012) 'On first-person narrative scholarship: Autoethnography as acts of meaning', *Narrative Inquiry*, 22(1), pp.155-164.

Bochner, A. and Ellis, C. (2004) 'Our writing lives: An introduction to writing and research-personal views', in Saarnivaara, M., Vainikkala, E. and Van Delft, M. (eds.) *Writing and research personal views*. University of Jyvaskyla: Finland, pp.7-19.

Bochner, A. and Ellis, C. (2016) *Evocative autoethnography: Writing lives and telling stories*. Routledge: New York and Oxford.

Booth, T. (1996) 'Sounds of still voices: Issues in the use of narrative methods with people who have learning difficulties', in Barton, L. (ed.) *Sociology and disability: Some emerging issues*. London: Longman.

British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. 4th edn. Available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018 (Accessed: 30 July 2018).

Brookfield, S. (2017) *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. 2nd edn. San-Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Chang, H. (2008) *Autoethnography as method*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Cixous, H. (1986) 'Sorties: Out and out: Attacks/ways out/ forays', in Cixous, H. and Clement, C. *The newly born woman*. Translated by B. Wing. 2nd edn. London: I.B. Tauris.

Cixous, H. (2007) *Hélène Cixous at the New York State Writers Institute*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evT0gGJ5Oms (Accessed: 7 November 2016).

Clough, P. (2002) *Narratives and fictions in educational research*. Buckingham and Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

Cohen, P. (1997) *Rethinking the youth question: Education, labour and cultural studies*. London: Macmillan.

Covery, I., Corsane, G. and Davis, P. (eds.) (2012) *Making sense of place: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press.

Cranton, P. and Taylor, E. (2012) 'Transformative learning: Seeking a more unified approach', in Taylor, E. and Cranton, P. (eds.) *The handbook of transformative learning*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, pp.3-20.

Cummins, R. (2010) 'Subjective wellbeing, homeostatically protected mood and depression: A synthesis', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 11, pp.1-17.

Delamont, S. (2009) 'The only honest thing: Autoethnography, reflexivity and small crises in fieldwork', *Ethnography and Education*, 4(1), pp.51-63.

De Neve, J., Diener, E., Tay, L. and Xuereb, C. (2013) 'The objective benefits of subjective wellbeing', in Helliwell, J., Layard, R., and Sachs, J. (eds.) *World Happiness Report 2013*. New York: UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, pp.54-79.

Dennis, B. (2010) 'Ethical dilemmas in the field: The complex nature of doing education ethnography', *Ethnography and Education*, (5)2, pp.123-127.

Denscombe, M. (2007) *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects*. 3rd edn. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

Denzin, N. (2006) 'Analytic autoethnography, or déjà vu all over again', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), pp.419-428.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) (2000) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) (2005) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) (2013) *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage Publications.

Department for Education Training and Skills (2018) *ILR specification, validation rules and appendices 2018 to 2019*: *Technical documents that define the ILR data that publicly funded providers must collect and return including ILR data returns calendar for 2018-19*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ilr-specification-validation-rules-and-appendices-2018-to-2019 (Accessed: 15 September 2018).

Diener, E. (2009) 'Subjective well-being', in Diener, E. (ed.) *The science of well-being*. New York: Springer, pp.11-58.

Dodge, R., Daly, A., Huyton, J. and Sanders, L. (2012) 'The challenge of defining wellbeing', *International Journal of Wellbeing*, *2*(3), pp.222-235.

Drake, P. (2010) 'Grasping at methodological understanding: A cautionary tale from insider research', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 33(1), pp.85-99.

Education and Skills Funding Agency (2018) *Adult education budget: Funding rules*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data /file/695007/2018-19_AEB_funding_rules.pdf (Accessed: 24 August 2018).

Egglestone, C., Stevens, C., Jones, E. and Aldridge, F. (2018) *Adult participation in learning survey 2017*. Department for Education. London. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/ government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/735438/Participation_in_Learning_Survey_2017.pdf (Accessed: 15 August 2018).

Ellis, C. (1995) *Final negotiations: A story of love, loss and chronic illness*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Ellis, C. (2004) *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Ellis, C. (2009) *Revision: Autoethnographic reflections on life and work*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. (2000) 'Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject', in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, pp.733-768.

Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. (2003) 'Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject', in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp.199-258.

Ellis, C., Adams, T. and Bochner, A. (2011) 'Autoethnography: An overview', *Qualitative Social Research,* 12(1), pp.273-290.

Feinstein, L., Hammond, C., Woods, L., Preston, J. and Bynner, J. (2003) *The contribution of adult learning to health and social capital. Technical Report*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, London. Available at: http://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/11847/1/The%20Contribution%20of%20Adult%20Learning.pdf (Accessed: 14 September 2017).

Feinstein, L., Budge, D., Vorhaus, J. and Duckworth, K. (2008) *The social and personal benefits of learning: A summary of key research findings*. Institute of Education, London. Available at: http://discovery. ucl.ac.uk/10003177/1/Feinstein 2008thesocialreport.pdf (Accessed: 8 June 2018).

Field, J. (2006) *Lifelong learning and the new educational order*. 2nd edn. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.

Fieldhouse R. (ed.) (1998) *A history of modern British adult education.* 2nd edn. Leicester, NIACE.

Forgeard, M., Jayawickreme, E., Kern, M. and Seligman, M. (2011) 'Doing the right thing: Measuring well-being for public policy', *International Journal of Well-being*, 1(1), pp.79-106. doi:10.5502/ijw .v1i1.15.

Formenti, L. (2015) 'Auto/biography: A relational journey', in Reid, H. and West, L. (eds.) *Constructing narratives of continuity and change: A transdisciplinary approach to researching lives*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.11-24.

Fraser, W. (2015) 'Moments of being and the search for meaning: Epistemological and methodological challenges for the autoethnographic researcher', in Reid, H. and West, L. (eds.) *Constructing narratives of continuity and change: A transdisciplinary approach to researching lives*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.25-36.

Fraser, W. (2018) *Seeking wisdom in adult teaching and learning: An autoethnographic inquiry*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Geertz, C. (1973) *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gielen, P. and De Bruyne, P. (eds.) (2012) *Teaching art in the neoliberal realm. Realism versus cynicism*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

Gornick, V. (2008). 'Truth in personal narrative', in Lazar, D. (ed.) *Truth in nonfiction.* Iowa City, IO: University of Iowa Press, pp.7-10.

Guyotte, K. and Sochacka, N. (2016) 'Is this research? Productive tensions in living the (collaborative) autoethnographic process', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15(1), pp.1-11.

Harnett, P. (2010) 'Life history and narrative research revisited', in Bathmaker, A. and Harnett, P. (eds.) *Exploring learning, identity and power through life history and narrative research*, pp.159-170.

Heron, J. (1996) *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. Sage Publications: London.

Hillman, J. (1981) *The thought of the heart*. Dallas: Spring Publications.

Holford, J. and Jarvis, P. (2005) 'From the great tradition to celebrity Big Brother: Whatever became of adult education?', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 24(6), pp.445-457.

Holliday, A. (2007). *Doing and writing qualitative research*. 2nd edn. London: Sage Publications.

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) *Doing qualitative research differently: Free association, narrative and the interview method*. London: Sage Publications.

Holstein, J. and Gubrium, J. (2012) *The Sage handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft*. London: Sage Publications.

Hughes, D. and Adriaanse, K. (2017) *Adult education: Important for health and well-being*. University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education/adult_education_ier_report_final_2401018.pdf (Accessed: 3 December 2017).

Hughes, D., Adriaanse, K. and Barnes, S. (2016) *Adult education: Too important to be left to chance*. Research Report for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Adult Education. Inquiry into Adult Education. London. Available at: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education (Accessed: 30 March 2017).

Humphrey, A., Lee, L. and Green, R. (2011) *Aspirations for later life*. Department for Work and Pensions. London. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/ system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214511/rrep737.pdf (Accessed: 23 July 2015).

Hunt, Celia (2013) *Transformative learning through creative writing: Exploring the self in the learning process*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Hunt, Celia and Sampson, F. (2006) *Writing: Self and reflexivity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hunt, Cheryl (2009) 'They pass by themselves without wondering: Using the self in, and as, research', *Proceedings of the 39th Annual SCUTREA Conference*, University of Cambridge, 7-9 July. Available at http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ documents/ 181937.pdf (Accessed: 3 May 2016).

Hunt, Cheryl (2016) 'Spiritual creatures? Exploring an interface between reflective practice and spirituality', in Fook, J. *et al*. (eds.) *Researching critical reflection: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.34-47.

Hyde, M. and Phillipson, C. (2014) *How can lifelong learning, including continuous training within the labour market, be enabled and who will pay for this? Looking forward to 2025 and 2040 how might this evolve?* Future of an ageing population evidence review. Foresight Publication for Government Office for Science. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/463059/gs-15-9-future-ageing-lifelong-learning-er02.pdf (Accessed: 13 February 2016).

Jamieson, A. (2007) 'Education and the quality of life in later years', *Quality in Ageing*, 8(3), pp.15-23.

Johnson, C. (2012) 'Bricoleur and bricolage: From metaphor to universal concept', *Paragraph*, 35(3), pp.355-372.

Josselson, R. (2006) 'Narrative research and the challenge of accumulating knowledge', *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 3-10.

Kaomea, J. (2016) 'Qualitative analysis as Ho'oku'iku'i or bricolage: Teaching emancipatory indigenous research in postcolonial Hawai'I', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(2), pp.99-106.

Kavanagh, P. (1967) *Collected pruse*. London: McGibbon and Kee.

Kegan, R. (2000) ‘What ‘form’ transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning’, in Mezirow, J. and Associates (eds.) *Learning as transformation*: *Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, pp.35-69.

Kimberley, H., Holding, B. and Simons, B. (2016) ‘In the company of others: Generating knowhow in later life’, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 35(5), pp.509-521.

Kincheloe, J. (2001) ‘Describing the bricolage: Conceptualizing a new rigour in qualitative research’, *Qualitative Inquiry,* 7(6), pp.679-692.

Kincheloe, J. (2005) ‘On to the next level: Continuing the conceptualization of the bricolage’, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(3), pp.323-350.

Kincheloe, J. and McLaren, P. (2005) ‘Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research’, in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp.303-342.

Kinn, L., Holgersen, H., Ekeland, T. and Davidson, L. (2013) ‘Metasynthesis and bricolage: An artistic exercise of creating a collage of meaning’, *Qualitative Health Research*, 23(9), pp.1285–1292.

Kirkwood, T., Bond, J., May, C., Mckeith, I. and, Teh, M. (2010) ‘Mental capital and wellbeing through life: Future challenges’, in Cooper, C. *et al*. (eds.) *Mental capital and well-being*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp.3-54.

Knights, B. and Thurgar-Dawson, C. (2006) *Active reading: Transformative writing in literary studies*. London and New York: Continuum.

Kynaston, D. (2009) *Family Britain, 1951-1957*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Lambirth, A. (2008) *Rose Hilton: The beauty of ordinary things*. St Ives: Tate Publishing.

Lather, P. (2007) *Getting lost: Feminist efforts toward a double(d) science*. Albany, NY: University of New York Press.

Lavretsky, H. (2014) *Resilience and aging: Research and practice.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. and Davis, J. (1997) *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1966) *The savage mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lomax, Y. (2000) *Writing the image: An adventure with art and theory*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Lomax, Y. (2004) *Sounding the event: Escapades in dialogue and matters of art, nature and time*. London: I.B. Tauris.

MacKenzie, F. (2004) 'Place and the art of belonging', *Cultural Geographies*, 11, pp.115-137.

Madison, D. (2006) 'The dialogic performative in critical ethnography', *Text and Performance Quarterly,* 26(4), pp.320-324.

Mann, S. (2011) 'A critical review of qualitative interviews in applied linguistics', *Applied Linguistics*, 32(1), pp:6-24.

Mauthner, M. (2002) *Sistering: Power and change in female relationships*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

McCormack, C. (2004) 'Storying stories: A narrative approach to in-depth interview conversations', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(3), pp.219-236.

McGilchrist, I. (2012) *The master and his emissary: The divided brain and the making of the western world*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

McLaren, P. (2001) 'Bricklayers and bricoleurs: A marxist addendum', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(6), pp.700-705.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. New York: Routledge.

Merrill, B. and West, L. (2009) *Using biographical methods in social research*. London: Sage Publications.

Mestheneos, E. and Withnall, A. (2016) 'Ageing, learning and health: Making connections', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 35(5), pp.522-536.

Meyer, J., Land, R. and Baillie, C. (eds.) (2010) *Threshold concepts and transformational learning*. Boston: Sense Publishers.

Mezirow, J. (2000) 'Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory', in Mezirow, J. and Associates (eds.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, pp.3-33.

Modell, A. (2006) *Imagination and the meaningful brain*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Murray, M. (1978) *The new hermeneutic.* London: Routledge.

Narushima, M, (2008), 'More than nickels and dimes: The health benefits of a community-based lifelong learning program for older adults', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 27(6), pp.673-692.

Office for National Statistics (2016) *Measuring national wellbeing*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/measuringnationalwellbeing (Accessed: 12 November 2017).

Office for National Statistics (2018) *Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland mid-2017*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland (Accessed: 20 July 2018).

Ollerenshaw, J. and Creswell, J. (2002) 'Narrative research: A comparison of two restorying data analysis approaches', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(3), pp.329-347.

O'Reilly, A. and Abbey, S. (eds.) (2000) *Mothers and daughters: Connection, empowerment and transformation*. Oxford. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Osberg, D., Biesta, G. and Cilliers, P. (2008) 'From representation to emergence: Complexity's challenge to the epistemology of schooling', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40(1), pp.213-227.

O'Sullivan, E. (2005) 'Emancipatory hope: Transformative learning and the 'strange attractors", in Miller, J. *et al*. (eds.) *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education: Breaking new ground*. New York: University of New York, pp.69-78.

O'Sullivan, E. (2012) 'Deep transformation: Forging a planetary worldview', in Taylor, E. and Cranton, C. (eds.) *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, research and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, pp.162-194.

Pelias, R. (2004) *A methodology of the heart. Evoking academic and daily life*. New York and Oxford: AltaMira Press.

Pelias, R. (2011) 'Writing into position: Strategies for composition and evaluation', in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 4th edn. London: Sage Publications, pp.659-668.

Pelias, R. (2018) *Writing performance, identity, and everyday life: The selected works of Ronald J. Pelias*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Phillipson, C. and Ogg, J. (2010) *Active ageing and universities: Engaging older learners*. Universities UK. Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2010/active-ageing-and-universities-engaging-older-learners.pdf (Accessed: 10 February 2016).

Pink, S. (2013) *Doing visual ethnography*. 3rd edn. London: Sage Publications.

Pink, S. and Morgan, J. (2013) 'Short-term ethnography: intense routes to knowing', *Symbolic Interaction*, 36(3), pp.351-361.

Pole, C. and Morrison, M. (2003) *Ethnography for education*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Raheim, M., Magnusse, L., Seske, R., Lunde, A., Jacobsen, T. and Blystad, A. (2016) 'Researcher–researched relationship in qualitative research: Shifts in positions and researcher vulnerability', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 11(1), doi:10.3402/qhw.v11.30996

Rasberry, G. (2001) *Writing research/researching writing: Through a poet's I*. New York: Peter Lang.

Reid, H. and West, L. (2015) *Constructing narratives of continuity and change: A transdisciplinary approach to researching lives*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rich, A. (1976) *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*. Norton Press: New York.

Richardson, L. (1997) *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Richardson, L. (2003) 'Writing: A method of inquiry', in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2003) (eds.) *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. 2nd edn. London: Sage Publications, pp.499-541.

Rolling, J. (2010) 'This do in remembrance of me: Narrative uncertainty and the frothing of contentious identity', in Bathmaker, A. and Harnett, P. (eds.) *Exploring learning, identity and power through life history and narrative research*. Routledge: London, pp.144-158.

Roman, B. and Kay, J. (2007) ‘Fostering curiosity: Using the educator-learner relationship to promote a facilitative learning environment’, *Psychiatry*, 70(3), pp.205-208.

Schmitt, F. and Lahroodi, R. (2008) ‘The epistemic value of curiosity’, *Educational Theory*, 58(2), pp.125-148.

Schnelker, D. (2006) ‘The student-as-bricoleur: Making sense of research paradigms’, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(1), pp.42-57.

Schuller, T. (2016) *Adult education: Too important to be left to chance.* Formal response to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) call for evidence on adult education. Available at: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/research/adult_education /evidence/tom_schuller.pdf (Accessed: 8 January 2017).

Schuller, T. (2017) *What are the wider benefits of learning across the life course?* Foresight Report. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/ uploads/attachment_data/file/635837/Skills_and_lifelong_learning_-_the_benefits_ of_adult_learning_-_schuller_-_final.pdf (Accessed: 2 January 2018).

Schuller, T. and Watson, D. (2009) *Learning through life*. Available at: http://www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/IFLL-summary-english.pdf (Accessed: 20 July 2015).

Schwartz-Shea, P. and Yanow, D. (2012) *Interpretative research design: Concepts and processes*. New York: Routledge.

Shepherd, N. (2011) *The living mountain: A Cairngorms journey*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books.

Sikes, P. (2002) ‘Series editor’s preface’, in Clough, P. *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp.ix-xiii.

Sikes, P. (2010) ‘The ethics of writing life histories and narratives in educational research’, in Bathmaker, A. and Harnett, P. (eds.) *Exploring learning, identity and power through life history and narrative research*. London: Routledge, pp.12-24.

Sillars, L. (ed.) (2011) *George Shaw: The sly and unseen day*. Gateshead: Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.

Smith, K. (2011) ‘Curiositas and studiositas: Investigating student curiosity’, *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 30(2), pp.161-175.

Sparkes, A. (2003) ‘Editorial’, *Auto/Biography*, 11(1-2), pp.1-3.

Speedy, J. (2008) *Narrative inquiry and psychotherapy.* Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Speedy, J. and Wyatt, J. (2014) *Collaborative writing as inquiry*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Spielhofer, T., Golden, S., Evans, K., Marshall, H., Mundy, E., Pomati, M. and Styles, B. (2010) *Barriers to participation in education and training.* Department for Education: London. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government /publications/barriers-to-participation-in-education-and-training (Accessed: 5 January 2016).

Spry, T. (2001) ‘Performing autoethnography: An embodied methodological praxis’, *Qualitative Inquiry,*7(6), pp.706-732.

Stengers, I. (1997) *Power and invention: Situating science.* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis.

Stevens, R. (2004) *University to uni: The politics of higher education in Britain since 1944*. London: Politico.

Sylvester, D. (1954) ‘The kitchen sink’, *Encounter*, Issue 18. December. pp.61-64. http://www.unz.org/Pub/Encounter-1954dec-00061 (Accessed: 16 February 2016).

Teddlie, C. and Tashakkori, A. (2009) *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioural sciences*. London: Sage Publications.

Todres, L. (2007) *Embodied enquiry - phenomenological touchstones for research, psychotherapy and spirituality.* Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Torchia, J. (2013) *The restless mind: ‘Curiositas’ and the scope of inquiry in St. Augustine’s psychology*. Milwaukee: Marquette University.

Tuckett, A. (2017) ‘The rise and fall of life-wide learning for adults in England’, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 36(1-2) pp.230-249.

Tullis, J. (2014) ‘Self and others: Ethics in autoethnographic research’, in Holman-Jones, S., Adams, T. and Ellis, C. (eds.) *Handbook of autoethnography*, Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, pp.244-261.

University of the Third Age (2018) *The Third Age Trust. Learning not lonely: Living life, expanding horizons, challenging conventions*. Available at: https://www.u3a.org.uk/ images/misc/impact report/impact-report-2018-06-1.2-final-web.pdf (Accessed: 13 September 2018).

Updike, J. (2004) *The early stories: 1953–1975.* London: Penguin.

West, L. (1996) *Beyond fragments: Adults, motivation and higher education - a biographical analysis.* London: Taylor and Francis.

West, L. (2014) 'Transformative learning and the form that transforms: Towards a psychosocial theory of recognition using auto/biographical narrative', *Research Journal of Transformative Education*, 12(2), pp.164-179.

Wimpenny, P. and Gass, J. (2000) 'Interviewing in phenomenology and grounded theory: Is there a difference?', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 31(6), pp.1485-1492.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent form for educational organisations

Consent Form for Educational Organisations: Exploring adult education in later life Jane Evershed email: j.r.evershed14@canterbury.ac.uk Postgraduate Research, Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University		
By completing and signing this form you are agreeing that your organisation is willing to be included in the research and that you have the authority to act on their behalf.		**Please initial**
1.	I agree that the organisation is content for research to be conducted during 2016 and 2017.	
2.	I agree that the organisation is willing to provide general information regarding the enrolment of post 60 learners along with information regarding any particular initiatives in place regarding this age group.	
3.	I confirm that the organisation has received a copy of the Participant Information Guidance and Participant Consent Form and understand that it will be given to all volunteers taking part in the research.	
4.	I understand that the confidentiality of the organisation, individual students, and any staff involved in the project will be respected at all times.	
5.	I understand that any information provided will be anonymised.	
6.	I understand that a short summary of findings from the study may be disseminated to the organisation on completion if requested	
7.	I understand that any data provided by the organisation will be securely stored in digital form for analysis and that it will be deleted at the end of the study.	
Any additional comments regarding the scope of the project.		

Name of Organisation	Name of person signing on behalf of the organisation	Signed on behalf of organisation
	Position held within the organisation	Date

Appendix 2: Participant information and guidance

Participant Information and Guidance

Exploring adult education in later life
Despite an increasing number of older people in the UK population, the number of over-60's accessing creative art classes in adult education is falling and this research, which will be conducted during 2016 and 2017, will explore this phenomenon. I am keen to work with students who have experience of participating in adult education and are willing to discuss those experiences with me. The following guidance explains what the study will involve in more detail and I will be pleased to answer any questions before you decide to take part.

Who is organising the research?
I am conducting the research as a doctoral student of the Faculty of Education at Canterbury Christ Church University and it has been approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee. It is neither funded nor sponsored by any other organisation or institution and permission to conduct the research has been granted by your education provider.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
There are no payments or other direct incentives available for taking part in the study, but your sharing of valuable information will add to existing knowledge on issues facing older learners and I hope may lead to improved services in the future.

Do I have to take part?
The research is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether or not you would like to be involved. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign the attached consent form, but you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Whatever you decide, the study will not impact on any of your assessments or future studies.

What will it involve?
If you would like to offer your expertise and knowledge you will be invited to take part in a one to one interview or possibly to join with other students in a focussed discussion. Both options will last no more than an hour at a convenient time and place and will centre on your experiences of adult education. Any interviews will be audio recorded to enable me to transcribe and anonymise them and I will then providing you with a copy to review and check. Alternatively, or additionally, you may wish to express your experience through a creative medium and your permission may be sought to photograph your work and include it in the final thesis. It is also possible that you will be invited to a further interview or to take part in a focus group discussion of similar duration as a follow-up.

Confidentiality
All information collected will be kept strictly confidential, unless there is any legal obligation or duty of care which overrides this. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the same researcher to prevent any third party access to the data before it is anonymised. Your identity, interview locations and the identity of the learning organisation will remain confidential. Your learning provider will not have access to your identity. All reasonable steps to ensure that hard copy and electronic files containing personal data are processed securely will be taken.

What happens to my information?
Consent is sought from all participants to reproduce anonymised extracts of transcripts, observations or photographs of participant's creative work in the final thesis. The recordings, transcripts and any other visual material will form the basis of the researcher's interpretations. Part of this process is likely to involve the researcher keeping in touch with you following your interview(s) to discuss her interpretations further.

How do I take part?
If you would like to opt into the study, please complete a consent form and return as indicated.

Appendix 3: Consent form for participants

Consent Form for Participants: Exploring adult education in later life Jane Evershed email: j.r.evershed14@canterbury.ac.uk Postgraduate Research, Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University		
The completion of this form confirms your agreement to taking part in the research study.		**Please initial**
1.	I confirm that I am over the age of 60 and have been regularly attending adult education creative art classes.	
2.	I confirm that I have read and understood the attached Participant Information Guidance and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. I understand that I may raise additional questions at any time during the process.	
3.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without the need to provide a reason.	
4.	I am interested in taking part in one to one interviews with the researcher.	
5.	I am willing to take part in group discussions if requested.	
6.	I understand that interview recordings will be transcribed and anonymised by the researcher and that I will have the opportunity to review and check the transcripts for inaccuracies before they are used in the research.	
7.	I understand the researcher may contact me to partake in follow-up interviews or to clarify information. I can decide not to take part at any time, but that the anonymised information gathered can still be used.	
8.	I agree to the use of anonymised interview quotes and any photographs of my creative work to which I have first agreed to may be published in the final thesis.	
9.	I agree that my anonymised information will be securely stored in digital form for analysis and understand that it will be deleted 5 years after the end of the study.	
Any additional comments regarding the project or your involvement in it?		
Contact details		
Participant's name	Signature	Date

Appendix 4: Sample interview questions (pilot interview)

Name

Age

Gender

Contact details

1. How long have you been coming to class?
2. Education background?
3. Why art education?
4. What are your perceptions of Adult Education?
5. Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to attend?
6. Which aspects of the classes do you find most interesting?
7. Has anything changed recently that makes access more difficult or easier?
8. What would improve your access to education?

Appendix 5: Source examples 'displaying' the analytical process.

Appendix 5a: Sample of digitised transcript shown in Appendix 5b in the process of analysis indicating how transcripts of recorded interviews are collaged together with field notes (Appendix 5c) and extracts from research journals (Appendix 5d) according to the following key:

Time elapsed mm:ss	Derived from elapsed interview time displayed on the digital recorder.
Clock time hh:mm:ss	Derived from wristwatch and used to synchronise field notes with interview transcript
Verbatim transcript derived from recorded interview	G - Participant , J - Researcher
Redactions to preserve anonymity	[redacted]
Portions of direct transcript edited out	~~Verbatim transcript from recorded interview~~
Field notes recorded during interview and later synchronised with transcript	Contemporaneous field notes FN
Re-ordering of transcript (Tn) for narrative	TN7-1,2,3,4 etc.
Extracts of reflexive writing taken from research journals and written following the interview	**Reflexive writing extract (Journal number RJ1 and date)**
Pauses in conversation recorded as part of the interview	**{P}**
Material sourced from further discussions with participants after the interview	**Additional material from other sources eg. emails, phone calls etc**
Beginning of analysis of motivations and barriers	Motivations Barriers
*	Requires follow-up by the researcher

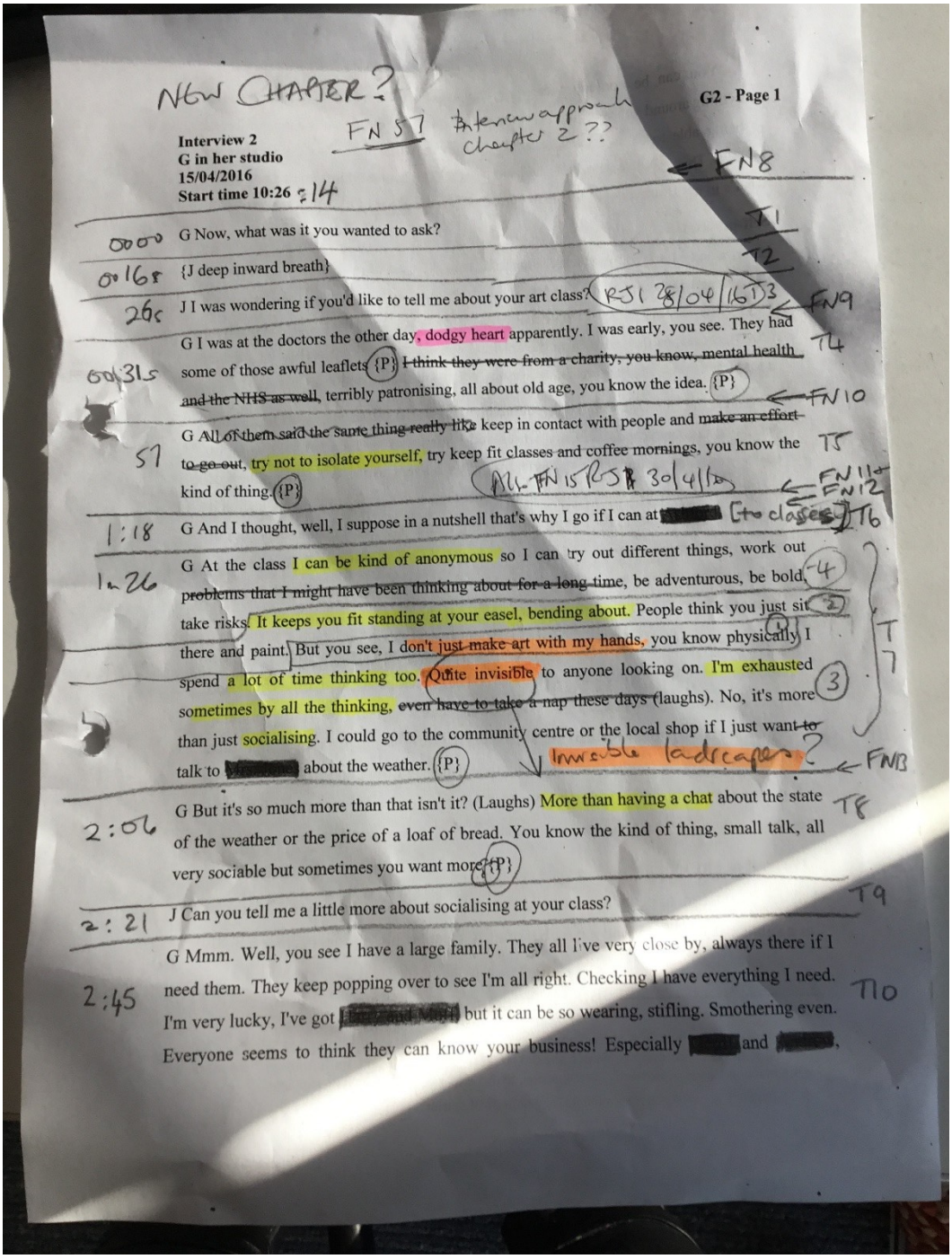
Time elapsed (mm:ss)	Clock time (hh:mm:ss)	**Interview 2: G in her studio** **15/04/2016 Start time: 10:26:14**	Source and notes
00:00	26:14	G looking for materials on table, thick charcoal. Rook stands/shakes. G sits facing windows. SUN FROM RIGHT. strikes Gs face.	**FN8**
00:16		G Now, what was it you wanted to ask?	**T1**
00:23		{J deep breath}	**T2**
00:26		J I was wondering if you'd like to tell me about your art class?	**T3**
	26:42	G hesitates/indecision? stops drawing. Have I blown it? G smile/draws. OK. Twig taps, cool breeze. Jam/coffee. WARMTH.	**FN9**
This was a pivotal moment - I knew I had to get this right, could feel the tension. Everything I'd learned [from writing] about my life had been for this moment. I felt my research would turn at this point. This was a chance to start again.			**RJ1 28/04/16**
How did G take to my different interview approach? - G said she hesitated at this point because she wanted to 'help me' in my research and wanted to say 'the right thing' but she was 'hoping for more interesting questions than the first time [interview]'. She said the best interviews 'give you room to talk around what you want to say' and knew she had 'a lot more to say' after the first interview which lead to her email (24/03/2016) of Janus. The opening question meant she 'could be more herself' and she decided to 'go with the flow' and see where it went. She had enjoyed the experience.			**FN57 Phone conversation RJ1 (30/04/16)**
00:29		G I was at the doctors the other day, dodgy heart apparently. I was early, you see. They had some of those awful leaflets **{P}** ~~I think they were from a charity, you know, mental health and the NHS as well,~~ terribly patronising, all about old age, you know the idea. **{P}**	**T4**
	27:07	G sketches and talks, Rook stretching wings. Wind rising, s/shine gone.	**FN10**
00:57		G ~~All of them said the same thing really like~~ keep in contact	**T5**

		with people ~~and make an effort to go out,~~ try not to isolate yourself, try keep fit classes and coffee mornings, you know the kind of thing. **{P}**	
	?	Direction? WAIT! G drawing COME BACK TO THIS? * see FN15	**FN11**
	27:26	G intent on R[ook].	**FN12**
1:18		G And I thought, well, I suppose in a nutshell that's why I go ~~if I can at~~ [redacted] [to classes].	**T6**
1:26		G At the class I can be kind of anonymous so I can try out different things, work out ~~problems that I might have been thinking about for a long time~~, be adventurous, be bold, take risks.	**T7 - 4**
		G It keeps you fit standing at your easel, bending about. People think you just sit there and paint.	**T7 - 2**
		G But you see, I don't just make art with my hands, you know physically.	**T7 - 1**
		G I spend a lot of time thinking too. Quite invisible to anyone looking on. I'm exhausted sometimes by all the thinking, ~~even have to take a nap these days (laughs).~~ No, it's more than just socialising. I could go to the community centre or the local shop if I just want to talk ~~to~~ [redacted] about the weather. **{P}** **invisible landscapes?**	**T7 - 3**
	28:32	R stops. Struts with high legs, head pushes forward. G readjusts her seat.	**FN13**
2:17		G But it's so much more than that isn't it? (Laughs) More than having a chat about the state of the weather or the price of a loaf of bread. ~~You know the kind of thing, small talk, all very sociable but sometimes you want more.~~**{P}**	**T8**
2:53		J Can you tell me a little more about socialising at your class?	**T9**
2:59		G ~~Mmm. Well,~~ you see I have a large family. They all live very close by, always there if I need them. They keep popping over to see I'm all right. Checking I have everything I need. I'm very lucky, ~~I've got~~ [redacted], but it can be so	**T10**

		wearing, stifling. Smothering even. Everyone seems to think they can know your business! ~~Especially~~ [redacted] ~~and~~ [redacted] ~~they're such worriers~~.	
	28:50	G speaks quietly but emphatic. Snaps her charcoal pressing hard. Picks up another. S/shine back.	**FN14**
3:37		~~I get really irritable because what I want to do is spend my time creating things and all they want to do is wrap me up in cotton wool.~~	**T11**
3:45		G I'm a very independent sort of person. Always was, had to be. Was born in the twenties, was in my thirties by the sixties. The liberation that brought was astonishing. ~~Taken for granted now by most people - that annoys me no end especially young women who throw it all away because they don't know how hard that fight was.~~ (sigh) I lived through the war, the rationing, ran my own businesses, looked after my own finances, lived in many places. I can do my computer and I've got opinions about things! **{P}**	**T12**
4:36		That's why I need those classes. It's about being together with other artists. Helps you think about things you've not thought about in a long time, or never thought before, or to join things up in different ways. Stretches your thinking in different ways, challenges me, keeps my mind active **{P}**	**T13**
4:43		G quiet. Starts another drawing. Themes - Suffrage? Artist's colonies? Wenger? Lave? ..... LISTEN! * and FN11 RJ1 30/04/16	**FN15 see FN11**
Q??~~Why do I always~~ I stopped trying to ~~put~~ analyse emerging themes here. Is this as important as I feel it is? Why? My ideas ~~take~~ are sometimes take [sic] a long time coming and I don't want to jump the gun (indecipherable). ~~I feel sometimes it is too early~~ I need to spend time with it more and not rush That feeling of something about to happen excitement? like when I'm about to ~~pai~~ . start a new painting. Need to be aware of black/white, knee jerk interpretation. Live with it a while, step back a bit. Let it happen, don't push. What would Dad have said?!			**RJ1 30/04/16**
4:51		G Of course, there are lots of reasons not to go, physically I mean. Like driving in the dark and not having parking and the	**T14**

		cost and all that wretched form-filling - all petty things really. One at a time they're nothing, but when you put them together, ~~to be honest, but they are maybe important I think in the longer term maybe~~.....(sentence unfinished) **{P}**	
	31:23	Quiet. NB Check parking, costs and forms (which forms?) * against class obs. Twig tapping again. might rain? R looks in, moves sideways L and R. Dancing? G looks up	**FN16**
G response to email: Confirms forms are individual learner records (ILRs) completed with outcomes 'cobbled together' by her and the tutor each term.			**Email 02/06/16**
5:27		G Do you know that piece from Ovid about water being stronger than rock?	**T15**
	31:45	OVID??? shake my head	**FN17**
5:32		Meant to be a puzzle I think. ~~It's from my classics class at school I think that~~'s ~~where it's from.~~ Goes something like which is harder, rock or water? and of course you're supposed to think the answer is rock, ~~something like that~~ but then it goes on. Even granite can be eroded by the slow drip of water.	**T16**
Quid magis est saxo durum, quid mollius unda? Dura tamen molli saxa cavantur aqua. What is harder than rock, what gentle waves? Yet hard rock is hollowed by soft water. Ovid (43AD-18BC) *Ars amatoria*, Liber I, pp.475-476). Advice given to a rejected lover to persevere in his courtship.			**RJ1 02/05/16**
5:53		G It's about perseverance. You see, at the moment I can deal with the physical side of getting to class, though I have to admit it's getting harder, ~~what with the car park being so far now. I get really breathless especially if it's cold.~~ But I have to persevere, not thinking, not being mentally active, that's what really scares me ~~the most~~. And of course, it's a safe place.	**T17**
6:13		J Safe?	**T18**
6:15		G Well yes, I am eighty-eight!	**T19**
	32:33	G smiles and starts drawing again	**FN18**

Appendix 5b: Photograph of a page of the transcript of Ginny's second interview dated 15/04/2016 demonstrating the layering of multiple research sources and the start of the analysis (see Appendix 5a for digitised version).



NEW CHAPTER?

FN 57 Interview approach chapter 2??

G2 - Page 1

Interview 2
G in her studio
15/04/2016
Start time 10:26 :14

FN8

0000 G Now, what was it you wanted to ask? T1

0:16s {J deep inward breath} T2

26s J I was wondering if you'd like to tell me about your art class? RJ1 28/04/16 13 FN9

G I was at the doctors the other day, dodgy heart apparently. I was early, you see. They had some of those awful leaflets {P} ~~I think they were from a charity, you know, mental health and the NHS as well,~~ terribly patronising, all about old age, you know the idea. {P} T4 FN10

57 G ~~All of them said the same thing really like~~ keep in contact with people and ~~make an effort to go out~~, try not to isolate yourself, try keep fit classes and coffee mornings, you know the kind of thing. {P} T5

All FN 15 RJ1 30/4/16 FN11 FN12

1:18 G And I thought, well, I suppose in a nutshell that's why I go if I can at [redacted] (to classes) T6

1:26 G At the class I can be kind of anonymous so I can try out different things, work out ~~problems that I might have been thinking about for a long time~~, be adventurous, be bold, take risks. It keeps you fit standing at your easel, bending about. People think you just sit there and paint. But you see, I don't just make art with my hands, you know physically I spend a lot of time thinking too. Quite invisible to anyone looking on. I'm exhausted sometimes by all the thinking, ~~even have to take a nap these days~~ (laughs). No, it's more than just socialising. I could go to the community centre or the local shop if I just want ~~to~~ talk to [redacted] about the weather. {P} T7

4 2 1 3

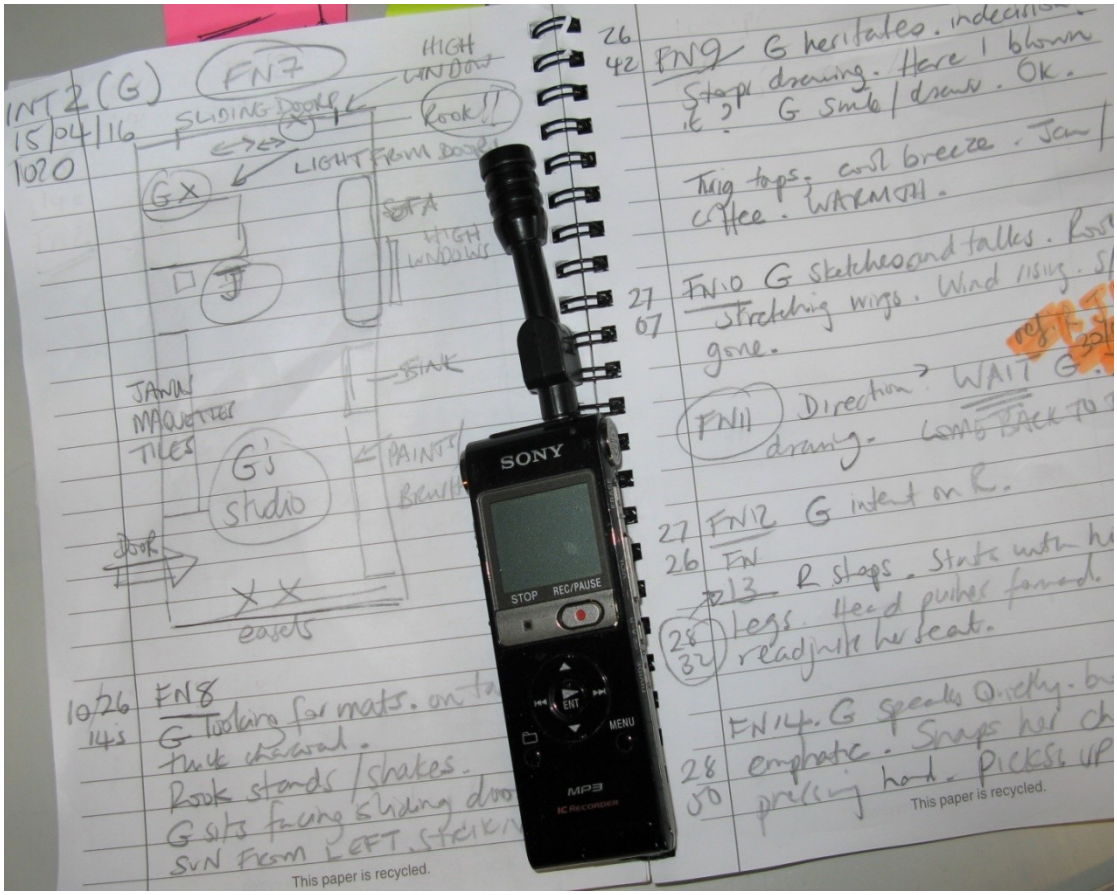
Invisible landscapes? FN13

2:06 G But it's so much more than that isn't it? (Laughs) More than having a chat about the state of the weather or the price of a loaf of bread. You know the kind of thing, small talk, all very sociable but sometimes you want more. {P} T8

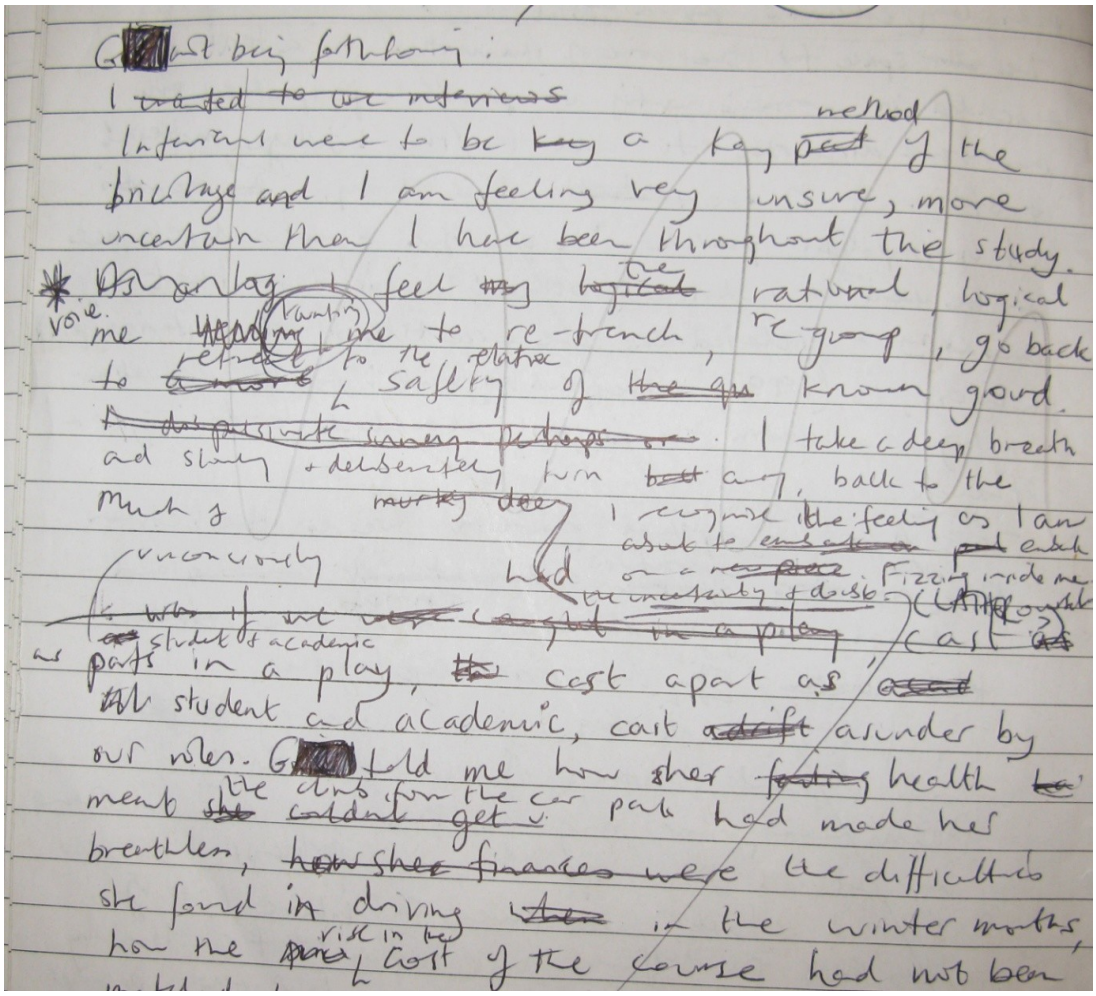
2:21 J Can you tell me a little more about socialising at your class? T9

2:45 G Mmm. Well, you see I have a large family. They all live very close by, always there if I need them. They keep popping over to see I'm all right. Checking I have everything I need. I'm very lucky, I've got [redacted] but it can be so wearing, stifling. Smothering even. Everyone seems to think they can know your business! Especially [redacted] and [redacted], T10

Appendix 5c: Photograph of field notes (FN) recorded during Ginny's second interview dated 15/04/2016 (digitised in Appendix 5a for clarity) and later 'collaged' with the transcript. The digital sound recorder used to record the interviews is also visible in the photograph.



Appendix 5d: Photograph of Research Journal I (RJ1) dated 29/03/16, digitised below for clarity. The extract was written prior to Ginny's second interview as I considered my use of a semi-structured interview method.



G [redacted] not forthcoming: ~~I wanted to use interviews~~ Interviews were to be ~~key~~ a key ~~part~~ method of the bricolage and I am feeling very unsure, more uncertain than I have been throughout the study. ~~As a log~~ I feel ~~my logical~~ the rational, logical (voice) me, ~~leading~~ taunting me to re-trench, re-group, go back, to ~~a more~~ retreat to the relative safety of ~~the qu~~ known ground. ~~A dispassionate survey perhaps or~~ I take a deep breath and slowly and deliberately turn back away, back to the ~~murky dee~~ the uncertainty and doubt LATHER? (Later inserted - I recognise the feeling as I am about to embark on (indecipherable) embark on a new piece Fizzing inside me (see thesis p.71)). It was if we were caught in a play, cast ~~as~~ unconsciously as parts in a play, student and academic, cast apart as ~~acad~~ (indecipherable) student and academic cast ~~adrift~~ asunder by our roles. (see thesis p.54) G [redacted] told me how her ~~failing~~ health ~~had~~ meant ~~she couldn't get~~ the climb from the car park had made her breathless, ~~how her finances were~~ the difficulties (see thesis p.51).