GENERATING EXPERIENCES OF TRANSFORMATION: AN ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE OF CHANGE

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Abstract

This portfolio identifies a lacuna in the ways most mainstream management literature speaks of change. This literature focuses predominantly on the activities of 'planning', 'implementing' and 'evaluating' change in organizations, while largely overlooking the *situated and embodied experience of actually becoming changed.* I propose that this type of experience lies at the heart of organizational change. My research focuses on such experiences, addressing the questions of what characterizes them, what are the conditions that enable them, and what is involved in a practice that attempts to generate and sustain them.

Building on Complex Responsive Process Theory, which claims that all change is constituted by shifts in the patterning of local interactions, I am proposing that the study of the *qualities* of ordinary, everyday 'experiences of transformation', which take place in conversational interactions between organizational members, is crucial to our understanding of how change happens.

These qualities involve fleeting and elusive shifts of awareness and energy. What I am suggesting 'transforms' in such experiences is the complex interweaving of meaning, sense of self or identity, and ways of interacting and speaking. I argue that these shifts both create, and are created by, the responsive engagement with the complex, puzzling and ambiguous aspects of lived experiences of interaction. My narratives are concerned with the ways in which new meaning and novel directions of 'going on together' emerge paradoxically within the very experience of the fragmentation and dissolving of our usual, taken for granted understanding and sense of self. This often happens as we agree to encounter the 'otherness' of others in a conversational setting in which all the disconcerting, troubling and moving ramifications of that encounter are allowed to play out.

In crafting an approach to change which resonates more with our everyday organizational lives, my narratives call attention to the details of such experiences: their textured richness and complex multi-facetedness. I propose that learning to carefully notice and engage with such experiences offers both deeper insights into the nature of change, and generates more nuanced, subtle, and ultimately effective, ways of working with change processes.

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1. SYNOPSIS (April 2007)

1.1 INTRODUCTION: BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

"What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from" T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*

As I move towards the final stage of my DMan journey, I am called upon to revisit my 4 projects, and make yet another attempt to understand what it is I have been exploring. Rereading my portfolio, I am aware of the ways in which my thinking has progressed, not in a linear way, but in a curiously circular – perhaps spiral – way. All the themes I have been concerned with are there in potential: the 'end', so to speak, glimmers elusively right from the 'beginning'. And yet, at the same time, these themes have been in continuous movement, taken up in different forms, leading me to different, and often surprising, understandings and connections. I take up this task of what is to become my final iteration with an awareness that the patterns that are to emerge here will ring true and false simultaneously, for they too are subject to the ceaseless movement of experience in time, in which

"Knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
 For the pattern is new in every moment
 And every moment is a new and shocking
 Valuation of all that we have been…" (Ibid.)

How then, do I now understand what it is that I have been researching? Right from the start, Patricia, my supervisor, recognized the way I was drawn to a certain kind of experience, without either of us being able to clearly articulate it. "It is obvious", she would repeat, "that there is a type of experience that you feel is central to your work, and that you keep returning to again and again in your writing and speaking. This is what you need to study and articulate". And, indeed, this is what my research has involved: the study of a certain type of experience that I value above others, and that I have come to understand as seminal to my consulting practice. It is a particular quality of experience that I am calling an *' experience of transformation'*, as it occurs

in the situated moment. To return to Eliot's words, it is this very experience which constitutes "a new and shocking/ Valuation of all that we have been".

How can I make what I am speaking of come alive for you, my reader, at the outset of your reading? Speaking in general or abstract ways about 'qualities of experience', or defining them, is extremely difficult. Lived experience is particular, specific and concrete; and experiences of 'transformation' are forever new and different. Yet, these qualities can be known and recognized, for I believe we have all experienced them. As Wittgenstein points out: "The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity…we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful" (Philosophical Investigations, 129; quoted in Genova, 1995). I will therefore attempt to spark a recognition, or an appreciation, on your part, by 'showing', through a brief narrative, one such experience. Then I will speak about the varieties of such experience in a more generalizable way.

1.2   NARRATING AN ELUSIVE EXPERIENCE

I have begun to write my synopsis. I have spent several arduous weeks attempting to locate and articulate my contribution. In reiterating the themes that have arisen in my four projects, I am re-examining my own ideas, and experimenting with different ways in which I consider them a 'contribution to professional practice'. I am producing acceptable writing, and a synopsis is being crafted, but something is not alive in my writing. I am not able to 'get at' a meaningful formulation of what I have been studying. I am becoming more and more aware of an impatience and lack of engagement in my writing, which seems forced. What is missing is the excitement and vitality of new understanding that has characterized each of my projects at times. I just want this last phase of my thesis to be over.

Our learning set meeting begins, and I give voice to these feelings. One of my colleagues has produced some writing that I appreciate deeply, and it becomes spoken of as a 'reflexive turn' in his work. I am aware that nothing has 'turned' in my own: I have a sense of repetition, rather than re-iteration. We begin to discuss my

synopsis. Two of my colleagues question my choice to characterize the experiences I have been exploring as 'the micro experience of transformation in the moment'. "But is it a particular moment" asks R., "a moment in time that has a specific beginning and end?" "And I don't like this 'micro' thing", adds C. I am recognizing the irritation that arises in me as my hard work becomes challenged, and I see my argument beginning to dissolve under rigorous scrutiny. I can feel the contraction forming in my stomach as I automatically brace myself for defense. Yes, it is a particular moment! Yes, it is what I think of as a 'particle' of experience! How can they not see that? "Because", counters Patricia, "this is not what I see your work as focused on…" Her voice resounds with its usual gentleness – I feel how I am being seduced away from my defensiveness. I do not let it go easily. She begins to speak about the way she understands what I am saying. Rather than drawing on a *quantitative* metaphor, as I have been doing in trying to understand my contribution in terms of 'micro' and 'macro'; she suggests that I try to explore the *qualitative* aspects of the experience I am speaking of.

I suddenly recognize something important in her words. Without exactly understanding what it is, I sense the contraction in my stomach beginning to melt, and become aware of a dawning and renewed interest my own work. As she speaks, I can feel myself becoming more and more excited. She too appears animated, searching to express something she has just seen. I cannot quite grasp what I am beginning to understand – it is frustratingly elusive; but I am experiencing a shift in my engagement in our conversation, and the quality of attentiveness that is being generated. What was 'known' and 'certain' to me just a few minutes ago, and that I was ready to 'fight for', is suddenly fragmenting. I glimpse new possibilities – although that is all they are at the moment – glimpses of potential. I can actually feel my energy changing. My sense of heaviness, my feeling of stuckness and repetition, is becoming permeated with a new vitality. For a moment, I experience them both simultaneously: an impossible intertwining of heaviness, fatigue and 'fed-upness', and the fragile wisps of a renewed interest and energy.

The conversation gets taken up by others, and goes off in other directions. I am suddenly aware of the multi-leveled qualities of our speaking in this group, of different needs and desires, of shifting power dynamics, of the interweaving of co-

operation and competition between us. I am left shaken, and a little angry: a new direction glimmers, and, almost as quickly, disappears again. But, just as complexity writers speak of 'time irreversibility' (Thietart and Forgues, 1995), I am no longer the same as I was when this conversation began. Something has changed, although I would be hard put to say what it is, exactly. I am glimpsing new possibilities of understanding my own work. I am sensing myself differently in relation to my writing, and in the desire to go on with my synopsis. I realize uneasily that I cannot, at the moment, 'finalize' any further what has been grasped; and need move on with the conversation. Within moments, I do so.

1.3   THEORIZING AN ELUSIVE EXPERIENCE

It is this type of experience, *in which we actually sense ourselves as shifting, or 'transforming', as we encounter and agree to engage with 'others and othernesses'* (Shotter, 2007), that I am writing about in this thesis. Such an 'experience of transformation' involves changes in the way we experience and understand ourselves, each other, and our situation. Such experiences assume many forms, occur in differing circumstances, and lead to different 'results'. Yet, at the same time, I am proposing that such experiences can be recognized and identified, if not clearly defined. My study of the experiences of transformation that take place in our everyday organizational life leads me to the following attempt to describe the qualities of this experience, to aid that recognition and identification. You will be reading about experiences which:

- Entail a radical questioning of our usual ways of being, thinking and understanding
- Are suffused with a sense of felt meaningfulness, of discovery, and the creation of new connections
- Constitute shifts in experienced identity, in which a new sense of 'who I am' and 'who we are' is created in the moment
- Invite more complex and nuanced ways of understanding the interconnections between us, and the ways in which we are forming and being formed by the specific situation

- Often resonate with a 'taste' of paradox, as we become aware of the contradictions that co-exist in the situation and in our responses to it
- Are themselves paradoxical experiences, in that they often entail a sense of meaning fragmenting and crystallizing as part of the same movement, leaving us with a sense of clarity and ambiguity at the same time
- Often evoke a 'fuller' participation in the moment, as intensified physical, emotional and cognitive responses are called up
- Are created in interaction, especially as we agree to engage intensely with 'otherness', with the differences between us, rather than the 'sameness'
- Are amplified by the degree and quality of our responsiveness, and our willingness to remain engaged in situations which are often uncomfortable and anxiety provoking
- Are self-organizing and therefore cannot be controlled or manipulated; but can be intended, invited or 'coaxed' in certain conditions
- Are fleeting and elusive; often noticed and understood only in retrospect

Why are such experiences important? In my research, I have come to understand them as *lying at the heart of organizational change.* For, as we become differently oriented to ourselves and each other, we are able to imagine, anticipate and therefore move into, possibilities of action and interaction that did not exist moments ago. In doing so, we call up different responses from others, and a 'ripple effect' is created, sometimes becoming amplified to the degree that we recognize, in retrospect, that our ways of working together have indeed changed. I am suggesting that it is precisely in this way that situated and specific 'experiences of transformation' are related to larger changes in the patterning of organizational activity – what we speak of as 'organizational change'.

My narratives are all concerned with the presence or absence of such experiences of transformation in the organizational conversations I participate in. Their presence constitutes movement in organizational life, the kind of movement which may be seen in terms of 'organizational health' (Stacey, 2003) in that it enables the emergence of novel and creative possibilities of action. Their absence, by contrast, often entails the experience of stuckness, in which the repetition of all that is already known becomes the dominant pattern. Given the ubiquitous concern with

organizational change and transformation in management literature, I understand the study of the particular qualities of the experience in which we actually *sense ourselves as becomimg transformed*, becoming 'other' than who we were moments ago, in situated moments in everyday interactions in organizations, to be of crucial importance. My portfolio is concerned with the detailed exploration of such experiences, as they occur between people in different constellations, in different departments and national sites of a global organization, which I shall call 'Kelide'.

Let me then attempt to formulate the contribution to professional practice of the approach to change that I am advocating. I shall do so by exploring four aspects of what might considered a contribution. These involve the ways in which my research:

- may impact the work of change practitioners (consultants and managers), by reorienting attention to aspects of their practice that may have gone hitherto relatively unnoticed, or not taken seriously;
- offers a different way in which we might think about the practice of change within the broad sweep of organizational change literature;
- fleshes out facets of complex responsive process thinking, and thereby contributes to the development of theory;
- has changed my own practice, in terms of the confidence and clarity with which I can recognize and articulate the value of what I do. As others recognize themselves in my writing, noticing and articulating similar experiences, the field of change practice may begin to shift.

1.4   EXPERIMENTING WITH ASPECTS OF CONTRIBUTION

1.4.1 Contributing to professional practice

My contribution to practice lies in calling attention to these self-organizing, fleeting and often unarticulated experiences of transformation in all their richness and multi-facetedness; and in exploring ways of inviting, sustaining and amplifying them, within everyday conversational life in organizations. I propose that a practice which focuses on such experiences can afford change practitioners deeper insight into the

nature of change; and generate more nuanced, subtle, and ultimately effective, ways of working with change processes.

In its broad and declarative sweep, this statement leaves me deeply dissatisfied. While I recognize its 'truth' (this is indeed where I feel my contribution lies), I am also aware of the 'falsity' that lies in the 'completeness' of its formulation. In effect, I feel that it is within the evocative and 'telling' detail that I put around my broad statements that my writing may have an impact, and through which an elusive shape may be formed for long enough to make a difference for my reader. Let me unpack how I understand the notion of contribution.

In a sense, this notion is a modernist one, implying an objective, measurable and fairly permanent 'thing' that practitioners will be able to 'take away' from my writing, and 'apply'. This is not different from the demand I am usually faced with in my organizational work: 'tell us how to work together in order to be more effective'. Much of my practice involves engaging seriously with this *need* for prescriptions (which offer the illusion of control in face of the intractable uncertainty of human experience), while simultaneously avoiding the reduction of meaning and significance that characterizes prescriptions. My resistance to prescribing comes from the understanding that linear, abstract and universal 'solutions', created a priori to action, are of very limited help if one is attempting to work effectively within the complexity of human interaction, which is concrete, specific and in continuous flux. And so, my practice – as my writing now – entails the ongoing attempts to redefine what might, nevertheless, be considered 'a contribution' to effective action.

In the organizational conversations I write about, I attempt to 'broaden the bandwidth' of our mutual engagement. In inviting and sustaining a particular quality of experience, I am continuously trying to create a modality that is more 'poetic', so to speak, than literal. I do this, because I have understood that conditions which enable the emergence of these experiences involve a 'loosening' of our tightly focused, goal-oriented ways of engaging. I find that as we relate to each other less literally, or instrumentally, meaning begins to move – new connections are created, new images appear, new sparks of recognition and appreciation glimmer. This activity itself – this *quality of experience* – becomes my contribution; rather than the

particular 'take-aways'/ recipes for action we think we have been looking for. While we often spend time formulating these 'recipes' at the end of such conversations, we do so with a certain irony – we all know this is not what has really been significant in our time together.

It is in a similar way that I would like to speak about the contribution of my research. Shotter suggests that there are two ways of reading a text: "We can read…for what is left behind for us after having read it, or, for what can happen to us during our reading of it" (2007:189). My writing is oriented towards the second, for I believe that it is only within the situated experience of *being changed in the reading*, that 'what is left behind' becomes meaningful. And so, if you, my reader, are moved in the reading of my stories; if you appreciate the qualities of experience I am evoking, and recognize my ways of working with them; if you 'hear' the resonances with what you yourself think of as change; if a certain energy is generated in the reading, and you find some of this echoing with your own practice, inviting you to amplify experiences that may have gone half-unattended before – this is what I will consider a contribution.

What then, is actually involved in a practice which takes such experiences of transformation seriously? It entails a fine-tuning of the quality of our awareness of ourselves and of the world we are embedded in, creating and created by. It demands a noticing of elusive, but definite, qualities of experience; 'moments of life' in which we actually experience ourselves as 'other' than whom we were just moments ago. I believe we have all encountered such experiences, but, because they are so fleeting, we do not give them much importance, or consider them vital. Speaking of 'qualities' has two implications. First of all, they cannot be separated into ingredients or structures, and so I cannot say, a priori, "this is exactly what they will look like". Yet, it is possible to recognize qualities, and I have tried above to characterize what might distinguish them and call them up for my readers –in both memory and imagination. Secondly, there are no prescriptions available for 'producing' or 'guaranteeing' these fleeting experiences of transformation. However, by evoking them again and again in my writing, I invite my reader to fine-tune his/her awareness: to notice, along with me, the conditions under which they might emerge;

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what is involved in inviting or coaxing them, staying with them and allowing them to flower; and what it takes to follow the different trails of their scents.

Much of this 'activity' is dependent on one's ability to attend to the finest nuances of energy that permeate conversations, its qualities of vitality and weariness. This involves a careful and vigilant listening – both to spoken and unspoken expression. It often demands the ability to enable uncomfortable silences and conflictual perspectives to live; and the intensely uncomfortable efforts to stay with one's own anxiety of not-knowing what will emerge in these attempts. In other words, because I – as practitioner – am the primary 'tool' of this kind of work, I am called upon to continuously 'work' on myself, enhancing my own abilities to become changed by the situation at hand, for this is the crucial condition for calling up and enabling change in others. And so, my call to other practitioners has become far more clear and coherent: this is what is involved in the practice of stimulating, leading and participating in organizational change. Although it cannot be reduced to a set of a priori prescriptions, it can be carefully studied and emulated. My narratives are all concerned with the evocative study of what it *is like* to work with such experiences of transformation.

1.4.2 Locating a contribution in organizational discourse

I am locating my thesis in the field of organizational change, for I am proposing that at the heart of change in organizations lies a particular quality of experience that actually constitutes transformation in the everyday interactions between organizational members, that is, in conversations. What I am suggesting 'transforms' in such experiences is the complex interweaving of meaning, sense of self or identity, and ways of interacting and speaking. What is therefore often referred to as 'organizational change' in macro terms – namely, a carefully planned, top-down, organizational-wide phenomenon – can be better understood as the amplification of specific, situated and emergent experiences of transformation. I suggest that speaking of organizational change in this way both resonates more closely with our everyday experience, and provides practitioners with more modest and practical ways of promoting and participating in organizational change. Let me attempt to briefly sort out the different ways of speaking about change, thus illuminating the 'sameness' and 'difference' of the particular approach I am advocating.

The stream of organizational thinking that is pertinent to my research includes those voices engaging with notions of change. Broadly speaking, mainstream management discourse posits change as large-scale, organizational-wide strategic interventions, in which plans to induce new work practices or products, redesign structures and change attitudes, are intended and designed by management, and consequently implemented in a more or less linear fashion. It is this type of thinking about change that forms the basis of organization development, the organizational practice of change management. The 'planned change' approach is attributed to Lewin (Cummings & Worley, 1993) whose formulation of a three step model of change ('unfreezing, moving, refreezing'), inspired innumerable organizational writers to generate a similar kind of linear modeling. These range from Blake and Mouton's 'six phases of grid training' (Luthans, 1989), through French and Bell's development of the action research model (1990) and Hersey et al.'s 'cycles' of 'participative' or 'directive' change, to Kotter's 'eight steps to transforming your organization' (1998) – to name but a few.

In the past two decades, however, the voices problematizing how change is to be managed have amplified, as scholars and practitioners alike have become increasingly concerned with the high failure rate of most planned change initiatives, admitting that "organizational change has proved a very elusive creature" (Burnes, 2005). Increasingly, these voices speak of the limitations of the rational, strategic choice model of human action (Stacey, 2003); notice the continuous, non-linear, self-organizing and emergent qualities of change; and call for more appropriate and effective ways of engaging with the messy and emergent processes of change. Many are turning towards the complexity sciences as a source domain for more resonant ways of speaking about and engaging with change (Lewin and Regine, 2000; Wheatley, 1992; Senge et al., 2005; Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997; MacIntosh and MacLean, 2001; Morgan, 1997; Burnes, 2005; Grobman, 2005; Griffin, 2002; Stacey, 2003; Shaw, 2002; Fonesca, 2002; Streatfield, 2001).

There seems, however, to be an inherent difficulty involved in forging consistent and coherent theories which speak of change in its radically unpredictable and uncontrollable aspects. In my reflexive engagement with different scholars whom I

feel are seeking more meaningful ways of speaking about organizational reality (Vaill, 1998; Wenger, 2004; Smith and Berg, 1987; Senge et al., 2005; Isaacs, 1999; Lowe, 2002), I find that they too often fall short of a radical perspective. And so, despite the declared intention of these, and many 'complexity writers', to engage with the complex, participative and processual aspects of human action, their writing is laced with a more systemic, engineering perspective; and permeated with notions of objectivity, control and individual agency (Griffin, Shaw and Stacey, 1998). What often ends up happening is that the operational implications tend to reduce the messy and multi-facetedness of organizational life into models of 'manageability' – albeit more sophisticated and nuanced ones. These may involve normative prescriptions for flatter organizational structures; simple order generating rules; 'embracing' a paradoxical perspective; and a democratization of power – all of which are seen as creating the conditions for the emergence of self-organizing patterns of meaningful order (Burnes, 2005; Grobman, 2005; Wheatley, 1992; Lewin and Regine, 2000).

What I find is largely overlooked in both these streams, however, is the situated and embodied experience of change: the ways we both experience the living moments in which we sense ourselves as actually shifting and becoming changed, and are able to recognize and appreciate the implications of what has 'happened to us' in terms of the different responses that now become available – to us and to those we are involved with in the organizational web of relations in which we all partake. These experiences are, by nature, self-organizing, fleeting and elusive, and therefore exact more radical ways of understanding 'change in organizations'.

Since the situated experiences of transformation that I am suggesting constitute the essence of organizational change emerge within interaction – that is, in conversations; my work also intersects with that of scholars whose interest lies in processes of conversing. Again, broadly speaking, these voices sound what Alvesson and Karreman call 'the linguistic turn in organizational research' (2000), and draw on post-modern and constructionist thinking in order to problematize the notion of language as simply representational of reality, seeking instead to understand the complex relations between the use of language and the construction of social reality. While the more traditional models of organizational change were also concerned with the links between the 'effective communication of change' and its successful

'implementation', thus generating prescriptive models for the former; those speaking within constructionist discourse see conversations as *constitutive* of change, rather than as antecedents or outcomes of change (Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2003; Barge and Little, 2002; Shotter, 2002; Shotter and Cunliffe, 2002; Ford, 1999; Durand and Calori, 2006; Hardy et al., 2005).

But here too, I notice similar difficulties with some writers. In that they posit organizations as 'networks' or 'patterns' of conversations, transforming conversations becomes synonymous with transforming organizations. But, as the questions of what 'it' is that actually transforms, and how this transformation is created, are addressed; once again I find notions of control and managerial agency creeping into the discourse. Ford, for example, focuses on changing the *content* – or topic – of conversation, using cybernetic terms to position the manager as identifying the kind of conversation that is dominant; deciding on the kind of conversation needed for more effective action; "generating, sustaining and completing" (1999:486) this new conversation; and "deleting" the old one. Thus, a 'complacency conversation' can be intentionally changed into a 'competition conversation', with the a priori and fixed purpose of generating more energetic action. Isaacs (1993), on the other hand, like Frahm and Brown (2003), calls for a transformation in the *process* of conversing, advocating a movement from monological to dialogical forms of conversation, under the understanding that this will create greater receptivity to change among organizational members. 'Process' here is understood in terms of prescriptions for *how* dialogue is to be conducted.

Focusing on content entails a static perspective, and loses the processual aspects of conversation. Focusing on a clearly intended process loses the paradoxical dynamics inherent in conversations: the self-organizing and emergent dynamics which both create and are created by those who participate in them. The approach I am offering suggests that what shifts actually lies in the 'inbetweeness' of content and process, between the "verbiage" and the "phenomenology of encounter" (Gurevitch, 1998:26), for "conversation always moves between proximity and distance, familiarity and strangeness, sameness and difference…forever breakable and breaking" (Ibid:25). This notion of 'inbetweeness' (Clegg et al., 2005) would approach what I am

attempting to describe as *qualities* – for as quality of experience transforms, so do the qualities of the conversations which spark and are sparked by such experience.

And so I find myself continually turning to those who I feel are moving away from a static, uninvolved perspective, which often tends to focus on the 'before' and 'after' of change; towards thinking in more dynamic and involved ways, with a focus on the actual movement of change. These writers speak into radically 'processual' perspectives, in which social reality is understood as "living, responsive, complex, indivisible (and) temporally unfolding" (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2002), and therefore inherently unfinished and 'unfinalizable'. Many of them speak into an ontological dialogism, in which reality is jointly constructed in conversational interaction (Shotter, 2002; Holquist, 2005; Jabri, 2004; Gurevitch, 2001; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002); and in which individual and social identity emerge together, continuously moving and changing through the same self-organizing and emergent processes of interacting (Elias, 2004; Dalal, 2000; Mead, 1967; Shotter, 2000; Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2003; Griffin, 2002). According to Stacey, in a process perspective there is no 'system' being created outside the interactions themselves, and therefore one cannot speak of any organizational member, no matter how powerful, as stepping outside these temporal processes, in order to better understand, plan and implement change. This would apply equally to a manager 'acting on' a system from without; people 'applying' a given model to their conversations (as suggested by Isaacs, 1993); or people purposefully changing the 'lens' or mental models through which experience is understood (Senge, 1990). "Managing change' thus becomes a process of participating in ordinary, everyday conversations, although, as my research shows, there are ways of participating that make it more likely that conversational themes and patterns of speaking will change.

In theoretical terms, then, I see my work as emerging from and building significantly on Complex Responsive Process Theory (Stacey, Griffin & Shaw, 2002). Like most complexity thinkers engaging in organizational discourse, Stacey and his colleagues are concerned with change and the emergence of novelty. Unlike many complexity thinkers, however, who apply complexity notions emerging from the natural sciences in somewhat unexamined ways to social reality, they are forging a theory of specifically human action, one that resonates more closely with lived experience.

Paradox becomes central to their thinking, and 'complex' phenomena (of which individuals and organizations are examples) are seen as inherently paradoxical, exhibiting simultaneous strains of stability and instability; predictability and unpredictability; repetition and transformation (Stacey, 2003). 'Responsive' becomes the human equivalent of 'adaptive', given that humans are not necessarily adaptive in the sense of strategic survival, but engage in evaluative choices and acts of meaning (Ibid.). 'Responsive' also evokes the essentially social nature of humans, whereby the individual and the social emerge as twin aspects of the same process: human relating; and where 'meaning' becomes a property of interaction, rather than an individual construct. 'Process' draws attention to the temporal (and consequently ever-moving) nature of human experience, in an attempt to offer an alternative to understanding groups and organizations as 'whole systems', reified and attributed causality and characteristics of their own.

1.4.3 A contribution to complex responsive process thinking

Complex Responsive Process Theory, then, speaks to our *experience* in and of organizational life. Organizational change is understood in terms of the link between the local and the global. Because organizations are "the ongoing, iterated processes of …interactions between people" (Stacey and Griffin, 2005:1), then what we think of as large scale change, or global patterns, emerge seamlessly from local interactions, so that changes in the patterning of local interactions produce further patterns of interaction, in iterative process similar to fractal patterning (Shaw, 2002).

Yet, here too, I think that what is insufficiently highlighted is the elusive *quality of experience* which I believe generates change. It is here that I see my contribution. I am attempting to refocus attention on quality, rather than scale; and speak of change as a particular quality of experience, in the living of which we become – subtly and perhaps momentarily – 'other' than who we were moments ago. In adopting a process perspective, we are, by definition, speaking of change and continuous movement, as the essential characteristic of human experience. This movement, however, is not a steady, constant and unbroken process of incremental change (Gersick, 1991). In other words, while we (in terms of identity and experience) are continuously in movement, we are not continuously changing in significant or meaningful ways. My research shows that that there are lived moments in

which change takes on a far more concentrated and intense quality, thus creating a sense of 'discontinuity' in the flow of experience. It is therefore not enough to posit, as Stacey does, that complex responsive processes exhibit simultaneous patterns of "continual reproduction and potential transformation" (Stacey, 2003:410). What is needed in addition to this is a detailed study of such 'potential' transformation in terms of the quality of experience which generates and is generated by the *actualization* of such transformation.

Let me clarify how I see this omission as it manifests in Stacey's writing. Although he too refocuses attention on *quality* – of managerial participation, conversational life, anxiety and diversity (Ibid:415-19), he uses this term in a different way. For him, 'quality' is synonymous to 'characteristic'. Thus, when he calls for 'focusing attention on the quality of participation', I believe that he is saying something along the lines of 'let us notice that the manager is a participant rather than an observer', so that "attention is then focused on the thematic patterning of interaction, such as the patterns of power relations, the patterns of inclusion and exclusion, the ideological themes sustaining them and the feelings of anxiety and shame aroused by shifts in patterns of identity" (Ibid:417).

While I agree completely with what he is saying, I find little in his writing that approaches what I am calling 'quality of experience', for he usually remains firmly at what I would term the 'outskirts' of experience. This creates a curious dissonance in his work, for although he emphasizes the importance and value of 'taking experience seriously', he rarely explores his own, or that of others, in what Shotter refers to as a "sufficient degree of detail required to show worked examples" (2007) that can actually awaken a sense of such quality in his readers. What do, for example, 'shifts of identity' actually feel like in their happening? Apart from signposting 'anxiety' and 'shame' as inherent to this process, we are left to our own imagination. He posits, for example, that "effective managers are those who notice the repetitive themes that block free-flowing conversation, and participate in such a way as to assist in shifting those themes" (Ibid:418), but, when attempting to relate this more closely to lived experience, he proposes a 'prescription' that I feel undermines the depth of what he is saying: "They may do this, for example, by repeatedly asking why people are saying what they are saying" (Ibid.). Despite his emphasis on participation – both in practice and in research - as local and situated "communicative interaction, in the living present, between human bodies" (2001:163); his writing seems to retain a strong 'observational' tone, intellectual and somewhat distant, as he eloquently discusses what he is thinking and

noticing; and usually omits the detail of what he is feeling and sensing. This seems to me a crucial omission if one is attempting to speak of quality in a way that remains close to experience.

Shaw (2002) comes much closer to engaging with what I understand as qualities of experience in her exploration of conversations. She is acutely aware of the qualitative nuances that signal and constitute transformation, speaking of them as the mess of human interaction generated in movement, voices, words, laughter, silence, bodily gestures, breathing rhythms, sounds and looks. Indeed, in contrast to other scholars I have mentioned, she manages to forge the most coherent account of "*conversing as organizing*" (2002:11), in which "no single individual or group has control over the forms that emerge, yet between us we are continuously shaping and being shaped by those forms from within the flow of our responsive relating" (Shaw, 2002:11). In her rich evocation of the hues of conversations, she takes quality notions such as 'free-flowing' and 'spontaneity' and actually explores how they manifest in living interaction. In attempting to evoke such qualities of conversation, she is often hard put to find words to evoke the fullness of experience in its happening: this is, I believe one of the 'signposts' of those attempting to speak of 'quality' and forge what Reason and Goodwin (1999) call a 'Science of Qualities'. Perhaps the most significant quality she notices as conversation transforms is the 'unknownness' that sometimes permeates our speaking, as " unrehearsed expression replaces familiar and polished phrases, …glimpses, half-formed ideas, intuitions that we clothe in words for the first time" (2002:13).

While I feel that Shaw and I are attempting to articulate similar notions, there is a difference of focus. Shaw is mostly concerned with qualities of conversation as they impact and are impacted by shifting of power relations and ways of narrative sensemaking. In describing, for example, a conversation shifting and transforming, she speaks about how issues are raised and renegotiated: "Was this a genuine move? What exactly did opportunistic mean? What were the ethics of opportunism?...(An) atmosphere of liveliness, interest and tension developed in which conflicts of interest, shifting alliances and power relations reorganized themselves live" (2005:15). My own interest lies in the *quality of experience* that both creates and is created within such shifts. In this specific situation, for example, I would ask: how is it that questions

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that are usually 'invisible' because the answers to them are taken-for-granted, suddenly become alive and vibrant? What is the felt, lived quality of the experience of 'answers-becoming-questions' in the joint activity of conversation? I see the "shifting alliances and power relations" as both cause and effect of this movement, generated as participants allow themselves to question. My focus lies in this very *experience of movement* itself: the minute shifts in which we become other than what we were; shifts which both compel and enable a fundamental questioning of 'what we are attempting to do together'. This 'moving experience' lies at the heart of organizational change, 'moving' both in the sense of 'changing' and in the sense of 'touching' – for we are inevitably 'touched' by the quality of experience which alters meaning, perspective, and sense of self-in-relation-to-other.

1.4.4 The contribution of the DMan program to my practice

Finally, I would like to speak about the way both the theory of Complex Responsive Processes, and the experience of the DMan program, have contributed to my own practice – for the notion of contribution is itself a complex responsive process, in that 'contributing' and 'being contributed to' are aspects of the same movement.

When I first encountered complex responsive process thinking, I felt exhilarated. I sensed that I was encountering, for the first time, a way of speaking that was resounding very closely with my experience. In allowing – indeed, demanding – that paradox and process be noticed and engaged with, rather than 'resolved' and eliminated, I felt that here, finally, was a theory that enabled a more complex approach to the multi-facetedness of organizational reality. I recognized an attempt to articulate what had often been for me merely inklings of unformed thoughts, glimmers of understanding that would never stay still long enough to formulate. Also exciting for me was that theory and practice were not being spoken of as two separate spheres of human activity, for this division that had always felt forced to me. In a processual perspective that posits "human interactions (as producing) nothing but further patterns of human interaction" (Stacey and Griffin, 2005:1), organizations cannot be understood from outside of these interactions, but rather must be explored "in terms of one's own personal experience of participating with others in the co-creation of the patterns of interaction that are the organization" (Ibid., p.2). The

methodological imperative that emerges from this perspective is therefore the study of lived experience in practice. I seized this opportunity to combine my passion for exploring lived experience, with my equally strong attraction to academic activity. In the first interview for the program, I knew I had found 'my place'.

How has my own practice been changed by this study? In a strange way, I feel that it has both remained the same, as well as changed completely. I have always been interested in the minute and detailed nuances of the movement of attention and energy – perhaps as a result of years of meditation practice (see project 1). It is perhaps here that my deep appreciation of 'ordinary' experiences of transformation has emerged. Over the years, my professional practice has become more focused on noticing and working with the particular qualities of experience which I have come to understand as constituting felt, lived change. What has changed profoundly, however, as a result of my participation in the DMan program, is my willingness and ability to voice and articulate what it is I am doing.

I had always been loathe to do so, perhaps under the assumption that language cannot 'capture' the delicate qualities of shifting experience, which would only dissolve under the clumsy attempts to be 'straight-jacketed' into words. Perhaps I feared being dismissed in professional and academic environments obsessed with 'literal', measurable and instrumental ways of speaking. In assuming the challenge of 'taking my experience seriously' advocated by the DMan program, I have had to speak of, and argue for, what constitutes the heart of my practice: inviting and sustaining such 'transforming experiences'. I have been 'forced' to find ways of speaking about qualities of experience that I had been working with intuitively and silently – almost secretively. In attempting to articulate and theorize my experience, I have been challenged continuously. And, miraculously, rather than collapsing under such rigorous testing, my experience and my reflective and reflexive understanding of it, has become more robust. Conversation has generated a 'knowing' that can be shared, robustly discussed and engaged with, if not clearly defined.

Metaphorically, this feels like the kind of change that takes place when processes that have been going on in the dark, are suddenly suffused with light. They are not only 'seen' more clearly, but they themselves change, for their conditions are now different.

The transformative clarity of consciousness, and the strange way words both reduce and deepen experience, are simultaneously at work here. And so, I have come to be more courageous in my approach, more confident about what I am trying to do, and more articulate about my 'method'. I am able, still perhaps more evocatively than systematically, to argue for it. I am able to speak out more coherently, both with colleagues and clients, about what is involved in the kind of practice I am advocating. However, because transformative qualities of experience are emergent, 'success' and 'results' – the basic vocabulary of organizations – are never guaranteed. Thus while the challenge remains, I have become far more courageous in my willingness to take it on.

Let me give an example of how all this plays itself out in my work. A few days ago, I met with the CEO of a large, Israeli global company. He has been searching for someone to help 'strengthen' the top management team, which works "well, but not together". This meeting has taken months to materialize, after a process of working closely with the OD manager and the VP of Human Resources on a proposal, and after having had my 'credentials' and references closely examined. I walk into the room, and am immediately aware of all the power signals: the huge, mahogany desk; the carefully engineered 'informal conversation' corner; the numerous certificates of excellence that adorn the walls. Eric himself, a handsome man in his fifties, has an impressive presence: a firm handshake, a confident demeanor, penetrating eyes and a charming smile. We sit, and he immediately demands to hear what I can do for his management team. Not so long ago, all this would have paralyzed me. Now, I take a deep breathe (it is all still a little intimidating!). We begin to speak.

His is the language of strategic choice; he knows where he wants to go, and he knows how to get there – the success of the company is proof. I am not well-versed in this kind of language, and so the conversation unfolds as a kind of dance; I am attempting to suit my steps to his rhythm, and he too, is faltering a little, intrigued by the rhythm I bring – so different from his own. We speak well, and our conversation meanders into different realms: history, organizational stories, areas of discomfort and personal longings all weave together. But through this all, he keeps coming back to a powerful concern of his. He is looking for someone who speaks his language – the language of strategy, goals, structures, plans and results. It is clear that, while I can join him in this

way of speaking, I do not initiate it, and it is not my 'home'. This worries him. How can I facilitate a management conversation with people who are all used to this kind of language, and value it?

Before my encounter with complex responsive process thinking, I would have found myself either retreating ("no, I guess I am not the one you are looking for"), or else defensive, proving my ability to 'speak strategically'. Now, I find myself speaking of my understanding of this team-building process in terms of the emergence of a partnership between us all, and the value of engaging in and exploring different ways of interacting and speaking. I suggest that this may actually be the kind of changes he is looking for in his management team. He is very attentive. I sense that something is resonating for him. There is a silence, and I know that he is experiencing a conflict: what has emerged as a possibility here between us is definitely not what he has been expecting. I think he is waiting for me to convince him. I remain quiet. The silence is quite uncomfortable for both of us, yet I feel that speaking into it will only serve to eliminate the tension that has formed as his clear sense of 'what will work' becomes a little looser, as his certainty fragments a little. "I don't know", he finally says, "this is not what I was looking for, but…"

Our time is up. We have been speaking for two hours – half an hour longer than we had planned. I get up to leave. We have both enjoyed the conversation, and say so. It has been meaningful for me – it really has been a living example of how my work has changed; and I believe it has for him too, for it has raised some important questions about what change means, and how it can be generated. We agree that he will get back to me in two weeks. My sense, as I walk away, is that he will not take me for this work. And yet, I am not left with the disappointment that usually accompanied this dawning understanding, for I feel like 'what I do' has expressed itself in this meeting: we have both come away a little changed. Will this be seen and trusted in a way that will invite Eric to risk working with me? I don't know. It takes him two months to come back to me. "I'm not sure how or if this will work", he says, "but let's try…"

Stacey emphasizes that one cannot speak of prescriptions or applications when one takes up the theoretical shift suggested by complex responsive process thinking.

Instead, what is at stake is the 'refocusing' of attention, and, "when people focus their attention differently, they are highly likely to take different kinds of action" (2003:415). My own practice has, indeed, become 'refocused': my attention is constantly drawn towards the emergent possibilities for the generation of such qualities of transformative experience. Increasingly, I find myself able to invite a similar refocusing with those I work with. Increasingly, people I work with agree to engage in such conversations. As they do, a new vocabulary becomes created, and the field of practice shifts. So too, my intention is to generate this kind of confidence in others who are seeking to nudge the boundaries of what can be noticed, spoken about, and seriously engaged with, as we attempt to change, and be changed by, our organizational practice.

1.5   A GLANCE AT METHODOLOGY

While I am aware that it is customary to account for methodology towards the beginning of a thesis, I would ask to do so later on. The reason for this is that a detailed exploration of the methodology I am using constitutes a significant part of my third project, in which the ways I deal with the difficulties involved in articulating what I am doing highlight significant aspects of my practice. However, let me mention some of the key characteristics here.

What is compelling for me about the methodology evoked by Complex Responsive Process Theory as 'taking experience seriously' is the iterative resonances it creates between the activities of research and practice, positing both as "emerging participative exploration" (Christensen, 2005). In so far as research and practice are concerned with the attempt to study experience-in-movement, they are both emergent phenomena. Just as I do not bring a fixed set of 'tools' to 'implement' in my organizational practice, but rather try to notice and make sense of qualities of experience and patterns of interaction that emerge in the conversations I participate in; so what I am doing in my research is recounting these conversations, and noticing the patterns of my interest and activity as they emerge. A similar question drives them both: how can I write coherently about thoughts that do not yet cohere for me; and how can I act coherently into a reality that is not yet coherent – and that actually becomes coherent only in the action itself (Griffin, 2002)? And both call for action,

each moment anew, into unknown – yet not unrecognizable or unintended – territory. Thus, in conducting my research, I am continuously understanding my practice in new and unexpected ways.

In that what I am researching is 'qualities of experience', I must do so participatively. What is spoken of as 'primary qualities' of phenomena, such as mass, position, velocity etc. (Reason and Goodwin, 1999), are those which constitute quantifiable, measurable data in the natural sciences; and can be accessed by observation. In social reality, what we are concerned with is closer to what have come to be known as 'secondary qualities', such as color, texture, aesthetic experience – and these can only be accessed through participation, or experience. They emerge in relationship, between us and the 'objects' we interact with, which, again in social reality, are other human beings. My work takes a more complex and recursive turn, for I am not only studying the experience of the qualities of such interaction, I am also looking at the qualities of these experiences. This becomes terribly complicated to speak of if I attempt to differentiate between all the aspects of this activity. In recent philosophy, as Shoemaker points out, "the term 'qualia' is sometimes used for what (he calls) 'subjective properties' …properties of sense-experience that somehow correspond to secondary qualities" (1990:110). It is the study of "what it is like" (Ibid:111) to have certain experiences that is the focus of my research. As such, my methodology involves the reflective exploration of my own experience, and my intuitive sense of the experience of others I am engaged with. The study of qualities of experience necessitates the break with the positivistic tradition which insists on separating 'facts' and 'values' (Reason and Goodwin, 1999), for I am suggesting that certain qualities of experience have greater value – if we are concerned with impacting human action, as I am. So, one way of speaking about what I am doing is that I am seeking for ways to contribute to what Reason and Goodwin speak of as 'a science of qualities', based in participation and intuition.

In that I am speaking of the emergence of experiences of transformation, my methodology consists of the narration of stories in which I sense and see this happening. The connection between the construction of meaning and the act of narrating has been explored by various writers (Bruner, 1990; Rhodes and Brown, 2005; Czarniawska, 2004; Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001). I choose to tell stories about organizational events I participate in, and to study the stories told by organizational members I engage with. This choice is guided by my sense of narrative as enabling richer and more complex ways of engaging with an organizational

reality that I see as narratively constructed (Weick, 1995). Within this perspective, change can be seen as the shifting and transforming of people's subjective and inter-subjective accounts of whom they are and what is happening in a given situation. Thus, rather than speaking into the 'grand narrative' of organizational change, as strategically planned and implemented, I am calling for the noticing of change as it happens in lived experience, by definition local and temporally situated. My thesis is therefore *my narrative* of how change is sparked, and sometimes amplified, in organizations.

But, if this is simply my narrative, why should it be of interest to others? Or, as Rhodes and Brown ask, what is needed in order for 'stories' – rich nuanced and detailed accounts of the particular – to become 'science', usually thought of a timeless and universal 'non-narrative narrative'. These questions address issues of validity and reliability that arise in narrative methodology, in particular that which intersects with autoethnography in its use of "self as the only data source" (Holt, 2003). Because I am 'taking experience seriously', and "no one single method can grasp the subtle variations of human experience" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), I am engaging in a variety of methods: observation of and participation in 'events', reading, writing, introspection, reflexivity, and constant conversation. Denzin and Lincoln see this in itself as a kind of 'triangulation' which serves as an alternative to traditional validation criteria. Of all these methods, the most significant is the last. I have been engaged, over a period of three years in an ongoing series of reflective and reflexive 'conversations', with myself, with writers in different fields, and with colleagues and supervisors in my research and practice community. In the latter, I am continuously challenged, and called to account for and justify practical, philosophical, moral and ethical issues revolving around the following questions:

- On what grounds am I arguing what I am arguing for?
- What are the constraints and the ideology that drive my interpretations?
- What are the implications for practice – the possibilities and dangers – of noticing what I notice; thinking what I think; and doing what I do?

And so, my writing is subject to a type of 'social accountability' (MacLean et al., 2002), which involves the "intersubjective testing…to find consensus amongst a group of practitioners…(in order) to evaluate the insights gained from use of qualities of experience" (Reason and Goodwin, 1999:291) for the understanding of the complexities of organizational life. As Reason and Goodwin point out, this process is no different from that which underlies

more traditional, quantitative research: for, "Where there is no (intersubjective) consensus there is no 'objective' scientific truth" (Ibid:91). Each of my projects thus undergoes numerous iterations, until there is a consensus around criteria for the quality of my research that will stay still long enough to enable the move into the next project.

Such criteria form an ongoing debate in research communities, generated by what Denzin and Lincoln have called the 'crisis of representation and legitimation'. The "proliferation of concepts" that has emerged from this search "reflects the difficulties that qualitative methodologists, committed to creating some overarching system for specifying quality, have had in making their ideas stick" (Seale, 2003:171). Seale explains this difficulty as inherent in the attempt to 'regulate' and 'constrain' "an endeavor whose guiding philosophy often stresses creativity, exploration, conceptual flexibility, and a freedom of spirit" (Ibid.). Among all the possibilities, I justify my interpretive accounts in terms of notions like 'verisimilitude', 'compelling', 'recognizable', 'convincing' (Lincoln and Denzin, 2000). I speak of the 'resonance' of my work for other practitioners; the credibility of my stories as well as their aesthetic value. Perhaps most important for me is whether my writing will have an impact – emotional and intellectual – on my readers, inspiring them to question and explore their own experience and practice in new ways. While interpretive methodologies are often 'accused' of being "only exploratory" (Ibid., p.7), I would make a case for 'exploration' as being the most valuable contribution social science research can make to the human endeavour – generating the ongoing probing for meaning that emerges as we construct and are constructed by our interactional realities. Within this continuous search for new and renewed meaning lies the possibility for change.

The issue of impact intersects with that of generalizability, which is particularly problematic in a methodology that engages with the subjective qualities of experience. The research question I am addressing: 'how do people and organizations change?' is certainly relevant to many theoreticians and practitioners in the organizational field, and thus generalizable. But can this study of the 'single experience', unique, and firmly situated in time and context – *my* experience – be of use to others?

In Complex Responsive Process thinking, the individual is seen as social 'through and through' (Dalal, 2000), and the individual and the social are posited as two aspects of the same process: human relating (Stacey, 2003). If we take this notion seriously, then

the uncompromising exploration of my own experience becomes, of necessity, an exploration of others' experience as well. Generalizibility is thus less a matter of the actual *content* of the specific, situated conclusions generated, but rather a process by which experience may be explored (MacLean et al., 2002). Like many action researchers, I aim to impact action. But while action research tends to produce knowledge that can then be 'implemented on' the system, I would both question the linearity with which this is assumed to happen, as well as the meaning of 'action'. I would propose that 'noticing' or 'paying attention' are no less 'action' than is observable behaviour, even though they cannot be easily measured. My research consists of the attempt to reorient our attention to particular qualities which constitute what I am calling the experience of transformation. Thus, its purpose is not to solve a particular problem, but to address the complexities of what is involved in generating and sustaining change in organizations. What emerges is an approach that I believe is generalizable across contexts. This approach entails the interweaving of a myriad of subtle activities a 'change practitioner' can notice, enhance and become more versed in. Just as the people I engage with in my organizational practice do not come away from conversations knowing exactly what to do, but *being differently oriented*; so too I would like to speak of the impact and generalizability of my thesis.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of voice. Because I am writing about qualities of experience, I find myself continually groping to find words to evoke their elusive nature. There is an unrelenting concern in all my projects with the question of how to write in a way that remains faithful to the essential quality of experience: ceaseless movement. I keep struggling with the complex relationship between language and reality, continuously noticing both the formative and representational aspects of language. I am acutely aware of the ways language both enables and constrains my search for ways to explore the unfinalizable qualities of experience.

The experience of writing is indeed one of continuous frustration, for:

"Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,

Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,

Will not stay still" (T. S. Eliot.)

Each time I reread what I have written, there is a sense of not really having expressed what I wanted to, the shock of how imprecise I have been. This frustration is compounded by the sense that, in effect, words *only* 'stay still', for what I have wanted to express is continuously changing even as I revisit it, and the words do not move together with the experience.

From the start, I have been called upon to justify what my colleagues and supervisors have noticed as the particular 'voice' that emerges in my writing, describing it as 'poetic', 'suffused with adjectives and metaphor', 'repetitive', more 'oral' than 'literary', and often more 'evocative' than 'academic'. I find myself caught between the desire to conform to what I think would be a more 'academic' voice, which would be more distanced and precise; and the desire to sound 'my own voice', which I experience as more personal, hesitant and adamant in its resistance to closure, to collapsing words to maximum precision. Because of my intense awareness that "what needs to be put into words is indefinite, open, incomplete, still unfolding, still developing" (Shotter, 2007:79), the 'decision' that emerges – shifting in its strength and steadfastness, as can be seen in different parts of my thesis – is to remain as close as possible to this type of evocative writing, despite the anxiety it provokes around issues of 'inclusion' in the academic discourse. In a paradoxical way, as I do my best to reach precision, it is often in their very imprecision that words come closer to actually conveying and conversing with the messiness of experienced reality. I concur with Levine (1985), who argues that it is only through the use of ambiguity that we can actually find a more inclusive and resonant (ironically, a more 'accurate') way of speaking of our experience of reality: "complex, full of overtones and cross-currents which razor-sharp unequivocal statements do not capture" (1985:30). In that my research is narrative, surely the concealment of my own voice would not be authentic. In that it is emergent and participative, surely voicing my understanding in a distanced and authoritatively 'final' way would undermine my endeavor, one which partakes in what Najmanovich (2007) speaks of as "a new adventure of knowledge: the navigation of the seas of complexity and the exploration of their strange and changing territories. This journey is a dynamic one,

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one that always implies fluid territories, uncertainty and creativity. The price we have to pay for this trip is to forgo the illusion of an absolute and guaranteed knowledge." (p.97-8). How then, can one speak in a voice that is certain?

2. THE MOVEMENT OF MY THOUGHT

(Project 1, February 2005)

2.1 INTRODUCTION: AN EXPERIENCE OF TRANSFORMATION

I choose to pick up the ever-evolving thread of my thought in a moment that occurred many years ago. Perhaps this is my first recollection of what I have come to call 'an experience of transformation'. I was a lonely child, constantly moved around the globe, never and completely at home anywhere. My inner world was my anchor, nourished and created through reading. At the age of about 12, I found myself reading John Fowles' *The Magus* , a bizarre work of literature, of which one passage remains with me till today. It is a quote by T.S. Eliot:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we first started
> And know the place for the first time
>> (Eliot, "Little Gidding", 1963: 222)

I distinctly remember a kind of silence suddenly enveloping me as I read these words. A sense of excitement permeated the moment, rising from the stomach, generating a giddy sensation of the boundaries of my world suddenly transforming, expanding to infinity. I felt, without knowing why, that I had encountered 'Truth'.

As I reflect on that moment now, I am aware of the richness of the experience as memory savors it, a richness that cannot be understood by a mere deconstruction of the words. It is rather a result of the lived experience, composed of my physical, emotional and spiritual state at that moment, my own history as it had evolved to that moment, and the words T.S. Eliot had chosen to describe his own experience and understanding – all these coming together in an inexplicable way to create a moment of profound meaning.

Having brought this experience as that which launches this exploration of the movement of my thought, I would like to 'unpack' the text itself, for it contains a fusion of the elements which I sense as moving my thought in terms of both energy and direction. First

and foremost, is the idea of journey. I experience my life as a journey, not merely a movement through space and time, but rather an 'exploration', embodying an attitude of search and discovery; of observing, probing, and questioning the processes within me, around me, and the interaction between the two. It is an engagement with mystery and the unknown. This journey is not time-bound: the exploration is "unceasing". It is not driven by answers, but rather by questions that are both self-referential and self-generating. The movement is not a linear one, in which one path leads onto another, but a circular one, in which one continually returns to the point of departure, 'knowing' it afresh, "for the first time". This recursive dynamic, embodying simultaneous movements of progression and circularity, has always resonated with the feel of 'truth' for me: the familiar ("where we started") is forever permeated by the unfamiliar ("for the first time").

The movement of my thought has been a resonance of these themes as they meet, blend with, separate from and illuminate my experience of life. As experience moves through time, I have encountered different voices that have both seemed to originate from my very soul and speak my experience through someone else's words, and have profoundly impacted and helped create my own voice. I use the word 'voice' here as the embodied expression of my experience as it is made sense of by thought and 'risked' in contact with others, changing and being changed by this very contact. I would like to tell the story of three such encounters.

2.2   THREE TRANSFORMING ENCOUNTERS

2.2.1   Participation in the 'Gurdjieff Work'

By far the most significant in its impact on the way I make meaning of my being-in-the-world is the voice of G. I. Gurdjieff, a Georgian-born philosopher/ teacher, who made his way from Russia to France towards the end of the First World War, where he founded the "Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man". His teachings wove together strains of esoteric Christianity and Sufism, as well as other, less well-known, traditions. My involvement with these teachings started almost 30 years ago, and has evolved through my participation in groups led by students of his. The work in these groups invites an ongoing exploration of life, as embodied in internal processes of consciousness and their

interaction with external manifestations of self and others. It takes place in different places around the world, where groups meet together to study, through conversation, meditative exercises, dance movements, music and the study of texts.

So far, so good: I have described, somewhat factually, the 'activities' that give shape to the experience that has so profoundly influenced the movement of my thought. How can I now go about making sense of this experience in a way that will both remain faithful to its depth and 'multi-facetedness', and make sense to a reader? The task seems almost daunting, as I become aware of the power and powerlessness of words to form and express living experience.

In 1976, I came across *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* by P.D. Ouspensky (1949) which was, at that time, the most accessible route to the ideas of Gurdjieff. The only way I can relate that experience to the movement of my thought is to say, quite unequivocally, that the way I had 'thought about' the world and myself in it, seemed to disintegrate, resonate and crystallize with that reading. Let me give a specific example, one that touched me deeply. Quite early on in the book, Gurdjieff relates to the idea of agency: man's ability to decide, and move the decision to action. I remember distinctly the description of the way someone 'makes' a decision, which, at the moment of the 'making', is infused with a sense of utmost significance and importance, and involves the utter conviction that it will be implemented in exactly the way it was planned. And, come time for action, nothing happens. Or, perhaps a very watered-down version of the original decision takes place. Or, worse still, one finds oneself involved in an action that is almost the opposite of the original decision. How can this be?!

The coming together of the text with my practical experience of myself 'shook the ground under my (conceptual) feet'. What I had always thought about as a unified 'Self', suddenly became a multiplicity, a collection, as it were, of "I's", each of which could be lord of the moment, with very little or even no interaction between them. The absence of a unified, stable and continuous Self resonated with my lived experience. As did the understanding that, at the very same time as he is unable to will and to act in an autonomous way, man is obliged to both, and is responsible for the outcomes of his action. I found myself reading small sections of the book at a time, with a growing sense of dread and excitement, as my whole life seemed to be called into question. What is the

meaning of agency? What is the essence of intention? What is the connection between intention and action? What, for that matter, is the nature of this phenomenon called 'man' which up to now had seemed relatively clear? I was beginning to understand it as essentially paradoxical: a 'double' nature that was at once material, and subject to all the laws of material existence; and, at the same time, it was also 'non-material', or at least participated in a different kind of 'materiality', which we could call spiritual, and which was subject to different 'laws'. It was a nature which could expand endlessly, reaching out in longing to a reality beyond the five senses, and, at the same time, be reduced to fretting for hours about a leaky tap, the color of sofa, a misunderstood intention…It embodied an ability and an inability to do at the same time, a 'remembering' that was inextricably interwoven with a 'forgetting', a deep longing to touch the reality of itself together with a deep fear of touching that very reality…What suddenly permeated my world was a sense of wonder, of the immensity of things, of the endless realms to be explored, understood, and left mysterious.

In his writings, Gurdjieff expounds a perspective of all creation as arising from one source, and evolving into different levels of existence or 'worlds', which are characterized by differing qualities of what he terms "materiality" (Ouspensky, 1949). While clearly thinking in systemic terms, he invites a view of the basic unity of all phenomena by destroying the duality between 'matter' and 'movement' or energy:

> Matter or substance necessarily presupposes the existence of force or energy. This does not mean that a dualistic conception of the world is necessary. The concepts of matter and force are also one. But in this connection matter and force are not taken as real principles of the world in itself, but as properties or characteristics of the phenomenal world observed by us… The 'constant' is taken as material, as matter, and 'changes' in the state of the 'constant'…are called manifestations of force or energy. All these changes can be regarded as the result of vibrations or undulatory motions which begin in the center…and go in all directions, crossing one another, colliding, and merging together…From this point of view, then, the world consists of…matter in a state of vibrations, or vibrating matter…   (1949: 86-88)

Man and the universe are not two systems, rather man is, "in the full sense of the word, a 'miniature universe': "in him are all the matters of which the universe consists; the same forces, the same laws that govern the life of the universe, operate" (Ibid: 88). These 'laws', which he spoke of in the early 20's, such as the "discontinuity of vibrations" (Ibid: 123) and the "deviation of forces" (Ibid: 129), recall the discoveries of quantum mechanics regarding the place of the observer and the inextricability of matter and energy; as well as with the concept of non-linearity taken up in the complexity sciences. The 'Gurdjieff Work' is an invitation to study these 'laws' in a direct, experiential way through the study of the movement of consciousness. Because consciousness exists directly only in the present – in the lived moment – this 'Work' is carried out, for the most part, in the oral tradition.

As the years have passed, my participation in the 'Gurdjieff Work' has evolved. At times I have been more actively involved, participating as well as leading. At times I have found myself intensely engaged in the politics of shifting power relations. The very idea of a 'spiritual practice' is a paradox. At times I have retreated from active participation, unable to 'hold' and move within the simultaneous manifestations of human frailty and human potential. These shifts in my own participation have created an intense awareness that it is only through a full engagement in this 'paradoxicality' – understanding living side by side with puzzlement; hope with disappointment; anger with gratitude – that experience can be lived in the richest, fullest way. The 'Gurdjieff Work' has introduced me to many of the ideas that have come to function as 'lampposts' in the path of my experience, illuminating the way, calling attention to different phenomena, providing islands of light in the dark and unknown territory of search.

2.2.2 Teaching and learning

The second 'voice' that has influenced the movement of my thought is not an individual voice; it is rather an encounter between many voices, an ongoing conversation between me and my students over a ten-year period in which I was a high school teacher. In reflecting on those years, I see their significance in the ways they evoked questions regarding the meaning of 'teaching' and 'learning'. What began as a clear 'sender/receiver' model of communication (Stacey, 2001), in which I 'had' a certain

knowledge that I needed to 'transfer' to the students; was transformed into an understanding of the ways knowledge and meaning are actually created within conversation, as my students and I explored and made sense of works of literature together in the moment. What I understood then, I can perhaps 'name' today: that learning is indeed a "complex responsive process", one which is "an activity of interdependent people and (which) can only be understood in terms of self organizing communicative interaction and power relating in which identities are potentially transformed" (Stacey, 2003). How did I come to understand this?

I began teaching when I was 21, inexperienced and deathly frightened of what I saw as my 'task': to maintain discipline and control over a bunch of rowdy teenagers in order to teach them English literature – which really didn't interest them at all. From the first, the ruling paradigm seemed to be one of 'war': when the lesson moved through its preplanned design in a relatively smooth flow, I had 'won'; when it was disrupted by all sort of 'disturbances' (students being rowdy, the discussion being 'highjacked'), they had 'won'. Very quickly it became clear that I could not maintain discipline in the classroom through rules and the direct use of power. I was not a 'believable' authority figure, and I was uncomfortable with the creation of fear, the dominant tool of discipline in this school.

As I searched for an alternative, I began to notice that there were different 'qualities' in different lessons, sometimes, in fact, within the very same lesson. What defined these differences was the quality of our engagement: at certain times it seemed as though we were all participating with attention, exploring our experience of a text together. I became aware of the fact that when my own attention was not imprisoned by my fear of losing control of the class, but was free to engage with whatever was happening in the moment; the attention of my students seemed to move together with mine, rather than what I experienced as 'against' mine. Paradoxically, the more I was ready to 'lose control', the more 'control' there seemed to be. I began to understand that it was this very engagement that lay at the heart of what we call discipline, and my thought shifted completely. What had been an experience of failure – the inability to implement and enforce rules – suddenly became an exciting field for a new kind of exploration. As I look back on it today, I am aware that both experiences involved anxiety. The first involved the anxiety of not living up to expectations – the students', my own, the system's – and the

humiliation of being discounted as I stood before 35 students who wished I were not there. The new field of exploration brought with it a different kind of anxiety: the acute fear of moving into unknown territory, of risking what I 'know', and my sense of control and competence, for the chance of something novel emerging.

In the classroom, this discovery was the beginning of a new dynamic, a new relationship between me and (most of) my students. The better lessons became a joint search for meaning, with the text serving as an attractor for emergent conversations around the meaning of the writer's experience as it resonated with our own. These became an exploration of the essence and nuance of experience evoked by a text; and the thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations and insights this experience called forth in us. My challenge became a constant attempt to invite the conversation to a deeper level, where it seemed to generate an energy that was qualitatively different from that we usually experienced.

How did I do this? I cannot say with any certainty. What I can say is that it involved an inner gesture of letting go – even of the intense desire to achieve depth of conversation! – and becoming more attuned to the movement of thoughts, emotions, associations, interactions (silent or otherwise), attention, physical sensations and a myriad tiny details I cannot even specify. At times like these, the power relations between us seemed to be transformed completely. While I clearly always had a status different to everyone else's in the classroom, the power relations were not in the forefront of the interaction, not being constantly challenged/asserted. Instead, power seemed to move around, manifesting itself in our ability to stay with the moment, to keep the conversation meaningful.

And, inevitably, there were those times in which, try as I might, nothing of this sort was created. I will forever remember the angry, frustrated outburst of a dearly loved student of mine: "What is it you *want* from us? We walk around here all day, doing our best to survive in this jungle of demands, rules and expectations, and then – you come along, with completely different demands. You want us to experience things differently in your class, to think differently, to speak differently, to be different! It's not fair, and it won't work!!" He was, of course, right. The experience sometimes embodied in our conversations was not present in most of the other conversations students were having in

school. Eventually, the pattern that seemed to take hold was the dissonance of this experience, rather than the hope it offered. I could no longer bear it. I moved to an 'experimental' school where I hoped the conversations could sustain a different quality. Three years later, I left teaching altogether.

What is it that remains alive in the fabric of my thought, and that I can locate as coming into being simultaneously with my teaching years? Perhaps most salient is my direct understanding of what I can name today as the dynamics of non-linearity and the concept of emergence (Goldstein, 1999). My teaching experience showed me that I could never truly understand the causality of, and therefore plan for, human processes such as learning. I could, as a participant in the conversation, recognize moments of the creation of new meaning, of what I considered 'learning'. I could identify some of the different elements present: focused attention, both psychic and physical; a sense of 'togetherness' in the activity of exploring a text-in-experience; a listening to spoken and unspoken meaning; an engaged participation in something that was unfolding as we participated in it, without really knowing where it was leading. I could appreciate and orientate myself to these – but I could not recreate them at will! They seemed more like a dance of virtual threads, weaving themselves together into something that, at a certain moment, could be recognized as a coherent pattern. It was obvious to me that I could contribute to both the creation and the destruction of this dance, but that it was never completely, unequivocally clear which action would lead to what.

2.2.3 A supervisory conversation

The third encounter I would like to speak of consists of a conversation I have been engaged in with Isaac, who has been my supervisor, on and off, for over 12 years. Isaac is a social psychologist, one of the founders of the field of organizational consulting in Israel, and one of the leading voices in its academic community, sounding a psychoanalytic approach to organizations. Isaac's presence in my life has been both extremely constraining and extremely enabling. Having to find and differentiate my own voice from within a conversation with a man whose voice is one of the most profound, incisive and intelligent I know, has been no easy task, and is still in progress. Being aided and supported in this search by the same voice, has been a gift that I am deeply grateful for.

When I was in the throes of career change, in my early thirties, a close friend of mine who was an organizational consultant, suggested that I join her supervision group, run by Isaac. I had met him before, and had found his presence quite daunting. A well-known figure, he was either profoundly appreciated, or experienced as incomprehensible and unapproachable. The intense insecurity I was feeling around my own competence in my new profession made me balk at the idea of exposing myself, especially before Isaac. I struggled between desire and fear for a year, and joined the group. It then took me another whole year to dare to bring my experience into the conversation, partly due to my complete awe at Isaac's understanding and insight, which I experienced as a direct threat to my own; and partly because I felt like an outsider in a practice everyone else seemed to be so at home in.

The trigger that eventually forced me to speak was the intense confusion I was experiencing in a leadership development training project I was involved in with a local fire department. While I do not remember the details of the story, I distinctly remember the feeling that all of us were partners in an organizational ritual that had absolutely no meaning for anyone. The firemen were finding the conversation irrelevant to their experience and were brutally expressive of this. I too felt that nothing meaningful was happening, no matter what I tried. My experience of both meaninglessness and helplessness was acute: not only was my self-worth called into question, but also the enormous effort I had invested over the previous few years in career change!

Through a couple of conversations with Isaac and the rest of the group, my experience was transformed. While I never managed to feel fully useful and impactful with the firemen, this experience became extremely valuable in terms of my emerging understanding: of my own ability and inability; of the firemen in the context of their organizational lives; and of the complex interaction between us. It was with Isaac's help that I first learned to explicitly use the resonance of my own experience – physical, emotional and intellectual – in order to understand the experience of people living in organizations. As I reflected on the subtleties of what I was experiencing, I learned more and more about the firemen, and as my understanding became more complex, my discomfort became permeated with compassion.

What had seemed to me a simple power struggle (between me and the firemen – no different from me and my students!), began to take on multiple layers of meaning. I became aware of the impact of the military structure and power relations in the absence of a clear enemy; the social expectations and fantasies projected onto the firemen; the taste of intense life/death activity interspersed by weeks of empty, useless waiting time; the desire for action and the guilt interwoven with this desire (*wanting* a fire to happen!)…And, through all this, my role as consultant/trainer in this specific situation seemed to change, and become far less clear and obvious than I had thought. I became aware of the complex ways (political and psychological) in which the organization was 'using' me and the leadership training program. Somehow, Isaac always seemed to invite the unknown into the conversation, generating both the excitement of exploration and the fear and uncertainty that comes with the realization that there was not, and could never really be, a clear and predictable model for action.

How then, do I understand some of the ways in which my interaction with Isaac has impacted the movement of my thought? A starting point would be to examine what I see as a 'psychoanalytic approach' to organizations. Most salient is the deep conviction that there are forces at work in any kind of human interaction that are not completely conscious to those involved, but which, nevertheless, impact those interactions in a significant way. These dynamics need to be noticed and taken account of in working with people in organizations. As consultant, I too am participating in these unconscious dynamics in different ways, and therefore am called upon to constantly be aware of and reflect on my own experience. It is this call to 'use' my own experience as a source of data for what is happening with others (typically defined as noticing the processes of transference and countertransference) that is another underlying characteristic of the psychoanalytic approach.

Menzies-Lyth (1989) calls attention to two more characteristics. The first is the abandonment of the 'expert'/solution focused stance, and an engagement in a kind of listening that is not 'focused' on finding something specific, "not making a premature selection or prejudgment about what is significant …(so that) consultant and client can work towards the emergence of new meanings and appropriate action" (1989: 31). The second involves a particular understanding of the consultant's responsibility, which is not to provide a solution or blueprint for action, but rather "lies in helping insights to

develop, freeing thinking about problems, helping the client to get away from unhelpful methods of thinking and behaving, facilitating the evolution of ideas for change, and then helping him to bear the anxiety and uncertainty of the change process" (Ibid: 33). I am aware of all these as they express themselves in the approach Isaac embodies in our conversations. He has deeply impacted the processes of my noticing, questioning and speaking about organizational life. With his help I have come to understand that, as a consultant, I can bring no ready-made solutions. With his support, I have come to be more comfortable moving within the uncertainty of the emerging reality of my participation in organizations. Here, each answer is always partial, and there is never a sense of complete closure, only a deepening understanding and appreciation of the moment as it is lived, and the different directions of thought and action it affords.
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2.2.4 Reflections on three conversations

What then are the threads that have emerged as I attempt to follow and make sense of the movement of my thought, and how do they inform my professional practice? In rereading what I have written, I become aware of the importance of experiences in which meaning becomes transformed, and new directions of understanding and action emerge. These experiences are often generated within a more profound probing and exploration of everyday situations, through the medium of conversation. And I see that the more one probes, the more complex, rich and paradoxical both the situation, and our understanding of it, becomes.

I find that I am intensely interested in the paradoxes that emerge as one probes. I see them reflected with a fractal quality in all fields of human interaction. In our relationships we can see the simultaneous forces of cohesion and separation, the intense desire to be close to our loved ones and the intense fear of losing ourselves in that closeness. In our organizations we experience and observe simultaneous processes of the centralization and decentralization of power, of order and stability, and of flexibility and change (Stacey, 2003). Our technology creates unprecedented connectivity between people all over the globe, even intimacy – and, at the very same time, unprecedented alienation and estrangement (Handy, 1995; Black et al., 1999). I believe that it is the ability to experience, explore and work within the simultaneous presence of contradictory forces which can create the movement that transforms the meaning of the lived situation, and

opens up possibilities for new action. It is in the invitation to do so, and in the support along this tenuous path, that I see my value as a practitioner.

I am usually called into organizations when questions arise, to give 'useful' and 'actionable' answers. I am acutely aware that, while answers are what is usually perceived as the platform for effective action, I believe that it is the power of questions and the ability to hold the paradoxes inherent in any given situation that actually generates the energy necessary for the transformation of one's understanding of, and relationship with, the lived situation, in the midst of which action emerges in a meaningful way. What eventually happens is that I am able to invite conversations in which these questions emerge, are explored, are and are not answered, as participants move in action with a deepened sense of the complexity of the reality that generated the questions in the first place, a renewed recognition of their own competence and limitations, and a new set of questions to explore.

2.3   AN ACCOUNT OF PRACTICE: TWO WORKSHOPS

I would like to give an example of the way this works (and sometimes doesn't!), by telling about two workshops I facilitated in the Israeli subsidiary of Kelide, a global, high-technology organization. As corporate globalization intensifies, and local management is increasingly aware of a perceived threat to its sustainability, I have been called in to design a program to address what we are calling "Global Effectiveness". It constitutes an invitation for people from different divisions, who lead and participate in culturally diverse and geographically dispersed teams, to explore their managerial and collegial interactions. It is run over three days, and consists of an exploration of different models of cultural preferences, case studies of professional interactions, and research findings, all in relation to participants' own experiences, dilemmas and questions. It is facilitated together with a senior manager ('coach'), who is responsible for sounding a more formal 'organizational voice', as well as his/ her own experience.

The program is conversational in nature, and its success is directly connected with the quality of conversation created. This is not a simple matter, for, at Kelide, unequivocal answers are highly valued; and success is usually judged by the ability to generate a clear

set of action items. And yet, the field in question is, in my experience, fraught with uncertainty, ambiguity, messiness and, inevitably, paradox. While participants begin the program with the powerful desire to simplify all this and create clear answers ("tips for effectiveness" in 'organization-speak'), I believe that what actually enhances their effectiveness is their ability to encounter and explore this very messiness, to understand the paradoxes inherent in this reality; and to become more comfortable in moving in action with a heightened awareness of these paradoxes, rather than the illusion of having resolved them. All of this creates its own paradox: in order to act effectively in the global environment, people need to let go of, and be ready to question, their ideas of what it means to act effectively.

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The first workshop consists of a group of experienced HR people, and is 'coached' by Nancy, VP of Human Resources; and the second, of a group of Finance people, and coached by Joan, a senior Finance manager. It is the different qualities of conversation generated in these two workshops that I would like to speak about, qualities impacted by the coaches' own ability and willingness to encounter the paradoxes inherent in the messy reality of their globalization processes – as well as my own ability to encourage and support this encounter.

The workshop is always launched by the coach, who speaks of his/her understanding of, and vision for, the globalization process, its dynamics and its challenges. Nancy begins with incredible energy. It is clear from the start that she is extremely high powered, energetic, charismatic – in short, quite an organizational heroine. She is fairly new to this most senior HR position, and obviously concerned with the power dynamics of positioning, both of herself within the HR organization, and of the Israeli HR organization within Corporate HR. Her opening presentation is what is usually considered 'motivational': she speaks (much) of the opportunities and (briefly) of the challenges posed by globalization processes; and of her supreme confidence in the ability of the HR organization to function as 'strategic partner' in leading the Israeli subsidiary forward to take a new position in the global arena. Somewhere in the middle of her talk she stops to ask how participants see the dynamics of globalization. I am struck by two things: very few people speak up (an extremely unusual phenomenon in an Israeli setting!), and, those who do, speak mostly of the 'down' sides – crazy working hours, an inability to influence and move projects along in the desired direction at the desired

speed, feelings of frustration and helplessness. Nancy discounts these immediately, in an enthusiastic 'we shall overcome' way.

Shortly after, I invite participants to discuss their expectations of the course. What is usually a one-hour conversation which begins to touch upon the complexity of the issues involved, shrinks into a hesitant fifteen minute 'list-generating' activity. This unusual silence is echoed in another activity that takes place on the first day, in which people are invited to experiment with cultural parameters, comparing their own cultural preferences to those of another culture. In a room full of highly experienced people, suddenly no one had enough experience to make intelligent guesses or comparisons. This has not happened before – usually people are ready to dare an assessment, to be playful, to exaggerate and joke about the differences, to exchange personal anecdotes. There seems to be no playfulness here – I feel an unspoken anxiety permeating the atmosphere. People (myself included as the day goes on) are very careful. In what is becoming a forced conversation, things are quickly polarized: there are *either* opportunities *or* challenges, you *either* rise to the challenge *or* are defeated by it, and no one seems ready to risk 'the wrong answer'.

I walk away from the first day with great unease. The conversation has not 'taken off'; it has limped its way through the day. It is clear to me that the 'flat' quality I am sensing has something to do with the dynamic generated around Nancy. She is very powerful in this configuration, and her 'model' has become the norm. Because she is so biased towards answers, only the questions which can be clearly answered are allowed into the conversation. As such, the conversation self-organizes into securely rational patterns. Emotions are kept at bay, and my attempts to invite them back in to conversation only seems to aggravate the anxiety. Paradox, with its invitation to explore the puzzling, the illogical and the ambiguous – the very essence of global work – is firmly locked out of the room, and I do not know how to invite it in.

The next two days play themselves out in the same melody, and there is a feeling of repetition, of stuckness, which I am not able to impact. The conversation is tight and action-focused, and, as far as I am concerned, there is no learning going on. We are all involved in exchanging knowledge, not creating new meaning. I find myself in a painful situation. Nancy's own anxiety in face of the unknown and the ambiguous is clearly

amplifying. I am experiencing a paradox: on the one hand, I am drawn to become more and more passive, as the course seems to take on its own dynamic, and its 'failure' is clearly not my 'fault'. At the same time, I am moved to be more and more active, my activity generated by an intense unease, as I am responsible for generating learning. I feel that, in some way, my struggle is everyone's. As I try to stay with it, I can feel us all collapsing this struggle into its passivity pole.

On two occasions, I speak with her about my experience. She has a vague idea of what I am talking about – she seems to recognize herself in my words, and is troubled, but immediately moves onto "what to *do* about it". I suggest she try to keep more of the questions open, and let participants explore their own perspectives; but, while she is willing to try, she very quickly falls back into her very decisive, binary perspective. The workshop itself is given good feedback – I believe more from the wish to ingratiate Nancy than anything else. I myself see it as a failure. I have not found a way, within the constraints, to deepen the dialogue, to invite its transformation, to help generate meaningfulness. I do not feel that participants have come away with a heightened ability to interact within the complexity of their global realities.

The second workshop is identical in design and structure, and completely different in quality of conversation. It is coached by Joan; quiet, intelligent and uncolorful. From the start, her lack of charisma paradoxically enables a different interaction with the participants. She launches the program with a question: "Where and how do our globalization processes find you?" and proceeds to give each participant a chance to answer, without interrupting – only writing down points on a flip chart. The process is long and arduous. I can feel the energy dropping. I wonder whether I should intervene to keep the energy 'up', and decide not to – if I am concerned with paradox, I need to legitimize boredom and sluggishness as a part of learning, as well as engagement and excitement. My decision pays off: by the end of the round, a rich and paradoxical picture, jointly created, stares back at us from the flip chart. People speak of the conflicts and connections created, of their world seeming both larger and smaller, of the excitement and frustration generated by the sameness and difference they are discovering in global colleagues, of the need for their organization to become more assimilated and more independent, of the twin pressures to customize and standardize their own internal

processes. By the end of the first hour, the low energy had been transformed into a quiet thoughtfulness. The course has 'taken off'.

The three days hold us engaged in intense conversation. We all look forward to our meetings. We know, at every given point, where we are, but not where we will be in another hour. People bring their experiences - joyful and painful, their interactions, their conflicts, their questions, their answers, their insecurity and their confidence. In my experience of this kind of work over the years, I have come to understand that 'global effectiveness' is a question that touches upon one's very identity and sense of self, which can become quite shaky as we move beyond the familiar cultural boundaries. It involves a paradoxical call to be oneself and 'other' at the same time. It touches on profound questions of personal, cultural, organizational and professional identity. When the paradoxes often inherent in these issues are given space in the conversation, and when 'not knowing' how to make sense of this complexity is allowed, the field of action becomes much wider – more scary and more exciting. We all leave the course with a sense of energy and motivation, knowing that, while we can never be in complete control or 'manage' this reality, we can engage with it in meaningful ways, and experiment with some of the new ideas generated.

2.4   CONCLUSION: A 'HESITANTLY POWERFUL' COMMITMENT TO STUDY PARADOX

In my first learning set meeting of the DMan program, I speak of my interest in the exploration of paradox. I find myself becoming hopelessly confused and increasingly inarticulate in face of my colleagues' challenging. Together, we try to tease out of my first draft other issues which could invite directions of research. "The nature of insight" is one, "the connection between insight and action" another. These questions interest me deeply, and, for a while, I become increasingly drawn to abandon a topic which our conversation had shaped into a sea of inchoate material. There is a growing dread that I may not find an appropriate way of investigating a phenomenon as puzzling and intangible as paradox – one that seems to defy logic and elude rational analysis (Lewis, 2000). Late that same night, unable to sleep, I am caught and tossed within the intense contradictory feelings of desire and fear. Suddenly, I experience, in a direct way, the

'transformation' that only an engagement in this kind of paradoxical dynamic can create. In a moment, I understand that *this is* my challenge – this was where my passion lies! In an instant, I realize that what I need to seek is a way of formulating this very experience of transformation I have just lived. This would be exactly what it means to 'take my experience seriously'! Can I do so? I am not sure. But I am sure that I can not give up the attempt without a far more rigourous attempt. I resolve, somewhat uneasly, that my research will take on what Lewis speaks of as the "daunting task of conveying the intricate and seemingly absurd nature of paradox" (2000: 773).

In this endeavor, I am drawn to exploring the conversation of others on the subject in four fields: psychology, organizational behavior or management studies, 'esoteric' literature (traditional and modern) and complexity studies, both 'scientific' complexity and 'social scientific' complexity. And, while I still struggle to create some kind of clarity in my approach, the following questions emerge as a starting point:

- Why is the question of paradox important in the field of organizational dynamics; where and how is it spoken about?
- How can one understand the nature of paradox as it expresses itself in the dynamics of identity, interaction and organizational patterns?
- What is the kind of meaning that can emerge from the experience of paradox?
- What happens when paradox is not enabled? What 'disenables' it?
- What does 'working with paradox' actually look like, and what kind of movement does it create?

As I come to the end of this paper, I am aware of the spiral movement the writing has taken, the type of movement Stacey, Griffin and Shaw describe in terms of "transformative teleology" (Stacey et al., 2000). I become aware of how powerfully the dynamic of paradox as an expression of the unknown (and perhaps the 'unknowable!') has permeated my experience and my way of thinking about it. I have understood how this dynamic informs my professional practice, and the different qualities of experience, understanding and conversation it enables. I have felt the excitement and the anxiety involved in trying to make the exploration of paradox central to my research. I am aware of how these patterns have emerged as I have attempted to follow the movement of my own thought through conversation with my colleagues and supervisor, surprising and obvious at once. This attempt at describing what 'was' has created a new 'is': I have a

sense of revisiting where I "first started", and "knowing it", in T.S. Eliot's words, for what feels like "the first time". Within this 'knowing', the next step emerges – together with the understanding that this knowing will shift, and yet remain, endless times to come.

3. THE EXPERIENCE OF PARADOX: AN INVITATION TO TRANSFORMATION (Project 2, September 2005)

3.1 INTRODUCTION: AN UNFAMILIAR GLIMPSE OF THE FAMILIAR

A few weeks ago, my daughter, Meshi, had her final examination in theatre. She directed and starred in a play, and the performance was remarkable. Meshi was very disappointed that her brothers, both of whom were in India at the time, had not called to wish her luck. That evening, a good friend of her brothers emailed them, describing the performance.

The following night, both brothers called. Meshi was not at home, so I told them about the play, and they were delighted. They made me promise to tell her how proud they were of her, and how sorry they were not to have been around to see it. The next day, I passed on their message. She was not impressed. "Nah", she said, "they're just saying that. They don't really care". "Why do you say that?" I asked. "Because", she said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "If they did, they would have either come back, or at least have called before to wish me luck".

I realized we were 'caught' in a paradox that did not make easy sense. There were two sets of behaviours that could be noticed, both of which were 'real', and embodied a different meaning or narrative. The first was "the boys didn't call/didn't come, therefore they don't care about/love me", and the second was "the boys called, therefore they love and care". The two narratives presented a choice: their contradictory nature prevented their co-existence. I chose to see one, Meshi the other.

The conversation continued. I said "Meshi, you're not hearing me. They were both really excited, and kept saying how proud they were of you". "Yeah", she answered, "and if *you* hear *only* that, you live in a made up world that's all good". "True", I

heard myself say, "and if *you* hear *only* what *you* do, you live in a made up world that's all bad".

There was a silence. "Well", said Meshi, "So how can I hear both at the same time?"

I had no good answer. I had no answer at all. But it was clear to me that, *in that very moment*, we were suddenly both 'hearing' both. And the 'tune' we were hearing was very different from what either of us had heard a moment before. It was more complex. It was richer. It was more confusing. And, in my experience of it, it was more 'real'.

Several months later, my sons returned. The older, Tori, had been away for a year and a half, and the younger, Eden, for nine months. Their homecoming was laced with much emotion: anticipation, nervousness, joy, confusion, and moments of almost unbearable excitement. At one point, I went to make tea, and Tori came to help me. On the way, we hugged. Tori said: "This must be a day you've been waiting for a long time!". The remark surprised me. My surprise surprised me even more. I had not actually been *waiting* for this day. Which was also not true, because I had been. Tori noticed my surprise. "No?" he asked. Once again, I found myself 'caught' in a moment of paradox. Yes and no. Together. I said "I don't really know. I haven't actually been *waiting,* but, as you say it now, I see that I have been. But I haven't. Have I?" Tori laughed. "And here I am thinking that I am the center of your universe!" he said. We both smiled in recognition – of the understanding that he indeed *was* and *was not* the center of my universe.

The moment passed. The conversation continued in my head, precisely because it was not resolvable in the moment. Once more, there were two sets of behaviors that were contradictory: waiting/not waiting. I found myself mulling it over as I went to bed: what *was* I doing – waiting or not waiting? The easy solution was a temporal separation of the two activities: sometimes I was waiting (imagining their homecoming, speaking of it) and sometimes I was not. But this description did not capture the essence of what I had discovered – that I had actually been 'waiting-not-waiting'.

3.1.1 Reflections: a tentative move to clarity

What is it about these two experiences that leads me to choose them the opening for my second project? In a direct and situated way, they embody the concept of paradox: the co-existence, in time and space, of two contradictory directions, thoughts or ideas, as it appears in our ordinary, everyday life. And why – as my learning set colleagues demand to know again and again – is it important? Because it puzzles and confronts us with the illogical, demanding a questioning of what we usually take for granted. Can 'brotherly' or 'motherly' love be paradoxical? Can one experience a 'caring' and 'not caring'/ a 'waiting' and 'not waiting' at the very same time? If so, what kind of sense does that make? In these two stories, the encounter with paradox arrested the flow of experience for a moment, as we all suddenly found ourselves questioning the very nature of love. An experience that is fairly taken-for-granted in family life (either in its presence or its absence) suddenly takes on a quality of 'strangeness', and opens up in all its complexity, depth and multifacetness. In this moment, all participants in the experience are 'transformed', in a small and significant way. The way we were, Meshi, Tori and I, in our thinking and speaking about ourselves and each other, shifted as a result of this shared moment of surprise, confusion and discovery. We moved away from these encounters with a heightened sense of the mystery of our shared love, and with a quality of openness to each other that had not been there before. And this shift was somehow connected to the kaleidoscopic quality that had permeated our perspective through the encounter with what I am calling paradox.

From this intimate realm of family life, I would like to zoom out to the realm of organizations, which is permeated by moments often no less intimate, albeit of different forms and textures. How is this relevant to my practice as consultant? I believe that perhaps the only real value I bring to my practice is the invitation to 'see anew' what is taken for-granted, under the assumption I share with social constructionists that our joint ways of seeing and speaking of our reality is simultaneously created by and creates the situations we act into (Gergen, 2002; Shotter, 2002). In encountering paradoxes, we are jolted (often quite violently) out of our 'ordinary' perspective, and are called upon to make fresh sense of what is 'real' or 'true' in a particular situation, and, in agreeing to stay with the paradox (as opposed to collapsing it into one of its poles) this 'truth' becomes far richer and

more complex. In this process, new and often surprising possibilities are created. As we act into a reality permeated by a sense of the 'unfamiliar familiar', creative action may be generated (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000).

In thinking this way about ourselves and our organizations, we move away from the reductionism found in so much management thinking, which seems to work under the Tayloristic assumptions that the messy human reality in organizations may be simplified into clear, linear processes and efficiently directed by a manager making rational decisions from 'outside' this system to move it in the desired direction. This is a paradigm that leaves little room for creative action, which is, by definition, action into the unknown (Ibid, 2000). In the past two decades, however, in the face of the turbulence, uncertainty, and complexity of the organizational environment, there has been a growing dissatisfaction with this dominant management paradigm of 'predict and control' (Block 1996, Farson 1996, Fonesca 2002, Griffin 2002, Handy 1994, Johnson 1992, Lewin and Birute 2000, Morgan 1986, Quinn 1998, Senge 1990, Shaw 2002, Streatfield 2001, Stacey 2003, Vaill 1998, Wheatley 1992, Weick 1995, Wenger 2004, Weisbrod 1987). As I proceed with my own enquiry, I would like to engage reflexively with four of the voices sounding this dissatisfaction, and seeking different, and more resonant, ways of speaking about lived experience in organizations. I choose these voices in particular because they engage with the contradictions we encounter in organizations, taking up or avoiding the notion of paradox, which I see as central to this endeavor.

3.2   RESONANCE IN THE MANAGEMENT FIELD: FOUR VOICES

3.2.1   A 'reflexive conversation' with Peter Vaill

The first voice I would like to examine has always been one of my favorites: Peter Vaill's (1988). Vaill's argument revolves around a vivid metaphor: "permanent whitewater", through which he attempts to evoke the turbulent reality of our organizational environment, characterized by "destabilized contexts", "great ambiguity and fluidity", and in which things are "only very partially under control" (1988:28). Under these conditions, what is usually considered 'effective action' in

organizations, i.e. "the process of rationally figuring out what needs to be done and rationally doing it" (Ibid:14) is no longer viable. A great portion of Vaill's endeavor is to expose and debunk what he calls the 'myths' of management, most of which tend to fragmentize, reduce and abstract the human from the manager, turning him into "superficial man…whose behavior is predictable…nameable and explicable… (and who) does not do anything utterly novel" (Ibid:129-30). It is in the incongruence between the actual experience of managers and the way management is spoken about, that Vaill locates what he terms the 'grand paradox of management': "(while) there has been more rational analysis, design and control of human systems in the last 50 years in America than possibly all of the rest of human history…(nonetheless) those living in the midst of these systems continue to find them mysterious, recalcitrant, intractable, unpredictable, paradoxical, absurd" (Ibid:77). The dissonance generated by this experience must be taken into account in any theory which can help us understand and move within our organizations. He himself, however, is deeply ambiguous about this dissonance, vacillating between the desire to find a way of resolving paradox, and considering it as a fact of life to be accepted, even 'embraced'.

The theory Vaill claims as "the nearest thing we have in the management field to a direct embrace and confrontation of paradox" (Ibid:78) is systems thinking. He is, however, is not completely satisfied with systems thinking. This dissatisfaction stems from two inconsistencies he notices (and calls paradox). The first is that white water conditions seems to defy all models, thus creating a paradoxical loop in which "the more comprehensive we attempt to make our organizational models, the more we can detect phenomena *outside the model* that are influencing the organization" (Ibid:79). The second stems from the lack of sufficient accounting for the action-taker's presence within the system, where his/her behaviour is not more stable than any of the other constantly moving elements, and therefore "just how the consciousness of this person is going to 'dance' with the events of the system cannot be known…by an external observer in any very complete way" (Ibid.)

Vaill's is a passionate battle against the rampant reductionism of mainstream management thinking. In the complexity of organizational life, he invites us to "*know* that one is in a situation that will seem to be filled with paradoxes…(and)

resist the seductive idea that the concrete world becomes more rational as we invent more and more rational ideas about it" (Ibid:84). Yet, he himself is occasionally seduced, for, while "we can't do away with (paradoxes) completely… perhaps we can 'outframe' our thinking about comprehension and control in such a way that some of the more common paradoxes will diminish in intensity" (Ibid:83). In other words, paradoxes are inherent both in our permanent white water reality and in our experience of it – but only because we have not yet found a "mentality friendly to paradox", which would – if not remove them – at least make this experience less confusing and frightening. The purpose then becomes to make them 'go away', as far as possible.

What then is Vaill saying about paradox? His uses of the term are revealing. On the one hand, he uses it to connote an inconsistency, a theoretical or epistemological problem that needs to be resolved. On the other hand, it is a 'fact of life', which most models of organizational life ignore. He wavers between the desire to create a theoretical model that would include the notion of paradox; and a deep dissatisfaction with the operational implications such a model would offer, because, in order to act, we may need the kind of clarity that paradox destroys by its very presence. Here, he falls into the same trap he accuses others of: splitting human consciousness and knowing from action.

Ironically, while Vaill seeks for an 'antidote' to the confusing and painful experience of paradox; it is in his vivid evocation of this very experience that I find the unique richness of his voice. Notwithstanding his own ambivalence towards the notion of paradox, I find that he makes a significant contribution to our understanding of it. This lies in his attempts to forge what he calls a mentality 'friendly to paradox', which would involve two things. The first is the abandonment of the observer stance for a more participatory way of thinking. This would entail the manager, for example, understanding himself not as "operating *on* the organization from a detached, omniscient perspective (but rather) as growing from within the organization and influencing it as an expression of (a) personal growth process" (Ibid:81). The second lies in the attempt to speak about organizational experience in a way that is less static, for if we are able to think of situation as ceaselessly moving and evolving, rather than 'fixed' realities, the contradictions and tensions are

somehow 'resolved' in their movement. Both these suggestions seem crucial to our ability to engage with the paradoxes of organizational life – where I would disagree with Vaill is that in partaking of them, we can reduce the confusion and pain involved, which I see as integral to the experience of paradox.

3.2.2 A 'reflexive conversation' with Etienne Wenger

Like Vaill, Wenger (2004) too is dissatisfied with the way life in organizations is spoken about, and attempts to formulate a way of understanding the processes of learning, meaning and identity creation grounded in the everyday practice in organizations. Like Vaill, his voice resonates with a rich understanding of the complexity of these processes, and yet remains on the edge of a radical perspective, never quite actualizing it. I will attempt to show this through his powerful evocation, coupled with his careful avoidance, of the concept of paradox.

On the one hand, he is acutely aware of the complexity created by the contradictory dynamics of organizational life. His writing abounds with the seeds of a paradoxical perspective: communities of practice entail "power and dependence, pleasure and pain, expertise and helplessness, success and failure" (2004:77); they are "both enabling and limiting of identity" (Ibid:207); and any practice "must constantly be reinvented, even as it remains the same" (Ibid:194). On the other hand, he consistently and assiduously avoids a radically paradoxical perspective. How and why does he do this?

From the start, Wenger sets up his opposing forces as "complex dualities" rather than paradoxes, juxtaposing them to "mere dichotomies". A dichotomy refers to a polarized opposition which demands an 'either/or' choice because its poles are mutually exclusive classifications, whereas a 'complex duality' is " a single conceptual unit that is formed by two inseparable and mutually constitutive elements whose inherent tension and complementarity give the concept richness and dynamism" (Ibid:66). So, for example, more "traditional dichotomies", like tacit versus explicit, individual versus collective, conscious versus unconscious, present us with a continuum along which these polarities are 'translational': an increase in one immediately implies a decrease in the other. This is not true, however, of

'participation' and 'reification', the duality seminal to his thinking. Participation refers to the direct, embodied and living process of people engaging together in their practice; while reification is the process by which direct experience is given lasting form in the production of artifacts (minutes of a meeting, role definitions, procedures etc.), which are then often taken as the 'thing itself' According to Wenger, the relationship between these two constructs is 'transformational': their meaning is transformed in their interaction.

While dichotomies have the potential for becoming paradoxes, dualities do not. Although the latter embody opposing characteristics (participation implying movement and fluidity in relation to the fixed and frozen nature of reification), and there is definitely a potential explosiveness in their "inherent tension" (Ibid:66), Wenger never explores this. He carefully separates dualities into two 'distinct' processes (as opposed to the poles of one continuum), and makes their interplay inherently "complementary" (Ibid:62), thereby removing any potential for conflict. They never clash in time or compete for the same space. Rather, they work together to create a 'whole' outside of themselves, that is, participation and reification become constituent aspects of the construct of 'meaning'. Here Wenger finally collapses the paradoxical potential of their interplay, subscribing firmly to the "both…and" structure of dualistic thinking (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000).

By insisting on the 'harmonious' quality of the interplay between these two forces of dualities, Wenger circumvents the potential for transformation implicated in paradox. Although he speaks of their inseparability and power to transform meaning in interaction, this is not the kind of inseparability and transformation implied in paradox. Mathematical chaos can be taken as an example of the latter, in that it presents a dynamic which is both stable and unstable at the same time, thereby transforming the very constructs of stability or instability into 'stable instability' or 'unstable stability' (Stacey 2003:5). Stability and instability have all the makings of Wenger's dichotomies (they are apparently mutually exclusive; they are classificatory categories; they can substitute and translate into each other). What makes them paradoxical is that they are both there at *the same time in unresolvable form*, and therefore their interaction creates the transformation into 'stable instability'. Wenger's dualities never exhibit this type of transformation. They

remain a "mixture" of their separate elements (Wenger, 2004:153), they "come into contact and affect each other", they "converge" and "shape" each other – but they are never "essentially coupled" (Ibid:87). The image Wenger uses to describe this interplay is telling: participation and reification are like a mountain and a river, which "shape each other but have their own shape"; and which "cannot be transformed into each other, yet they transform each other" (Ibid:71). My argument would be that the latter is exactly what they *do not do*: the mountain and river may do all sorts of things to each other, but they *never* 'transform' each other. The mountain is forever rock and the river is forever water. They never become a 'riverous mountain' or a 'mountainy river'.

The question therefore becomes: why does Wenger banish paradoxical thinking from a text so rich in paradoxical potential, and what does he gain and lose by this adamant avoidance of paradox? What I believe he gains is an approach to the complex issues he grapples with that is more harmonious and gentle than the inherently conflictual approach suggested by the paradoxical perspective that Stacey and his colleagues adopt (2000). It is easier to understand and accept; it is more 'user-friendly'. What I feel he loses is depth. In this, I find that Wenger's text, with its wealth of material for thought, falls short of resonating more fully with what is the complex 'truth' of the lived experience of the processes of meaning, identity and learning, which inevitably contain the intense conflict of paradox.

3.2.3 A 'reflexive conversation' with Ralph Stacey and Douglas Griffin

I would like to turn now to the ways Stacey and his colleagues (2000) speak of paradox. Like Vaill and Wenger, they too are attempting to forge a theory of human action that is 'truer' to lived experience in organizations. Unlike them, Stacey (2001; 2003) places the concept of paradox firmly in the center of his thinking, reviewing organizational theories in relation to the way they deal with or ignore paradox. He moves away from the rational, strategic choice model of human action, with its emphasis on the goal-directed individual acting upon the organization from without, and impacting it in a linear fashion. One of his assumptions is, therefore, that the kind of 'messy' reality evoked by paradox is a 'better' way of *understanding* what is 'out there'. He sees organizations as essentially paradoxical, embodying – at the very

same time – both order and disorder, stability and instability, predictability and unpredictability. In doing so, Stacey then, unlike Vaill and Wenger, agrees to see tension and conflict as inherent to the ways we experience life in organizations.

Stacey defines paradox as "the genuine, simultaneous co-existence of two contradictory movements" (2003:4). 'Genuine' implies that the presence of these contradictory movements is 'real' rather than 'apparent' or 'seeming', as paradox is often referred to in management literature (Smith and Berg, 1987; Farson, 1996; Lewis, 2000; Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). What is 'genuine' and how can we tell if something is 'genuine' or not? In the spirit of positivism, reality is an objective phenomenon to which we can relate in different ways: we can perceive, interpret, understand and act 'upon' it. In the spirit of postmodernism, reality becomes dependent on the beholder, enabling the generation of endless narratives, each as valuable as any other (Kilduff and Mehra, 1997). In the spirit of social construction, which makes a major contribution to Stacey's thinking, reality is constructed within our conversations with each other, constantly renegotiated and changing within the constraints of our histories, relations and experiences (Shotter, 2002; Gergen, 1999; Wenger, 2004). Complex Responsive Process Theory speaks of reality as constructed in the emerging patterns of communicative interaction between people who are simultaneously forming and being formed by these interactions (Stacey, 2003, Stacey, 2001; Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000; Griffin, 2002). 'Genuine' thus becomes a far more complex construct, a property of reality which itself is situated within the paradoxical movement between 'outside' and 'inside' – the phenomenon I am encountering as it forms and is formed by my experience of it.

The second point Stacey emphasizes is that these contradictory movements are *simultaneously present* – they do not merely closely follow each other chronologically, within the ceaseless movement of experience in time. They are inextricably connected – the moment one diminishes, we no longer have paradox. Despite this intense awareness of movement, and his insistence on temporal thinking, Stacey occasionally falls into the trap of speaking about paradox in terms of stasis: he speaks of it as a 'state' (rather than a process), which "can *never* be resolved" (2003:12), the very use of the word 'never' itself connoting lack of movement. Is this an internal contradiction in Stacey's thinking? I believe it is not.

But I do believe that it reveals the immense difficulty of finding an accurate way of speaking about simultaneity and ceaseless movement, inherent in any attempt to approach experience through a fundamentally temporal rather than spacial perspective – exactly what Stacey is attempting.

Finally, the third point Stacey emphasizes is that these forces/ideas/movements are "contradictory" or "diametrically opposed" (Ibid:11). Because there is no way of uncoupling them, they defy logic and thus shatter our habitual processes of sense-making. As such, the encounter with paradox is inherently conflictual, for it does not enable our longing for a kind of Aristotelian logic, which would eliminate contradiction (Ibid.). It therefore involves a search for new ways of understanding and speaking that holds contradictions in a paradoxical tension, rather than the attempt to 'resolve' them . Thus Stacey and his colleagues seek a new vocabulary, speaking in terms of the "known-unknown", "stable instability", "enabling constraints" (Stacey et al., 2000), of simultaneous continuity and transformation (Stacey, 2003), of the individual as forming and being formed by group (Stacey, 2001), of the manager being simultaneously "in control" and "not in control" (Streatfield, 2001).

To understand how this perspective is 'operationalized', I would like briefly to turn to Griffin (2002). Griffin attempts to "recover… a way of thinking based on living in the movement of paradox" (2002:9), and illustrates this with an example of the way people in *The Body Shop* manage to hold a paradoxical perspective. He locates paradox in the continuous conflict between two of the company's "cult values" (Mead, in Griffin, 2002): the company's business commitment to making a profit in a competitive market and its equally powerful commitment to ecological ideals. According to Griffin, "this paradox is never resolved – but it generates problems again and again at all levels and in all the activities of the company, which are analyzed and fixed as dilemmas that are resolved" (Ibid:13). What Griffin is pointing to is how the company "functionalizes" these values in the ongoing, everyday conversations in which ethical actions emerge and are enacted, through "participative self-organization" which itself is "a paradoxical process of interactive participation between self-conscious embodied subjects who are observers and participants, subjects and objects at the same time" (Ibid:14). It is in Griffin's

'anthropomorphizing' of the organization ('how *The Body Shop* deals with…') that I find the key to differentiating and elucidating my own interest in paradox, and to which I will now turn.

3.2.4   Reflections: a tentative move to focus

In 'conversing' with these four writers, I begin to understand the focus my research is taking. I share with Stacey and Griffin the understanding that the concept of paradox is seminal to our understanding and speaking about experience in organizations. Their writing is permeated by a constant and direct confrontation with the messiness and conflict inherent in a paradoxical perspective, and, as such, comes closer to what I am calling paradox than does either Wenger's or Vaill's. Both acknowledge their debt to Hegel's dialectical thinking (Stacey 2003, Griffin 2001). Hegel speaks of a logic in which thought moves in a dialectical dynamic, in which any phenomenon (which is not separate from the consciousness interacting with it) can only be understood in relation to its opposite. In this interplay between opposites, a transformation of meaning occurs to create a third concept, in which the original opposites keep their meaning and yet, in their inseparable tension, create new meaning. Meaning is thus in constant movement and transformation through paradox. Hegel speaks of this process as 'aufhebung' which captures the activities of 'cancelling' (the irreconcilability of the opposites), 'raising' (the opposites forming a different meaning in their unity), and preserving (their tensions never being resolved) (Ameriks, 2005).

Thus paradox becomes a source of new meaning. But while I subscribe wholeheartedly to the use of the *concept* of paradox in describing and engaging with the complexity of organizational life, what I see emerging as my own particular interest is the *actual, lived experience of paradox in the moment*. What does this paradoxical perspective actually feel like in the immediate experiencing of it? Thus, in returning to Griffin's example, my focus would not lie directly on the ways in which members of *The Body Shop* manage to work through these constantly emerging paradoxical situations but rather in *how they actually experience these contradictory values in the living moment, and how this experience generates action*. What does it *feel like* to experience the intense desire to make money in an

amazing business opportunity when that desire is simultaneously coupled with the equally intense desire to save the environment, and the unequivocal understanding that the two are mutually exclusive? What happens in the moment of that experience, cognitively, emotionally and physically? And what kind of engagement and action does this kind of experience lead to? The fact that the company is constantly juggling these two cult values is certainly an organizational paradox (of which there are many!) – but that does not mean that people are actually constantly experiencing the two together simultaneously in the living present! How is this experience different from a cognitive understanding of the dilemma, and a rational attempt to 'work out a solution'?

Coming back to my experience with my children, I notice that it entails an intense intellectual confusion and emotional unease. In the moment, I am suddenly aware that my usual mode of understanding of what 'love' is, becomes directly challenged, and I am shocked out of complacency into a cognitive/emotional state in which there is the potential for the emergence of new meaning. This 'newness' involves a complexity that has suddenly permeated the experience, creating the potential for a transformation of who 'I' and 'we' *are* in that very moment. In this sense, the experience of paradox is a 'transformational event'. In calling into question what *is*, it calls *myself* into question. What is equally important in such moments is that they are not grandiose, once-in-a-lifetime events, but rather everyday events, occurring in everyday circumstances, in our personal and professional experience. They create a kind of 'space' in the flow of ordinary life, in which we actually experience ourselves and the world around us in their 'sameness' and 'difference' simultaneously. This is what I would like to explore.

3.3   A LIVED MOMENT OF TRANSFORMATION: AT A CROSSROADS

The time: May 17, 2005, two hours after the end of the third DMan residential.
The place: Main entrance of Victoria station, London
The characters: I am the main character in this 'drama', but there are other characters who participate, some in the form of voices in my inner conversation, and some in the form of passengers rushing around me

The action: There is no 'action' that can be physically observed. The action takes place within the main character: an intense flurry of thoughts, emotions and sensations

I would like to speak about an experience of 'transformation' in my thought on paradox. Why have I chosen to frame it in this way, evoking the medium of theatre? I did not plan to – it somehow emerged as I began writing, and, as it did, I am suddenly made aware of the drama present in that very ordinary moment in life.

I stand at the station thinking about the learning set meeting at the residential. It is a confusing and anxiety provoking experience for me. My attempts to speak about paradox are, yet again, being seriously challenged. C. voices his deep dissatisfaction with the word 'paradox', and, while he proceeds in his own words to beautifully describe what I thought I had been saying, he does not recognize it in my writing. R. confesses to not quite understanding what this paradox thing is really about – is it what he is calling in his own writing 'contradiction' or 'tension'? M., who has an immediate sense of what I am trying to speak about, feels I am doing it too *'patly'* – "you are already 'there'" he says. In a research methodology which values the emergent study of emergent phenomena, this is devastating criticism. And P., with what I feel is both a sense of what I am groping for, as well as an understanding of what is *not* being understood, is suggesting that I substitute the tentativeness of "an experience I will call paradox for the moment" for my unequivocal "paradox". As we speak, I feel my anxiety rising, laced with touches of anger and frustration. Am I once more being nudged, in a gentle and supportive way, to leave the subject of paradox? That I am not really managing to make head or tail of it in a communicative and convincing manner? This experience is all too familiar. I had been at this juncture, and had agreed to take the risk involved this line of inquiry (see project 1).

And, here I am, at Victoria station, at this very crossroads yet again. After five months of trying. The experience is recognizable, yet different. Have I failed? Is it time to abandon this effort? The possibility feels like a betrayal. Of what? Of whom? I am not sure. I question my own motives: am I just being obstinate? Am I stuck and refusing to see it? I have a vivid flash of Ahab, in Melville's *Moby Dick*.

The tragic greatness is obviously not there, but is the stuckness? These questions combine in a dissonant melody of turbulence. There is a sense of unreality about the scene as I perceive it: the purposeful movement of the swarms of people rushing to their clear destinations seems like a parody of the painful lack of clarity I am experiencing in relation to my own 'destination'. There is a heightened awareness of movement and non-movement, both in terms of space and time. At this 'crossroads' I can see two paths, one *staying with* and the other *leaving* the exploration of paradox, but the 'destination' of both is blurry. I feel I must make a decision, and I can't. Or rather, I have 'made' and 'unmade' that decision a myriad times over the past months. So, now what?

Suddenly, for a short moment, the two paths become indistinct. There is an immediate and 'uncapturable' flavor of a path in which I can paradoxically *remain with, and leave*, the question of paradox – *at the very same time!*

I remember something C. said – about a 'third dimension' involved in paradox. I don't quite understand what he means, but it echoes with a sense of possibility. I remember something P. says about the temporality implicated in the experience. I remember P.'s voice, as she says "an experience that, *for the time being*, I shall *call* paradox". Quite unexpectedly, I find myself thinking, 'well, the truth is it doesn't matter what I *call* it – what is the *nature* of this experience?' *And suddenly I realize that I am in the midst of some form of it!*

No wonder I frame the experience 'theatrically'!

So, what is the nature of this experience, as I live it in this specific situation? Because of its temporal nature, I cannot speak about it in a complete or finalized way. What I am doing now therefore, as I chose words which will reveal and clarify it for myself and my reader, is 'setting' something whose essence is movement. I have a heightened sense of Wittgenstein's observation that:

> Mere description is so difficult because one believes that one
> needs to fill out the facts in order to understand them. It is as if
> one saw a screen with scattered color-patches, and said: the

way they are here, they are unintelligible: they only make sense
when one completes them into a shape. – Whereas I want to
say: Here *is* the whole. (If you complete it, you falsify it).
(Quoted in Shotter 2002, p.104)

That said, what do I notice? Primarily, I notice the significance of the experience. It is a moment of profound meaning for me, far more 'meaningful' than the moments that precede or that follow it. The way I am experiencing myself is different. I am more present to my thoughts and emotions, as well as to my surroundings. It is as though, for a few moments, I am participating more fully and intensely in my own life. There is an intensified sense of my self 'experiencing my experience'.

I notice the presence of a struggle. It manifests as a conflict between two irreconcilable alternatives: should I stick to my line of research or should I move to another? There is an intense desire to resolve the conflict. Seeped in anguish and ambiguity, I long for a clear sense of direction. The intensity of the desire for clarity, coupled with the pain of its absence, seems to 'fix' this struggle in time. 'I *am* my lack of clarity, and will always be so. And then, in an instant, there is the overwhelming sense of movement.

I notice the profound temporality of the experience itself – there is an unusual sense of myself *as actually transforming*. It is a direct experience of what Stacey et al. call the 'living present' (2000). It entails the past flowing into the present through an awareness of memory (of the learning set session), at the same time as the present is flowing back into and patterning the past, (my anxiety is patterning what I remember of the meeting). In this circular movement, I am suddenly remembering things I did not notice before, and the memory of them is giving them a new meaning. As this is all happening, the present suddenly becomes connected to the future in a different way – I find that I have left the struggle and become really interested in the experience itself. New possibilities are opening up. What seemed to me two separate, irreconcilable directions of action that demanded an 'either…or' choice, have suddenly changed into something else. They are somehow both present simultaneously in the felt transformation that is enabling me to move into an unknown and familiar future with a curiosity and energy that was not there before.

All this does not actually 'make sense' in a rational way. I am not sure I understand it myself. I have a sense, as yet unnamable, of a direction. What has emerged is a new way of thinking about what I am doing – a kind of 'moving' away from, and 'staying' with the topic of paradox. This is *exactly*, to quote P., "what I am calling, for the moment, the experience of paradox"!

3.4   RESONANCE FROM AFAR: TWO EASTERN TEXTS

I therefore begin to locate my interest in the experience of transformation as it impacts and is impacted by paradox. In so doing, I turn to engage with a different body of literature. While much Western thought (certainly most management literature!), deals with paradox as a 'problem to be solved', and shies away from speaking in terms of 'transformation', traditions coming from the East see both paradox and transformation as far more organic to the experience of life. I would like to look at two texts that resonate with some of the themes emerging from my own questioning. I am aware of the criticism both Griffin and Stacey have expressed regarding the way writers have appealed to Eastern thought, taking "a number of deep insights completely out of their cultural context and easily (assuming) that they can somehow be transplanted into a completely different culture" (Griffin 2002:86). Despite what may, in some cases, be seen as an abuse of Eastern thought; many of the insights coming from complexity research, and certainly within the perspective of complex responsive processes, while clearly emerging from a Western tradition, echo and play off of certain notions and experiences spoken about in the Eastern hemisphere: how can these perspectives converse in a serious and responsible way?

The first text is *The Gateless Gate*, a thirteenth century volume of Zen teachings. The text is a compilation of koans, with commentaries by several Zen masters from different centuries. The koan is a question, saying or story, used by the master as a 'technique' to help the student reach enlightenment. If, for the sake of exploration, we remove the dramatic connotations of 'master', 'student' and 'enlightenment', we get the koan as an invitation to transformation. How does it work? Each koan presents us with a question that cannot be solved by ordinary thought, logic, or

reasoning. In this sense, koans are often spoken about as quintessential paradoxes, of which perhaps the best known are: "what is the sound of one hand clapping?", or "what was your primal face before your parents were born?"(Yamada 2004:115). The student receives the koan especially chosen for him by the master, and 'contemplates' it. This may take minutes or years. At any rate, the 'understanding' or 'cracking' of a koan is the experience of enlightenment, in which one understands and participates in the 'essential nature' of all things, which, in Buddhism, is spoken of as 'emptiness'.

The Zen cosmology differentiates between the world of phenomena, which is in constant movement and subject to the laws of cause and effect (karma), and the essential world, which is unchangeable and 'empty'. In effect, however, these two worlds are not really two at all; they are "two aspects of one substance" (Ibid:14), which is, paradoxically, 'emptiness'. This notion of 'emptiness' involves the immediate understanding of the illusoriness of our unequivocal belief in the fixed reality of the phenomenal world. So, "to ordinary common sense, subject and object oppose each other… For the truly enlightened eye, however, this dualistic contrast is nothing but an illusion produced by one's thought" (p.42). The koan works as a potential trigger for this experience of understanding – it is a way of breaking through our own conceptual constructs.

Thus, there is a 'reality' that is 'more real' than that which we encounter in our ordinary lives, in whose making we ourselves are implicated. As opposed to the social constructionist perspective, however, we do not construct this reality in conversation with each other, but within ourselves, again a concept of limited accuracy, because the distinction of 'within/without' is already a false distinction of our own making. Thus, any attempt to move beyond this phenomenal world must leave language behind. It is only direct experience – unmediated by language or thought – that can create an immediate understanding of reality.

And so the koan is a paradoxical attempt to use words to cut through the phenomenological reality created by words. Because 'working' with a koan can only happen in direct experience, perhaps the best way of approaching this experience is by looking at a koan:

"A monk asked Joshu in all earnestness, 'Does a dog have a Buddha nature or not?' Joshu said 'Mu'" (Yamada, p.10-12).

'Mu' is apparently beyond translation, but comes closest to mean 'nothingness', or 'nonbeing'. So, in a literal sense, the koan could simply mean 'no, a dog does not have a Buddha nature'. But the Buddha said that all living beings have a Buddha nature. So the dog must have one too. But then, how can a dog be the same as the Buddha? This is completely illogical, and so, in effect, a dog can't have a Buddha nature. But it must, because Buddha said that…And so the argument goes on, in a paradoxical loop. This is the point: arguments based on logical cause and effect thinking cannot break through this loop, and so the invitation is to:

> concentrate your whole self into this Mu, making your whole body with its 360 bones and joints and 84,000 pores into a solid lump of doubt. Day and night, without ceasing, keep digging into it… It must be like a red-hot iron ball which you have gulped down and which you try to vomit up but cannot. You must extinguish all delusive thoughts and beliefs which you have cherished up to the present. (Ibid:11-2)

What becomes clear here (if anything!) is that indeed there is no way to cognitively understand this, and the practitioner is called to struggle with the *experience* of Mu. The imagery is violent in its immediacy and passion. As such, the experience is certainly not an 'everyday' one. On the other hand, Zen sees ordinary, everyday experience as both the path to, and the expression of, enlightenment. In other words, 'enlightenment' does not entail anything other than what we would ordinarily 'do' (sweeping, walking, eating etc.). But the *quality* of the experience is different – in the doing, doer and 'done' are no longer dual; they have become "two aspects of the same substance", which is 'emptiness'. It is a quality connected to the fullness with which one experiences the experience, or, as Zen Buddhists say, the 'suchness' of the experience.

What is it about the Zen koan that has drawn it into my search? The koan uses paradox to fragment thought and assault taken-for-granted meaning. In the struggle to resolve the tension created, coupled with the inability to do so, the potential for transformation is created. This transformation, in a very simple and direct sense, is indeed a transformation of 'self' in the sense that I am no longer the same as I was the previous moment – something has moved in my way of 'being in the world'. With this new sense of myself, I experience things a little differently – and often this is expressed in the way I see what was paradoxical before. In Zen, one speaks of 'emptiness' and the 'oneness' of what was previously thought of as duality. In my own language, I would say that perhaps what I *actually experience* is the *paradoxical perspective in the lived moment* (the possibility that the boys care/don't care; that I have/haven't been waiting; that I can stay with/move away from my topic – at the very same time). I think it is the possibility of *directly experiencing* what Stacey et al. speak of as the paradoxical dynamic of 'forming and being formed by', or the simultaneity of sameness and difference, stability and instability. And so paradox becomes both a *cause* and an *effect* of the lived experience of transformation. This experience entails struggle or conflict, and its 'medium' is regular, everyday life. For me, koans evoke the taste of the wonder of 'ordinary transformation'.

The second text I would like to explore is the *Dao De Jing*, an ancient Chinese text, attributed to Lao Tsu, and translated and commented on by Ames and Hall (2003). The latter see it as a quest to optimize human life within "the reality of time, novelty and change; the persistence of particularity; the intrinsic, constitutive nature of relationships; and the perspectival nature of experience" (2003:22). In more modern, Western terms, it could be seen as addressing the question: how can we live our lives in a meaningful way? Its answer lies in the cultivation of a certain disposition and character which would enable one to act upon and shape one's world at the very same time as one is acted upon and being shaped by it, in our ordinary, everyday lives, a notion surprisingly similar to that spoken of in the perspective of complex responsive processes.

The worldview expressed here, in contrast to that of *The Gateless Gate*, is 'acosmotic' in that there is no presumed existence of a unitary or permanent reality

behind appearances. Instead, there is a constant flow of experience, in which cause and effect are circular rather than linear: "The nameless is the fetal beginnings of everything that is happening,/ While that which is named is their mother" (p.77). In this unceasing movement, everything is in the process of continuous transformation. In a sense, it is a treatise on the kind of creativity Stacey et al. speak of as "transformative teleology" (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000). In that there is no God as maker or creator, the kind of creativity evoked is not generated by a power that is prior to or behind the flow of existence. For Ames and Hall, "creativity can make sense only in a processual world that admits of ontological parity among its constituent elements and (therefore) of the spontaneous emergence of novelty" (2003:17).

What are these 'elements'? If everything is in constant flux, there can be no real distinction between things, for any boundaries would also be constantly moving, thus things cannot be 'defined' in the sense of 'made finite'. These 'elements', of which human beings are the supreme example, are therefore more accurately spoken of as 'events'. This has two implications. The first is that identity, or self, is also constantly changing, and can be seen as "our immediate experience…composed of fluid, porous events that entail both persistence and the spontaneous emergence of novelty" (Ibid:16). The second is that 'self', as an 'event in movement', cannot be individual, but is rather communal – in ongoing interaction with its environment, that is, other people. Thus 'integrity of self', for example, does not mean *being* or *staying* whole, or even actualizing its own internal potential. Rather, integrity is the process of 'becoming' in relation with 'other'; it is "a co-creative process in which one shapes and is shaped by one's environing circumstances" (Ibid.).

What then is the 'Dao' and how is it expressed in life? Usually translated as 'the Way', Ames and Hall suggest that "way-making" may be more accurate, for it avoids the 'nominalization' of the word, which they see as "decidedly verbal" (Ibid:58)), In order to 'realize' it - in the sense of both understanding it and actualizing it - the text calls for an appreciation of, and participation in, the movement of life. This is a circular movement in which opposite forces inherently imply each other exactly because they are not distinct and can only exist in relation to each other. "In the process of all things emerging together/ We can witness their

reversion" (Ibid:99) and so: "Determinacy and indeterminacy give rise to each other/ Difficult and easy complement each other…Refined notes and raw sounds harmonize with each other (Ibid:80). All phenomena partake of this movement; so, for example, 'young' can only be truly understood in its 'young-becoming-old' aspect, or 'dark' as 'dark-becoming-light'. Only through this understanding that we can actually respond to and participate in the 'fullness' of life**.**

In this responsive participation, what is called for is a kind of 'non-coercive action' (wu-wei) and an 'unprincipled knowing' (wu-zhi) both of which entail acting spontaneously into the moment without preconceived notions or principles. This has implications for moral and ethical action, in which "Foreknowledge is tinsel decorating the way/ And is the first sign of trouble" (Ibid:136), strongly evoking Griffin's notion of ethics emerging in everyday action within the framework of "participative self-organization" (Griffin, 2002). And so, 'way-making' involves a continuous search for what is 'right action' in the moment, with all the ambiguity that entails:

> Looking and yet not seeing it
> We thus call it "elusive".
> Listening and yet not hearing it
> We thus call it "inaudible".
> Groping and yet not getting it
> We thus call it "intangible"…
> Hold tightly onto way-making in the present
> To manage what is happening right now
> And to understand where it began in the distant past (Ames and Hall, 2003:95)

It is this ability to act spontaneously into the moment, coupled with a sense of continuity, which constitutes the lived experience of transformation. It is also the condition within which creativity and potential novelty can emerge, and in which the future is a constant becoming of the "known-unknown" (Griffin 2002). And, as the *Dao* emphasizes, it can only happen in direct experience, the nature of which, must remain forever 'incomplete' and 'ungraspable'.

3.4.1 Reflections: a move to differentiation

I leave these texts as such (fully aware that I have only scratched the surface of their wisdom), and return to the ways they illumine some of the questions I am exploring, specifically in connection with complex responsive process thinking. Several similarities have been examined above: our implication in the construction of reality, the importance of ordinary, everyday experience; the embeddedness of human experience in the flow of time, and its consequent movement of ceaseless repetition and transformation. There are, however, two differences that I feel are of major importance. The first has to do with the dynamics of power relating, and the second to the way paradox and conflict are (or are not) dealt with.

Complex responsive process theory, drawing on the thought of Elias (2004), places power at the center of human interaction, through the iterated patterning of themes such as inclusion and exclusion or cooperation and competition, with ideologies either sustaining or questioning the existing power relations (Stacey, 2001). The power figuration at the basis of both these texts is unquestionable: it is the rigid hierarchy of Eastern society (whether it be 'master' and 'student', or 'ruler' and 'common people'). In as much as this hierarchy is seen as both 'natural' (i.e. mirroring and mirrored by nature) and 'good', it forms an ideology, in which the value of harmony serves to make invisible the power relations. The Dao, for example, can thus also be seen as a treatise for the ruler to effectively sustain his status in very manipulative way: through 'wu-wei' or non-coercive power. Harmony, as a crucial part of this ideology, serves to make invisible notions seminal to complex responsive process thinking, such as struggle and conflict.

The second difference leads on from this. In its evocation of the vivid sense of movement as the essence of all 'things', the *Dao* is remarkably similar to Elias's notions both of human beings as 'processes' (rather than fixed entities) as well as the inseparability of the individual and the social (Elias, 2004), both of which lie at the heart of complex responsive process theory. But there the similarity ends. In the *Dao*, movement becomes patterned as the tendency of all 'things' to become their opposites, as is beautifully expressed in the Chinese symbol of yin/yang, which visually illustrates the mutual implication of opposites. The overwhelming insistence is on the harmony in this movement, a constant pull to the *reconciliation* of opposites, because 'tian' ("the way of the world" Ames & Hall, 2003:65) is

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sustained equilibrium within movement. Thus, at any given 'point' in time, we will encounter the 'intersection' of opposing movements; of necessity, we will see/feel/sense that stability and instability, for example, are simultaneously present. But we will never experience them as paradoxical because they will never be simultaneously present in equal 'volume', for one is on the wax while the other is on the wane. In other words – despite its constant evocation of opposing forces, paradox, as Stacey speaks of it, cannot exist for more than a split second, as forces meet and move. Equilibrium, not upheaval, is the name of the game. How different from the emphasis Complex Responsive Process Theory – and all theories engaged with complexity thinking –   places on disequilibrium and the immense potential for creativity and transformation found at 'the edge of chaos'! (Stacey, 2003). And, as I have been seeing through the iteration of my experience in writing, this perspective resonates more 'truthfully' with my lived experience.

3.5   PULLING THE THREADS TOGETHER: EXPERIENCES OF PARADOXES IN A CROSS-CULTURAL WORKSHOP

Having examined texts both from Western management tradition and from Eastern traditions, and noticed how different writers take up the themes I am concerned with, I would now like to explore how these themes impact and are impacted by my practice as consultant. In writing about the following project, this exploration remains open, for the experience of paradox, and its invitation to transformation, refuse to be squeezed into tight conclusions. They remain elusive processes of lived experience, to be sensed, felt and reflected upon.

The following is another project I have been engaged with at Kelide, again an attempt to impact the effectiveness of cross-cultural work. Working with, managing and being managed by people from different cultures are inevitably complex experiences, often evoking a kind of 'hall of mirrors' disorientation, in which there is no 'ultimate' ground for our accounting of reality - only a multitude of competing discourses (Dalal, 2000) As such, here is fertile ground for encounter with paradox, with its assault on meaning-making.

This project has spun off from the one described in project 1. As a result of the success of the workshops I ran over a period of a couple of years at the Israeli subsidiary of Kelide, I am approached by a senior member of Corporate HR, who is requesting that I create a one day workshop, and train Kelide managers around the world to facilitate it. The request surprises me, pleases me, frightens me, and raises a lot of questions. It is the ultimate reification of a conversation whose very life lies in the living interactions I struggle to create. Can this be reified into a 'standardized program' – even if I am the one to train the facilitators? What am I contributing to? How will it be used and/or abused? Who will do it if I don't, and what will 'it' then look like? I am afraid that this will be the death of this conversation. After intense deliberation, I agree to take it on. I work on the design for several weeks, and, with much apprehension, I fly to the U.S., where the first 'train-the-trainer' event is to be held.

The workshop begins. 'Kick-starting' the conversation is always difficult. From my previous experience with Kelide, I know to make use of a theoretical model to do so. In small groups, we attempt to compare and 'map' cultures, using personal stories as data for generalizations. Stories begin to flow, and people are becoming engaged and enthusiastic. Inevitably, the question arises: what does 'objective data' show? How does one break the news that there is no truly 'objective data' that deals meaningfully with the notion of culture, which is essentially a complex response process in which collective patterns of identity, continuity and stability emerge together with the potential for change and transformation? The intense need for unequivocal answers is palpable – people want to come away with validated and reliable knowledge – this is what they will be passing on to others! This is my challenge: how can I invite these members of this engineering, solution-based company to experience that what is important in these questions we are just beginning to touch upon *is the conversation itself*? That, while there may be no clear 'answers', it is the very act of *asking the questions* that can transform our understanding and noticing, engaging and acting?

I experience the circular movement of opposing forces spoken of in the *Dao*, as the conversation flows between curiosity and exploration and the powerful need for unambiguous solutions: "well, what is the *right* way to understand this?" It is as if a

space is created, and the conversation begins to meander, and then suddenly there is a wave of panic as we notice this meandering quality, and rush right back to a tight agenda. I too am implicated in the panic. Am I 'delivering' what was expected? Will this be successful? Will people appreciate the quality of conversation, or will it be seen as a waste of time unless we zoom in immediately to 'action items'? How will people go out and facilitate the course if they come away from the two days remembering 'only' this meandering? In my experience, 'train-the-trainer' events always evoke high levels of anxiety, because people move between being engaged in the conversation, and suddenly imagining themselves leading these conversations, and immediately try to 'capture' what the trainer is saying. The challenge is to continuously find a way of moving within the simultaneous desire to explore and discover, on the one hand; and to 'capture' and 'encapsulate' understanding, on the other. It is clear to me that the key lies in my own ability to hold these two paradoxical movements within myself. In the moments I succeed, the invitation to participants to do the same is intensely alive. In moments where the paradox of 'exploring/capturing' becomes decoupled, I immediately sense a more forced quality in the conversation.

Tom, a senior IT manager, with 20 years of expatriate experience, voices his uncertainty: "I don't have your expertise. You know so much, you know all the models". I invite him to challenge the way he is thinking about knowledge and expertise. The models have been minutely detailed in the manual. Can we perhaps view expertise as a kind of 'noticing-in-experience', and a willingness to engage with others in their own experience and noticing processes? I sense that, in this very moment, Tom is suddenly experiencing his own ability and lack of ability *at the same time*. I see the difficulty he is experiencing. I am aware of the struggle my comment has invited. And then I see him relax again. The 'ordinary miracle' of transformation occurs. He is suddenly aware of the complex richness of his experience, his interest in, and commitment to, generating this conversation, as well as his feeling of incapability. He expresses this, with some surprise.

He is animatedly speaking with Sarah, as they try to deepen their understanding of a situation she has brought up. And then, equally suddenly, he is intensely concerned with stage 4 of model 3, and what that means exactly, and could that be the 'answer'

to Sarah's dilemma? I am aware that I am both participating in and witnessing the ebb and flow of relaxation and tension, of expansion and contraction. In moments of relaxation and expansion, we are all able to hold our paradoxical task: of moving with the open, questioning quality of the conversation, and 'capturing' the insights that can generate a clear direction of action. And, in a second, this ability disappears. Both this ability and inability are contagious, and move between us as a group.

We are speaking about a case study. What Liam understands as an act of fine leadership, inviting participation and empowering, Sanjay sees as the abandonment of leadership, and the reluctance to take responsibility. Liam is astonished that what seems so obvious to him could be perceived so differently. He is actually quite shocked. I see him struggling to digest the flavor of paradox he has just had a taste of: how can two such different perspectives exist – and seem, at this moment, equally valid? He cannot stop speaking about this. It is as if he has suddenly encountered, in immediate experience, a kind of 'koan'. We embark on an exploration of what perspective means, how it develops and changes, what its impact is. Liam is troubled and thoughtful.

We speak of a model of 'intercultural sensitivity'. Despite my reservations, I have chosen to include it because I think it raises important questions. One of which emerges right now: Is Kelide trying to become more global, more ethnorelative, or is it digging its heels in and becoming increasingly 'American' as globalization intensifies? This is clearly a complex question, and one that touches all the participants in their everyday activities, although they do not often think about it. There is a silence, as the significance of the question is recognized. A heated conversation begins. There is talk of a gap – between the verbal expression of intention and actual behavior; there is talk of organizational culture and its value; there is talk of history and change. There are no clear answers. Having worked with Kelide for 4 years now, I see the organization as doing both simultaneously. There are clearly attempts to become more ethnorelative – the amplification of this workshop across the world is proof of this. As more and more people are exposed to this conversation, they are walking away with more questions, and an enhanced noticing of the complexity of working in the global environment. At the very same

time, I am also aware of the amplification of voices and processes firmly rooted in the unequivocal belief in the American management ethic of individualism, achievement and "can do" thinking. And both seem to be intensifying as globalization spreads. I try these thoughts out with the group.

George, who brought up this question, listens intently. Others take up the conversation. The reaction is mostly to 'dualize' the paradox – to separate these two directions in time and space. Ethnocentrism is amplified in the growing standardization of certain processes around the globe, and ethnorelativism is amplified as others are being customized according to local needs. This of course, is true – and not easy to handle, for many times it is taken to be a form of hypocrisy: "We say we want to become more ethnorelative, but we are doing the opposite". I do not feel it is as simple as that. Both are being said, and both are being done, simultaneously – and sometimes in the same processes! It is a situation similar to that spoken of by Griffin in relation to the dilemmas of the *Body Shop*.

The powerful Kelide culture, as it impacts these questions of global work, is an example brought up now. Some view with concern what they see as the dilution of this culture, which they experience as a threat to survival of the company. Others view with concern its intensification and pervasiveness, experiencing this as the source of the organization's lack of flexibility and responsiveness - an equally powerful threat to its survival. The conversation continues, with a strong need to resolve the issues, both of 'what *are* we doing?' and of 'what *should* we be doing?' There is a longing for a 'cult value' that will bring relief from the ongoing struggle to 'functionalize' it in everyday conflicts (Griffin, 2002). "What does management say about this?" becomes the question that focuses the discussion: "What is our strategy?" The confusion and anxiety are palpable. We are in koan territory again. 'Can strategy be paradoxical?' is the question that is in the air, although no one, including myself, actually verbalizes it. No, absolutely not, seems to be the unspoken answer.

Sarah suggests that at the end of the course, she will take the problem to the VP of Human Resources, and let everyone know 'the answer'. An immediate relief seems to sweep the room. I say nothing. I know that it is not so simple. We have looked at

this issue in a more complex way, and a simple answer may no longer do. I have a feeling that we all know this, but it is too scary to verbalize. The conversation moves on. My sense is that we have bypassed an opportunity, and the conversation flattens somewhat.

This question will not rest, however, and reappears again and again for the next day and a half, in different forms. It is becoming a metaphorical attractor through which we are seeing different issues. We notice for example, how 'directness' in communication has been set up in Kelide as a 'cult value'. What does that mean? How is this functionalized in the everyday interactions with people from cultures in which 'indirectness' is a cult value? Can people change? Should people change? When do people do their best and give of themselves? As we explore these issues, I begin to sense that the need for an unequivocal answer becomes less potent. Anita points out that *this discussion itself* is the way Kelide actually needs to be dealing with these issues; that having this very conversation in different places *is* actually the change that needs to happen, and that as this conversation gets amplified through the organization, a direction will emerge each time anew. Her voice sounds out with a compelling quality that has been missing from the conversation. Her suggestion has a paradoxical flavour of the 'certainty of the uncertain': she is suggesting that the only way to resolve this issue it to make it the focus of constant negotiation. There is an unusual energy in the room. People are silent, and the significance of what she is saying is permeating our understanding.

And then Kyle can no longer remain silent. "I am an engineer. I am paid to find solutions to problems that I can define. If I can't find a viable solution, I am worthless to this organization. I'm not sure I can live with this duality. More important, I'm not sure I can carry forth this class and be a spokesperson for this duality!" We are, once again, in the 'giving clear answers' territory. "Well", I answer, "You certainly don't have to be a spokesperson for this duality – you need to find your own way through this maze. You need to be a spokesperson for whatever you feel comfortable with – but that, at the same time, remains true to the complexity we have touched upon". "Yeah", he says, "The problem is that I don't feel comfortable with anything at the moment!" The conversation moves to the role of a facilitator. Is it a role which needs to be the source of 'the answer', or is it one

which 'simply' requires its holder to be a more experienced participant in the conversation?

We are back with Tom's question of expertise. 'Simply' to be a participant in the conversation is not usually an accepted option within the Kelide framework – which is actually strange, because of the organization's admirable tradition of having managers run courses in all kinds of subjects that are not within the realm of their expertise, like this one. The courses are all built, however, on the dynamics of answers, of providing a 'one best way to resolve the issue', whatever that issue might be. I offer my own facilitation for examination. The amount of times I have said "I don't really know" in this workshop has been countless. Has that made me less credible? Kyle mulls that one over. And I am left wondering what I am doing. Am I causing harm? I am giving them a designed program through which the idea of global work can be examined, and I am coaxing this examination into the areas that are so complex that answers must always be partial and contextual. We are in the realm of Gallie's 'essentially contested concepts': "concepts whose proper clarification gives rise to endless disputes…(which) by their very nature… are not amenable to resolution simply in empirical or theoretical terms; (and) all proposed 'clarifications'…are themselves a part of the practical politics of everyday life" (Shotter 2002, 154).

Just as there are no clear, 'final' answers to these questions, there is certainly no recipe for the immediate success of the course. These questions will not stop gnawing at me. Can these participants engage others in the type of conversation I am inviting here? I don't know. Should I be making this attempt easier for them by not going into these incredibly complex issues and sticking strictly with models and case studies with clear recommendations? This would not be an option for me - any serious attempt at this conversation will bring them up. And, to my mind, these are exactly the kinds of questions that need to be engaged with in order to be able to move more effectively within the complex challenges of global work. Effectiveness too becomes an 'essentially contested concept', my own included. At Kelide, the unspoken assumption is that effectiveness involves the clarity to move forward confidently in an unequivocal, predetermined direction. And, as I examine my own assumptions, I become aware that effectiveness involves the confidence of moving

forward in conditions which will never afford complete clarity, and that it is within the constant engagement with this lack of clarity that 'effective action' will emerge in ordinary, everyday kinds of transformation, like those that have permeated our conversation in the workshop. In other words, 'effectiveness' is a complex responsive process. Paradoxically, its expression in action can actually never be predetermined, and, at the same time, it will always be measured and evaluated according to predetermined criteria.

At the end of the workshop, I invite participants to give feedback and to say where they find themselves, in terms of thoughts, questions, reservations, feelings etc. Many speak of the energy the workshop has generated, the interest and the involvement, together with the fresh perspectives created. There is much excitement at the thought of taking this conversation to their own teams. They also speak about the deep discomfort created in a conversation without easy answers, and their ambivalence about their own ability to facilitate it. One participant, Dave, says something that touches me (and I think everyone else) deeply. He expresses the difficulty he is having in articulating what he is feeling at the moment. He says: "I feel that these two days have had a humbling effect on me. I have an impression of the immense complexity of this subject, and am aware that what coming to terms with this complexity entails is really an ongoing process of engaging with what *is*, in every encounter. I feel excited as well as awed by this challenge. And I am really grateful for this".

3.6 CONCLUSION: THOUGHTS ON METHODOLOGY

The research methodology proposed by the DMan program is an invitation to 'take our experience seriously'. This project is an attempt to do so, through the reflective examination of my experience in narrative and through the attempts to locate my thinking in different traditions of thought. Let me now take my experience of *writing* this project seriously.

My search starts with a fascination with the concept of paradox, which emerged in my first paper. This is rooted in a powerful sense that the really important questions

for us as human beings are, in their living, often paradoxical. My first two stories are personal attempts to grapple with the notion of paradox as I encounter it in my life. It is in the telling of them that I begin to understand that what I find valuable about this encounter is the way in which it demands a profound questioning of what I take for granted, for this assault on 'ready' meaning is what creates the possibility for the transformation of meaning, and thus new, richer ways of understanding ourselves and our relationships.

I realize that in this search for a more meaningful way of understanding experience, I am coming from a certain tradition of thought, and turn to examine some voices in the management field that I feel are concerned with similar questions. In conversing with these voices, locating similarity and difference, I become more aware of how I am thinking about paradox as central to the attempt to speak about 'reality' in a way more resonant with lived experience. I also begin to locate my own interest as lying in the exploration of the concrete, immediate experience of paradox in the moment.

At the same time as my own understanding of paradox is deepening, it is also being continuously challenged by my colleagues. What begins with a relative clarity, slowly dissipates into intense self-doubt at my own capacity to deal coherently and meaningfully with this topic. My confidence wavers, and I entertain thoughts of changing topics. The detailed narration of the experience in which my own understanding and resolve is transformed is therefore an attempt to 'theorize' about transformation through the telling of a story. A renewed appreciation of the connection between paradox and transformation – *both as experience* – emerges, and sends me to a tradition of thought in which both are spoken of as inherent to the search for a meaningful life. In picking up these threads, I become aware of where this thought resonates with and differs from my own.

In the final section, I turn to explore what all of this means in relation to my practice as consultant. I choose to conduct this exploration in a field riddled with paradoxes - cross-cultural encounters in a global organization - and in which I sense that the need for a transformation of the way our thinking, relating and acting is urgent. I follow the movement of conversations as they self-organize into patterns which enable, and disable, transformation.

There is no conclusion, for my inquiry is still in progress. And so I continue to take my experience seriously, in my personal life, my practice, my studies, creating and crafting my research in the paradoxical dynamic of the 'unknown-known'. Clarity emerges in writing and in conversations, only to be negated, renegotiated, lost, transformed. In taking my experience seriously, I have begun to understand, in a more direct way, what the complexity sciences speak of as emergence and self organization. I experience the anxiety involved in partaking of an emergent methodology, as well as the excitement and curiosity generated. As I articulate this, I find myself thinking – is this not actually the essence of the experience we all have as we live our ordinary, every day lives in organizations: that of encountering complex situations which call us to make sense of the 'unsensible', coupled with the imperative to go on in action in the midst of uncertainty? In studying myself as I do this, alone and with others, I am aware of the possibility for generating a kind of 'knowledge-in-movement', which has the potential to transform the ways we think and speak about what it is we are doing together in organizations.

4. THE EXPERIENCE OF 'KNOWING/NOT-KNOWING': A SEARCH FOR METHODOLOGY (Project 3, January 2007)

4.1 INTRODUCTION: "ALAS – ALL DIRECTION IS LOST AGAIN!"

It is days after our fourth learning set meeting, and, yet again, I find myself groping for a clear sense of what I am trying to write about. Having written several pieces over the last few months, I have not yet recognized the kind of patterning necessary to articulate in a meaningful way where my research is going next. The experience is one of anxiety; of feeling lost, out of control, and floundering in a swamp of uncertainty. P., my supervisor, recognizes this experience itself as a pattern, which she formulates (with affectionate mockery) as my "alas-all-direction-is-lost-again!" cry. I immediately identify what she is saying, with a mixture of relief ("I've been here before, and have come through it") and anger ("my experience is not being taken seriously!"). With a minimal trace of conscious intention, I set out to 'prove' my lostness. By the end of the next hour, my whole learning set is lost. There is a palpable heaviness in the air. We opt for the "we must be tired and hungry" over the "there is no hope of getting Chen out of this swamp" alternative, and break for lunch.

As we sit on the balcony, enjoying an unexpectedly hot December sun and the stunning view of the wild, desert valley my house is perched on, I think of our conversation. We have explored my pattern of lostness and foundness, and I become increasingly aware of my own ideology of sense-making, in which meaning can only emerge in the direct experience of its own loss. This resonates with the experience of paradox I have been trying to explore. We have noticed how, working solely within the dynamics of 'foundness' and answers, feels unbearably reductionist to me. This is what I fight so relentlessly in many of my Kelide experiences[1]. I want to work with people who are willing to tolerate 'not knowing' where they are going, in the firm belief that new or renewed meaning can emerge only within this experience.

I become aware of two things. The first is a grasped significance of my work at Kelide. It is one of the organizations in which there is the most reluctance to tolerate any experience of 'lostness', and my sense is that it is this very reluctance that lies at the

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[1] See projects 1 and 2.

heart of much of the 'stuckness' I am called in to work with. I also have the direct experience, from many moments of my work there, that, in agreeing to risk our 'knowing', new directions of thought and meaning have indeed emerged. Much of this work lies in generating the kind of conversations that will enable people to hold off 'knowing' (even just a little!), to risk 'lostness', rather than banishing this experience immediately, in favor of the reassuring clarity of "best known methods for effective action". While my work is often seen as "so un-Kelidey", as one manager said in frustrated amusement, there is obviously much appreciation for what he termed "whatever it is you do".

The second thing I am understanding, as we all sit on the balcony, is the actual pain of this experience I am inviting people to participate in. I am experiencing my own pain – panic, almost; inherent, in differing degrees, to the lived experience of 'not knowing'. What I have just written about as "my firm belief" is much less firm when I am experiencing it myself!

After lunch, I speak my understandings. The conversation moves on – without further clarity on my part. The intense discomfort of not being able to generate a set of 'action items' for myself remains, but it is now laced with a sense of the importance of staying with this experience. This is the very experience I feel is so often vehemently avoided by organizational members, and I understand that somehow it is only from *within* this experience – if I can only stay with it! – that a new and meaningful direction can emerge for my own research. Will it emerge 'quickly' enough to enable my next project within deadlines? There is, of course, no guarantee of that. How can I participate in this process of emergence as it happens, trusting that pattern will emerge, but not being in control of its emergence? What am I called on to 'do'? I feel that it is not only passively waiting, nor does it involve the forced activity of writing. I have an unarticulated sense that it has something to do with *paying attention* to this experience, noticing and exploring its different aspects as it moves in time.

As the days go by, and much of my energy is drawn into the occupations of daily life, the acuteness of the 'lostness' experience lessens. I read texts on methodology, aware of the fact that this both reinforces my feelings of confusion as I become increasingly overwhelmed with the scope of theoretical material; and, paradoxically, gives me tiny

glimpses of direction as I find myself engaged in snippets of meaningful 'conversation' with these texts. I take long walks, aware of my need for activity that is not primarily cognitive. As I walk, unexpected connections surprise me in my silent conversation, appearing and disappearing as part of the same movement, like the glimmers of a firefly.

While there is no linear movement towards clarity, there is a kind of meandering, exploratory quality in my thought, which laces through the heaviness of emotion that still accompanies this sense of not- knowing. I am vaguely beginning to recognize this complex interweaving of 'not-knowing' and 'knowing' as a theme in the back of my mind. I am reminded of Bergson's concepts of "the Gaze", "which extracts, fixes, objectifies and disembodies something from a process" and "the Glance", "which is concerned with motion, peripheral vision, an unfocused field of experience we attempt to construct continually" (Cunliffe, 2003:987-8). Working through this experience of lostness involves 'relaxing' into a kind of 'Glance approach' – trusting my ability to move with these moving, unfocused processes I am experiencing, and the kind of 'peripheral noticing' that is emerging.

At one point, it suddenly occurs to me that what I am in the midst of **is** the experience of research: the attempt to take my experience seriously; to notice and explore it, accepting that, in its very movement, it can never be fully understood. I am studying myself as a 'sample' of 'working within uncertainty'. I recall a sentence that my supervisor said to me, almost in passing, towards the end of our meeting: "You need to write about methodology. I have a feeling that as you do, you will understand your practice better". This sentence is suddenly resounding with new meaning for me. In an instant, new - yet recognizable - connections are created.

I am understanding the intimate connection between my research and my practice methodology. 'What I do' as practitioner and as researcher is not different, for this is the experience I try to create/invite in my practice. And what I am experiencing, *in this moment*, is what I hope for in my practice: the revitalized energy generated by this discovery/creation of new meaning from within the energy-sapping experience of 'not-knowing'. While I still have no clear idea of where this project will take me, I do have a

clear 'next step'. And I am aware that, as my understanding of this experience deepens, so will my ability to work with it in my practice.

And so I turn to explore the question of methodology. I have a growing sense that the methodology I am taking up is an expression of what I value most in my life: the reflective questioning of my own experience in the moment, in the search for meaning. In this continuous questioning, the experience of 'lostness', of 'not-knowing' is crucial to the creation of new understanding and meaning. I am recognizing anew the paradoxical nature of experience, in the form of the iterative and non-linear relationship between what I am calling 'lostness', or not-knowing, and 'foundness' or knowing. This relationship interests me profoundly. Unexpectedly, I find an argument emerging.

I am proposing that while 'foundness' is what we seek ('to find' echoing experiences of achievement and mastery) and 'lostness' is what we avoid at all cost ('to lose' calling up loss, separation, defeat), the two are inextricably connected. They are not separable experiences, arising from each other in linear fashion ("I once was lost but now I'm found", as the American spiritual has it), but together form the dynamic and paradoxical movement of the transformation of meaning in experience. It is only by tolerating the anxiety evoked by 'not-knowing' that we have the possibility of stumbling across something as yet unimagined, of being surprised by the unexpected; and this is what enables us to go on, individually and together, in ways that are new, vital and meaningful. My 'method' in organizations involves a continuous search for ways of inviting people to dare to get lost, and – from within this somewhat shaky experience in living interaction – to respond to each other and to their surroundings in a way that is more spontaneous and direct, to "go beyond the possibilities of the already known, and explore the possibilities of the present" (Montuori, 2003:240). My research methodology entails a way of studying and writing about how this happens in my practice.

4.2   THE QUEST FOR METHODOLOGY: WHAT AM I DOING?

The methodology I am taking up, 'provoked' rather than prescribed (Stacey and Griffin, 2005:26) by Complex Responsive Process Theory, is informed by many sources. It

shares the privileging of embodied, local experience, and the understanding of the participant observer role of the researcher, with anthropological and ethnographical perspectives (Geertz, 2000; Clifford, 2003); it shares the intention of impacting action rather than 'merely' generating knowledge with action research (Reason, 1988); it posits the mutual and recursive constitution of knower and known, and the concept of a relational self with social constructivist perspectives (Gergen, 2002; Shotter, 2002); it advocates the importance of interpretive, sense-making activity along with hermeneutic perspectives (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000); it focuses on personal, reflexive narrative as do autoethnographical (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) perspectives – to name but a few. It also differentiates itself in significant ways, in particular in its relentless demand to 'take experience seriously'. What does this entail?

4.2.1 *"Taking **experience** seriously"*

In 'taking experience seriously', my own and others' in our ongoing interactions, the first notion to account for is 'experience'. I have no ready definition, nor can I find a satisfying one in the literature. As Clifford points out, "one has it or not, and its invocation often smacks of mystification" (2003:129). Alvesson and Skolberg call attention to its active quality, "creating and provided with intention (and) meaning" (2000:55); Maturana proposes "the happening of life" (in Steier, 1991: 48), and Griffin and Stacey speak of the "felt, meaningful engagement in relating to others and to oneself as we do whatever we come together to do" (2005:38). While I would agree with 'felt' and 'engagement', I would certainly not agree with 'meaningful', for experience may equally be 'felt meaninglessness', as many postmodernists emphasize (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Alvesson, 1995; Cooper & Burrell, 1988).

The dominant aspect of experience I notice and attempt to engage with is its ever moving quality: experience is a continuous process in time. Because 'defining' is the act of 'making finite', and lived experience cannot be 'finitized', perhaps there cannot be an adequate definition of the term. It is the continuously moving present in which we live. It is, of course, not independent of past and future, and thus Stacey and Griffin speak of the 'living present' as "a circular time structure…in which the past influences the future (in terms of expectations) and the future influences the past (in terms of reconstitution

through reinterpretation)" (2005:28). In this sense, experience is always more than 'just' the present, and is always uncompleted. These two qualities – incompleteness and continuous motion – render experience ever unpredictable, never completely knowable, and certainly uncontrollable. Thus the research I engage in, if it is to be appropriate for its 'subject matter', must be always in movement: a kind of knowledge-generation in motion. Thinking and writing both about, and in, movement is no easy matter, for, as Deleuze and Parnet point out, "movement always happens behind the thinker's back, or in the moment when he blinks" (Cooper, 1998:112). This remains the major challenge of my endeavor.

One of the most significant connections between my research and my practice is that they are both emergent phenomena. They both entail a "particular process of inquiry triggered by unforeseen events (that) both recognizes and gives rise to the occurrence of patterns" (MacLean, MacIntosh & Grant, 2002:197). In that both involve acting into the unknown, I notice qualities of anxiety that permeate them both. Few writers seem to take notice of this. Gergen (1991), for example, writes about her experience of engaging in an emergent methodology (Gergen & Gergen, 1991), observing how her interest and research focus change over time. She speaks of the quality of surprise that accompanies these shifts of interest, but not of the emotional process she undergoes within these changes. Did she just move from one center of focus to another in a simple, linear, and purely cognitive manner? Or did she experience throes of self-doubt, questioning the validity of her shifting interest, searching for the sense she was or was not making? Did she experience loss in the midst of finding new directions? If she did, she does not share these aspects of the experience with her reader. Maturana (1991) locates the very impetus for research in this experience of 'not-knowing': "The observer does not find a problem or phenomenon to be explained outside him or herself; but on the contrary, he or she constitutes one in his or her domain of experience as he or she *finds him or herself in a question that he or she desires to answer*" (1991:36; emphasis mine). It is clear to me that a part of this methodology involves my own ability to endure and work within the painful turmoil of not-knowing.

The second aspect of experience relevant here is its 'lived' nature, embodying a complex interweaving of physical, cognitive and emotional processes. In its lived nature, it cannot be comprehensively studied 'from the outside' (Alvesson and

Skoldberg, 2000; Toulmin, 2003; Stacey and Griffin, 2005).Whether this type of 'knowing from within' or participative knowledge may be called 'science' has been much debated (Toulmin, 2003). While traditionally the scientific endeavor, as provoked by the Newtonian paradigm, seeks to generate timeless and universal truths about a reality that is independent of its 'knower', the voices problematizing this paradigm have grown louder over the past 50 years. They range from those seriously engaging with the implications of the wave/particle conundrum of quantum mechanics (Zukav, 1980), which illustrates that our research results are 'hostage' to our design (Wenger, 2004); through complexity scientists who point out the experiential nature of all of our scientific endeavors (Maturana, 1991); to social scientists from myriad schools of thought, who question the possibility of decoupling the knower from the known (Toulmin & Gustavson, 2003; Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001; Steedman, 1991; Gergen, 2002; Shotter, 2002; MacLean, MacIntosh and Grant, 2002; Alvesson and Skolberg, 2000; Stacey and Griffin, 2005, Chia, 2003; Martin, 2002). Many of these base their arguments on a qualitative differentiation between the natural and social sciences, pointing out that the latter involves the distinctly human endeavor to study itself. In a tone of humorous frustration, Toulmin makes the differentiation: "does research in ornithology call for participation by the birds?" (2003:204)

While experience compels participation, and therefore the subjectivity of the researcher, the activity of research traditionally demands objectivity – the attempt to distance ourselves from the 'object' of our study in the service of a more 'impartial' understanding. These two perspectives seem downright contradictory. If, however, we accept any version of the constructionist stance of the inextricability of subject and object, and the mutually constitutive relationship between them (Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Gergen, 2002; Shotter, 2002), then research calls for a complex activity of 'objectifying' my own 'subjectivity'. It requires a relationship with my own experience that entails both detachment and involvement. While Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) advocate alternating between these two stances, Stacey and Griffin insist on their simultaneity within a paradoxical dynamic of 'detached involvement' (2005). In involved participation, I partake fully in the unique situation. In detached observation, I notice as many aspects of lived experience as I can. Within the simultaneity of the two, both experience and research inevitably take on a richer and more complex meaning.

*4.2.2 "Taking experience **seriously**"*

This stance of 'detached involvement' also engenders the reflexivity crucial to this methodology, for the simultaneity of being both subject and object of my experience defines the effort involved in taking it 'seriously'. 'Reflexive research' is a term that encompasses different approaches arising from a critique of conventional empirical research, and emphasizing the constructed, political and linguistic nature of social research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Clifford, 2003).

Two assumptions underlie these approaches. The first is that the social reality we research is, in itself, a complex, interactional and emergent reality, and thus we are called upon to question the 'truth claims' of those we are studying (including our own!). The second involves our responsibility as researchers – for, if we cannot make a claim to any kind of 'objectivity', we are bound to at least to acknowledge our own 'fingerprints' (Gergen and Gergen, 1991) on the research process. We are thus required to make visible, to the best of our ability, our own values, intentions, ideologies etc., engaging in a process of "radical" (Cunliffe, 2003) or "second-order" (Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001; Stacey and Griffin, 2005) reflexivity: we are called to reflect upon ourselves reflecting on our field of research. Reflexivity thus lies in the circular movement between the emergence of meaning from experience and the recursive impact of that meaning back onto the experience itself.

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) speak of reflexivity as the movement between levels of reflection, without letting any level predominate[2]. "The trick" they claim, "is to control theories …without letting them control you" (2000:251). This 'trick' is problematic, for it grants us an agency as researchers that I am not sure we have. I do not believe that we can 'freely' choose our theoretical position 'from outside' the ideological/ political framework we are deeply implicated in. If reflexivity stems from the understanding that we cannot study social reality from the outside – it seems ironical to think we can 'influence' our own thinking from this position! Many times we ourselves are unaware of the frameworks that are impacting our thinking, and our awareness only flickers to give elusive hints of the way we

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[2] What they speak of as 'levels' of reflexivity entails engagement in empirical, hermeneutical, ideologically critical and postmodernist research perspectives. They differentiate this 'reflexive' movement between 'levels' from what they call 'reflectivity', which would consist of simply taking an interest in the way our meaning-making is impacted by the theoretical, cultural and political context we are a part of.

are constructing and are constructed by our realities. In reflexive research, it is our responsibility to notice these flickers as they occur.

Reflexivity therefore involves both the introspective activity of turning our attention to ourselves as we research the social reality created by ourselves-in-interaction-with-others; as well as an ongoing, iterative dialogue with others. The latter can assume two forms. The first involves the activity of an ongoing, reflective conversation with colleagues and supervisors, both in the academic and the professional environment; and the second takes place as a 'conversation' with texts from different disciplines (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Bamberger and Schon, 1991). This dialogue is built into my methodology, and results in continuous iterations my writing. In this iterative and reflexive engagement with the thought of others, I become increasingly aware of the way my own thought is both formed and moves. As such, social research becomes an inherently reflexive activity (Gergen and Gergen, 1991; Bamberger and Schon, 1991; Cunliffe, 2003), for "all knowing is self knowing" (Stacey & Griffin, 2005: 37), in the sense both of knowing oneself, and of knowing through the self. These iterative, introspective and reflexive aspects of this methodology constitute a continuous demand to validate and justify my thought – to myself and to others. Here too, I find a close connection between my research and practice methodology. In reflecting on my experience as I engage in research, I am recognizing that what I do in my practice is just this: participating with others in reflexive processes of knowledge-generation.

There is, however, a danger in reflexivity, both in research and in practice, and that is the possibility of infinite regress which stalks the researcher engaged in a knowledge production process to explore the nature of knowledge production (Cunliffe, 2003). This danger resounds powerfully in organizational practice – can too much reflexivity paralyze action? While the line between enabling and disabling complexity generated in reflexive processes is a thin one, it seems to me that the far more immediate danger in practice is the tendency to over-simplify experience in the service of immediate action. In research, clarity is often at stake. While remaining aware of the possible dangers, I find that I, like many other reflexive researchers, do indeed privilege the generation of a richer and more complex understanding of the way we impact and are impacted by social reality (Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001). It seems to me that the

more complex our understanding is, the more it resonates with the 'truth' of our experience, and the more it can allow for rich and nuanced ways of understanding and speaking about it.[3]

If what I am doing is reflexively exploring the way meaning is generated in lived experience, what then is the appropriate mode of writing? Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) refer to Bruner's (1986) distinction between 'logico-scientific' and 'narrative' modes of thought. The first privileges 'objective truth' discovered through empirical research processes, and is concerned with the production of general, decontextualized and consistent knowledge; while the second aims for verisimilitude and meaning through the exploration of experience; situated, concrete and often paradoxical (Ibid). This places narrative thinking and methodology firmly as the only option for the kind of research I am engaging in. I am telling stories of my experience of interactions in organizational life, and trying to make sense of that experience as I tell it.

For Stacey and Griffin, because these interactions are actually "patterned primarily as narrative themes", taking one's experience seriously is "the activity of articulating and reflecting about these themes" (2005:35-6). In this sense, I am both creating and discovering these narrative themes in the act of writing, and they, in turn, generate the meaning that recursively impacts further interactions. Within this dynamic, my experienced identity is implicated: "Since what I and we are doing is inseparable from who I and we are, a meaningful narrative is also always expressing, that is iterating and co-creating, individual and collective identities" (Ibid, 38). And so, yet another connection emerges between research and practice methodology – for is this not exactly a description of what happens in the conversations I participate in organizations?

Czarniawska (2004) speaks of organizing *as* narrating, and Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) make a claim that narrative discourse is isomorphic of action in organizations – we narrate our organizational experience as research in the same way we construct our experience as practice. As we do so, we must constantly give attention to the performative aspect of language (Gergen, 2002; Shotter, 2002), for the ways we narrate: our organization of 'plot', our characterizations, the motives we attribute, where

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[3] Maturana (1991) connects this kind of complexity directly with the possibility of creativity, and I agree: "The more complex and rich our dynamics of state (including the dynamics of states of our nervous system, of course), the more unexpected will be our participation in the different conversations in which we are involved, and the more creative we shall be in the eyes of the surprised beholder" (pp.45-6).

we decide to begin and to end – all act back into the reality of the 'story' we are telling. Thus narrative methodology is far more appropriate to the exploration of the dynamic nature of our experience than any kind of empirical methodology which generates clear, propositional conclusions.

4.2.3   Questions of validation criteria

If, however, what I am doing is 'just telling stories' (and, not coincidentally, does this phrase connote lying!), what claims can my narratives make to the kind of validity, reliability and generalizability traditionally spoken about as criteria for 'good', 'rigorous' research?

The question of validation criteria for this kind of qualitative research must be approached both in terms of goals, and in terms of process. Traditionally, management research has been concerned with prediction and control, in the service of effectively implementing organizational goals. Over the past two decades, however, this way of thinking is seen as creating a growing gap between theory and lived practice, or the 'production' and 'use' of organizational knowledge (Martin, 2002), that has become a source of frustration for both managers and researchers. *Can* experience be accurately predicted and controlled? Wenger (2004) points out that any kind of 'design' in organizations is never actually 'implemented' – it is 'responded to'. Due to the non-linear characteristics of complex responsive processes that constitute organizations (Stacey, 2002), and the tendency of unexpected events to be amplified, the way individual or interactive experience will evolve cannot be predicted with much certainty. If we want to generate meaningful knowledge about our experiences in organizations, and narrow the gap between management theory and practice, what are we to do? This is the question MacLean, MacIntosh and Grant (2002) engage with in their attempt to give a lived example of "Mode 2 knowledge production"[4], with the goal of producing knowledge that is relevant, practical and useful to managers.

This question also drives much 'action research' – a process of knowledge generation conducted in and on experience. The goal of action research is emancipatory – from

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[4] Mode 2 is characterized by the following: it is produced in the context of application; it is transdisciplinary; it is produced in conditions of heterogeneity and organizational diversity; it places emphasis on social accountability and reflexivity; it allows for a diverse range of quality controls.

claims to being a spiritual practice in itself (Reason, 2000); through the endeavour to promote 'the good life' (Ravn, 1991) in which humanistic values constitute a central ideology; to a kind of 'organizational therapy' (Toulmin, 2003). While I agree wholeheartedly with the approach which posits that organizational research should be 'actionable', in the sense of impacting and being impacted by practice, I believe that many of these approaches adopt a stance that both strengthens the gap between research and action, and assumes that that the 'practice' can be directly and linearly impacted by our actions 'on' it.

Perhaps, then, we might ask ourselves what we mean by 'action'. Is it 'only' observable acts that have clear and definable consequences? Would 'attending to' or 'noticing' be considered an action? Understanding? Insight? Many action researchers would consider such processes as 'intervening variables' that impact action, not actually action in and of itself. I would make a case for the fact that all these are indeed 'action', taking place within and between individuals in all of the local interactions that constitute our daily organizational life. The fact that they cannot be clearly measured and that we cannot always and immediately see their direct connection to observable reality, does not reduce their 'action' status. Indeed my research aims to impact our noticing processes, under the assumption I share with Stacey and Griffin, that the purpose of research is "to develop the practitioner's skill in paying attention to the complexity of the local micro interactions he or she is engaged in because it is in these that wider organizational patterns emerge" (2005:40). While Alvesson and Skolberg see the relationship between the generation of new meaning and the possibility of new action alternatives as a "blunt" criterion (2000:274), I would argue that it is this very relationship that creates the value of much qualitative research, which teases out and explores the complex and elusive connections between understanding, meaning, ways of speaking and 'behavioural' action.

In terms of process, what claims can the study of "the single experience" (Lincoln and Guba) make to validity or generalizability? I am my main 'data source', for I am 'taking *my* experience seriously' – although my narratives also include the ways those I engage with speak of their experience. However, I partake of different activities in the research process (reading, reflecting, conversing, writing and re-writing), all of which are oriented towards 'validating' my research. Traditionally spoken of a kind of 'triangulation', Richardson (1997) proposes that the image of a crystal may be more

appropriate than that of a triangle, combining "symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach…(to) provide us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding" (quoted in Lincoln and Guba, 2000). As mentioned above, the most significant of these consists of continuous, robust and challenging conversations with peer researchers (Healy and Perry, 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

These conversations give rise to emergent criteria for the 'goodness' of my research (Lincoln and Guba, 2000), and are in constant negotiation. Am I being reflexive enough? Too introspective? Precise enough? Convincing? Do my narratives ring true to experience? Am I writing in enough/ too much depth and detail? Am I engaging intelligently and critically with others in different fields concerned with similar issues? Do my readers enjoy my stories? Are they coherent? Are they professionally relevant? Am I raising non-trivial questions about practice? Am I impacting my readers' noticing processes? These questions revolve around what researchers have offered as possible alternatives to positivistic, measurable criteria: verisimilitude, richness, integrity, intellectual rigor and depth, utility, aesthetics (Garman, 1996; Czarniawska, 2004; Holt, 2003). My projects get written and rewritten time and again under the scrutiny of this simultaneously exhausting and exhilarating process, as I myself continuously gain new understanding into my own experience and writing.

As to the 'external validity', or generalizability of my research (what Healy and Perry, 2000; call the 'penulitmate criterion'!), my research is certainly not generalizable in the traditional sense of the word, for it is neither systematically replicable, nor can it be rigorously applied to a 'population'. My subject matter, experiences of transformation and ways of working with them, does not have the predictive ability that is the goal of most generalizations. I myself, in my own 'samples' cannot tell if, when and how they will happen. Yet, my narratives show such experiences again and again, as they take place in different forms, in different contexts, and with people from different cultures. As such, they are certainly generalizable. My research aims to study experiences of felt meaningfulness, and these experiences, while not provable or measurable, are certainly generalizable – they are, I believe at heart of what being human entails.

And so my exploration of methodology draws to a close. The turmoiled experience that launched this exploration has become transformed – I now know where I want to go. Having understood with a little more clarity the complex connections between 'not-knowing' and 'knowing' in my experience of research, I will now attempt to understand these in organizational life, which may be seen again in terms of further exploring the generalizability of my own experience. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which movement and transformation are (and are not) created within this complex intertwining of knowing and not-knowing.

4.3   STUCKNESS AND MOVEMENT IN A KELIDE PROJECT

How does one tell a story which is still in the making; whose plot is highly dynamic, whose characters come and go, taking up and abandoning roles; and whose meaning and significance changes each time one engages with it? The difficulty of attempting to speak about experience *as it moves* is the defining one, for, as Shotter asks: "How can we investigate the nature of something that lacks specificity, whose very openness to being specified or determined by those involved in it is its central defining feature?" (2002: 58).

A chronological organization of events does not feel satisfying, for while my story happens in a certain sequence, this sequence does not resonate with the sense I am making of events – both in participation, and in writing. As such, I can only begin with the present, for it is here that the activity of sense-making occurs. I am aware that as each present 'happens', a slightly different story takes form, acting back on the past and forward into expectations for how it will continue (Shaw, 2002). Because of the complex and non-linear relationship between past, present and future, I pattern my narrative through theme, rather than sequence. From within the infinity of complex detail, I obviously choose what to include and exclude. I am becoming increasingly aware of my 'authoring'. As such, it is, and can only be, *my story* of this experience. Because what I am trying to understand again and anew in the telling is related to what I experience as movement and stuckness in my organizational work, and the possible

connections to the turbulent experience of losing and finding direction, I will tell of three conversations that embody different aspects of these dynamics.[5]

4.3.1   Setting the scene

The project at hand is a leadership development program for managers working in the global environment, leading multi-cultural and virtual teams. The request for its design comes from Jamie, an experienced OD practitioner, who will lead the project together with Sue, a member of the Training Department. It is to be 'sponsored' by three managers of the most senior level in the organization, for it is considered of top priority.

In my first conversation with Jamie, I find myself – yet again[6] – expressing my hesitation concerning the effectiveness of the form this initiative has taken: it is to be a training program, the unexamined and automatic Kelide solution to all complex issues. I am already uncomfortable with what I feel is an a priori 'reduction' of the possibilities of this kind of conversation. Rather than a program with a defined beginning and end, I feel it needs to exist and develop within a wider framework of different kinds of interactions, some predictable and 'designable', some not. In my imagination, it needs to permeate the conversations already happening, about what it is like to lead people in the global environment, and of the incredibly complex, messy issues involved. The 'how' is not yet clear, but I would like to keep it open.

Jamie listens to me, agrees wholeheartedly, and says "We have the mandate to create a training program. Where it goes from there will be a function of so many other parameters. Let's start and see". The experience of unexpected and surprising directions emerging within my work at Kelide (despite the powerful norms of immediate closure and tight structure!) is familiar. Desire interlacing with unease, I agree. I have two conditions. The first is the inclusion of KJ, a colleague whose collaboration is very valuable to me; and the second is that we bring up my hesitations with the steering committee. Jamie agrees. I call up KJ (who is English, and lives in London). With responses similar to mine, she comes on board.

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[5] Although all three 'conversations' are based on actual, situated conversations that took place, what I am describing are, in effect, patterns of conversing that emerged within this project, and so I take the poetic license of bringing together elements of various conversations into each one.
[6] See project 2.

At an initial meeting with Jamie and Sue, we negotiate a way of working, timetables, process etc. They speak of the importance of "working together" and taking "joint responsibility" for the development. We begin to explore what we see as the challenges of leading people and projects in the global environment. We are in agreement on some, not on others. The areas of disagreement are quickly 'resolved': Jamie and Sue decide to bring in another consultant to work on issues like 'organizational savvy', which I think need to be addressed by Kelide managers, rather than external consultants. I find myself wondering whether this will very quickly become a patchwork of topics, rather than an intergrative program. Sue and Jamie assure me that it will be fine. While there has been a certain amount of movement and negotiation in this conversation, I am left with a vague sense of my own inability to influence the course this is going to take. Silently, I question my reaction. To what extent does it involve my own lack of flexibility and need for control? Am I threatened by the potential competition of another consultant? With no satisfying answers to these questions, I am aware of experiencing a somewhat lessened sense of responsibility: KJ and I will focus on three modules. Jamie and Sue will 'take care of' the others. I am vaguely conscious of how "working together" has already unraveled in some way, taking on an emergent sense of 'us' and 'them'.

KJ and I begin. Within a few weeks, we have come up with a preliminary proposal, based on a model which locates global leadership as a response to two sets of dynamics that drive work in the global environment: "duality" and "dispersion" (Black, Morrison and Gregersen, 1999). The first refers to the dual pressures for global integration and local adaptation faced by global leaders, which require the ability to hold both together in a paradoxical way as they move in action. The second refers to the dynamics created by the distribution of organizational 'resources' across geography and time zones, and which call for the kind of leadership which can no longer rely on a traditional 'command and control' paradigm. Both work together to make this environment tremendously complex and permeated by radical uncertainty. This makes sense to us, and seems like a good spring board for the kind of exploration we would like to generate. We send our thoughts to Jamie and Sue. A conference call follows.

4.3.2 One Conversation

The experience is a difficult one. Almost immediately, a sense of 'tightness' appears in the conversation. While KJ and I see our suggestions as 'work in progress', to be taken up in an exploratory way, Jamie and Sue do not seem to be willing to engage in this kind of open conversation. Our intention is to involve them in our deliberations, thinking that this would be the way we could actually "work together" - but something else is emerging. KJ and I experience the conversation as a barrage of criticism at what is being taken up as the 'finished product', rather than any kind of joint exploration. Why are we not giving definitions of our basic terms? All Kelide programs start with definitions! Why are there no 'tools' in the program? The managers need to know exactly what to do in these situations! Several times, we return to emphasize the very preliminary nature of the document we are all looking at, but it seems that the very fact that it is in power point format has reified it beyond negotiation. In a strange way, the fact that our suggestions are being related to as the 'finished product' is actually making them so – I am surprised by the vehemence of my defense of them, aware of how my own responses are constructing and being constructed by this way of speaking (Gergen, 2002).

Two issues emerge as central for me in this conversation. The first has to do with my and KJ's assumption that HR/OD practitioners at Kelide would be more receptive to working within the uncertainty of exploration, with its accompanying undertow of 'being lost'. It dawns on me that they too, like our (as-yet imaginary) participants, need immediate answers, need to avoid the possible risks involved in exploration. I am recognizing anew the conversational patterns at Kelide: succinct, action-oriented, with enormous pressure to closure and quick, unquestioned clarity – in short: unbearably reductionistic! I feel myself recoil with this recognition, angry with myself for not having 'foreseen' this, and spent more time exploring what we all meant by "working together" – could that have made a difference?

The second (and not unrelated) issue is more problematic. I am becoming increasingly aware of my own ideology: in order to take up any kind of leadership one needs to be able to move through unknown territory without a clear 'map'. This would entail not only 'dealing with' the turbulence of losing direction and moving within the chaos of

not knowing – but actually understanding this kind of experience as *essential* to leading, particularly in the global environment. It entails the ability to tolerate some version of what Dalal speaks of as the "intolerable existential anxiety that is evoked as we contemplate chaos, where meanings slide and evaporate, where nothing whatsoever is fixed and stable" (2000:175). While not usually as dramatic as this, the determined avoidance of this experience closes off all possibility for creative action, which, by definition, is about acting into the unknown. To design a program, therefore, that is known and familiar (starting with definitions, going on to problems, and ending with heuristics) in order to help people feel more comfortable dealing with this kind of experience suddenly seems ludicrous. I try these thoughts out with Jamie and Sue. Jamie seems to understand the point, and I can sense her mulling it over. Sue is adamant: "Our programs work really well – we have a tested format, and this is what we need to go on". Jamie acquiesces. "Sue has a really good grasp of what works – let's go with her instincts", she suggests.

But I feel strongly about this, and put up a fight. I speak of all the work I have done over the past four years, stubbornly resisting the Kelide training mold, and succeeding nonetheless. As I speak, I am aware of the unproductive pattern of my own response – I have become entrenched in my own agenda. If I am advocating exploration and a risking into the unknown, I am certainly not enacting it! The pattern emerging is the opposite of what I value – the conversation is funneling itself into a very restrictive range of possibilities. I am sensing the threat of losing my own voice in a coherence so firm that it is stifling, and notice how vehemently I am battling this. It has become a power struggle between Sue and I, both of us clutching our own ideologies of 'what works' and 'what is valuable'. As all these still undefined impressions swirl around, I have an immediate taste of the unproductiveness of what is happening, and, with no clear direction, I try something different. A question rises in my body, and makes its way out through my vocal chords. It is a question to myself, and gets sounded between us. "Why don't we take another look at what we are looking to do together?" I hear myself say.

The response is quite amazing. The conversation takes an immediate turn. A more relaxed quality appears, and, for a few moments, we are actually speaking 'with', rather than 'at' each other. There is more hesitation in our speaking, as we find ourselves

groping to formulate a direction that is in the making, rather than ready-made. But this pattern is somehow untenable – is it too risky? It certainly doesn't resound with the robust 'safeness' our power struggle had! At any rate, it gets immediately dampened, as the reductive quality of 'this will work; this won't' quickly reasserts itself as the dominant pattern of our speaking.

I am aware of the levels of fear and anxiety evoked in these conversations; they serve as a magnet – no matter where we move, they are there like an undertow. For Jamie and Sue, they revolve around the importance of this program, and its potential impact on their reputation. Their anxiety takes the form of an overwhelming need to control the program design, language (we cannot entitle a slide 'the bad news' because, says Sue, "we never use the word 'bad' in Kelide trainings"), and the kind of experiences the managers will have. For me, they involve a sense of being bound and suffocated, "pinned and wriggling on the wall" as Prufrock would say (Eliot, 1962). My own fear makes any effort to invite a different way of interacting almost impossible. In what I am experiencing as an attempt to design a program that will be 'risk-proof', I have lost the ability to take the risk needed in the moment – to speak my own experience in its happening. For KJ, the fear revolves around being silenced, in a way that seems to her lacking any 'rhyme or reason' – she cannot see the logic in Sue and Jamie's injunctions.

Later, she articulates this: "They have taken you on because of your experience with Kelide managers all over the world, and because what you do seems to work. The conversations you invite are much more open and exploratory than their usual ways of speaking together. I am not sure if what you do 'works' *in spite of* the fact that it is so different, or *because of* it, but your track record is good. So, as they take you on for the difference you bring, they are doing everything possible to make you the 'same'! What is going on?!" I sense the importance of what KJ is saying – both for the quality of our work with Jamie and Sue, as well as for what I think the managers should be speaking about: *what is the experience of working with differences?* Surely this is at the very heart of leading in a global environment – and at the heart of creativity, so necessary for this kind of leadership! But none of us seem to be able to make this experience come alive in the living present of this conversation. While differences are so clearly present, we are not engaging with them in a way that is useful. I am feeling completely powerless – powerless to change direction, and powerless to leave. I am aware that both

KJ and I have withdrawn from any kind of authentic participation in this conversation. Three weeks later, KJ resigns.

4.3.3 Reflections on stuckness

There are two aspects of this conversation I would like to explore further: the first has to do with a methodology based on the narration of experience, and the second with how I am understanding the dynamic of stuckness that has emerged.

I am uneasy with the way I have told this story. I have painted Sue and Jamie as caricatures: inflexible, uncreative, and motivated by fear. I now feel compelled to question the ontological status of this. Clearly, I am speaking the 'truth' – there is not a word in these conversations that was not actually spoken! But, in subscribing to a more socially constructed notion of 'truth' (Gergen, 2002; Shotter, 2002), this is obviously not a merely a 'mirror' of what happened (Rorty, 1979). What am I doing?

I am telling *my* story, patterning and patterned by my experience of frustration and hopelessness. Jamie and Sue would probably tell it in a very different way. How? I try to speak with Sue's voice: "KJ and Chen are doing their own thing. They are designing a training that will not work here because it is so different from what our managers are used to – and I will be implicated in the oncoming disaster. They are pushing managers to ask questions rather than giving clear solutions to their problems. This will just call forth all their frustrations, draining their energy, rather than mobilizing it into effective action…" I am aware my reluctance to speak in Sue's voice. I want my reader to experience her like I do, and so have crafted her into a mindless organizational automaton. I have used my power as 'creator' of this text to take my revenge on her! I have reduced her in the same way that I experienced her reducing me. I am sensing the incredible power afforded me by this narrative methodology. This is *my experience* – and, as such, what I am writing is *true*!

But, in order to strive at some validity, I must do more than this. For just as I have the power to craft the characters, I also have the responsibility to examine what is impacting this crafting: the responsibility of reflexivity. In this sense, reflexive narrative is a paradoxical methodology, simultaneously enabling the freedom of story-

telling and compelling the constraint of reflexive examination. I am therefore obliged to examine my own implication in these dynamics of stuckness. In order to do so, I would like to turn to a theoretical framework offered by Smith and Berg, in their investigation into the paradoxes of group life (Smith and Berg, 1987).

Smith and Berg approach the question of paradoxes in the dynamics of group life through the issue of conflict. The latter, they claim, is often defined in terms of tension, ambivalence and paradox; all of which arise through a struggle with contradictions, and involve "the attempt to create meaning and coherence out of what seems to lack them" (1987:9). While much mainstream literature on groups deals with conflict as a 'problem to be solved', they differentiate their perspective by claiming that "group life is inherently paradoxical" (Ibid:11), saturated by thoughts, emotions and behaviours that members experience as contradictory. Because this experience is often intensely uncomfortable, group members usually adopt one of two unproductive responses. The first entails the attempt to expel the contradictions, either by ignoring them or by forging some kind of compromise, and often leads to a loss of energy or vitality. The second entails some form of the splitting mechanism: 'depositing' the contradictory experiences or perspectives in different people or subgroups. The catch here is that "the more the members seek to pull the contradictions apart, to separate them so that they will not be experienced as contradictory, the more enmeshed they become in the self-referential binds of paradox" (Ibid:14). Smith and Berg use the term 'paradox' to connote both the experience of contradiction, as well as the paralysis implied in the kind of circular thinking we become trapped in when we attempt to *think* our way out of paradox. While the experience itself is integral to group life, the dynamic of paralysis is not - this is precisely the stuckness generated by uncoupling the poles of the paradox.

How can all this help me understand my story? The unproductive responses are both recognizable to me. When compromise was the solution, what was felt – by us all, I believe – was indeed a loss of energy and vitality. But it is the second response – the process of splitting the paradoxical poles – that resonates more with my experience of the situation. This splitting went on in many different ways. From the start, our intention to 'work together' did not really materialize. Power, for example, did not involve a paradoxical dynamic of inclusion and exclusion, empowering and being

empowered. I experienced power as only 'theirs', and therefore not 'ours'. In this binary way of thinking, our only experience of power became the ability to withdraw from the interaction, which KJ and I did constantly. I withdrew emotionally; KJ, after much anguish and deliberation, withdrew physically. Even more salient than the issue of power, however, and not unrelated, was the way in which I polarized us into the good and bad guys, locating, for example, the desire for creativity and exploration in 'us' and all ossification and stuckness in 'them'. I uncoupled what I identified as the paradoxical dynamic of losing/finding, positing the willingness to risk 'losing' in 'us' and the obsession with answers, the dynamic of 'finding', in 'them'.

What then, do Berg and Smith offer as a more productive alternative to the experience of paradox? They speak of a three stage process:

> First is an awareness of the presence of opposing or contradictory forces. Second is an acknowledgement and understanding that these are natural and inevitable forces that attend individual and collective life. Third is an assertion, often but not always tacit, that these contradictory forces are somehow linked or connected. (Ibid:45)

Once we have acknowledged this link, where do we go from there? Here is where their argument becomes somewhat fuzzy. On the one hand, they speak in process terms of "immersing oneself in" and "living within" the paradox (Ibid:216). On the other hand, as firm adherents of a systems perspective, they posit that the ability to deal effectively with paradox is dependent on the creation of a new sense-making framework, from outside the experience, which would unite the opposite poles into a unified concept *at a higher level*. So, for example, engaging with the kind of paradox posed by male and female dynamics (either from a behavioural or psychological perspective) would entail understanding these dynamics from a meta-level perspective of gender. They use a metaphor to describe this possibility. It hypothesizes the existence of a "Jovian organism" (Ibid:209) which exists in a world of extremities (heat and cold). Its sustenance depends on partaking of both extremes, and only in its full immersion in the cold can it then rise to the hot, and vice versa. The meta-level link they make in this metaphor is the movement of oscillation, which unites the extremes. This metaphor seems to undermine what they are advocating, for by separating the hot and cold zones,

and making their organism move *between them*, they themselves have uncoupled their paradox, locating the contradictions in different spacial areas.

As I write, I become aware of the inability of this model to resonate with my lived experience of the situation. While I was aware of the contradictory forces in this situation (power and powerlessness, creative and repetitive, movement and stuckness), accepted them as 'natural', and could acknowledge the links between them; I could only see them osscilating – I could never experience them at the same time together, moving within and between us all; and I could certainly not 'rise above' my experience to create a 'meta-level' perspective! And so, finally, Smith and Berg fall into the trap that stalks theory constructors who attempt to "to treat sets of essentially historical, often still temporally developing events… as if they are a set of 'already made' events in which we are not involved – with the overarching aim of bringing them all under a unitary, orderly conceptual scheme. (Shotter, 2002:57)

They have created a rather static framework through which we can think through possible events from outside of our direct experience of them, thus separating thought and action, in order to make them amenable to our influence. This does not ring true to my experience. Once more I see how I am drawn again to speak of events in the process terminology of Complex Responsive Process Theory, which I feel comes closest to resonating with the complexity of lived situations. It is a language which attempts to 'move with' the continual movement of experience, and retain a deeply paradoxical perspective, never collapsing these into a fixed and tidy model. In rereading my account, I notice how this language has made its way into my writing, as I speak of emergence; of the interweaving patterns of repetition and change; of the self-organizing ways in which fear patterned our conversations; of the way we created and were created within these interactions.

4.3.4 Back to Kelide: another conversation

As all this is happening, another conversation is taking place. KJ and I are exploring ideas, experience, materials and possibilities. As opposed to our conversations with Sue and Jamie, which resonate with the quality of 'already spoken words', in which pattern and meaning exist a priori, and repeat themselves uncontested; my conversations with

KJ resound as 'words in their speaking' (Shotter, 2002). They have the quality of discovery, in which thoughts and ideas emerge in the process of speaking them together, and meaning becomes created in the relational movement between us (Shotter, 2002; Shaw, 2002). This is the "zone of indeterminacy (and)…uncertainty" that Shotter refers to as 'joint action' (2002:38), in which unintended and unpredictable directions emerge in a non-linear way within an interaction that nonetheless has a sense of intentionality about it. We experience the breathless heights of discovery and moments of insight as new and powerful ideas emerge; together with the turbulent and frightening depths of overwhelming confusion, frustration and insecurity. The interwoven and often paradoxical experience of losing and finding direction and meaning is a pattern that characterizes our interaction, and we keep noticing it.

We have several marathons, in an attempt to utilize our infrequent visits to each others' countries. We work very differently, and these differences are sometimes unbearable. I can probe endlessly, not resting until I feel I have touched what feels like the very depths of a question; KJ does not work with this type of energy – she engages with the logical flow of ideas. She brings to our conversation a focus that I appreciate deeply and simultaneously drives me crazy. She is relentlessly practical. "Let's think of Paul", she suggests, "How will this help him in the next conference call he has with his team?" And I pull away, with the intense desire to uncouple the conversations from a clear prescription for 'what to do tomorrow morning', which I know is the ultimate criterion for success at Kelide. My desire is to help Paul understand that there actually is no prescription for what to do tomorrow morning, but that there is a way to participate and to invite the members of his multi-cultural and virtual team to an ongoing search for what form this participation can take in the moment; and that clarity of direction will emerge in a self-organizing manner within the constraints of their joint task. KJ doesn't buy this 'emergence' and 'self-organization' stuff. "This is not your doctorate!" she wails, "This is real life!"

One conversation remains vivid in my memory. We have hit a particularly difficult spot, in which a module we have spent days working on, suddenly dissolves under scrutiny. We are tired, stressed by time constraints, and somewhat fed up with each other. I think about how, in complexity literature, a recurrent theme revolves around diversity being the enabling condition for the emergence of novelty. While I understand

this as a concept, this is certainly not my experience at the moment. In cross-cultural literature, phrases such as 'leveraging differences' and 'creating synergy' are glibly bandied around. The undisputed 'cult values' of multi-cultural work, what does their 'functionalization' entail? What do they mean to me, right now, as KJ and I experience conflict and the frustration of our differences in this specific situation?

I feel suffocated by what I experience as her need to control the situation through the meticulous working of logic. I want to shout our "KJ! Stop! You're stifling me! I can't think like this!" But I don't. I know she will be hurt, and withdraw – we have been there before. Perhaps I can take a couple of deep breaths, and tone down the emotion to where I sense she is comfortable, in her understated English way. Perhaps I can say "KJ – can we try to leave these logical connections and just flow for a few minutes with our ideas? We'll come back to making strict sense of them…" That would probably make sense to her, and maybe calm the tension. It would not express the intensity of my frustration. Is that important? What does actually bringing myself to this conversation mean? What is the risk involved in the moment? I wonder what her inner talk is about – what is she experiencing in this turbulence of emotion and sense of chaos that is enveloping us both?

I begin to speak. I have not planned what I want to say, but the words seem to formulate themselves. I speak my frustration. KJ looks miserable. She is silent, and I sense her pain. I stop, sensing that she needs the space to be able to respond. She begins, hovering on the verge of tears. She says that she is intensely aware of her inability to move from topic to topic with the speed I do, and, as she tries to keep up, finds herself feeling more and more stupid. I am completely taken by surprise – this had not occurred to me. The conversation strays, opening other realms of experience that suddenly, unexpectedly, seem connected. KJ speaks of school experiences and the anxiety associated with excelling. We find ourselves speaking about differences – the different ways we experience and meet challenges; understand 'success'; experience power and powerlessness within our own interactions. Paradoxically, our differences seem to be amplifying as we speak of them, and yet, there is a quality of closeness that is also being amplified in the very act of our speaking about them. In a strange way, speaking of the reduction we are both feeling right now (my experience of suffocation,

and her experience of stupidity) is expanding the way we are relating to each other. We are no longer one dimensional to each other, the way we were a few minutes ago.

I remember a quote I read somewhere, by Stephen Covey, American management guru, who says "The real challenge is not to acknowledge differences, accept them, or understand them - but to celebrate them!" This facile injunction seems ludicrous to me in this moment. I tell KJ, who smiles ruefully. "Well", she says, "Maybe Americans can do that. But do you think there *is* really anything to celebrate, any *real* value to working with differences?" And suddenly, we both recognize that *this is exactly the conversation we want to encourage the Kelide managers to have!* Can we create it? Is asking KJ's question legitimate – or must we restrict ourselves to asking only *'how'* can we 'celebrate' differences, never questioning our assumptions that there *is* something to be celebrated? We are both suddenly excited by the possibility that has emerged, sensing the importance of this experience. Almost imperceptibly, we have returned to our work, with renewed energy and sense of direction.

4.3.5   *Reflections on movement*

What was it that enabled this conversation to retain vitality and meaningfulness, even as it wove through zones of stuckness? I can speak of trust, of empathy, of support, of a willingness to take risks together. But even as I do, I notice the non-linear ways in which these are both cause and effect of our willingness to keep engaging responsively with each other, despite the difficulties. I sense the enormous seduction of creating what Shotter calls a "counterfeit construction", by forging a set of coherent and ordered 'conditions' that enabled the movement of our conversations, thus "falsely (completing) what was an open and unfinalized circumstance, whose very openness 'invited' and 'enabled' the action taken within it" (2002:14-5). In effect, I do not really know what created our willingness to risk engaging in open-ended, exploratory conversation. It sort of 'happened' in the moment, like a kind of dance, in which each gesture calls forth a response which is both recognizable and new. Somehow, we were allowing ourselves and each other to be simultaneously known and unknown, generating a quality of responsiveness that Shaw sees as essential to the metaphorical 'edge of chaos' dynamics that characterizes a "free flowing communicative action…whereby we experience

meaning on the move, neither completely frozen into repetitive patterns nor fragmenting and dissolving into meaninglessness" (2002:68). While I question the temperate quality of this – for our conversations seemed permeated with extreme experiences of 'frozen repetition' as well as the fragmentation into meaninglessness, it is indeed the paradoxical interweaving of the two that kept 'meaning on the move', allowing moments of transformation of both ourselves and our conversations.

It just "sort of happened"?! Is that a good enough argument for a doctoral thesis? Despite my deep dissatisfaction with the amorphous quality of this, it is actually the best I can do at the moment with any sense of integrity. While I have explored different explanations for the dynamics of stuckness and movement in the conversations I have been recounting, there is no one convincing answer I can come up with – no prescription as to 'how to keep conversations moving'. And so, rather than "seeking to extract universally applicable prescriptions" (Shaw, 2002:21), like Shaw, I too feel that what needs to be worked with is our noticing processes in the movement of interactions. Only as we intensify these to probe the 'ordinary artistry' of the way we participate in the complex social processes that constitute our ordinary life, can we both create and discover the improvisational artistry we are actually involved in as we 'go on together' (Montuori, 2003). It was, indeed, our continuous noticing and reflective exploration of what was happening to us *as it was happening*, which enabled the movement of our conversation. Perhaps this is what constitutes the 'method' of my work, a method that can be shown and seen in the narration of the experience, but that remains tantalizingly out of reach of my attempt to craft it into a prescription for success. Let me thus attempt to evoke yet another conversation, to deepen this exploration.

4.3.6   A third conversation

Over time, some of the characters in my story change: Jamie goes on maternity leave, Sue disappears for weeks at a time. KJ has resigned. George, the other consultant brought into this project, has been fired. Two new Kelide members join the project: Terry and Anne, who will lead the program to implementation. Still bruised from both KJ's and George's departure (I loved working with both of them!), and within the dissatisfaction that colors so much of this experience, I am still hanging in there. What

keeps me is a mixture of my own pragmatism (so much of my work is done at Kelide – I am afraid that resigning here will impact my ability to work elsewhere in the organization), and my stubbornness and unwillingness to 'admit defeat'. I question this: am I too stuck? Will I be able to impact the way 'global leadership' becomes spoken of and enacted in this organization? Is this slim possibility a living response to what I experience as tiny vibrations of hope, in which the space for change is created – or is it an illusory creation of my lack of responsiveness, the blindness of my own ambition? Is this an either/or option? Or, could I rather say that perhaps my own glimpses of hope generate tiny moments of a different quality of conversation that may actually amplify these possibilities? Can the potential for novelty exist here too?

With all these changes, the conversation inevitably changes. Anne and Terry are more willing to take risks, to reopen the scope and format, and, in my sense of it, the program is becoming a more meaningful one. It is to include the different kinds of consulting and coaching conversations that I had wished for at the beginning. It is to include managers from different sites in the world. We are questioning the prescriptive training mode. There is slow, but palpable, movement.

The event I recreate here involves this new cast (including Sue) and their manager, Patty. I am glad of Patty's participation, for I feel that it gives this conversation a more powerful footing in the organization, although I am also somewhat wary of how she will participate. She is practical and impatient, constantly seeking closure; yet, at the same time, I have experienced her in previous interactions as sensitive and insightful. Her pragmatism launches the meeting: goals and outcomes are clarified, agenda crystallized, and we begin, step by step. The issue at hand is the use of a competency model. This has come up several times, strongly advocated by Sue and Jamie; equally strongly resisted by me. They are all in agreement that we 'need' a competency model, against which managers can 'measure' themselves, and see where they need to improve their skills. I have never found much value in competency models, feeling that they create an unrealistically simplistic impression of the management experience, and the illusion that it can be reduced to set of discrete individual competencies to be learned apart from the experience itself and implemented at will (Vaill, 1998). I have not, however, managed to convince anyone.

I am aware of my hesitation to voice these thoughts again – for while most of the participants in this conversation are new, the conversation has a history, and I am hearing this as the recognizable patterns of unquestionable assumptions ("this is what we need"). I am silent as everyone discusses which competency model should be used. There are three options, and a heated discussion of the pluses and minuses of each ensues. The conversation reaches an impasse – it is a difficult decision to make. No one quite knows where to go from here, and a kind of gloom settles in the room. This sense of 'not knowing' is not one that is given any kind of legitimacy here, and the discomfort is palpable. From within the heaviness of my passivity, I vaguely recognize a glimpse of unformed possibility. With no clear understanding of what I want to say, I speak into this gloom of not-knowing. "Why don't we take a look at why we want a competency model – what it is that we want managers to engage with? Perhaps this will help us decide which model is best." There is expressed surprise, laced with a touch of impatience. Isn't it obvious what a competency model is for? "Well", I counter, "We are not designing a course for individual work on managerial competencies, and you yourselves have said that this is not the place for any kind of 360 degree feedback. That suggests that maybe what we are looking for is another way of inviting personal and group reflection on the kinds of skills needed for effective leadership. In this case, would the rigorousness of the model be a decisive factor? Maybe the one that is the most imaginative would be best".

There is silence in the room. I notice Anne and Terry look expectantly (and anxiously – or is this my own projection?) at Patty. My words speak into the gap that has emerged in the conversation, and we are all aware of the uncertainty of what will happen next. It feels as if we are all holding our breaths. What is clear is that it is Patty's response that will, in this very moment, enable or destroy a new direction of thought. I am aware of the enormous power she is being offered by us all in this moment, and I sense she is feeling it too. The uncertainty is too strong for Sue, who jumps in with "I think that what we need to do is…" but she is quietly and firmly silenced by Patty. "Say some more" she orders me. "I'm not really sure what to say", I say, "but I wonder if we can think of this in a different way. One thing that has just occurred to me is - since we don't know which model to use, and don't really like any of them – how about inviting the managers to use their joint experience to create their own model?" Terry responds immediately: "Hey – you know, once we…" Patty is hesitant. "Hmm" she begins, in

her strong Brazilian accent, "I wonder what it would be like to invite them to create something rather than 'fill out' something already created…"

In a burst of energy, there is cacophony in the room, as everyone speaks at once. The not-knowing that had permeated our experience just a few minutes ago, has been suddenly transformed into a kind of excitement. Creative ideas are being thrown around. We have all become involved in this conversation, interrupting each other, trying out different ideas. For a moment, I am aware of a childlike quality in our conversation, a kind of spontaneity unhampered by the constraints of what others will think of us, the tight agenda and the overwhelming need for good results. It feels incredibly free. For the seconds I am not engaged in the actual back and forth of this messy conversation, I am delighting in this quality – so rare in Kelide; non-existent up till now in this particular conversation. All sorts of stories suddenly appear, as we speak associations of other times and places that suddenly seem relevant. And, in no time, we have come to the end of our meeting. We have not quite reached any final decisions about a competency model – but we are well on our way, with some interesting and exciting ideas. And we have created – for the short time of our interaction, a different way of speaking together and experiencing each other.

As we gather our things to move on, Anne takes the initiative to set the next meeting. We are back in 'closure' mode. She proposes that we meet at noon on the same day next week, inviting Patty to join us at one thirty, so that we will be able to present her with our conclusions. Implicit in the suggestion is that Patty's valuable time will thus not be 'wasted'. I am quite astounded at this, but before I have the chance to say anything, Patty wails "Why? I want to be involved too!" We all laugh, and the meeting breaks up. The next day, I receive a phone call from one of Patty's subordinates, a close colleague/friend. "I heard about your meeting yesterday with Patty. The news has spread all over the department. What did you do to her? She's never like that!"

4.4 WHAT DO I THINK I'M DOING - REVISITED

I, of course, did nothing 'to' her. Yet, in her participation in this meeting, she was changed – as were we all. It 'just sort of happened', but it was not unintentional, for it is this elusive quality of open, exploratory interaction that I keep trying to invite in my organizational conversations – sometimes more, sometimes less successfully. How do I do this?

In my own intense engagement with keeping conversations moving and vital, I am aware how difficult it is for me forge 'closure' for this project, which sets out to examine the methodology I take up, both in research and in practice. I think of the Kelide manager who spoke of "whatever it is you do", and realize to what extent I am invested in *not* defining it! There is a sense that, under the severe scrutiny of the 'Gaze' (Bergson, in Cunliffe, 2003), what 'I do' will either dissipate away to a wisp of nothing, or become falsely 'fixed' and disembodied. How can I hold the paradox of formulating a clear and stable picture of an elusive, ever-moving activity, whose essence is, in some way, not-knowing?

What I am doing as researcher and as practitioner involves moving into the unknown, in each moment anew. I begin this paper without a clear sense of where I am going, and realize that this is indeed an integral part of using an emergent methodology, in which patterns are both created and recognized as they appear. I identify this encounter with the unknown as central to my methodology – and begin to explore my own experience of 'lostness' or 'not-knowing'. Taking my experience seriously, I understand "yet again for the first time" (Shotter, talk at CMC, 2006) both the intense discomfort provoked by this experience, as well as its crucial importance for the emergence of new directions. This leads me to explore the patterns that characterize three different conversations in my work. I examine what enables and prevents this type of experience and its impact on the quality of conversation. While I am aware of both my ability and inability to directly impact this quality, I am also beginning to identify, with increasing clarity, what it is that I am constantly attempting - the 'method' of my practice (Shaw, 2002).

What I actually do changes with each encounter, for it involves a response in the very moment, and is thus unpredictable and 'unplannable'. But it is not unrecognizable, for I

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do have a strong sense of what I am seeking: the emergence of what I have come to call 'gaps' in the conversations I partake of. These are created in movement, and often entail an instant in which the conversation reaches a kind of impasse: for a quick moment, clarity disintegrates, and different – and as yet unknown – possibilities glimmer. These 'gaps' usually involve the space created by the experience of 'not-knowing' where we should go next. They often involve confusion and a certain anxiety, which is sometimes slight, and sometimes debilitating. Because we are not willing to risk the latter, the living experience of such 'gaps' becomes completely delegitimized in organizational life. The automatic response to such moments is an immediate attempt to banish the uncertainty by funelling the conversation into 'knowing' through the generation of clear 'conclusions', 'action items' etc. As we rush to create the experience of 'foundness', we opt for a sense of security through the formulation of all that is already known, over the possibility of allowing for the unknown to emerge, enabling new possibilities to take form between us.

These 'gaps' are both fleeting and fragile. Noticing them demands a feel for the different moods in the room, the different tones, rhythms and patterns created in movement. It involves being able to listen carefully and attentively – to myself and to others as we participate in the conversation. It entails an awareness of my living experience in its physical, emotional and cognitive nuances – for often I sense these gaps physically and emotionally before I am cognitively aware of their presence, or of what to 'do'. Speaking into them often feels risky, and involves a quality of response that will enable the unknown to resonate and be experienced – even for a few moments, inviting participants to explore possibilities rather than to craft answers. I am often aware of a sense of danger – not-knowing what may emerge feels intensely unsafe. And yet, it is only in speaking into these gaps that there is sometimes the possibility to "change the agenda of argumentation", rather than simply to 'win the argument' (Shotter, 2002:9). It is the former that seems to me key to what I 'do' – perhaps a more satisfying way of saying this would be 'who I am willing to be' in that moment.

In the first conversation I describe, the underlying anxiety of all the participants seems to create a tightness which both completely disables such gaps, as well as eradicating my own ability to notice them in potential. In the very few and delicate moments of possibility that do flicker, and into which I attempt to speak differently, a slight change

in the quality of conversation glimmers, so tenuous it cannot be sustained in face of our overwhelming need to remain in the secure zone of knowing and being certain of the 'product' we are creating. In the second conversation, with KJ, these gaps are taken up with far more courage. Why? Perhaps the trust generated over our joint history serves as a kind of precarious anchor, allowing us to remain responsive to each other, even as we experience emotions and thoughts that threaten disintegration, both of our direction and of our relationship. But then, in the third conversation I explore, this trust does not exist a priori. A gap appears, and is taken up in the moment. It is clear to me that it involves Patty's willingness to respond to my invitation to move into a different direction, for in this specific interaction she wields the power of role. In her willingness to risk a different approach, however, she creates a different kind of power – empowerment, perhaps? – that calls forth novel responses from others. In this conversation, my ability to notice the gap and speak into it in a different way, as it intertwines with Patty's willingness to meet me on this as-yet-forming new ground, enables us all to move into a different way of speaking. And this difference is both sustained and amplified, generating a sense of excitement and creativity.

And so, as my project approaches completion, I recognize anew the paradoxical quality of the experience which lies potentially in these gaps, and come to see it as the simultaneous interweaving of not-knowing with a vague sense of knowing, a "tendency", that is "the fleeting, flickering presence of new possibilities merely glimpsed" (Shotter & Cunliffe, 2002:8). Perhaps it is better spoken of as the delicate and fragile experience of *not-yet-knowing*. As such, it is an experience of the transformation of knowing, or 'knowing-on-the-move'. And, as I understand from my stories, this is the kind of movement that lies at the heart of change in organizations. What is thus emerging in my research is not a 'theory' as such; but rather an 'account' of specific transformative moments, which remain incomplete and open to interpretation (Shotter, 2002), and known directly in their living. As a practitioner, I am advocating an alertness to these moments, as they appear and disappear almost simultaneously, and calling for an exploration of ways of working with them. In this account, I am hoping that other practitioners – consultants and organizational members – can come to recognize in a different way what I believe we have all experienced: vital moments of conversation which flicker with new and creative possibilities.

5. 'GETTING IT': CROSS-CULTURAL CONVERSATIONS AS EMERGENT CHANGE IN ORGANIZATIONS (Project 4, January 2007)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this project, I am investigating what constitutes effective cross-cultural communication in global teams. I am arguing that new and creative directions of thought and action – the value global organizations seek from diversity – cannot be formulated and prescribed a priori, but can only emerge in the interactive moment. I explore how experiences of transformation occur as shifts of meaning in conversation when people engage responsively with difference and 'otherness'; the conditions which invite them; the different qualities of conversation which both enable and are enabled by such shifts, and the ways in which my practice impacts this process.

The expression "getting it" I choose as my title is an echo of Shotter (2007), and offers a way of making sense of and structuring my investigation. Shotter uses this term to evoke the kind of experience I feel is central to what I am investigating: "a way of acting and a form of understanding….in which we, so to speak, 'know what we are doing' while we are doing it, but which we didn't plan in detail before we embarked on it" (2007:1). It constitutes an attempt to answer Wittengstein's call "not to think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all…But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say, "now I know how to go on" (Wittgenstein, 1953; in Shotter, 2007:4). Thus 'getting it' speaks to the quality of understanding or knowledge that both emerges within the "uninterrupted realm of ceaselessly flowing, spontaneously occurring, always interplaying, activities" (Ibid:2), and shapes our participation in them. It includes our bodily and emotional responses, as well as our intellectual understanding, and evokes moments of subtle yet tangible "felt change of consciousness" (Ibid:94), in which our sense of self and our interactions with others transform, enabling the emergence of new patterns of understanding, speaking, and going on together.

While Shotter's use of notion of 'getting it' skillfully evokes the qualities of elusiveness and movement involved in this kind of emergent, participatory and shifting understanding; he never really explores what this 'feels like' as it happens. What I am noticing is that the experience itself, as it occurs, is one in which confusion, discomfort and anxiety, intertwine with the joy of a novel understanding of 'how to go on'. The anxiety is generated on two accounts. The first has to do with the elusiveness of the 'it' we have 'gotten', which at any given moment is inevitably incomplete, continuously on its way to being other than what it is. So, while we may be 'certain' in the moment, we cannot capture what it is we have gotten for future 'use' in similar circumstances. It remains a continuous 'first-time' experience. The second has to do with the experience of 'being changed by otherness', for, in being changed, or transformed, *what we are* is inevitably called into question by the responsive encounter with 'otherness'. Thus, my own use of the term posits an intimate connection between 'getting' it and 'losing' it – whether the 'it' is my new understanding or my usual sense of self.

Part I of this project is an exploration of my own experience of 'getting it' as I attempt to locate my voice within the cross-cultural management field, and find myself struggling with an intense resistance to doing so. It is through my engagement with the 'otherness' of some of the voices in this field that I begin to make sense of the way I both recognize and don't recognize my own as belonging to this discourse. As I explore my own disconcerting experience, I 'get' that what I am asking people to do in their cross-cultural interactions is exactly this: to agree to tolerate the discomfort of the encounter with otherness and yet to remain engaged and responsive, to enable the possibility of change. What emerges is an elusive clarity of what it is that I am attempting to forge: a different way of approaching change in organizations, as embodied in cross-cultural interactions.

Part 2 'shows' – rather than explains – this approach in action. It involves the creation of opportunities in which people 'get it' from within their participation in living interaction with others. The stories I tell entail cross-cultural encounters which often involve the experience of disorientation that arises as people recognize/ don't recognize themselves in the patterns of understanding, behavior and values of others. I show how shifts in orientation and understanding are created as responsivity

becomes heightened in our participation in, and telling of, such encounters. My narrative offers such moments of transformation – or 'getting it' – as they occur in my practice. My hope is that through these stories, I can make my practice come alive to my readers in a way that the abstraction of generalized principles will not. As such, it is my attempt to invite my readers into a more direct experience of 'getting it'.

Part 3 is an attempt to articulate what it is I have 'gotten' through the continuous iterations of my writing. I attempt, again with the help of other voices in organizational literature, to make sense of these shifts. I explore their nature; what is involved in participating in them; what may constitute a practice of enabling them; and what I see as their value in organizational life.

5.2 THE LOCATING OF VOICE

5.2.1 An exploration of resistance

The experience of locating my voice within the cross-cultural field has been a struggle with the disorientation, reluctance and dread generated by my own encounter with what I sense as the 'otherness' of many of the voices speaking into this field. Because this type of experience constitutes much of what I work with in my practice in global organizations, I am 'taking it seriously', exploring it, and noticing how it transforms as I agree to remain engaged with these voices.

My story begins at the end of the fourth residential of the DMan program. I am sitting on a bench with my supervisor, taking a last look at my second project. 'Essentially completed', there are just a couple issues to resolve. One of them involves a preliminary formulation of the contribution of my research to organizational practice. We are both being very practical. "Well", says Patricia firmly, "I think all you need to do is explicitly tie up the themes you are exploring – paradox and transformation – with your work in the cross-cultural field, and that will be sufficient for this project. You can elaborate as you go on to the next". The sentence is spoken in a very matter-of-fact way: it is a logical conclusion of an action-oriented conversation. Yet, as the words are spoken, I am suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of dread, aware of a

powerful contraction in my stomach. The cross-cultural field? "No!" screams an inner voice; "No – I don't want to be making a contribution to that field! It doesn't interest me, it doesn't excite me, it is *not* who I am!!" I am quite taken aback by the intensity of this response, which I venture, tentatively, in words. "That's interesting", counters Patricia, "Seeing as how this is what you have been speaking about in all your papers".

The significance of her words hits me in 'a blinding flash of the obvious'. This *is* indeed what I have been speaking about: from the 'reflective essay' that started my doctoral endeavor, and through all my research projects. In fact, the first twenty years of my life have been a cross-cultural narrative, a permanent transience of living in different countries, belonging everywhere and nowhere; 'being different' creating the most repetitive theme of my identity. Professionally, I have been engaged in cross-cultural work, on and off, for 17 years. And yet, locating my research within this field paradoxically generates both an intense energy of negativity, as well as an acute sense of loss of energy, interest and passion. What is going on? What am I 'not getting'?

Patricia and I spend a few minutes reflecting on this together, and my exploration continues for weeks after that, alone and with others. What becomes clearer as time goes on is that the cross-cultural conversation – at least as I experience it both in professional and academic literature – feels extremely constrictive, and resonates with a reductionism that is anathema to me. My reaction to the suggestion that I 'recognize' myself here is one of panic – I experience an overwhelming desire to flee, to leave the doctoral program. Recognizing the parallel between this reaction and those I have seen time and again in people I work with as they are asked to engage closely with others so different from themselves, I understand the importance of staying with and exploring this reaction.

5.2.2 *Next steps: an examination and critique of literature*

In order to do so, I need to engage, in a more reflective and reflexive way, with some of the ways cross-cultural work is spoken about in the literature, and to examine what is creating the reductionism that colors my experience of this field. As I do so, become aware of how my resistance becomes more nuanced. First of all, my powerful

criticism of many of the dominant assumptions generating and generated by this writing becomes clearer; and, as it does, I find that it is laced with an appreciation of some of the voices so different from mine. I begin to notice both their 'groundbreaking' qualities, and acknowledge the attempts to grapple with immensely complex questions. I also notice that my ability to mould my own approach emerges only from within the responsive interaction with the 'otherness' of these voices: this is, in fact, central to the work I do.

The model of culture that dominates cross-cultural management literature remains that forged by Hofstede (1980), whose seminal study involved over 50 different national sites of IBM. He paved the way for a generation of researchers who engage with what he identified as primary cultural dimensions[7]; agreeing with, disagreeing with, and expanding on his work[8]. As one fan points out ""it would be easier for caravans to cross the desert without touching sand than it would be for researchers and practitioners in this field to avoid Hofstede's work" (Bing, 2004:81). Academics concern themselves mostly with ontological and methodological issues, focusing on the accuracy of measurement, and the predictive ability of the model (Smith et al, 1996); or on comparative studies of individual dimensions (Imahori and Cupach, 1994). More action-oriented researchers and practitioners are concerned with applicability issues, generating studies of leadership and management across cultures (Javidan et al, 2006; Kedia and Mukherji, 1999); cross-cultural team work (Distephano and Maznevski, 2000) and, in general, the 'international dimensions of organizational behavior' (Adler, 1997). Like most mainstream management literature, the predominant interest is with prediction and control; with the generation of clear-cut solutions and prescriptions to all eventualities, aimed at generating unequivocally 'effective action' in a field riddled with paradoxes and ambiguity.

Despite the fact that Hofstede (1996) has come to stress both the impossibility of a 'universal theory of organization', and the situatedness of any author within his culture; it is his work that has generated the 'grand narrative' of culture. His understanding of culture is firmly rooted in systems thinking, whereby it is a 'whole'

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[7] The dimensions Hofstede identified were individualism, masculinity, power distance and uncertainty avoidance (1980), adding a time dimension several years later (1991).
[8] In particular Bond, with the 'Chinese Culture Connection'; and Schwartz, with his addition of two bi-polar dimensions: openness to change versus conservatism, and self-enchancement versus self-transcendence (Smith and al., 1996).

which acts causally on its parts. He evokes Boulding's 'General Hierarchy of Systems' to explain the human inability to rise above their own cultural assumptions. While he asserts that because "the social sciences are the only sciences in which the scientist (*at level 7*) is less complex than her/his object (*at level 8*)…social knowledge will always be subjective, partial and tentative" (1996:533, italics mine); it is, ironically, his own model which has inspired so many voices who seem to speak in an 'objective, impartial and assertive' tone!

Definitions of culture are almost as numerous as definers, but, whether articulated in cognitive terms ('mental models', 'schemas' etc.) or in behavioral ones ('learned behaviors'), most definers assume that "culture is composed of psychological structures by means of which individuals or groups of individuals guide their behavior" (Geertz, 2003). Geertz sees three primary problems in such definitions, and I agree wholeheartedly. The first involves reification, where culture is imagined as "a self-contained 'super-organic' reality with forces and purposes of its own" (2003:150). Consequently, it is often anthropomorphized, and attributed causal verbs (culture 'creates', 'acts', 'defines'…). The second involves reduction, and the claims that "it consists in the brute pattern of behavioral events we observe *in fact* to occur in some identifiable community or other" (Ibid.), generating the stereotypical phrases that populate most cross-cultural management literature: 'The French consider…', 'The Argentinians believe…', 'The English prefer…', etc. The third, and most insidious because most popular, locates culture in "the minds and hearts of men" (Goodenough, in Geertz, 2003:151), where it serves to generate behavior, thus creating 'cultural algorithms': sets of rules or prescriptions that can be known and predicted, and, in terms of management literature, responded to in equally known and predictable ways.

These three tendencies (reification, reduction and 'algorithmication') are amplified through the two most popular metaphors used to describe culture. The first is the computing metaphor, which Hofstede himself uses, subtitling the latest reworking of his model "Software of the Mind"(2005). This is also taken up by others, with bodies as hardware, social or national culture as operating systems, and organizational culture as program applications (O'Hara-Devereaux and Johansen, 1994; Duarte and Snyder, 2000). Bruner (1990) points out the severe limitations of this metaphor, emphasizing its unexamined substitution of 'information processing' for 'meaning

construction'; the reductionism inherent in classical information theory (in which a message is 'informative' to the extent that it reduces alternative choices); and its evocation of rational choice theory, in which human action is spoken of in terms of the 'computation' of the utility of alternative outcomes. While this metaphor certainly evokes the profound impact culture has on human action, it leaves no room for the emergence of such action in surprising and unexpected patterns – so common in cross-cultural interactions!

The second metaphor posits culture as a map. The map image serves to generalize and abstract culture from its embodiment in the micro "day-to-day challenges (which are) confusing and much of the time painful" (O'Hara and Devereaux, 1994:37). It offers a macro level solution that can enable the successful 'navigation' of these challenges – thus bypassing the confusion and pain. This image is based on assumptions that we can learn what the territory is like prior to, and from outside of, our immediate experience of it, and so plan for appropriate responses. By suggesting that there is a way of 'arriving' at effectiveness without getting lost, the map image affords a false sense of security, and a gross simplification of the embodied cross-cultural experience. Once more I find myself evoking Geertz, who insists that "cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape" (2003:159).

The popular use of these two metaphors constitutes what I see as the major inconsistency in much cross-cultural management literature. While most writers stress the inevitability of ambiguity, uncertainty and contradiction in global work (Black et al., 1999; O'Hara and Devereaux, 1994; McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002; Jokinen, 2004, Kedia and Mukherji, 1999; Bird and Osland, 2005; Javidan et al., 2006); they often proceed to formulate models and prescriptions that can be used in order to 'overcome', 'manage' and 'control' these. The global leadership version of the competency movement is particularly implicated in this dissonance. 'Embracing uncertainty', 'tolerance for ambiguity' and 'acceptance of complexity and its contradictions' are identified as characteristics essential for the effective global leader, only to be spoken about as discrete, clearly defined competencies, which can be systematically acquired.

There are, however, some voices which attempt to deal more directly with the contradictions involved in cross-cultural management, but they too fall short of a creating a truly paradoxical perspective. One notable example is the work of Hampden-Turner and Tompenaars (2000), who endeavor to tackle the complexity of "conflicting values"' that constitute cross-cultural encounters. Their basic thesis is that "cultures are not arbitrarily or randomly different from one another… (they are) *mirror images* of one another's values, reversals of the order and sequence of looking and learning" (2000:1). Such reversals, they claim, are sometimes "fascinating, (but mostly) frightening…because many of us mistake the reversal of our own value systems for a negation of what we believe in" (Ibid). Rather than exploring the paradoxical dynamic created by fascination and fear, however, the aim of their book is to provide a linear path "to lead you through the fright into the fascination" (Ibid). This is done through a careful examination of the way opposing values can be reconciled, thereby avoiding vicious cycles of conflict and discord, and generating virtuous cycles in which the synthesizing of these oppositions can lead to creative solutions.

Hampden-Turner and Tompenaars' work provides a good example for the kind of inconsistency I have been noticing. It stems from their adherence to a systems approach to culture, which often generates what Stacey et al.(2000) speak of as the 'both/and' approach of dual causality. On the one hand, culture is spoken of in terms of a 'formative teleology': it is a coherent whole which acts upon and directs human action in a deterministic way, forming 'mindsets', values and behaviors. On the other hand, the individual is completely autonomous, with the freedom to make rational choices and implement them ('rational teleology') – including acting against these mindsets and values! He/she can thus analyze conflicting values 'from outside' of them, understand that they are not *really* 'negations' of his/her own values, and act in a rational way to 'reconcile' these oppositions. By locating one teleology at the macro level (culture), and the other at the micro (the individual), paradox is resolved. Hamden-Turner and Trompenaars themselves seem to be slightly uncomfortable with the 'patness' of their model, admitting that, "in fact, life is far more perilous" (2000:62). But this 'perilousness' is firmly banished from their text. In my experience, cultures are *not* coherent ('mirror images'); opposing values do not '*seem*' to negate one's own – they actually *do*, providing "alternatives *to* us (rather than)…*for*

us"(Geertz, 2000, emphasis mine); contradictions are often not experienced as 'complementary', but remain intensely conflictual; and people cannot easily 'will themselves' into adopting other perspectives through "encompassing reasoning" (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 2000:4)!

Another voice problematizing the assumptions which pattern cross-cultural discourse is Lowe's (2002). In Lowe, I recognize a fellow rebel against what he calls the structuralist-functionalist paradigm. This privileges conceptual, structural analysis that generates relatively stable and static 'categories' of culture, over the understanding of process and interaction, with their accompanying dynamics of change, uncertainty and paradox. He locates this paradigm firmly within the tradition of Western thought, and sees the operational implications of speaking about culture in terms of a "real, mechanistic, measurable, controllable" construct (2002:21) in the creation of a power structure, a meta-narrative "for achieving social regulation and rationalistic logic" (Ibid:25). As an alternative to what he calls this 'monocled cultural myopia', he proposes a 'binocular' vision, based on the Chinese Taoist understanding of management, which legitimizes contradiction and paradox, and thus enables a broader and deeper understanding of culture.

But Lowe's work too, I feel, falls short of his intention. Despite his advocacy of a socially constructed, process perspective which admits the interdependence of self and environment; his use of the visual metaphor of 'binocular' vision is problematic. Although he posits the "practice of the observation of culture" as a "cultural product of the West" (Ibid:32), he goes on to construct a perspective that remains firmly within the 'observer' paradigm, placing the researcher outside the phenomenon observed. Binocular vision, by creating "another lens" may enable the inclusion of paradox – but its aim is accuracy of *vision*, belying the social construction of the phenomenon as participated in or experienced. Like Hofstede and many others in the field, he is drawn to systems thinking. Culture again works as a 'whole', impacting its parts at different levels: it is a 'deeper structure' which creates an 'explicate' world. Although he notices patterns of both stability and instability at work, he never sees these in paradoxical terms of, for example, 'stable-instability', for they exist on separate levels: stability remains ever a "surface appearance underpinned by constant transformation" (Ibid:28). And, while he negates the computing metaphor, his own

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alternative – DNA – rings with a similar (albeit more organic) flavor of programmed causality. Finally, despite his intention to speak into a post-modernist perspective, he advocates a Taoist approach, which privileges balance and harmony between opposing forces, over the conflictual and paradoxical aspects of organizational life noticed by many post-modern writers (Kilduff and Mehra, 1997).

5.2.3   'Getting it': an attempt at differentiation

In my engagement with these voices in cross-cultural literature, I am noticing how my resistance to locating my own here has moved: in a strange way, it has both become stronger, and less vehement. I am 'getting' what it is that I object to and feel constricted by, and the voices I wish to distance myself from; as well as what I recognize as resonating with my own approach, and the voices I am more willing to ally myself with. Most significantly, I understand far more coherently how I wish to speak into the field.

I wish to distance myself from the voices that speak in a positivistic, rationalistic manner about cross-cultural work as a set of discrete and predictable problems, for which simple solutions can generated. I wish to speak, in a more tentative and constructed manner, about this work as consisting of complex, interactive and dynamic 'first-time events' or 'difficulties of orientation' (Shotter, 2007). I am willing to ally myself more with voices who, like Geertz, speak of culture as "an essentially contested concept" in that "no one quite knows what it is" (Geertz, 2000:11). Although essentially 'unknowable', culture nevertheless weaves together themes of identity, meaning and context, all of which are intimately recognizable in the lived moment.

And so, I am arguing that in the uncertainty and complexity of the global environment, new and creative ways of 'going on together' can only emerge within the disorienting experience of a genuine engagement with difference and 'otherness' in the lived moment. Most the voices speaking into this field are implicated in finding ways of avoiding this experience under the assumption that 'effective action' cannot emerge within the process of disorientation. 'Getting it' – in terms of theory – would involve understanding that the direct 'application' of theoretical models, or the implementation

of general prescriptions for effective action, serve to block any kind of creativity which, by definition, can only emerge in self-organizing ways in interaction. 'Getting it' – in terms of experience in practice – is constituted by the sudden understanding that takes shapes from within the unorchestrated interaction.

5.3   CROSS CULTURAL CONVERSATIONS IN A GLOBAL ORGANIZATION: EXPLORING CONFLICTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS

"The mystery of difference", says Geertz, "takes place in the dark" (2000:82). We prefer to assume it, to label it, to seek reliable and validated ways of managing it –just not to explore in the darkness. My endeavor in practice involves the search for other possibilities of action: to bring differences to elusive, and perhaps shadowy, light in conversation. In the conversations I go on to recount, differences get explored, tested, challenged, justified, denied, questioned, laughed at. They are not reconciled, or 'dealt with' through the implementation of prescriptions for 'effective action'. They are made known, and engaged with in a living, embodied way in moments of interaction.

In June, 2006, I gave a presentation at a conference on "Conflict Resolution in Organizations" at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. While most of the other presenters spoke either about theoretical models or presented quantitative results of various conflict resolution methodologies, I chose (somewhat uneasily) to tell stories. The stories I told involved interactions that emerged in conversations I participated in within different Kelide projects, at various times, in various places around the world. Conflict was an organizing theme in all my stories: conflicts that emerged within these living conversations between people of different cultures as we participated in workshops together; and the stories of conflict they told, conflicts that arose in their everyday work within their own encounters with cross-cultural differences[9].

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[9] A quick note on cross-cultural differences, and the potential 'misunderstandings' or conflicts they sometimes generate, may be in order here. In order to illustrate, I will use a simple, and grossly generalized, example. It involves different ways of expressing a similar intention, say – respect. In Malaysia, for example, a cultural pattern that seems to get repeated is the expression of respect through a relatively non-confrontational way of speaking. This would mean rarely using a direct "no" in conversation, under the assumption that this could potentially disrupt the harmony of the immediate interaction, and entail the loss of 'face'. In Israel, on the other hand, this type of non-confrontational behavior tends to be 'immediately' experienced as 'weak', 'avoiding', 'hypocritical' – in short, untrustworthy. Why? Because, in Israel, if you respect me, you will not 'beat around the bush' – you

I chose to tell stories at the conference, as I chose to do now, because I feel that any attempt at forging an abstract, theoretical model of what goes on in these conversations cannot fully account for the self-organizing, emergent ways in which the experience of conflict often becomes transformed as people speak with each other. And so I will attempt to show, rather than explain, how this happens. I will do this in a series of stories, because I feel that each story alone does not give a sense of the patterns that crystallize. It is only in the engagement with one story after another that I feel my reader can be invited to 'get it'.

 This narrative is my attempt to show or 'make manifest' (Shotter, 2007) what I believe 'getting it' might mean in the context of cross-cultural conversations, and constitutes what is emerging as an alternative to the approach taken up by many cross-cultural theorists and practitioners, who advocate the clear 'mapping' of differences, the creation of a clear understanding of how one needs to adapt to these differences in order to be effective, and the consequent implementation of what we have understood. I am noticing how subtle shifts of meaning within conversation are created spontaneously and unexpectedly, calling forth transformations in the way we understand ourselves in relation to, and speak with, each other. These shifts, however, are not unintended – they comprise the approach I am trying to formulate. My practice is an attempt to create the conditions which may enable their arising. Since much of what I do emerges in subtle and tentative response to what is happening in the moment - and, as my learning colleagues point out time and again, often remains invisible - I have chose to highlight my own 'activity' through the use of italics. What follows is thus an exploration of "some of the very special phenomena that occur only when, as living, embodied beings, we enter into mutually responsive, dialogically-structured relations with the others and othernesses around us- when we cease to set ourselves, unresponsively, over against them and enter into a dynamic inter-involvement with them" (Shotter, 2007:27).

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will speak directly, saying exactly what you mean. In Malaysia, the latter is often 'immediately' experienced as quite violent, certainly 'rude', 'arrogant' and perhaps 'aggressive'.

5.3.1 *"This is who I am!": a personal story of identity and integrity (India)*

In a conversation at the India site, Cathy, a US participant newly arrived in India, tells of her encounter with different norms. One story becomes the focus of conversation. She tells of the apartment she lives in, and the cleaning lady whom she meets every day on the stairs. Each morning, she greets this woman with a cheery 'hello', and each morning, the woman 'answers' her with silence and an averted look. In her efforts to be friendly and to invite (maybe force?) a 'friendly' response, her greetings become more insistent. *As she speaks, I notice some of the participants in the workshop beginning to smile, while others look somewhat embarrassed. I too feel a little embarrassed for what I am sensing as her 'unresponsive' way of speaking. She is so emotionally implicated in her narrative that she seems unaware of these reactions. I notice the parallel theme that is emerging in the moment: the power of her convictions and ideology to blind her to the nuances of others' responses. I wonder if to say something, but make a quick call that she will not be able to hear yet – she needs to finish her story.*

She continues. Irritated by the woman's lack of response – 'coldness' and 'impoliteness' she names it – she tells this story to Rajindar, an Indian colleague. His response is non-committal: "Oh", he says, "She is not being impolite – quite the contrary. She is giving you the respect you deserve as a higher-status member of society by not speaking with you. In fact, your attempts at 'friendliness' are probably quite embarrassing to her. I expect she would prefer that you stop." He immediately returns the conversation to work, and Cathy is left quite shaken. She cannot let it go. What is so obvious to Rajindar – the Indian caste system and its implications for the way people live their everyday lives – calls into question her very basic belief in the equality of all human beings. She attempts to engage Rajindar in this conversation, but he will not go there. She is delighted at the opportunity to speak in the workshop.

She is, however, quite unprepared for the responses she soon elicits. She is challenged by her Indian colleagues: if she holds such a strong view on human equality, does she not also hold an equally strong belief that all human beings should therefore be equally respected? "Of course!" she answers. "For me to ignore this woman as I pass her would mean the ultimate disrespect*!" I suddenly understand that we are in the*

realm of cult values, which are being functionalized in very different ways (Mead, 1923, in Stacey, 2005). *I am aware of Cathy's distress, and of how the conversation is funneling itself into a focused discussion of 'Cathy's issue'. I try to turn the conversation slightly away from her, to widen it by inviting some reflection on what respect means to each of us. I speak of myself.*

The notion gets taken up in the conversation in a more complex way: what is respect if not somehow engaging in the other's understanding of it? One suggestion is that perhaps respect, in this situation, would mean *not* acknowledging the other. Cathy cannot accept this. Surely 'recognition' is a universal way of showing respect! Perhaps, she is told, in this case, recognition would consist of silence, a silent recognition of the place we hold in a social order – that here, is clearly hierarchical. *I am aware of my own discomfort in this conversation, surprised by the volume of my own reactions. Are my own egalitarian values a 'cultural bias' – or is it 'who I am'? I recognize Cathy in myself. Perhaps others do too.*

Cathy is shocked to hear that her 'innocent' attempts at respect and recognition may be understood as a power play – is she not attempting to dominate by imposing her values on another? I notice that people are speaking more gently – they are aware of the intention embodied in Cathy's behavior; they are aware that her confusion and distress are genuine. There has been a shift in the way she is being seen. She is no longer the 'colonizing American' she seemed to be at the start. People have begun to question their own notions of respect. Cathy's story has stirred all this up, but the conversation has shifted: what was an intensely personal experience has somehow become a shared experience that we all partake of, a joint exploration of power, recognition, respect.

There are no clear conclusions. What has become amplified is a sense of the immense complexity we are engaging with, as we attempt to 'act with integrity', and understand that what constitutes integrity for one person may be experienced as painfully abusive to another. Cathy comes to me at the end of the workshop, obviously disturbed. "I can't change my behaviour" she says – "it would mean going against everything I have been brought up to believe in! This is who I am!" We speak for a few minutes. *She longs for me to tell her 'what to do' – which, of course, I can't, because I am not*

sure what I myself would do. I tell her this. As we speak, I am aware of a change in the quality of our conversation. It has become permeated by a certain reflectiveness. She speaks with less conviction: in some sense, her sense of identity has been shaken, but, at the same time, she seems more willing to be in this experience of 'not-knowing'. I listen to her, hearing her confusion, experiencing my own helplessness lacing with hers: have I pushed this conversation to a point too painful for her to bear in these circumstances?

A few weeks later, I receive an email from her. She thanks me again for the workshop, saying that it was really meaningful for her. "I have stopped saying hello to the cleaning lady" she says. "But each time I pass her, I have a sense of discomfort. Even though it somehow seems the right thing to do, it never becomes 'automatic' – it always takes effort".

5.3.2 *"Can I trust you?": Ethics and the multi-cultural experience (China)*

I am working with a diverse group in China. One of the English participants, Jeff, is speaking about his first experience of working within what he understands to be a business norm in China: the ambiguous process of 'building relations' with local authorities. He is describing his attempts to get the authorization to build a new facility. After a few weeks of reluctantly 'wining and dining' officials, his request for certain changes to the building plans is refused.

He speaks of his frustration and anger – he had understood that the 'relationship building' would ensure the desired bottom- line results. A conversation ensues, about the meaning of this 'wining and dining'. Is it a linear process, in which one performs a certain action (the hosting) and the result is inevitably what one desires (the building permit)? In other words, does it constitute a kind of bribery – an absolute impossibility for those working in a global organization? And, if so, why was the request then refused? Or is it, as a Chinese participant, John, tries to explain, the 'lubrication' of processes – but not bribery in that nothing is actually promised? Is there a difference?

"Well," asks Jeff, in a pragmatic, matter of fact tone, "Are there rules about the building issue or not?" The answer he gets is ambivalent. "Yes, there are rules, but these can be changed under certain circumstances". "What would these circumstances be? Would they include personal connections?" The answer never achieves the desired clarity, remaining forever in the realm of contingency.

I invite stories that seem connected, and they begin to flow. People begin to tell stories of their encounters with the law, with regulations. In cross-cultural jargon, the issue at hand involves particularistic perspectives and universalistic ones. The conversation becomes heated. Ethics becomes its subject. People begin to speak about the concept of 'fairness'.

A senior American OD practitioner, Lorna, becomes quite vehement, embodying in this moment the uncompromising nature of universalistic thought: "I come from a law abiding country, where justice is the same for all, and fairness comes from applying the same law to all! That is, and can be, the only basis for fairness!" "Well", counters Li, "here we would say that that in itself is very unfair, because people live in such different circumstances. What would constitute, for example, a 'fair' fee for one person, would be devastating to another. How can we apply the same rule for all and consider that fair?" While there remain fairly clear organizational regulations about such issues, we are touching upon the different ways people make sense of and value these regulations – even as they are compelled to comply with them.

People walk out to the break quite disconcerted – a conflict that is usually invisible has come to light in all its complexity. Apart from legal issues, we are touching upon the primary question of joint endeavour: what constitutes 'trustworthy' behaviour? While the conversation is generating a deeper understanding of the multi-facetedness of this question, it is also becoming clear that a 'shared understanding' of this will remain forever elusive. *I feel that participants are understanding, as am I, that there can never really be an acceptance of the 'other view' as completely legitimate.*

After the break, the conversation moves to action, for this is the comfort zone. *I deliberate if we are closing down the questions too quickly – could we have gone further with them had there not been a break? Now it seemed like the atmosphere has*

contracted once more. I decide to wait and see where the conversation will go. The question becomes: how do we go on within the 'enabling constraints' of the way 'things are done around here'? 'Here' takes on an added dimension, for, in China, at least, there will never be complete overlap and agreement between the organizational 'here' and the cultural 'here'. The organizational way is clearly universalistic – quite understandably in terms of the global scrutiny such organizations function under – and takes precedence. But, at this moment, what is equally clear is that this does not constitute 'the obviously right way' for all, and the effort and cost sometimes involved in working according these kinds of regulations.

There is an uneasy understanding forming here, as we all 'get it' in our different ways: while disagreement remains, we all have to 'go on together'. This is the complex reality of global work, and my sense is that its exploration in this particular conversation has made our joint work more viable, though not necessarily easier. I say nothing, for I am sensing that, while we have moved into 'action-item speak', the conversation is more hesitant, more nuanced. Certainty has been permeated with questioning, although no one has actually voiced this. It seems to me we are 'getting it' in silence, and make a call to leave it at that, for ambivalence can never be formulated in easy 'conclusions'. What we are 'getting' is that, while we are all (including myself) bound to comply with organizational regulations, we have a deeper appreciation of what this might entail for the different people in the room.

5.3.3   *Being directly indirect: The experience of effectiveness (US)*

I am working with a group of senior level finance managers, from different countries and cultures. I have been asked to join their yearly face-to-face meeting, to facilitate a conversation about the ways they are 'managing' their cultural differences. People tell stories about and examine their own interactions, as well as their interactions with other departments, clients, suppliers. As always, the organizational agenda is 'effectiveness', and the dominant theme is 'what comprises effective action?'

In terms of ways of speaking, there is an obvious privileging of direct, unambiguous communication. This is obvious both in the way the conversation takes place, as well as in its content. The solutions being offered for effectiveness all involve 'speaking

up', 'saying what you mean', 'confronting others', and 'being assertive'. The voices of participants from cultures more accustomed to differing degrees of this way of interacting (American, German, Israeli, and English) are being heard far above the others (Malaysian, Indonesian and Chinese). *I notice this, and point it out. I myself have been acutely aware of the inequality of participation, and have been unsure as to what to do about it. I have invited people to speak, but with limited success.*

Donald, an American manager, says: "Well, my assumption is that if anyone has something to say, they'll say it." His comment is met with silence. People look around at each other. Those who have been speaking nod with silent consent, and those who have been silent remain so. But a sudden discomfort has been created. *I sense we are just beginning to 'get it': this 'unquestioned' assumption may not be shared by all. I voice my thoughts. The conversation continues, but with less conviction; it has begun to stumble rather than flow. My comment has fragmented certainty, and, in the discomfort that seems to be created, I wonder if I have done the right thing. People seem even more reluctant to speak with each other than before.*

I notice that Ming, a Malaysian manager, and one of the only two women in the group, is becoming very agitated. She has been very quiet during the day, politely refusing my invitations to enter the conversation. I wonder if I should try again, and how to do so without embarrassing her. Before I can come up with an 'effective solution' to my own question, she suddenly stands up. She is obviously very excited. She immediately has everyone's attention. She says – almost shouts – "You don't understand! Being indirect is VERY effective!" Her words create a shocked silence. She promptly sits down, stunned and somewhat embarrassed by her own outburst. The discomfort that had begun to form with my words has now become intense. We are all struck by the obvious dissonance between what she is saying and how she is saying it. She could not have been more direct. But it clearly took enormous effort to be so.

I let the silence resonate for as long as I can bear it, feeling that somehow this experience in silence is valuable. I want to explore the silence, to explore both Ming's experience, and our responses to it – but I am not sure this will be acceptable within the very pragmatic tone that had characterized the conversation up till now. I also

identify Ming's outburst as an opportunity to move into a different quality of conversation. It is worth the risk. I speak tentatively – I am a little scared. I turn to Ming, feeling like she needs to be afforded the space she seems to desire and fear so intensely: "Ming, can you say a little more – I'm not quite sure we really understand what you are speaking about". Another participant echoes my request.

She begins to speak, hesitantly, telling about the frustration she and her team members experience in the struggle to impact the agenda at hand, without risking 'loss of face' – their own, and others'. She describes the difficulty of not being able to participate easily in what she experiences as 'vocal arguments'. She tells of the ongoing effort involved in speaking in a way she values – indirectly, non-confrontationally – and still be heard as convincing. *We have all just experienced her struggle in a very direct way. We have all just experienced the profound differences between what people think of as 'effective', and how deeply connected this is with the sense of who they are.*

"Well," says Danni, an Israeli, "I think I understand what you are saying. This also helps me understand why sometimes members of my global team don't speak out; and why, while I assume that silence indicates consent, things don't move in the direction and at the speed I want them to. But the truth is, that if you had not said what you just did, in the direct and emotional way you did, I am not sure I would have understood. Does this bring us back to our starting point: that being direct **is** more effective?"

His question is both legitimate and valuable. We all smile at the irony of it. But our understanding of the question of effectiveness and its complex connections with identity has been transformed. Before this event, we seemed to be heading in the direction of what could have evolved into an uncontested (at least vocally!) 'prescription for effective action': "Be Direct". Now, as we all sit there together, we are aware of the complexity it entails: the contextuality of its 'truth'; the difficulty involved in its functionalization; the voices it paralyzes; the values it may silence. *For me, I am aware that it is this very understanding that both constitutes and generates 'effective action' in the global, multi-cultural space these managers inhabit. I have no need to speak this – it is clear to me that we have all, in one way or another, 'gotten it'.*

A year later, I come across Danni in the corridors of a different Kelide site. We are both rushing off to meetings. "That was some experience!" he tells me. "I feel it really impacted the way I relate to the people I work with. I can't believe how sure I was about how to get things done! I'm not so sure any more – but it seems to be working better!" It is a fleeting encounter. We both go back to rushing, I with a sense of deep gratification.

5.3.4 *Leadership: the global challenge (England)*

The conversation explores the notion of leadership, and the obvious complexity of taking it up in the uncertain and ambiguous global environment. The participants are English, American and Irish managers, all of whom manage global groups. Michael, an Irish manager tells about a particularly messy organizational project that involved people from different cultures and professions, whose work was highly interdependent. His story focuses on a crisis that emerged with the client, and the consequences of a deadline missed due to different understandings regarding product expectations.

He tells how he invited the participation of team members to explore the problem, and empowered them to create solutions, delegating authority to enable what he saw as the quickest and best decisions. He speaks with pride about how some of his team rose to the challenge, developing their own leadership capacities in the process; and of his disappointment in others whom he felt just couldn't rise to the responsibility. In particular, he speaks of two Indian engineers, whom he felt refused to take the initiative, and commit themselves to independent decisions.

The conversation moves to what leadership involves, how it can be developed, and how some people have a 'natural bent' – while others will never be leaders. All the participants agree that this becomes particularly problematic as globalization expands, and people need to take more and more personal responsibility for 'self management'. *There is a lot of self-justification in our speaking, and the conversation seems to be generating a kind of flatness, embodied in a growing consensus around complaints: 'too bad not everyone can be as good/ responsible/ committed ' as we are…' I sense*

my growing dissatisfaction with the direction we are taking, but the few comments and questions I make are not managing to impact it. I listen carefully, waiting for some kind of 'gap' or interruption in this music that has crystallized, one that may offer an opportunity for deepening our exploration of what leadership is all about.

I do not have to wait long. Sean, another Irishman, who has held management roles in Japan, suddenly says: "I wonder how your Indian team would tell this story". Michael replies quickly and unreflectively "Oh – they had lots of good excuses – they always do". *But I am intrigued, and recognize immediately the potential his comment holds for sparking a change of direction. "What are you getting at?" I ask.* In (what seems to me!) a terribly indirect and understated way, Sean begins to speak about some of his own attempts to manage Japanese teams. The pattern in his vignettes becomes: "What I thought of as really good leadership: participative and inspiring; was seen by many – as I heard only later – as the complete abandonment of leadership, my own inability to make firm decisions, and a lack of confidence and conviction on my part.*"*

Everyone is silent for a moment, as we all wait to see if Michael will choose to take this as a direct challenge, and what his response will be. Will he choose to defend himself, and continue the theme of justification, or will he be able to take this up as an invitation to explore assumptions of what 'good leadership' is about? With visible effort, Michael resorts to humor: "Is this your way of implying that I am a colonial boor?" he asks, grinning. *I am delighted. He has given us permission to explore his story in a different way.*

In the ensuing conversation, leadership gets spoken about in a far more complex way, with the understanding that it often involves paradoxical perspectives of what 'leading' is about – as well as what 'following' entails. The conversation moves in two directions simultaneously. One involves personal leadership experiences, values and assumptions; and the difficulty of actually adapting these to differing expectations that arise in different cultures. The other involves 'organizational culture', and the supposedly 'shared values' we are all presumed to hold. Leadership at Kelide has a specific shape and color: it consists of the cult values of 'personal accountability', 'risk-taking', 'productive confrontation'.

But what comes alive in this conversation is that, while we may all agree with these values – as values; the ways they are functionalized in the moment, particularly in different cultures, cannot be predicted or controlled. What 'risk' means to an Irish person, may be very different from what it means to an Indian. What are the implications of all this diversity for our ability to lead our teams to successful action? To what extent does someone leading a global, multi-cultural team need to be aware of and adapt to these differing understandings – and to what extent does anyone coming into this organization need to take on Kelide values – in the way Kelide defines them? Is this at all possible? If not, then what does being a 'global organization' actually mean? Power, hierarchy, domination are spoken about – sometimes openly, sometimes in evocative hints.

This is again a conversation with no unequivocal answers. It has come up, in different forms, time and again at Kelide (see project 2). It is taken up with different degrees of openness, and always has a sense of urgency about it, as well as traces of felt subversion. People are never quite sure to what extent all this questioning is legitimate, and to what extent it should be policed. *I have no ready answers. My own ideology leads me to recognize this conversation as an extremely important one, in which people attempt to understand what it is they are actually doing 'with' and 'to' each other; how their values are implicated in these activities, and how differences are engaged in, accepted and/or rejected. And so I encourage taking this up. Am I being subversive? Yes, I probably am.*

It is never an easy conversation for me. I am never sure of its boundaries. Several times after workshops, I have had the feeling that my work at Kelide was going to be terminated and that I was going to be asked to leave – that the conversations I was encouraging were going to be labeled 'non-productive'. Yet I am invited back, again and again. And, apparently, people who participate in these conversations do not go away and 'rebel'. Perhaps the power structure is too powerful. Perhaps the benefits too attractive. And perhaps the ability to explore all of these immensely complex issues in conversation with colleagues generates the energy to move forward in action with a new understanding of ourselves and others as we go on together in our daily work lives.

5.3.5 *"They say I am different": The cost of change (Indonesia)*

This conversation takes place within a forum that includes mostly Indonesians, a couple of Americans, a Singaporian, and two Chinese; all of whom work much of the time in global teams. We are speaking of the way work happens in these teams. The conversation seems measured and hesitant. *I am sensing a kind of impatience in myself, and suddenly understand that I am encountering, in a direct and situated way, the cultural norms of the 'teaching paradigm' within which most of the participants were raised, with its implications of power inequality. The minute I stand before them, I am 'teacher', and they are 'pupils'; I am all powerful, they are powerless; I speak, and they listen.*

This is a paradigm whose ideology I question intensely. My intention is to ease the conversation away from this, and, as far a possible and comfortable, towards more of what I experience as an 'equal exchange'. I am acutely aware of my own cultural biases as I attempt this. I have deliberated much over this issue. I find myself speaking far more authoritatively in situations like this – but I cannot let go of the desire to create a different kind of conversation. Am I the 'cultural boor' here – imposing my own values from a position of power? And, if I succeed, what effect will this conversation have? With no clear answers, I find myself treading very carefully.

I divide people up into small groups to engage in some of the questions that have been raised, in the hope that my absence in the groups – coupled with the use of their native tongue where possible – will free up what I am experiencing as an extremely constrained conversation. I voice my intentions, speaking hesitantly about cultural norms, and how different it is to facilitate a workshop here from one in Israel, for example. They laugh, for many recognize the 'Israeli experience' in which a second of silence is a proven impossibility, and where less than three people speaking at any given moment is in the realm of singularity. Between the humor and the small group method, animated conversation emerges.

Coming back to the large group, I invite them to bring some of the issues that were raised. There is silence. I wait just a tiny bit longer than I sense is comfortable, and

Sue, an Indonesian woman, begins to speak. She hesitantly admits that the conversation in her group has moved onto other topics. I ask if they would be willing to speak anyway. They all look a little embarrassed. I wonder if I should let it go. There is another silence. And then Julie says "We were speaking about how we have changed since we started working here."

I immediately recognize an opening. "In what way?" I ask. "Here, at work, we are encouraged to be direct, we are expected to confront others and express disagreement openly. We are learning, in some ways, to be more open – what the Americans call 'up front'. Sometimes, we are even expected to confront our bosses. It is not easy. It often doesn't seem quite right". I am surprised at her openness – although she speaks in the plural, she is quite forthright. The others seem surprised too – and I feel that they are looking at me expectantly: 'is it legitimate to discuss things like this here?' they seem to be asking.

I have no idea. Once again, I wonder to what extent this kind of conversation would appear subversive, and to whom? Should I let it go? I make a quick call not to, realizing I am taking a risk, both in terms of the participants' 'comfort zones', and in terms of organizational 'legitimacy'. It feels, in the moment, like a really important conversation to have. I decide to give it a try, and see what happens. "Does anyone else feel this way?" I ask. It is as if I have let open a dam. "My parents say I have changed", says Jalal. "My husband is constantly complaining that I am becoming a Western woman – I am more aggressive, more demanding" says Emma – and so on.

The conversation moves to the inevitability, the quality and the extent of adaptation, for most of those who speak say that indeed they *have* changed. Is this a good thing? The question is in the air, although no one actually articulates it. Some justify the changes. Some bring up the complex question of globalization and power: *who* should change? "Are the Americans also having these workshops?" is one of the questions that always comes up. The price of such changes is explored, as well as the price of not adapting. Most seem to feel that these kind of changes come with the territory – while they were not aware of all the nuances, they knew they were going to have to adapt ways of working, thinking and speaking when they came to work here. Some (mainly the younger participants) like who they are becoming; some are not sure.

George, the most senior participant in this group, is very practical: "I am one person from 8 to 5 o'clock (others laugh – it never ends at 5!), and another from 5 till the next morning. I have no problem with that!" Others nod – they recognize the experience, though it cannot be as simple as George proposes. There is a thoughtful quality in the conversation, a kind of joint reflection that is not a part of their ordinary work conversation.

I *sense it is time to move on. I too am left thoughtful. I am understanding 'conflict in cross-cultural encounters' in yet a different way: the inner conflict we experience as we move towards what has been defined in organizational terms as 'effective behaviour'. We are touching upon the deep changes globalization is creating, and the sense of opportunity and loss inherent in these changes. I am left with a taste of sadness, aware of the complex implications of all this. I am also left with an uneasy sense of my own activity – whose goals am I serving here? Am I being 'used' as an 'instrument' to strengthen the 'colonializing' power structure, making it 'easier' for people to adopt the Western values and behaviors so obviously privileged at Kelide? Or am I impacting the shifting of power relations by deepening people's understanding of the complexity of their experience, and thus generating the conditions for a renewed 'choice' of participation or non-participation in the Kelide ethos? Is it possible to be implicated in both simultaneously? That is often the experience of what I do.*

5.4 ACCOUNTING FOR PRACTICE

What emerges from my stories is the different ways in which subtle shifts occur in interactions between people from different cultures. These shifts can be spoken about in different ways; I would like to speak about them as a transformation of meaning, sense of self, and ways of speaking together that emerge interactively, in the lived encounter with cultural 'otherness'. I have used the expression 'getting it' to evoke the nature of the shifts, in which people 'get' "an 'optimal grip' on…events from a *standpoint in motion* – (grasping) the nature of their unfolding contours in time" (Shotter, 2006:94). The elusive quality of the term 'getting it' serves my purpose well,

for I am saying that creative responses to the ambiguity and conflict, which often typify the experience of working across cultures, can only emerge in unpremeditated, self-organizing ways within living interaction.

All these stories show how such subtle shifts occur in people's experiences of themselves-in-relation-to-others, in ways that neither I, nor they, could have predicted or planned. In this, I am differentiating myself from the approaches advocated by most cross-cultural practitioners, who focus on information gathering and the 'familiarization' with cultural differences; mapping the 'cultural gaps' and generating clear cut prescription for effective cross-cultural interaction. In the last part of this project, I would like to explore the nature of these experiences of transformation; how my practice invites them; and what I see as their value in organizational life. The 'explanations' I offer for what it is I am doing emerge from the activity of 'taking my experience seriously', and are more "a matter of connecting action to its sense rather than behaviour to its determinants" (Geertz, in Shotter, 2007:110),

5.4.1   The nature of transformation

In my viva exam, my examiner kept returning to the question of 'what transforms?', formulating it as "So, what you are trying to do is impact people's awareness of cross-cultural differences?" Yes, I am trying to impact awareness, but not in terms of gaining a clearer understanding of the *content* of these differences. My practice involves an attempt to impact and shift awareness as an emergent quality of self-in-interaction, in which sameness and difference take on new meaning in the continuous movement of conversation. It is a shifting of awareness *'in'* rather than *'of'* cross-cultural differences: a process of dawning understanding, in which our sense of self-in-relation-to-other/ness changes, as does our ability to respond to each other in different ways. What my stories 'show' are how shifts in the quality of attention and responsiveness that permeates our conversations emerge; and how these conversations themselves change, moving from a focused search for 'effective solutions' to the problems we encounter, to a more diffuse, textured and nuanced exploration of the complexity of our actual experience as we work and speak together. As these conversations gains depth, moment by unfinished moment, what is transforming is an

appreciation of all that we are and are not, as well as a forming sense of what we can be, separately and together.

To understand these shifts calls for different ways of understanding notions of communication, meaning and identity. Communication moves away from the more traditional and linear 'sender/receiver' model, to a more dynamic and dialogical one. In the first, 'information' is central: a 'message', seen in terms of a 'thing' which is 'fixed' within the head of an active speaker, is transmitted, as accurately as possible, into the head of a passive listener. In the second, meaning becomes central, and communication is seen as an irreducibly "contingent, emergent and responsive" process (Barge and Little, 2002:376). It is an activity "in which we see ourselves as participating in the self-organizing emergence of meaningful activity from within our disorderly open-ended responsiveness to one another" (Shaw, 2002:32). Thus, for example, the clear-cut demand to "tell us how to work effectively with (say) the Chinese" becomes a joint exploration of the multifaceted experience of *actually working* with the Chinese, and the meaning that both emerges and is lost in the living experience itself.

The notion of meaning is then seen less in terms of 'definition', but rather a relationally constructed and emergent property of interaction itself (Mead, 1967; Bruner, 1990). According to Mead, who was perhaps the first to speak of a dialogical concept of communication, the basic unit of study in human action is the interaction: the intertwined movement of gesture/response, within which meaning arises. For Mead, this dialogical act of communication is central to the formation of identity and the experience of self; within this relational movement, mind, self and society all emerge together. And so, identity becomes 'joint' rather than an individual construction; a continually shifting process rather than a coherent and unified monad (Elias, 2000; Stacey, 2005; Dalal, 2000: Holquist, 2005; Gurevitch, 2002; Gergen, 2002; Rorty, 1999). If we agree to speak of identity in this way, more in keeping with a 'weak ontology of becoming' rather than a 'strong ontology of being' (Chia, 1995), then what is happening in the conversations I speak of are transformations in the way people experience *who they are* in relation to others in the 'inter-lived' moment.

These shifts, which emerge in the encounter with the 'otherness' of cultural difference, are spoken of by different writers. Martin, for example, drawing on the work of Taylor, speaks of two conditions under which we can truly engage with 'difference', and become transformed. The first involves "the crucial moment (in which) we allow ourselves to be interpolated by the other; where the difference escapes from its categorization as an error, a fault, or a lesser, undeveloped version of what we are, and challenges us to see it as a viable human alternative" (Taylor, 2002; quoted in Martin, 2005:248). The second entails an acceptance of this challenge in a way that enables us to see our own perspective, beliefs, values etc. in relation to our own background, rather than as "a generalized feature of the human condition as such" (Ibid). These two intertwined processes must be lived and relived in the situated and complex engagement in the moment, for "no disengaged standpoint, free of our own prejudices, is available to expedite this protracted, painfully won process…(for it is) an interactive and conversational, 'coming-to-an-understanding' model (that emerges) in our effortful engagement with the other " (Ibid).

What it is, then, that is actually involved in this 'protracted, painfully won process' of 'effortful engagement'? Shotter speaks of "arresting", "striking" or "moving moments", in which we "let the otherness of the other enter us and make us other than we already are" (Shotter, 2007:104). Bhaktin formulates the notion of 'transgredience', evoking the way "aspects of self cross over to other selves" (Jabri, 2004:573; Holquist, 2005), and self becomes saturated with other. Gurevitch (2001) explores the 'dialogic moment', emphasizing its conflictual interweaving of threads of 'monovocality', coercion and fear as well those of mutuality, plurality and multivocality.

However we choose to speak of them, it is exactly these moments – in their immediate, embodied expression – that I am attempting to study: moments in which our selves and our voices become intertwined in new and unexpected ways, creating the 'ordinary transformations' that significantly impact and shift our sense of who we are. They are the moments in which Cathy struggles with the dawning understanding of the way her words and actions are experienced by others – and that this is exactly the opposite of what she intends. Meaning shifts and heaves, as saying hello to a cleaning lady becomes a colonializing act of power at the same time as it is

experienced as an act of deep respect; not saying hello becomes an act of authenticity. They are the moments of Michael's struggle to reorient himself as his convictions of what 'good leadership' – seminal to his sense of whom he is and how he manifests in work life – are powerfully challenged. They are embodied in the thoughtful sadness that permeates the conversation in the Indonesia workshop, as we all become open to experiencing the full significance and complex ramifications of who we are becoming as we live our workday lives within the 'otherness' of a global company. Within these moments, people actually experience themselves differently, and, as 'different' selves, different responses and actions become possible. They are the moments in which what we so glibly speak of as 'change in organizations' becomes a living reality: recall Ming, the Malaysian manager, who was suddenly able to confront her colleagues with a directness she had not imagined possible; or Danni, the Israeli manager, who surprises himself as new ways of speaking emerge in his interactions with others.

5.4.2   Creating transformation: a methodology of practice

In the attempt to understand how transformation, or change, is created in ordinary experiences in organizational life, I turn to others who are similarly interested, notably Isaacs (1993, 1999), and Senge and his colleagues (2005). Both Isaacs' notion of 'dialogue' and Senge et al.'s notion of 'presence' (2005) are attempts to articulate processes for transforming organizational reality. Isaacs is concerned with crafting a "process for transforming the quality of conversations" (Isaacs 1993:25) which could help us deal more effectively with the complexity of organizational life, and Senge and his colleagues are interested in the "extraordinary moments of collective awakening" (2005:3) which lead to profound change in social systems.

Isaacs' approach is based on the premise that human beings act into the world as a result of the meaning they construct in sets of assumptions, beliefs, values etc., and that these paradigms are often the cause of much organizational dysfunction: stuckness, conflict, defensive mechanisms etc. Drawing on the work of Bohm, he sees the notion of dialogue as a particular way of speaking together which involves surfacing these underlying assumptions, collectively examining them, and, through a process of 'triple loop learning' (1993), transforming our thinking and consequently our collective action. In this way, 'dialogue' is seen to be an 'antidote' to many of the

problems facing organizations, and lies at the heart of organization learning and change (Isaacs, 1999; Schein, 1993; Barge and Little, 2002). Senge et al. are concerned with the kind of individual and collective shifts created by what they speak of as 'presence', which entails "being fully conscious and aware in the present moment", "deep listening" and "being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense" (2005:13).

There is much I appreciate and identify with in what these writers are attempting to do. Theirs, like mine, is a call to change the mainstream organizational agenda, to speak more in terms of 'meaning' and less in terms of 'solutions'. They are passionately involved in a search for a different way of noticing and speaking about "subtle and delicate understandings that begin to emerge" (Isaacs, 1993:38) in elusive experiences of meaning, within a "collective inquiry into the…certainties that compose everyday experience"(Ibid.:25). They are profoundly aware of the somewhat mysterious, non-linear way in which such changes may occur. Senge et al. draw on the complexity sciences to emphasize the primacy of interrelations in human action, and the notion of the decentered self as a constantly shifting phenomenon. They draw on Eastern traditions to evoke the elusiveness of human intention and action as an intertwining of passivity and activity (speaking of the 'action' of 'letting come'). They are aware of how transformative shifts can only emerge from within our participation in them, positing their essential question as "what does it mean to act in the world and not on the world?" (2005:92).

And yet, at the same time as I am recognizing 'sameness', I find myself reacting powerfully to difference. Once more, I notice the kind of visceral reaction I experienced at the suggestion to locate my voice in the cross-cultural discourse. Once more I understand that it is only through my own engagement with what I am experiencing as the 'otherness' of these voices that my own comes to make sense – shifting and crystallizing at the same time. What is it that I find so objectionable in what these writers are saying?

I entertain the possibility that I am encountering a different 'cultural norm', just like participants in my workshops. Am I resisting the kind of pragmatism that permeates what I could refer to loosely as 'American' voices, which embodies (what I see as) an

obsessive preoccupation of 'what to *do* with all this'? But I do not have the same reaction to those writers, such as James, Mead, Dewey and Rorty, who partake of – indeed 'define' - the pragmatist tradition, and with whom I engage willingly and with profound (though not uncritical) appreciation. But the latter do not speak directly into the management and organizations. And so my hypothesis shifts a little. I begin to see that I am reacting, yet again, to the positivistic paradigm of 'predict and control' that seems, almost inevitably, to creep into the voices that address the organizational world, under the assumption that 'organizing' by its very nature is a linear, controllable, 'manageable' experience.

Despite the alertness of Isaacs and Senge et al. to the processual and emergent nature of human interaction, they both seem to want, and see themselves able, to 'prescribe' how the kinds of shifts they are seeking can be forged. Isaacs speaks of dialogue in normative terms, with a fairly tidy set of ideas as to how it can be engineered. Although his voice remains continually humble and tentative, he unabashedly proposes clear 'prescriptions' for creating the 'container' in which dialogue can occur: 'suspend assumptions', 'observe the observer', 'be aware of thought' (Isaacs, 1993). Senge et al. are implicated in a similar venture, forging a 3 step 'U model' for shifting consciousness, collective identity and possibilities for action: 'become one with the world', 'allow inner knowing to emerge', and 'act swiftly with a natural flow' (2005:88). While they pay homage to the fact that the "the shift is challenging to explain in the abstract, but real and powerful when it occurs" (2005:43), they go on to speak about "when we start down the left hand side of the U…then move up the right-hand side…" (Ibid.:103). In fact, their whole book is sprinkled with little prescriptions as to 'how to' create' processes that combine to form the U model.

Perhaps it is the 'directness' of these models that irks me, the linear way in which our intentions are assumed to generate desired actions, which, in turn, generate desired outcomes. Am I, like Ming, speaking up for the 'effectiveness of indirectness'? While what both Isaacs and Senge et al. advocate may be extremely valuable, they are hardly activities we can 'do' at will. Can we, merely by desire or intention, so easily 'suspend our assumptions'? 'Become one with the world'? In their engagement with esoteric teachings, for example, Senge et al. draw on the Buddhist notion of non-attachment, and posit that "continually letting go keeps bringing us back to the here and now"

(2005:97). In my experience, 'letting go' is enormously difficult, and rarely directly 'implementable'. Within the Buddhist tradition they draw on, for example, we are speaking of a gesture that may take lifetimes to perfect!

Finally, I see the desired outcomes they aim towards as problematic – not as 'cult values' in themselves, but in their 'functionalization' - as realistic, approachable and tenable experience. Isaacs sees dialogue in terms of an idealized form of interaction which eliminates misunderstanding, conflict and power inequality, and creates harmony and shared understanding; Senge et al. speak of shifts in 'presence' as entailing feelings of "solidarity, compassion, care and love" (2005:102). Once again, I find myself in the odd position of critiquing notions I value highly. But, in this critiquing, I am understanding that there is something I value even more: the willingness and ability to engage with the paradoxical complexity of experience. I am advocating a readiness to speak of the less benign aspects of human experience: conflict, misunderstanding, disharmony and power relations, as being no less integral to – or valuable for – human experience in organizations than harmony, shared understanding etc. In doing so, I am attempting to speak of shifts in meaning, identity and ways of speaking as occurring in our everyday organizational lives, not 'outside' of them. Barge and Little critique Isaacs in a similar way, as forging: an 'abnormal' form of conversation, a "highly structured conversational episode that needs to occur when the 'normal' ways of talking no longer address the puzzles, dilemmas and challenges" (2002:375-6). And the experiences that Senge et al. speak of are quite extraordinary, occurring in retreats, life-changing events, or highly unusual encounters.

5.4.3 Inviting transformation: the elusive 'tools' of practice

It is not enough, however, for me to critique others' attempts to account for their practice. It is not enough to say that my own sometimes creates the conditions for shifts to occur in living interaction, but that I cannot actually specify *how* this happens. Although I object to the definitive and authoritative ways these writers 'prescribe' the 'creation of shifts', I too am carefully and intentionally crafting an approach to change. "All this stuff against prescriptions", challenge my learning colleagues, "is this not a prescription in itself?!" As Shotter points out, it is not

enough for me to 'get it' – I need to prove to others that I have 'got it', which would consist of "being able to explain it to them, to teach it to them, in such a way that they too 'get it' and can go on in what can count as the 'same way' (2007:100). And so, what follows is my attempt to articulate what is it that I actually do in order to invite these moments in which the shifts I speak of become possible, to examine the 'method' of my own practice. In doing so, I am attempting to generalize my approach, offering other practitioners a set of elusive 'tools' which may serve to inform and enrich theirs.

The metaphor of 'tools' has become the dominant one in speaking of methodology of practice. It has become a rather constricted metaphor, calling up the kind of instruments that live in a toolbox, the kind a plumber or carpenter may use. They are inevitably discrete, and designed to performing specific task (a wrench, a saw); they usually suggest vigorous effort (wrenching a pipe; sawing a piece of wood); and that create direct and clearly observable results (an unclogged sink; a stool). If my challenge is to articulate a 'methodology' (the 'prescription for no-prescriptions', as my colleagues teasingly call it), what kind of 'tools' would I find more resonant with the activity of my practice?

The image that comes to mind is that of a dancer. What are a dancer's tools? They consist of his/her body, the choreography, the music, the space, the lighting, the clothing and stage setting, the dance partners – all of which intertwine responsively amongst themselves and with the audience to create an experience (the dance performance) which is, by nature, temporal and therefore transient. The performance that emerges is not a 'thing' that exists outside of experience, yet it both can and cannot be repeated. So too, my 'tools' are a complex intertwining of all I 'am' as I interact with others at any given point in time: bodily, emotional and cognitive responses to the living situation, together with a history of professional knowledge and experience. And these 'tools' do not create a 'thing' that is outside of them; what is created is the experience that emerges in the joint participation in the 'dance' of responsive interaction.

I notice, for example, how I tend to speak of my practice in the passive voice: how shifts or experiences of transformation 'are created', how conflicts 'are dealt with'.

This choice of grammatical construct is not arbitrary. It is certainly not 'I' who 'deals' with them – nor is it the participants. The 'dealing' happens in complex responsive patterns of interaction between us. My intention is clear: I am seeking to shift the way we experience and understand ourselves-in-relation-to-others in the complex setting of cross-cultural differences. Because of the non-linear connections between intention, activity and outcomes, the kind of shifts I am trying to invite cannot be a direct result of the implementation of an already formulated prescription, but emerge in the moment. I therefore understand my 'activity' as consisting of different kinds of invitation to a responsive engagement. Much of what I do has the flavor of 'passivity' – at least in terms of 'observable behaviors'. I find myself waiting; listening attentively; deliberating ardently with myself in silent conversation; trying to deal with my own anxiety around not knowing what to do next; keeping silence alive; noticing glimmers of gaps in conversation which may enable different ways of speaking; and trying to create space for the amplification of these shifts.

My sense of myself, however, is far from passive – I experience an intense 'activeness', in terms of my own alertness to what is going on within and around me, and in terms of my readiness to act into the unknown of whatever is evolving – my readiness to take risks. There is no word yet created to speak of 'action' in the hybrid space between active and passive – yet this is what I would need to describe most accurately what it is I do: the 'active-passivity' of my practice. Speaking of it in this way would also give expression to my continuous and acute awareness of the fact that my own actions are only one part of the endless 'gesture/ response' movement that patterns the interactions; the 'dance', so to speak, of my practice.

In speaking of my practice in this way, the notion of dialogue becomes central, not in the structured way Isaacs uses it, but rather as the movement of 'to-and-fro'ness of interaction that is seminal to the experience of transformation. As Bakhtin puts it: "Life by its very nature is dialogical. To live means to participate in dialogue" (Bakhtin, in Barge and Little, 2002:390). Dialogue thus becomes an ontological construct, rather than a normative one: it is a way of speaking about the interactive reality of human existence, and the primacy of human relating (Elias, 2000; Mead, 1967; Holquist, 2005; Bruner, 1990; Stacey et al., 2000; Dalal, 2000). Stacey and his colleagues emphasize, however, that they are not speaking solely in terms of "an

idealization of human interaction" or "the elevation of humans caring for each other" – as do Isaacs and Senge et al., but rather in terms the "caring and the harming, the creative and the destructive" aspects of relationship (2000:190). And so dialogue, as I speak of it, is by nature "an unstable state…forever either too much or too little, wavering and shifting sides which tilt not only toward understanding and open play but also away (from them)" (Gurevitch, 2001:87); both generating and troubling understanding.

But notions of dialogue-as-ontology, and dialogue-as-normative action, seem to interweave in uneasy relation. Shotter, for example, claims a dialogical ontology, for "we cannot prevent ourselves from being spontaneously responsive to events occurring in our surroundings"(2007:27), and, at the same time speaks of a "*truly dialogic exchange*" (Ibid.:37, emphasis mine). I too, while subscribing to a dialogical ontology, would say that there are different qualities of dialogical interaction, some embodying more of the felt experience of 'dialogicality' than others. This experience, however, far from being inevitably harmonious, is often confusing and fraught with anxiety. It is constituted by the movement of engaging with others in a way that one *becomes changed* by and within this engagement. At the heart of this possibility of becoming changed, is the quality of responsivity that permeates the situated interaction. Let me attempt to unpack what I see as 'responsivity'.

Stacey and his colleagues choose this word to differentiate the human theory of 'complex responsive processes' from the natural scientific theory of 'complex adaptive systems', emphasizing the 'responsive' rather than necessarily 'adaptive' nature of human beings. I would like to differentiate this notion from yet another – 'reactive'. While these two words are often used interchangeably, there are a few important differences. Turning to the dictionary, we see that 'response' is almost always used to speak of human interaction, connoting a certain 'answering' or 'corresponding' manner of behaving, and happens in relation to 'influence'. 'Reaction' is used equally for humans and 'things' or substances ('chemical reaction'), may evoke the static quality of 'effect' or result (rather than 'answer'), and happens in relation to 'stimulus'. It is not by chance that Mead chose the words 'gesture' and 'response', rather than 'stimulus' and 'reaction' to speak about the basic act of being human. Finally, 'reaction' also suggests repetition (*re*-act), as the automatic answer to a stimulus, and is used to

express "the tendency to oppose change or return to former system" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary). What is my point?

My point is that what constitutes a 'truly dialogical exchange' lies in the ability and willingness of participants to respond, rather than react, to the situation, and to each other. What I see as 'reactive' is the almost automatic reaction which usually constitutes a refusal to experience the uncertainty inherent in any kind of shift in meaning. It can be seen in my stories as the starting point from which a shift becomes possible: Cathy's indignant tale of the 'impolite' cleaning lady; Lorna's insistence that 'fairness means treating everyone the same'; the unreflective assertion that 'being direct is the only route to effectiveness' shared by most of the participants in the U.S. workshop.

What then, do I mean by 'responsive'?. In terms of my own participation, it consists of a certain intention and desire which are in continuous movement; of noticing and recognizing the moments in which transformation glimmers in potential. My stories show how I wait, alert to these 'gaps' in the conversation, in which the rhythm, the tone and the fluency of speaking falter, so to speak; and how I attempt to speak into them in a way that will, gently and almost unnoticeably, disturb certain patterns, and perhaps call others forth. In other words, my own facilitating becomes, in Shaw's words, "participating as fully and responsively as I can" (2002:32), in the hope that this may evoke similar responses in those with whom I am participating. For the participants, this responsivity manifests itself when 'otherness' is encountered in a way that does not reduce or dismiss it ('oh, they're just dancing the wrong steps'), and engaged with in a way that allows them to become changed. It is a movement within which our own 'rhythm' and 'steps' intermingle with the other's, creating a new choreography.

Shotter points to this movement of responsivity as essential to 'being changed': "if we are to prepare ourselves to be 'struck' by or 'touched' by (others and events)…then we must prepare ourselves by allowing ourselves to become responsively involved in them in some way. We must go out to meet them with the equivalent of an open, outstretched hand and a smile" (2007:109). In the stories I tell, people do, to a greater or lesser extent, become 'responsively involved with others', though rarely with an

'outstretched hand and a smile'. The transformations I speak of all involve a degree of struggle and discomfort, as who we are becomes infused with 'otherness' : Cathy is never at ease with the sense of herself that emerges in the conversation – she is never comfortable not saying hello to the cleaning; Lorna reluctantly agrees to engage with other notions of 'fairness'; and Ming speaks directly – but with such enormous effort.

5.4.4 The 'painful joy' of transformation

How, then, do people agree to engage in these kinds of experiences – and what is that I do to help them tolerate the anxiety they often evoke? Once more, I have no ready-made, replicable prescription. But I do have some ways of thinking about it. One of these draws on the complexity sciences, in particular what is spoken of evocatively as 'edge of chaos' dynamics (Langton, in Waldrop, 1992), as an analogy for human interaction. 'Edge of chaos' evokes the dynamics that enables the emergence of novel patterns of interaction. It is a paradoxical movement of stability and instability, created under the conditions that the interacting agents (however we may choose to define them) exhibit critical values of diversity and connectivity (Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2003). Under such conditions, novel patterns may emerge in a self-organizing way. How can this analogy help me speak about the way we can participate in these shifts?

The conversations I tell of (like all conversations), are a paradoxical intertwining of familiar and repetitive patterns of speaking, together with the continuously present potential for, and realization of, new patterns. The shifts I am interested in constitute the movement and interplay between them. The diversity necessary for the emergence of the new is clear in all my stories, and very little effort is necessary for its amplification to what might be called 'critical values'. It manifests as the differing notions people hold and express as to what constitutes respect, ethical action, effective communication, good leadership and progress. Because these notions, however, are not purely intellectual constructs, but rather form the themes that pattern people's identity; encountering these differences in a context in which we are forced to 'go on together' in our work lives inevitably creates conflict. Engaging responsively with them inevitably arouses anxiety, for they "unsettle the very way in which people experience themselves" (Stacey, 2000:418). It is the 'connectivity' that is generated which enables this engagement.

An important aspect of my practice lies therefore in inviting this experience of 'being-connected'. In these conversations, the act of turning attention to differences often amplifies them; yet, at the same time, *the very event of experiencing them together, and speaking them with each other*, amplifies both the intensity of interaction and creates the kind of 'connectivity' I believe enables us all to remain responsive in the face of anxiety. Thus I am continuously inviting people to speak, to tell their stories, to share their experiences, and open them up to questioning and exploration. I do so gently and often hesitantly, because I know that the kind of intimacy involved in such speaking is not a usual pattern at Kelide, and that often people retreat back into the armor of their habits at the slightest sense of 'danger'. I find myself coaxing and encouraging people to risk different ways of speaking together and looking at experience, always searching for the appropriate ways to do so – which are different each time. I am constantly alert to what might be experienced as danger – or safety – and trying to 'dance' the thin line between them. I am deeply implicated in generating the kind of 'psychological safety' that will enable risk, and simultaneously nudging people into the danger zones that create the opportunity for risk.

It is this tenuous 'connectivity-in-diversity' that enables the emergence of an understanding of ourselves and each other in more complex and nuanced ways. It is both the cause and the result of the shifts I speak of. As people open up to experiencing themselves differently, new and unimaginable possibilities open up. The participants in my stories could never have imagined that a 'global skills workshop' would entail, say, an exploration of how their families experience the changes they undergo over time in Kelide. Sean could not have thought he would be open to hearing how others see the way he takes up his leadership. Ming could not have dreamed of making her case in the directly assertive way she did.

And so, what emerges from these 'critical values' of diversity and connectivity are new ways of making sense of who we are and what we are doing together. The living experience of these shifts thus afford a complex intertwining of the discomfort of fragmenting meaning and identity, together with the joy, excitement, and kindled interest inherent in the emergence of new meaning. Thus I speak of conflicts and understandings not as separate dynamics, where the desirable movement is from one

to the other, but rather as a paradoxical dynamic of 'conflictual understanding'. When the two dynamics become uncoupled, the potential for transformation disappears. If diversity and conflict becomes the primary theme organizing experience, the conversations often disintegrate into an all out power struggle in which the energy is often too powerful to be harnessed into any kind of action that could be considered 'productive' in organizational terms. If participants are invested only in connectivity and the pleasant experience of 'shared understanding' and harmony, there is often a sense of 'rehearsed' speaking, embodied in a lack of energy and engagement[10].

Much of what I do entails dealing with my own anxiety, for, together with the deep satisfaction I feel as I both witness and experience these shifts, I am never completely at ease with these conversations. My anxiety is around my own ability to stay with the unknown and unknowable of what is emerging, my own discomfort at not being able to 'control' the shifts I am seeking – I cannot 'make' them happen, and, when they do, I cannot control what may emerge from within the fragmentation of meaning. My responsibility to the participants is implicated here. I am constantly asking myself if it would perhaps be better not to touch upon some of these issues – and yet, I often have the sense that "I can do no other", for I cannot ask people to risk speaking into the unknown without partaking of that risk myself. While these conversations often create a deepened understanding of the complexity of the issues at hand, they sometimes leave people right in the middle of the experience of fragmentation of meaning, unable to make new sense of things, or to take action. This does not happen much, but it does; and there have been a few people who have come away from these conversations with much frustration and anger. This is always a painful experience for me – and yet I cannot guarantee 'positive outcomes'.

5.4.5 The value of experiences of transformation

What then is the value of the work I am doing? Speaking in terms of 'outcomes' is tricky, particularly if one attempts to do so in the static, measurable way they are usually spoken of in organizations – even if one speaks of change!. "Acquiring tools for the effective management of cross-cultural differences" may be acceptable, in 'organization-speak' – but it is not something I can guarantee to 'deliver', particularly

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[10] Examples of both of these dynamics can be found in my third project

in the usual ways we understand 'tools' (see above). "Perhaps becoming changed in surprising ways" is far less acceptable – and this is what I can tentatively offer. I do not say this up front. I speak of "creating different ways of understanding", "exploring possible approaches and solutions", and this seems to be just about acceptable. If we are interested in creating the kind of shifts that may enable the emergence of novel ways of going on together – the heart of what I understand as 'organizational change' – then one is, by definition, working into the unknown, or 'working live' (Shaw, 2005). There is always a risk, for, as Shaw asks "what if nothing apparently comes out of this discussion?" (2001:37).

The word 'apparently' belies the deep discomfort that seems to accompany this way of working – 'apparently' means that there is something there, but it may not be seen – by the right people at the right time. And what if *really* (rather than 'apparently') nothing comes out of it? Is this a possibility? Or do we dismiss it by saying that as human interaction is an ongoing, non-linear flow, what we think should 'come out' of a conversation in terms of outcomes may emerge as this conversation branches off and gets taken up in different places by different people – but nothing happens at the actual moment of 'measurement'. That is always a risk: one cannot force emergence, and one cannot guarantee that the new will be desirable.

And yet, as a consultant to organizations, I am called upon to justify the value of my work, to articulate its impact. I can do so by turning to words participants in my workshops have used to describe their experiences. They speak in terms of surprise and new understanding ("It never occurred to me that I could feel so strongly about this!"); of renewed appreciation ("I never saw the effort they are putting into just moving things along"); of heightened motivation ("I always felt that working in the global environment was just a pain – now, I am feeling a growing interest in taking on all the difficulties I did everything to avoid"); of optimism ("Maybe now we can continue speaking with each other like this!"); of renewed engagement ("I am understanding that this is affecting all of us – the only way we can deal with it is to speak about it like this. I'm going to try this with my team"); of a sense of belonging ("In meetings like this I feel really proud to be a part of this effort") etc.

In my intermittent years of work at Kelide, I often get people, whom I only vaguely recognize, coming up to me in corridors, saying "Do you remember we spoke about….Well, I want to tell you this story…" These stories may involve the way things 'worked' or didn't – but always include the teller's intention and effort of doing things differently. One particularly satisfying moment for me occurred in the cafeteria of the Kelide site in India, where I overheard two HR practitioners speaking about a program I had run, and which they wanted to continue within the organization. One was saying to the other "You know, we have to think about this differently – it's not like the other courses we have here. It's a *conversational* course. We have to get everyone involved together to think about how we should get this going".

But all this remains 'local' – I am investigating the shifts that people experience individually and in small groups in their local interactions around the world. What impact can this possibly have on an organization as large and dispersed as Kelide? If one speaks, together with Stacey, Shaw and others, about organizations not as 'things', but rather as 'networks' or 'patterns' of conversation (Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2003; Ford, 1999; Durand and Calori, 2006; Shotter, 2006), then the value of what I do becomes clearer. While I am investigating these shifts within the context of cross-cultural conversations, I understand that I am speaking about a particular form of a far more generalizable human experience: the everyday experience of transformation of meaning that occurs in the responsive interaction with 'otherness'.

The shifts I invite in my practice can be spoken of as the transformation of patterns of identity, meaning and ways of speaking, all of which emerge together in everyday conversation. I understand them to constitute the core of organizational change, rather than an antecedent or outcome of change. As the ways we speak with each other change, in situated interaction, so do the wider patterns of working together, in a rippling movement – for all these are but differing forms of the complex responsive processes that make up organizational life. Through the understanding, seminal to Complex Responsive Process Theory, that global patterns emerge through local interactions (Shaw, 2002), I can speak of what I do in terms of organizational change.

The kinds of conversations I invite and participate in at Kelide have not amplified to become the dominant patterns of speaking. I doubt they ever will. Perhaps that is their

nature: once they have become dominant, they too may need to be 'disturbed'! But they have clearly become one of the options, one of the patterns that interweaves with others. They are appreciated and valued – this I know because I keep getting invited back. They are somewhat feared, for every time I am asked to get involved in a new project, I am reminded that "perhaps we need more structure this time – you know, we really want to achieve X this time". And, time and again, they are participated in, with hesitation and enthusiasm, with suspicion and desire.

The ideology that I can now articulate, and that has emerged over years of this kind of work is that, while there are no ready made solutions to solve or prevent cross-cultural conflicts in organizations, there is always the potential for conversation., in which our taken-for-granted assumptions are challenged and explored together with others, whose ways of being, thinking and speaking are so different from our own. In these situated interactions, new ways of going on together emerge – under the condition that we are able to remain responsive, curious and attentive with ourselves and each other. Here, we can negotiate – each time anew – what is meaningful and what is good, and understand, if not necessarily accept, other voices. Here, not only can conflicts be engaged in a way that permits us to go on together, but the kind of value from diversity that global organizations seek may emerge as we change together, as novel and creative paths of action materialize.

6. CLOSING REFLECTIONS (July, 2007)

What might I then speak about as 'future directions for research' suggested by my work? Let me again approach this question through a story.

It is the end of a workshop with a group of finance people at Kelide. We are wrapping up, and people are voicing their thoughts regarding the day. Leon, one of the participants, has been quiet during the first part of the day, and, during the remainder, his participation expresses itself mainly in the form of challenging, calling us all to question and be more precise in what we are speaking about. I find his participation quite difficult, but appreciate his unremitting desire to push the conversation to its limits. He now formulates his thoughts: "In clearing my schedule to come to this workshop, my expectations were that we would be given all kinds of 'tips and tricks' as to how to change the ways we work in the global environment that is causing all of us such frustration – how to be more effective and influential. You demolished these expectations within the first five minutes, when you said that you do not know of any prescriptions that can promise effectiveness. I was quite taken aback, and immediately found myself regretting that I had come. What on earth were we going to speak about for the next eight hours? And, if it did not concern tangible 'take-aways', how could I justify this wasted time? For the first half-hour or so, I tried to find a 'politically correct' way of leaving the workshop". Everyone laughs. Perhaps they recognize the experience. Perhaps they appreciate the directness with which he speaks of something they do not dare raise.

"As we come to the end of the day", he continues, "I am amazed to see that 8 hours have passed so quickly. I am not sure if I have received 'tools' as I understand them. I am not sure that I know exactly what to do in the complex situations we spoke about together, and that still leaves me dissatisfied. What I am sure of, however, is that this conversation has really deepened my awareness of the multi-facetedness of my interactions with others around the globe. I feel that I am far more conscious of things

that I didn't pay any attention to before – or, if I did, I only dismissed them as irrelevant to the actual 'work' involved. What is strange about all this, for me at least, is that I feel like I am turning to the conference call scheduled in another half an hour with much more energy than I had before. I have a couple of ideas as to how to get our conversation going – always such a difficult task! I feel I have a better understanding of what might be silencing people. I am more aware of how my own expectations are taking me in directions I am no longer sure are valuable – and I was absolutely sure I was right this morning! And what really amazes me is that this loss of conviction is actually generating interest rather than helplessness!

Driving home, his words keep resounding in my mind. Leon is recognizing the change in orientation to his work that he has just experienced. He is able to notice how he is anticipating acting in relation to his immediate next tasks in concretely different ways and seeing promising implications well into the future. He is speaking in terms of a deepening of consciousness and a re-awakening, or generation, of energy. He is imagining himself in relation to his circumstances in fresh ways that have impetus. The 'result' of the day's experience is not in a set of hypothetical action plans to be implemented on return to work. Rather I would say that there has been a qualitative shift in his intentionality – he is imagining different possibilities in his own responses and the responses of others in the web of relations in which he is implicated, and new avenues of action with their emerging consequences become available. I am suggesting that it is precisely in this way that a subjective shift of consciousness and energy is related to the larger changes in the patterning of organizational activity, those that most managers and organizational researchers focus their attention on and wish to direct.

It suddenly strikes me that that it is exactly the living experience of these two notions – the deepening of consciousness and the generation of energy – that perhaps most profoundly impacts the quality of our working lives, and, I believe, the quality of organizational performance. In his words, I suddenly recognize what I would like to propose as directions for future research: *a re-orientation of attention towards the elusive and barely graspable workings of consciousness or awareness, and their complex intertwining with the differing qualities of energy they generate and are generated by.*

Such a re-orientation would entail attending to aspects of organizational experience that are usually skimmed over by most researchers, and that usually draw an 'only' before them by practitioners (especially managers): 'it *only* impacted consciousness/ it *only* generated more energy – it didn't provide tools'. It would require that we become more attuned to, and precise about, the tiny shifts in human consciousness and energy in our everyday working lives. It would call for an approach to research that would not only be qualitative in method, but that would focus – as I have tried to do – on qualities of experience. As such, we could be studying qualities of experience – that is, qualities of awareness and energy – as they express themselves in any of the organizational processes we may be interested in: leading, strategizing, learning, motivating and becoming motivated, innovating, interacting with colleagues and customers…

To respond to my call is no simple matter, for we cannot speak about either consciousness or energy in the usual ways we speak of organizational phenomena. Because both are emergent, complex and responsive processes in continuous flux, they do not lend themselves easily to the fixed and orderly language of 'antecedents', 'outcomes', 'managerial implications'. As such, they often go unnoticed; at best, relegated to the status of epi-phenomena. Because these two concepts are extremely problematic to study and speak about explicitly, two questions arise: why should we make the effort to do this, and what would this effort entail?

I believe that taking on this challenge would generate a richer and more nuanced comprehension of the qualities of meaningfulness and engagement that sometimes infuse our organizational lives, and the complex ways in which these qualities impact (and are impacted) by the ways we are and act together in our organizational lives, and within which 'effective organizational performance' emerges. Indeed, if we are minded towards the development of a 'science of qualities', then the textures, tones and characteristics of consciousness and energy become central to our endeavor.

And what would this demand of us, as researchers? Because consciousness and energy are both primarily experienced phenomena, we would need to subscribe to a research method which indeed 'takes experience seriously'. I use the word 'method'

here in its original meaning of 'way', or 'pursuit'. What is needed is a re-orientation of our 'ways of seeking', rather than a delineating of specific 'topics' which could lend themselves to, and benefit from, such inquiry. And so, I find myself sounding more of an approach, a way of studying, engaging with, and appreciating organizational reality. Perhaps it could be spoken about, tentatively, as a 'Dao of Research'. It may both demand of, and enable, us:

- To loosen the ways we think of organizations and organizing. We might think of, approach, and engage in, our organizational experience in ways which are more tentative, suggestive, playful and creative – rather than reducing, reifying and concretizing organizational reality into fixed, static and discrete entities to be manipulated immediately and directly in the service of utilitarian action. We could create the space to explore our own consciousness and energy as it engages in, forms, and is formed by the kaleidoscopic experience of organizational life.

- To notice the paradoxical and multi-dimensional aspects of human experience. We would pay attention to the complex ways our consciousness expands and contracts as we engage in the diversity and plurality of organizational activities – whatever their nature. We could explore the complex ways our energy is impacted as we experience the interweaving of creation and destruction, chaos and order, hope and despair, stuckness and movement in our organizational realities. As researchers and practitioners, we might simultaneously study, and engage with, the fullness and complexity of such experience, rather than struggle to reduce this experience to a uni-dimensional simplicity which may allow unequivocal action, but which inevitably constrains its potentially surprising and unexpected possibilities.

- To become more alert to process, to life in the subtle and indefinable regions of 'inbetweeness', rather than approaching 'reality' as a set of distinct, consistent and solid 'states'. Perhaps we may even question the very concept of 'state' in relation to social reality. Consciousness and energy demand that we orient ourselves to the continuously moving, changing, transforming, uncontrollable and unpredictable aspects of the experience of organizing. We would become more attuned to 'processes of becoming', rather than 'states of being'. What we may lose in terms the solidity of our convictions and sense of firm agency, we may gain in creativity – the unimagined

and the unimaginable – that bubbles, flourishes and disappears in the fluid areas of uncertainty.

- To think in terms of shifting relations, relationships and interconnections, rather than in terms of fixed and static entities, be they people or organizational structures. We would pay more attention to the ways in which identities are formed and shift as we engage responsively with the otherness of others, as we come together and move apart in everyday organizational life. We may find ourselves noticing and acting into the 'inbetweeness' of connections and disruptions; listening more to unheard voices and qualities of conversation; engaging in conflict, diversity and multiplicity, as well as harmony and coherence.

- To be more mindful of the ways we use (and are 'used' by) language. We would be called upon to relate to (for example) 'strategy', 'models' and 'reports' more as constructed and possible narratives, which may call forth conversations and contesting perspectives, rather than as undisputed 'truths' to be directly 'translated' into action. In order to do so, we may need to approach such organizational artifacts in pragmatic terms of what they enable or disable in the ways we go on together, rather than as the 'final vocabulary' in the face of which we are called to take a solid, well-argued stance.

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