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Voices Within:  
Hermeneutic Conversations with People  
who Have Borderline Intelligence

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présenté par

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a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes:

Thèse accepté le:.....

## **Abstract**

The focus of this research is twofold. The study centres on the formation of identity and the experiences of marginalization amongst people who have been classified as having mild or borderline intellectual disabilities. The further aim of this research emerges from the growing interest in what has been called hermeneutical psychology, and will be to elaborate an approach that can be seen as a methodology for understanding the experiences of people with slight intellectual disabilities. This project can thus be considered as a study within a study: an exploration of a particular subject, with a particular population and framed within a further methodological endeavour. This will entail a kind of dialectical movement as the author attempts to integrate this double aspect into a single and cohesive study that balances between a work of content and a work of method.

The reason for this double focus stems from the author's belief that the lens by which we look at people determines what and how we see. For this reason the question of method becomes integral to the object of this study. This project begins with the premise that traditional research methods based on the positive sciences lose sight of essential information in the understanding of human experiences. Rather than cling to the objectivism of strictly empirical data, this project aims to proceed from the developing tradition of interpretive research while trying to elaborate a system that generates empirical information.

The study elaborates a qualitative investigation that considers the relationship and interaction between social disintegration and marginal intellectual functioning amongst people who have been classified as having mild or borderline intellectual disabilities. The research is based on the proposition that people with marginal intelligence abilities are vulnerable to



what can be called social disabilities both from the effects of being marginalized or stigmatized and from the main effects of the impairment itself. The research attempts to show that people with mild, or borderline intellectual limitations represent a distinct sub-group who are inadequately identified and studied, and who face serious social breakdown without preventive and supportive measures.

The research is further premised on the proposition that deficits at this level of intelligence are primarily manifested through emotional-social disabilities which can be (a) prevented, (b) contained, or (c) remediated. The research will aim, through case studies and interpretive investigation to 1) provide a profile of a segment of this population, 2) consider the factors which contribute to both the perpetuation and the prevention of their marginality in society, and 3) to embark on an investigation which can be called a journey, that aims to listen to the voices that emerge from of the conversations between researcher and subject.

## Résumé

Les définitions et catégories diagnostiques actuelles de la déficience intellectuelle que les professionnels de la santé appliquent habituellement n'abordent pas adéquatement les besoins des personnes qui se situent à un niveau léger ou limite de déficience intellectuelle ou même ne présentent pas de rapport avec ceux-ci. Souvent, ces personnes échappent à l'identification parce qu'elles ne présentent pas obligatoirement de déficiences visibles, mais elles n'en sont pas moins à risque parce qu'elles peuvent parfois ne pas être capables de faire face aux exigences et aux pressions d'une société urbaine plus en plus complexe.

Le principal but de cette étude est de répondre à une nécessité croissante de se centrer d'avantage sur la vie intérieure de cette population afin de pouvoir établir une base de données qualitatives qui soit descriptive et qui permette d'identifier ses besoins de façon utile et efficace, qui fournisse un profil de expériences qui ont causé ses handicaps et qui aide à établir les conditions sociales et les structures communautaires qui permettront de surmonter sa marginalisation dans la société.

### Introduction

Cet article poursuit un double objet. La discussion est axée sur une étude en cours qui examine comment des personnes qui avaient été classées comme ayant une déficience intellectuelle légère ou limite acquièrent leur identité. On étudie les facteurs qui contribuent à leur sentiment de marginalisation et ceux qui contribuent à leur intégration et à leur compétences sociales. En deuxième lieu, l'étude essaie d'obtenir un aperçu subjectif de la vie intérieure de participants au moyen d'une construction qui met en lumière les voix secrètes

qui émergent de leurs récits. Ceci représente un mouvement dans la direction de ce l'on appelle herméneutique ou recherche interprétative, et fait ressortir l'autre but de cette étude qui se veut un effort pour élargir les paramètres philosophiques et les paradigmes théoriques du domaine de la déficience intellectuelle, de même que le dialogue échangé avec d'autres disciplines.

Cette recherche peut donc être envisagée comme deux études l'une dans l'autre : l'exploration d'un sujet particulier, pour une population particulière, dans le cadre d'une entreprise méthodologique additionnelle. Ceci amène une sorte de mouvement dialectique alors que le chercheur s'efforce d'intégrer ce double aspect en une seule étude cohésive qui se tient en équilibre entre un travail de contenu et un travail de méthode. Les raisons d'être de ce double aspect devraient devenir évidentes si l'on considère l'argument selon lequel les lunettes que nous utilisons pour regarder les gens déterminent ce que nous voyons, et comment nous le voyons. Ce projet commence donc par la prémisse que les méthodes de recherche traditionnelles basées sur la science positiviste perdent de vue des informations essentielles pour la compréhension des expériences humaines (Bruner, 1990 ; Gergen, 1988). Plutôt que de s'attacher à l'objectivisme des données empiriques, il fut décidé de faire découler ce projet de la tradition toujours croissante de la recherche interprétative tout en s'efforçant d'élaborer un système qui puisse produire une information empirique (Meichenbaum, 1988 ; Packer & Addison, 1989).

Le but de cet article est donc de souligner quatre aspects de la recherche : 1. brève présentation d'une discussion des paradigmes théoriques actuels dans le domaine de la déficience intellectuelle et de ceux en train d'y émerger ; 2. survol des grands traits de l'entreprise herméneutique ; 3. définition des

paramètres de la recherche, y compris le contexte de l'étude et la méthodologie ; 4. présentation d'un cas.

### **Paradigmes de la recherche et de la pratique en déficience intellectuelle**

Le domaine de la déficience intellectuelle a adhéré, pour une large part, à une épistémologie strictement positiviste, et on a pu y reconnaître une certaine résistance à explorer d'autres façons de percevoir et d'agir. Ainsi que le dit Lax (1992), la tendance était de traiter les personnes comme de «<objets réifiés>> plutôt que comme des récits qui se déroulent dans un contexte de signification. Il y a eu en particulier de la résistance à explorer les expériences intérieures des personnes qui ont des déficiences, et l'attention s'est portée essentiellement sur des préoccupations de comportement et d'adaptation (Clements, 1987 ; Day, 1993 ; Dosen, 1993 ; Potts & Howard, 1986).

Le principe de la normalisation, auquel Scheerenberger (1987) a pu se référer comme étant «<la renaissance de l'humanitarisme...>>, tire par inadvertance ses prémisses philosophiques de cette épistémologie objectiviste par sa persistance à interpréter des objectifs de comportement quantifiables. En dépit des progrès de la normalisation, le danger existe maintenant d'adhérer trop longtemps à un paradigme qui est en train de devenir inadéquat en fonction du contexte social, intellectuel et culturel de notre époque. En effet, une puissante vague de changement paradigmatique est en train de déferler sur les sciences. Il s'agit d'un changement qui désavoue la poursuite d'une vérité univariée et réoriente le but de la recherche sur l'être humain afin d'y explorer les contextes de la création des significations humaines (Bruner 1990 ; Gauld & Shotter, 1987 ; Mishler, 1976).

Depuis peu, cependant, une recherche émerge dans le domaine de la déficience intellectuelle et annonce une nouvelle renaissance, une recherche qui se tourne vers la compréhension du contexte culturel et de la construction narrative des expériences de la déficience intellectuelle. Au lieu des paradigmes de normalisation et d'intégration, sont davantage envisagées la construction sociale des handicaps (Gergen, 1991 ; Clegg, 1993), la sémiotique sociale de la déficience (Woodhill, 1994), la constatation que l'apprentissage est social et la quête qui permettra de découvrir comment l'incapacité et la capacité peuvent être créées socialement (Clegg, 1993 ; Shotter, 1989 ; Newman & Holzman, 1993 ; Vygotsky, 1962). Sur la scène clinique, on évolue en direction des démarches narratives (La, 1992) des démarches du développement et de la psychodynamique (Dosen, 1993).

### **Le projet herméneutique**

Les limitations de cette présentation ne permettaient pas de discuter suffisamment de l'herméneutique. On se contentera de dire que cette tradition émerge en philosophie dans l'école phénoménologique et prend une importance accrue dans toutes les sciences. Elle affirme que tous les actes de la connaissance commencent avec notre propre subjectivité ou nos opinions préconçues et se développent dans un mouvement perpétuel d'interprétation et de compréhension. Elle commence en s'éloignant de ce que Taylor (1979) appelle « les faits à l'état brut » et en constatant qu'il y a des vérités multiples (Mischler, 1979). La possibilité que la connaissance puisse exister hors contexte est remise en question, et on passe de l'information à la signification. On reconnaît ici à la culture une importance primordiale par la constatation que les significations partagées sont incarnées dans la culture et que les êtres humains, comme le dit Bruner, « ne finissent pas à la peau » (1990, p. 12). Nous pouvons commencer à percevoir la relation réciproque, interactive qu'une

personne maintient avec son environnement. Nous pouvons commencer à voir, comme le dit Zavalloni (1991), comment la culture dresse une carte dans l'esprit. L'étude présentée ici découle de l'opinion que le moi se compose d'une construction narrative qui reflète la nature essentiellement dialoguante de la conscience humaine (Bahktin, 1981).

Le projet herméneutique nécessite de définir une démarche qui permette l'étude de la voix intérieure de personnes présentant une déficience intellectuelle légère. Il exige que le chercheur essaie de pénétrer dans le royaume de réciprocité mis en lumière par le phénoménologue Merleau-Ponty (1945/1981). Ici le chercheur se tient en relation avec le participant et ne le voit pas comme un objet extérieur à son existence, mais comme un «collaborateur dans une réalité accomplie» (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1981, p. 354).

S'inspirant de travaux de Brown et Gilligan (1992) et de Brown, Tapan et Gilligan (1989), ce travail est une tentative de faire s'exprimer les voix qui émergent de textes d'entrevue de personnes ayant des déficiences intellectuelles légères. On soutient que ces «voix» émergent de différentes conceptions, intériorisées et souvent en compétition, du moi et de l'autre. Ce processus d'interprétation et de compréhension amène le chercheur à établir avec le participant une relation où ils peuvent se mettre à l'écoute des niveaux multiples du langage.

## **Méthode**

### *Contexte de l'étude*

Cette étude a lieu sous l'égide d'une organisation du nom de Avatil, située à Montréal (Québec). Depuis plusieurs années, cette organisation a consacré ses services à des personnes qui présentent des handicaps intellectuels légers. Elle

utilise un démarche principalement sociale pour ses programmes cliniques et offre des communautés psychothérapeutiques d'apprentissages et de soutien. Ayant, pendant plus de vingt ans, aidé des personnes à atteindre un style de vie interdépendant, elle a réussi à obtenir une perspective longitudinale sur les besoins et les caractéristiques de ces personnes.

### *Population et procédure*

La population sur laquelle cette recherche a été conduite provient de l'institution dont nous venons de parler. L'échantillon comprend 16 individus de sexes masculin et féminin, d'âges variés, mariés ou célibataires.

Cet article ne va pas aborder l'aspect empirique de l'étude. Nous nous limiterons à dire que, à l'aide d'une technique décrite par Jahoda (1988), une série d'entretiens et d'analyses de cas va obtenir un composé du groupe de recherche qui identifie les groupes de traits contribuant soit à la compétence, soit à la déficience sociale.

La suite de cet article présentera une illustration de la démarche centrée sur la voix et qui a été mentionnée plus tôt. Pour cela, je vais m'inspirer d'une étude de cas récente qui servira à indiquer l'orientation de la recherche. Cette démarche s'est étalée sur une période de deux ans de recherche théorique et clinique à la fois. Elle reflète un mouvement dans la recherche et ajoute une dimension clinique et psychanalytique qui entraîne des lectures multiples des récits partagés. À chaque lecture, l'écoute d'une nouvelle voix est envisagée. Chaque récit peut avoir au moins sept lectures. Celles-ci comprennent ; 1. le moi en tant que narrateur, 2. la voix de la déficience, 3. la voix de la compétence, 4. la voix de l'Autre, 5. la voix de la confusion, 6. la voix intérieure de raconteur, 7. la voix du contre-transfert.

*Le guide de lecture et le guide d'interprétation*

Incorporant le guide lecture décrit par Brown et coll. (1992), le projet d'interprétation parcourt les étapes suivantes. La première lecture recherche l'écoute du moi en tant que narrateur. Elle demande quelle histoire est racontée, dans quel corps et dans quel contexte social, culturel et historique.

Deuxièmement, on écoute la voix de la déficience. Ici on cherche à entendre le sentiment d'échec qui les personnes reconnaissent dans leur vie. On le perçoit comme une introjection du monde extérieur qui ensuite se tisse imperceptiblement dans la représentation du moi de la personne (Zavalloni, 1989).

Troisièmement, on écoute la voix de la compétence. Cette voix existe souvent par dissociation à côté de la voix de la déficience. On peut la considérer comme le vrai moi, ou le moi caché (Winnicott, 1971).

Quatrièmement, on écoute la voix de l'Autre. Cette voix jaillit du monde extérieur et on entend la qualité particulière de la parole de l'autre. Il peut s'agir d'une introjection partielle (le moi s'aligne avec l'Autre) ou d'une référence extérieure qui peut être retenue (par exemple, «Ma mère dit que je suis paresseuse»).

Cinquièmement, on entend la voix de la confusion. Cette voix est perçue comme un affrontement entre les parties internes de l'expérience de l'individu. On ressent que des perceptions conflictuelles du moi luttent pour la première place.



La sixième voix est une nouvelle dimension rajoutée au projet quand on s'est rendu compte que certains indivis entendent en eux-mêmes une voix intérieure qui leur parle vraiment (Heery, 1989). Ainsi nous cherchons à entendre le monde imaginaire, les voix qui parlent au-dedans comme guides ou comme juges. Nous ne voyons pas cela comme une expérience de dissociation mais comme une fonction adaptée de l'esprit.

Finalement, dans la polyphonie des voix, nous guetons le contre-transfert, la voix de celui qui écoute, que nous considérons comme une pièce essentielle du processus herméneutique.

#### *Le texte et la lecture herméneutique*

**Ce qui suit est tiré des extraits d'une entrevue : j'ai entendu dire récemment qu'Emily Carr pénétra dans la forêt et s'assit devant un arbre pendant des heures, jusqu'à ce que l'esprit de l'arbre lui parle, et alors seulement fut elle capable de le peindre. On disait qu'elle avait dû renoncer à son moi pour accueillir en elle l'esprit de l'arbre. Je pense à la transcription de la conversation avec la participante et je la relis, attendant que l'esprit du texte me parte. Je le scrute pour découvrir sa métaphore. Je me sens obligée de mettre en place les constructions que j'ai choisies mais je me rends compte de leurs limitations. Pour pouvoir entrer dans la réciprocité dont parle Merleau-Ponty (1945/1981) je dois essayer d'aller au-delà de ces constructions pour voir le point de vue de la participante dans sa perspective à l'esprit cette réserve, je passe à la conversation avec la participante. Pour cette étude, elle a choisi de s'appeler Lisa.**

## Étude de Cas

L'exemple suivant illustre l'approche adoptée dans cette recherche le cas présente ici, sert à démontrer comment j'ai appliqué la notion de <<voix>> dans l'interprétation des textes et de la communication entre chercheuse et sujets.

### *L'exploration du contre-transfert*

Cet après-midi, je suis chercheur en train de me préparer à ma tâche d'explorer le monde intérieur de la participante. Je suis fatiguée, et tout en parcourant la courte distance jusqu'à sa maison, j'essaie de calculer combien de temps cela va prendre, à quelle heure je pourrai être chez moi...et je pense que je ne me sens pas pleine d'énergie. Je ressens une certaine fatigue que, je le sais, je vais vaincre une fois que je m'y serai mise.

En arrivant à l'immeuble, je me rends compte que la pauvreté que je cadre me déprime et je me prépare à me trouver face à face avec la pauvreté à laquelle la participante est confrontée. J'entre et je retrouve mon courage grâce à la propreté de l'immeuble, aux miroirs sur les murs et à l'ascenseur qui fonctionne si bien. L'air bourgeoise du lieu fait que je me sens à l'aise. Cependant, en entrant dans l'appartement, je sens ce sentiment de dépression m'envelopper de nouveau. Je sais qu'il va falloir de combattre.

La participante m'accueille chaleureusement, visiblement contente de me voir. Cici m'encourage. Je jette un coup d'œil sur l'appartement constitué d'une seule longue pièce, et bien qu'il ait du désordre, j'y retrouve la chaleur de la participante. Nous nous installons à la table de cuisine. Lisa sait que j'aime le thé et, sans attendre, se précipite pour le préparer. Pendant qu'elle s'occupe ainsi, je remarque qu'elle ouvre un nouveau petit carton de lait, une nouvelle

boîte de thé et un petit paquet de pâtisseries. Je comprend qu'elle les a achetés en vue de ma visite, Elle sert le thé et les biscuits à la cannelle dans la vaisselle de porcelaine des grands jours. Je fais la remarque que c'est très joli et elle semble contente.

A ce moment là, le magnétophone est en marche. Je suis émue par sa prévenance et je sens les larmes me monter aux yeux. Je sens sa dignité et je comprends que je perçois beaucoup plus de choses que si elle était venue me voir à mon bureau. Ma pensée se tourne vers des souvenirs d'un séjour dans une région rurale pauvre du Nouveau-Brunswick. Je me rappelle la pauvreté et la richesse spirituelle de ces gens, leur générosité envers moi et envers d'autre. Je sens que je suis une invitée d'honneur et la délicatesse et la dignité de Lisa m'émeuvent

Lisa me parle sans difficulté, je la connais bien, j'ai rencontré sa famille et pendant qu'elle parle, cette compréhension est implicite. Je ne me sens pas à l'extérieur de son expérience à cause de cela. D'une certaine façon, j'ai l'impression de faire partie de sa famille et la confiance semble implicite. Je connais aussi le fossé existant entre nos expériences du monde... Mais il n'est pas vraiment très large si je suis honnête.

#### *Exploration du moi en tant que narrateur*

Lisa décrit dans ce récit un aperçu de son monde physique, social et émotif. Dans le domaine physique, elle décrit son monde et comment son corps y bouge. Elle décrit trois mondes physique : celui de son appartement, celui de la maison familiale et celui de son lieu de travail. Dans son appartement, Lisa est aux prises avec sa lutte continuelle pour avoir <<l'illusion de la propreté>>. Son espace physique personnel semble représenter une source de pression qui

la pousse à faire face au monde, et pourtant c'est un refuge contre d'autres mondes. Elle dit : <<C'est tranquille et m'aime ça>>. <<Je peux faire ce que je veux, il n'y a pas de pression>>.

Je revois en esprit l'appartement de Lisa, son désordre et sa dignité... Des animaux en peluche sur le lit, chacun a une histoire, et alors que nous les regardons ensemble, elle me révèle chacune d'entre elle. Le monde physique de sa famille révèle un monde de bien-être, mais aussi une sorte de tyrannie. Elle dit : <<Une partie de moi souhaite que je puisse retourner chez mes parents, mais quelle liberté est-ce que j'avais là ?>>

Le travail de Lisa révèle un environnement de stress, mais aussi un environnement où elle peut s'affirmer personnellement. Il semble que Lisa ait du mal à manœuvrer dans son environnement. Elle désigne son corps comme une des sources de cette difficulté. Elle dit : <<Je suis souvent fatiguée.>> J'ai appris, au cours d'autres entretiens, que Lisa souffre d'un manque de vigueur et de difficultés physiques.

Lisa raconte l'histoire de son monde social. Il y a la solitude, mais aussi des satisfactions... il y a l'isolement, mais aussi la solidarité ; il y a les conflits qu'elle ne sait pas comment résoudre, si bien qu'elle ne sait pas comment résoudre, si bien qu'elle se retire dans son monde, mais elle est quand même capable de tendre la main aux autres... elle sait la valeur de l'amitié et de l'amour.

Lisa parle aussi du monde de ses émotions. Là aussi elle rencontre énormément de difficultés, cependant elle arrive à faire front et semble avoir des réserves où puiser des forces. Elle parle de tensions affectives auxquelles elle doit faire face—avec des crises de larmes, des sentiments de solitude—de sa

mère qui lui manque et se débattant avec les contraintes de la vie du fait de vivre seule, de sa vie de travail et de la souffrance d'être déçue par ses amis. C'est pour cela qu'elle se tourne vers ses amis imaginaires ; pour découvrir une nouvelle et meilleure interprétation du monde.

Lisa parle aussi de ses triomphes affectifs : pouvoir être seule, dominer son environnement (par exemple, être capable de dégivrer son réfrigérateur).

### *L'exploration de la voix de la déficience*

Lisa commence la conversation en mettant au premier plan sa voix de la déficience. <<Je suis paresseuse>> me dit-elles, <<je ne m'efforce pas vraiment>>.

Elle me dit cela comme s'agissait de faits empiriques, mais je l'entends comme si c'était la voix de quelqu'un d'autre... quelqu'un lui a dit ces choses et maintenant elles les croit vraiment. Je peux entendre les voix des enseignants, des parents, des médecins qui lui parlent : <<... si seulement elle voulait faire un effort>>.

Je me rappelle les voix de mon propre passé qui me disaient de faire un effort. C'est ainsi que je suis capable de connaître la voix de l'Autre. Lisa parle de sa fragilité. Elle me dit qu'elle est <<sensible>> et qu'elle se sent parfois <<débordée>>, Elle parle de crises de larmes, de sa <<dépression nerveuse>>, de sa difficulté à affronter son monde physique, social et affectif. Elle parle de son repli dans un monde imaginaire, commencé durant l'enfance, mais qui s'épanouit à l'adolescence. Elle dit : <<Mais je pense qu'à l'adolescence je les ai créés parce que je n'avais pas d'amis>>.

### *L'exploration de la voix de la compétence*

En dépit de la force de la voie de la déficience, il n'a pas fallu longtemps à Lisa pour trouver sa voix de la compétence. Après qu'elle ait dit combien elle est paresseuse et ne fait pas d'efforts, sa voix de compétence vient à sa défense en dit : <<Il faut que je fasse le ménage parce que je veux le faire pour moi-même, pas à cause des autres et à vrai dire je m'en moque. Je me dis, mes amis viennent me voir; pas mon appartement>>,

Lisa va aussi à aussi à l'encontre de sa voix de la déficience dans la zone affective de son monde. Après avoir parlé de sa sensibilité, de sa vulnérabilité émotionnelle, elle me dit que <<c'est juste quelque chose que arrive les fins de semaine>>, et qu'il u a <<du stress, mais pas autant de stress que...>>. J'interprète ceci comme une indication qu'elle fait front... et quoique son travail soit difficile elle <<l'adore>>.

La voix de compétence de Lisa peut aussi réveiller sa colère, de sorte qu'elle peut être <<fâchée>> quand on commet une injustice envers elle. Bien que sa vie puisse être solitaire, elle me dit qu'elle l'aime : <<Je peux faire ce que je veux... il n'y a pas de pressions... C'est tranquille et j'aime ça... même si c'est déprimant>>. Ici, Lisa semble accepter les difficultés de la vie... Elle aime sa vie même si elle est quelquefois déprimante. Lisa me dit qu'elle est <<heureuse>> et qu'elle revient de loin, qu' <<elle a sa liberté>>.

Cela me rappelle que la vie d'une personne qui sent qu'on la contrôle est une vie de prison, et que les personnes qui présentent de handicaps se sentent souvent incarcérées par tous les gens de leur entourage soi-disant préoccupés de leur bien-être. Peut-être qu'il y a des manières de se défendre de

la pauvreté, de l'isolement, de la dépression, mais comment peut-on affronter l'emprisonnement de l'esprit ?

#### *L'exploration de la voix de l'Autre*

Pour Lisa, la voix de l'Autre qui se fait entendre a un ton dur, critique. Elle semble être proche d'une prise de conscience de cette voix et, pour cette raison, peut prendre ses distance avec elle. La voix de l'Autre lui dit qu'elle est grosse, qu'elle n'est pas jolie... Elle passe son temps à lui apprendre des choses. Mais je me rends compte de l'effort que fait Lisa pour expulser la voix de l'Autre, par exemple <<en branchant son répondeur automatiques>>.

#### *L'exploration de la voix de la confusion*

La voix de la confusion a une position très forte dans le monde intérieur de Lisa. On sent qu'elle est engagée dans une lutte continuelle pour laisser la voix de la compétence dominer sa vie. Elle ne trouve pas cela facile et arrive à n'avoir plus qu'une idée confuse de ce qu'elle est vraiment : une réussite ou un échec, faible ou forte, capable ou incapable. Elle dit : <<Il y a du stress... pas autant de stress... J'adore mon travail>>. <<J'étais l'adjointe, mais je ne le suis plus... Cette grosse réunion... C'était très compliqué et c'est bien le diable si je sais ce qui se passe. Je n'y comprends rien>>.

#### *L'exploration de la voix qui parte au-dedans*

Lisa s'aventure dans le monde des amis imaginaires. On a l'impression qu'elle est capable de résister à la voix de l'Autre grâce à un monde intérieur très riche et très satisfaisant du point de vue affectif, peuplé de personnages qui la guident à travers la vie. Ici elle est capable de réinterpréter le monde et de transformer la voix de l'inflexible Autre en des voix qui parlent en sa faveur. Ce sont ses amis, ses confidents, ses alliés... et elle ne voit aucune raison de s'en

séparer. Ils lui donnent la capacité de faire face au monde à gérer et de se retirer quand elle en a besoin. Bref, ce monde de voix sert de tampon entre elle et le monde. On pourrait l'appeler un monde transitionnel, et elle apporte ces objets à l'intérieur d'elle-même. Dans ses mots, elle dit : <<Il me rend forte, techniquement je ne suis pas seule, là mon imaginaire... Je ne veux pas qu'ils disparaissent... Je pensais qu'une fois que je serais amoureuse ils disparaîtraient tous, mais ils sont encore ici à me tenir compagnie...à m'encourager à continuer... à m'encourager à vivre quand parfois je veux mourir.>>

### **Conclusion**

La question inévitable qui résulte de la discussion précédente est si, ou comment, le Project herméneutique et l'étude de la vie intérieure de personnes qui présentent de déficiences intellectuelles peuvent avoir des résultats pratiques. Le défi que la recherche devra relever sera le démontrer qu'une telle démarche peut avoir de vastes incidences pour les intervenants, tout en offrant un autre modèle clinique et thérapeutique pour travailler avec des personnes présentant ces déficiences. On pourrait dire que le changement des paradigmes a toujours des effets dans le monde de tous les jours, sur notre perception des gens avec qui nous travaillons, et par conséquent sur notre façon de les aborder. C'est à cette démarche que ma recherche espère contribuer.



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## **Dedication**

This Thesis is dedicated to the people of this study and to all people who find themselves on the Boundaries of Life .

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### **The Personal Quest: The Desire**

This thesis wishes to bring together the world of mind and the world of action. It begins with what seems like my “forever” need to bring understanding to my learning, to make sense of how I came to know things and to ask the question what does it mean to know, to grasp, to understand. This thesis has had a long journey. It began in my early childhood when one day I had the sudden thought that to hate another was to hate oneself. It seems to me this adult thought was pointing me in the direction of understanding how my humanity is connected intimately to another’s. As a child I understood this. As an adult I return to this innocent wisdom. Later as an adolescent I had another moment of insight. I thought to myself that all learning is emotional. That is how I learn...when I feel connected in my body, in my mind, in my soul, to the idea. In this way, I have come to understand that the idea does not hang disembodied from the rafters of the mind. Rather knowing emerges from the rich soil of my experiencing the world within me, and around me.

In retrospect I see how these two moments in my early life have impacted on all my searchings...on my thoughts and on my actions. This desire to bring mind to action and action to mind in the context of the intricate web of my shared humanity is what motivates the present project. My desire takes me to my contemplation, to my mind, to the words that form there in my deep need to explore the poetic boundaries of truth. My desire takes me to my community, my world and the world of others. It is here I have found the communion which feeds my contemplation. This thesis can be written from no other place but from the starting point of my journey through knowing and

understanding. It would make no sense for me to discard the vital, emotional, poetic threads that bind all that I have come to know. This thesis is thus a work of integration, a very personal quest that seeks to elevate one person's intellectual and emotional learning beyond herself, to reach a community of shared otherness.

By returning to my early learning, I begin with the belief that my own communion with the other makes human knowledge possible. If I expand my knowing and if my knowing is able to touch you, and you are able to touch my knowing, both of our humanities move forward. This is my belief and my wish for the unfolding project; that my humanity move forward and with it, a single drop of human potential is added to the vast ocean of human knowledge and human knowing. I wish then to advance my own being human and from the outset I acknowledge that it is I who profit from this project. It remains to be seen how my learning makes any difference whatsoever to the people chosen as subjects of this thesis.

### **The Orientation**

My learning orients me to think of subjects rather than objects of study. If I follow this notion I will become a participant, with the subjects, in the evolving and unfolding understandings this project hopes to generate. It is indeed curious how researchers often use the term subjects of study when they really mean objects. This then is the reversal I wish to accomplish: to bring the subject into the full relief of the light and in the shadow of objectivity make transparent the inter-subjectivity of all knowing. In this way, the project makes no attempt to make objective or factual statements about any human experience. It seeks human truth with the awareness that there is no real grounding for any such claim. In this way, the striving for, the desire for, the

living in truth become the main epistemological tools for understanding human experience. But it shall be a counter-epistemology because fundamentally such knowing will not be attained through the scope of observation. Rather I am called in this endeavour to enter into a dialogue with those whose experience I wish to understand.

This dialogue has no beginning or end. It is timeless. And in this I face my first task; to live through the abyss that endless not knowing creates. I am paralyzed by the evasive quality of another's experience. I am fearful of losing myself in another's experience. On the one hand there is this abyss and on the other, the sense that knowing could engulf me. These are the challenges I face in situating myself for the journey that will not begin or end with facts but with the open space of the question. I face the challenge of asking the question... of selecting from the wide contextual space of human experience a point of entry. There can be no other way but to face the bareness of the trees on a grey November day, to mourn the ending of what has not begun. Like the schoolgirl I sway with the movement of the skipping rope looking for my point of entry. The words of T. S. Eliot echo. "Between the desire And the spasm Between the potency And the existence Between the essence And the descent Falls the shadow." ( All of my preparing seems now remote ). Only my desire propels me forward. You must have passion the voice informs me. But in this I feel the mourning that passion evokes. As with Jesus, the cup is passed to me. And I wonder could there be another way. It is too late, the voice informs me. I search for any sign of a green bud on the grey mass of trees. But the voice counsels that things are as they should be.

And so the journey begins with my own humanity...my fears, my hopes, my aspirations. The living of my own life is infused in how I understand the

living of other lives. There can be no other way. And so the project proceeds from my own subjectivity, my own being in the world. My story unfolds with the telling of others' stories. In their lives I see my own humanity. My frailty and utter vulnerability come to surface. For this to be an honest work I know that I must allow the nakedness of authentic conversation.

### **The Child Poet and the Misfit**

When I was a child of six or seven, poetry was there. It came to me in the form of bird song, in the crumpling of the leaves, in the way the clouds drifted across the sky. Poetry was the way I enjoyed the world, took pleasure in the nature I so loved. I have no idea how the word poet came to me, but it did. I decided I would be one. I would be a poet-explorer, I imagined, and life would be this infinite bliss of being in tune with the nature around me. I thought a poet was someone who also loved to be outdoors. To feel the bumpy skin of a frog, dig one's little nails into the earth and look up to sky and imagine soaring across the horizon.

Imagine my sense of disillusionment when a little wooden school desk replaced my beloved tree stump. No longer did the birds chirp freely, inviting me to attach words to their sounds. Now I struggled with a new language, the alphabet. The youngest, the smallest, who did not go to kindergarten, I fell behind. Stubborn and proud, I did not appreciate the prize of winning the most improved student award at the end of the year. I was a social child with a vulnerable interior. I was a leader, a joker, a social climber who moved with the pack and made fun of the misfits. But it was I who felt like a misfit. Quietly I made friends with the misfits, still maintaining my place in the "in group." I moved in two worlds. I thought there was something special about these

misfits. They were nice, kind and they were poetic; meaning they were sensitive souls.

I remember Wanda who wanted to be a bird, believed she could fly. I remember the sight of her roaming the school yard, her arms flapping for flight, her flock of yellow frizzy hair trailing behind. I used to walk home with her. There was a rumour her family dissected robins on the kitchen table. The whole family were freaks. But I secretly admired Wanda's imagination. I thought she was an artist. I remember another child, a boy named Jean. Everyone said he was fourteen in grade seven. He was tall and he loomed over us. He had red pimply skin and wore pants that were too short. He was also the "dumbest" in the class, meaning we expected him to fail every school test. This was the norm. He sat at the back of the class and I remember the teacher would throw brushes and chalk at him for various misdemeanours. But there is another reason I remember Jean. One day we were doing arts and crafts. In my usual style, I managed to cover my tunic with paper mache. Jean helped me to clean it off. But then something terrible happened. I offered to help the teacher clean up after the activity. Jean innocently interjected to me that I shouldn't because I would get dirty again. The teacher only hearing the words "don't help the teacher" came over to Jean. In a state of rage he slapped Jean so hard that the boy flew several yards and fell on some nearby stairs. All of us who witnessed this froze in our own terror. We could not believe our eyes. I have never forgotten Jean, never forgotten his kindness to me, nor the injustice and cruelty of that act. Why did the teacher detest Jean so much?

Of course I remember other misfits, we all do. There was Peter who was slightly retarded and who, on a daily basis, would belt out Beatles songs while swinging on the swings at the park. Sing "She loves you," we would yell. Peter



would happily comply. Today one of his watercolour paintings hangs on my wall. Indeed if I were to further roam my childhood, my youth, I could easily conjure up the images and memories of those who seemed in some way to be misfits or marginal.

Interestingly, I would have a harder time conjuring up the memory of those considered more average. In many ways, it is the remarkable, and the extraordinary, that is remembered. This is how I have come to know and understand the people I have encountered who comprise this study, as well as those I know from the wider context of my work with people who have slight intellectual disabilities. In many ways the research is informed as much by the distant perspective of the historical events of my life as it is by the recent background of my work and study. In many ways this project brings together the remarkable tales of a gypsy population who move in and out of labels but always live on the boundaries of marginality. In many ways this project is about lives on the boundary. It is the poet misfit in me that seeks some kind of reconciliation with my own experience of the boundary; that seeks to dismantle the wooden desk and to bring my searchings back to the nature of my early knowing. The alphabet is not useful, at least not in the rigid confines of the cryptic messages inscribed on the black board. It does not inform to "see Spot run" written on the board or in the text. Rather understanding calls for the poetic boundaries of thinking and experiencing. It calls me to search for the images that can describe my experiencing another's experience. Poetry and misfitting take me to the land of the novel, the unusual, the remarkable. This is where I am sure to find authentic knowing.

### **From Poetic Knowing to Unreflected Action**

I remember the day many years ago when a friend who worked in a “group home” asked me to fill in for him over a weekend period. The residents were “mildly retarded” I was told. Unprepared, I innocently agreed to the request. I remember as he drove off how I suddenly felt like a traveller in a foreign land. I did not know how I would be able to relate to the occupants. Somehow they seemed strange and foreign to me. I did not know what language to use, how to approach them. I did not know where to situate myself in their horizon. I was afraid of them, of their weirdness and their differentness. Probably I wondered, on some level, if we shared the same quality of humanity. Did they too have deep thoughts, longings, creative urges? Did they reflect on their world and did their world impact on them? Did their lower intelligence alter in some way their way of being human? Were they less human somehow? (These are the thoughts that generally do not surface because we hide them behind the veil of double talk. We say one thing and mean another). Their lessor humanness is only implied, never spoken. This is the horizon of my prejudice that dares not speak but comes to light by my opening up to the question.

Somehow, Bev and Mark who, at the time, lived in that house washed away some of my prejudice. They are long gone out of my life but their representation remains within me. They are a part of my inner world. Years later I heard some news from Bev. She tracked me down through a physician I knew whom she had met while staying in a women’s shelter. I heard she had become a prostitute and a mother. This thesis is not about Bev or Mark and yet they both inform the writing of all these words. Not only them but the many people whom I have come to know over the years. They all inform, inspire, infuse my understanding about the horizon of lives on the boundary. Over the years I became captivated by their lives, their poignant struggles, their honesty,

their depth. I became concerned with their particular dilemma and I turned my attention to their situation in the world.

### **Action Becomes Reflected: A Return to Philosophy of Action**

I struggled with how to articulate their experience of marginalization and what conditions could offer them a better vantage point in life. I considered the empirical options for study; to point out their existence; justify their needs; articulate their deficits and pathologies; highlight their risks to self and society; probe therapeutic techniques.

None of these spoke to my desire, nor to my belief about the relevancy and truth value of poetic experience. I searched for a way to express the meanings of their experience through a vehicle that could allow their stories to unfold. I hoped to find a way to convey the rich texture of their lives, their struggles, their inner landscapes. I searched for “qualitative paradigms” of research that would allow the rich narrative quality of their experience to emerge. My searching took me beyond myself, beyond the initial question about how to define and describe an unarticulated sub-population, those who find themselves at the borders between the normal and deficient world. Soon into my exploration the question of research itself became a subject of study. No longer was I looking from the outside into a research question. Rather the question first imploded within me as I became infused with the searching, and then exploded into dozens of fragments that took me down the corridors of mind, philosophy, science and especially poetry. In this way, I had no idea before my entry into the question that poetry was waiting to take me on its magic carpet back to the origins of my childhood so that I could find my way into the thick forest of understanding human experience, my own included.

### **Arriving at the Question Hermeneutically**

No longer was my research about “a group of people” but about the question of being itself. In this way, the work arrives at the philosophy of hermeneutics in the way it guides the research and infuses the entire structure of the work. Hermeneutics thus forms the paradigm for the study and becomes itself an object for consideration. The thesis thus weaves between disciplines and levels of thinking, always to return to the poetic experience of the people this study hopes to convey. The question that asks: What does it mean to be a human being in this particular way? The task of the branch of philosophy called hermeneutics is to explicate and reveal the true nature of being human with the guiding principle that truth lies more in the question than in the answering of it. This paradox, fundamental to hermeneutics will lead to what is referred to as the “hermeneutic circle.” We cannot escape the circular nature of all knowing that our subjectivity entails. The fact that with every act of knowing, our conscious selves are intricately linked to what is known. In this way we can not have knowledge of human being without employing the very instrument of knowing our own conscious selves and subjective experience. We thus call on our own consciousness and subjectivity in order to enter the realm of understanding another’s. This hermeneutic circle will not like a maze lead to a dead end. It will not be a vicious circle. Rather the hermeneutic entry into knowledge is akin to that of a labyrinth. This ancient questing leads one through widening circles of understanding that bring one from the particular to the general and from the beginning to the end only to then reverse the whole process.

### **The Question of the Study**

This thesis springs from conversations with 16 people who function at the margins of normal intelligence. It is also informed by the many, many others

who, from the same horizon, have over the years shared their lives and their stories with me. It would be impossible to ignore their voices. Like a chorus they carry the sounds of the individuals beyond themselves so that a symphony, an opus of human experience finds expression through the interpretation of the conductor. I search for these sounds, those explicit and implicit. I listen for the nuances, feel the reverberations within myself. I try to bring fullness to each instrument, each voice, while trying to release the wholeness of sound from their collectivity.

The question of the study thus emerges tentatively because the hermeneutic striving of the endeavour requires that the question remain fluid and changing in order to reveal new prejudices, and thus deeper levels of knowing. In this way the hermeneutic stance dictates that no question should be a slave to an ultimate answer. Rather the question becomes the journey, the opening to another human experience which the self, situated in its own prejudice reflects upon and thus forces open a new context or horizon. With this caution in mind the question is put forth as a sign post which guides the present inquiry. It asks what are the "voices" that emerge from the texts of conversations between the investigator and the participants of this endeavour: 16 people who are considered to function at the borderline between normal and deficient intelligence.

### **The Journey of the Question: From Epistemology to Ontology**

The question first emerged from empirical concerns on the nature of having a mild or borderline intellectual disability. My long clinical work with this group of people informed me of the need to articulate their characteristics as well as the particular problems they face in society. It seemed urgent to identify those who so easily become lost in our vast social systems. I imagined

listing in one way or another statistical columns of information; measures, outcomes, facts and findings and I lost my taste for the venture. I could not imagine what this might really say about the people I have come to understand in the ways that I have. I wanted to pursue in place of a venture an adventure. I wanted to go on a voyage into my own landscape and the landscape of others. I began to understand my questions as a movement towards ontology instead of an effort to contribute to the domain of epistemology. This then became the philosophical parameter of the conversational study I embark on. In all this ambiguity I enter the door of not knowing.

## Chapter 2

### Revisiting the Science of Mind

This chapter sets out to provide a historical overview of the theoretical assumptions and directions that are implicit in the way the subject under investigation is approached. It sets its focus on establishing a theoretical rationale for a work that I hope will retain a scientific value without obeying the requirements of positivism. It is meant to demonstrate that a move towards interpretive, intuitive and perhaps literary perspectives in the pursuit of understanding human experience is not an expression of indulgent, whimsical, or less rigorous thinking but rather is grounded in trends of epistemological thought. It is important to trace the evolution of these conceptual frameworks in an effort to expose the fundamental premise of this research as a work that seeks to understand human intentional experience with new tools that are still in the making. Such interpretive tools will seek to harvest the storied nature of thought by entering the imaginative space of the subject and there participating in the dialogical quality of mind.

#### **The Re-Contextualization of Realism and Science**

Thomas Kuhn introduced what could be considered a turning point in the recent history of science. In his seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Kuhn seriously puts into question the thesis of “the unity of science” where the laws of physics govern absolutely. Phillips, (1996) He declares science to be influenced by what we now commonly refer to as “paradigm shifts” which reflect contextual and historical factors that move the direction of science in one way or another. This interpretative element of science puts into question realism, which states that there is a world of facts which exist independently of representations. Kuhn also challenges the notion

that science is unidirectional and progressive. Instead, he argues for a “revolutionary science” where new norms are introduced by the questioning of current practices and thus where new paradigms emerge. (Phillips, 1996) In this sense, Kuhn claims that scientific progress is historically contingent and therefore a fundamentally hermeneutic practice. He thus attempts to bridge the gap between the explanation/interpretation dichotomy often highlighted by various thinkers to divide the natural and human sciences. Both domains, he argues, are fundamentally linked through the same interpretative or hermeneutic practice. Science, he thus claims, is hermeneutic. The centrality of hermeneutics to the unfolding arguments in this thesis will be the focus of the subsequent chapter but let us return to the debate on realism and science through the contributions of Hubert Dreyfus, (1991) Charles Taylor, (1991) and John Searle (1995).

These thinkers offer counter views to Kuhn’s call for a return to realism in the light of a post-empirical philosophy. Dreyfus for example, argues for a moderate view of science and dubs his mentor Martin Heidegger a “minimal hermeneutic realist.” Science, he claims, can reveal the causal powers of nature but not of truth. (1991, p. 27) Dreyfus argues against the over reaction against science, while staunchly defending the primary difference between the natural and human sciences. Accordingly, he acknowledges a realism where facts about the world exist independently of any representations of them. However only “Dasein” or human being can render these facts intelligible. In this way, he maintains the fundamental split between the world of human meaning and the world of natural science. Each will have its own ontological distinction, each will have its own modality for investigation. In the tradition of hermeneutics, this modality will involve the interpretative capacity of the mind; one where the reign of intentionality will lead us to grasp another



human experience rather than lay claim to an objective account. This grasping leads us through the thickets of intentional experience where the metaphoric capacities of mind must be called upon as beacons showing the light to the structure of mind. Again the subject of metaphor as a vital human experience shall be returned to again and again in the ensuing chapters.

In a similar light, Charles Taylor (1989, 1991) has figured prominently in the debate on realism and science. Together with Dreyfus he argues for the fundamental distinction between the human and natural sciences. Science, he says “does not grasp things merely as they are relevant to our purposes and practices but rather as they are, outside of the immediate perspective of our goals, desires, and activities.” (as cited in Hiley, Bohmam, Shusterman p. 5, 1991) Hence for Taylor, as for Dreyfus, it is the intentionality of human behaviour that separates the human from the natural sciences.

John Searle also takes up the discussion of realism in his book, *The Construction of Social Reality*.(1995) He returns in this work to what he terms a version of correspondence theory and truth. He upholds the existence of “brute facts” that are language independent in terms of their existence but language dependent in the sense that we need language to speak of them. Searle is most concerned with what he terms social or institutional facts. He asks the question how do social facts come to be and what is the role of language in the construction of such facts? In pursuing this question, Searle puts aside the dualistic conception of mind in place of an embodied mind. In this new sense, mind is seen as a fluid and biologically interactive process that is not governed by linguistic structures but by pre-linguistic capacity for meaning. It is this capacity for contextual meaning that gives rise to what are considered social facts. This context is embedded in the collective intentionality of culture and is

considered to be a biologically primitive phenomenon that emerges from a neurophysiological causation. In order to understand this pre-intentional capacity Searle ventures into a new landscape of the unconscious. It is not the same terrain as that of psychoanalytic, nor the prevailing cognitive notions. Rather, Searle moves towards a wider definition; one that captures the Background of Capacities that are implicit in all social facts.

### **The Background**

Various ideas with different meanings for various authors pointing to a background of non conscious activity has been emerging through the disciplines. The thesis of the background, in Searle's terms, holds that "intentional phenomenon such as meanings, understandings, interpretations, beliefs, desires, and experiences only function within a set of Background Capacities that are not themselves intentional." (1992, p. 175) Every thing we say and do is thus understood in terms of the local background practice of culture or the deeper background practice that is common to all humans. Literal meanings, for example, cannot convey the context or the habitual perspective that emerges in language. Searle points out, for example, that the sentence "Bill cut the mountain" does not provide an understanding of the content even though it is grammatically correct. The background is therefore, according to Searle, the nonrepresentational capacity that enables all representation to take place. It is the capacity where meanings can be shared and cultural practice becomes embedded in the very biology of humans. Searle thus looks to the background to explain social phenomenon. The question becomes, from an investigative point of view, how we can tap into this bedrock that defies traditional, linear, or language based understanding. Searle maintains this is a problem and suggests that we must look for new tools to tap into this bedrock of human capacity. Zavalloni's work (1971, 84, 90, 93) is an

example which offers evidence that supports the claim that empirical approaches can be used in the uncovering of unconscious, non conscious mental activity. Through an approach she terms ego\ecology, Zavalloni has tracked the emotional lineage of identity words within the representational system of a person. She is able to explore "background thinking" through a model termed e\motional memory which by closer and closer approximations and associations to word presentations brings a person to reveal the deep contextual aspects of their personality. Using this method she is able to reveal the basic premises of how the person sees him or her self and others and thus their background thinking comes to surface.

### **The Problem of Consciousness**

Consciousness is something that in the every day world we take for granted. We do not debate its existence or what it means. We simply apply the word according to the context and we implicitly trust its given meaning. Hence a person may or may not have a conscience, she or he may or may not be aware, awake, asleep, dreaming, forgetting, remembering, meditating, and so on. (Natsoulas, 1986) The evidence of consciousness seems so clear to the average person that it in fact becomes part of what has been termed our "folk psychology." (Bruner, 1990) But simple truths, it seems, cannot be taken for granted and, in fact, the term "folk psychology" was introduced by a group of scientists who were really comparing its believers to the sort of country cousins who persist in holding onto folk tales. Searle describes their position in this way: "Giving up the belief that we have beliefs is analogous to giving up the belief in a flat earth or sunsets." (Searle, 1990 p. 48) But "folk psychology" has a much more positive meaning where such tales of human experience become the starting place for human knowledge and understanding. The present argument is that consciousness is an approachable subject not only in spite of

its subjective feature but precisely because of it. Not only this, but its intersubjective feature is what allows its mystery to unfold. That is, we may speak about it in a language community. Language shows itself to be the process and the instrument of consciousness. It will be through language that its substance will be revealed. But it will be a revelation of its self for in part consciousness is itself language. (Vygotsky, 1962) Language will bring us to the social world; to the community of others who motivate us to communicate, and with whom we interact in a constant exchange, where conscious beings impact on other conscious beings. Any theory of consciousness then, must be seen in the light of this transactional process between self and others.

### **The Monological Versus the Dialogical Self**

Any discussion on the nature of consciousness invites a closer look at current conceptions of what it means to have a self. The self has recently been reconsidered across several domains and in the latter part of the twentieth century we can see conceptions of the self moving away from the notion of singular consciousness more towards an interactive view where the individual, culture and the biological world intermingle within a dynamic matrix of interaction. Sampson, (1989) provides one overview of the historical and sociological challenges mounted against the western notion of the self as a "bounded, closed, centre of awareness." (See also Geertz, 1979) From cross-cultural investigation, to the various intellectual movements such as critical theory and more recently deconstructionism, the self has been re-situated within a socio-historical, socio-cultural framework. (Baumgardner, Rappoport, 1996) In this context, the self emerges from a historical consciousness. We are bound to the synergy of all that precedes and culturally surrounds us. Like the circular nature of knowledge, the idea of historical consciousness forms a

central hermeneutic thread and will be returned to in later chapters through the eyes of philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey and other hermeneutic thinkers.

In the light of the cognitive domain, philosopher Charles Taylor (1995) offers the view that prevalent theories of mind propose a stripped down view of consciousness. They do this by eliminating the essential “other” in formation of the self. In other words the individual is seen as a cognizing subject who relates to the world through the modality of representations. This Cartesian subject is thus trapped in a perpetual state of relativism and what Frederic Jameson has called “the prison house of language.” (as cited in Kent, 1991, p. 283) Here the subject becomes “disengaged from the world of practice” where for Taylor, and his predecessors Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, human being and human consciousness originates. (Taylor, 1991) Mind, in the former view, becomes a “container,” a place to process representations that either originate in the world or, alternately, are hard wired into the brain as a computational formula. In place of this stripped-down view a number of philosophers and theorists offer the suggestion of a dialogical self. (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon, 1992; Sampson, 1989; Taylor, 1991). In this view, consciousness emerges not from the internal mechanism of the brain nor as the reflection of an external world. Nor is the self merely the incorporation of the other as is suggested by the social behaviorism of George Herbert Mead. (cited in Taylor, 1991, Sampson, 1989). Rather the self emerges through an essential matrix within the social and biological world. In this view, the self does not incorporate this world but emerges from it and specifically from the “dialogical” quality of human action. (see also Levinas, 1961 and Jopling, 1993 ) The human subject is thus seen as engaged in practices and from this a self emerges. This new view of the self denies a fixed meaning or transhistorical self. In this new sense, self is seen as fluctuating and linked to the cultural

understandings, through what Heidegger's terms "a horizon of shared understandings." (Cushman, 1990) This self-in-process can be seen as engaged in an evolving narrative with one's self and others. (Peacock and Holland, 1993) The notion of the narrative self and of developing a narrative psychology that can respond to the storied nature of thought will be developed in later chapters.

### **The Problem of Intentionality**

The problem of intentionality leads us to the inner structure of psychic life. It arises from the question, "what are the characteristics of mental life which are absent in what we call the physical world?" Franz Brentano (1838-1907) first systematically posed this question but it was his student Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who in researching the answer demonstrated the far-reaching implications of the response. Intentionality refers to the fact that mental life is always directed towards an object. (Lewis, 1990; Mohanty, 1972) It names the fact "that mental states such as perceiving, believing, desiring, fearing and intending are always about something, directed at some object under some description, whether the extramental exists or not." (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 48)

Hence, intentionality refers to the observation that within conscious experience are self-contained meanings which bring intelligibility to everything we encounter. (Dreyfus, 1991) In John Searle's terms, this intentionality refers to the first feature of consciousness which is to assign function to objects. It is the capacity of the mind to "stand for" to "represent" or to "symbolize," in other words to have language. Searle (1995) points out that intentionality may be collective as in "social facts" and that such "we" intentionality cannot be reduced to an "I" intentionality. Rather, collective intentionality stands as biologically primitive.

It is the job of the phenomenologist, according to Husserl, to study the contents of mental experience, not through the tools of pure science (which failed to identify the intentional structure of mind) but by a return to consciousness, where a description of its contents can unfold. (Husserl, 1970) Hence, the implicit inter-connection between consciousness and intentionality is arrived at. In this way, Searle argues that, though not identical, any study of intentionality must include a discussion of consciousness. Only a conscious being could have intentional states, and every intentional state involves awareness or the potential for awareness, as is the case with unconscious intentions.

This argument holds enormous implications for the study of mind in that it maintains that an account of intentionality must include an account of consciousness. (Searle, 1992) The natural science and rationalist approaches, in particular, attempt to separate intentionality away from consciousness by ignoring its subjective feature and endowing it with a representational feature that is based on rule-governed mechanisms. This representational theory of mind provides a causal-explanatory framework and attempts to demonstrate that thinking takes place through a computationally based “language of thought.” (Fodor, 1975) But the present work presents the view that such formulations cannot account for the rich, meaningful quality of intentional life. Furthermore, arguments will be presented that intentionality is understood in terms of language, but that it also fundamentally precedes language. As Bruner (1990) says, the innate capacity for language is preceded by an innate capacity for meaning. In this way, “intentionality of act” is distinguished from “operative intentionality” where in the former something is known, and in the latter something is grasped. It is this grasping that forms the intentional opening to another hidden meaning. It is here where the “para-

rational" aspect of human consciousness comes to light. (Freeman, 1993) Such a premise leads phenomenologist Amendo Giorgio (1993) to refer to psychology as the science of the para-logical. This grasping, for Merleau-Ponty, is inherent in the deep subjectivity of our consciousness. It is for him "a third term" of existence held in between the psychic and the physiological; one where meanings may be lived but not known in the rational sense. Vygotsky also explores this third term of existence naming it the "the zone of proximal development." We can begin to see how constructivist concepts such as "scaffolding" venture towards a description of the experience of grasping. (Bruner, 1990)

### **The Problem of Meaning**

The problem of meaning concerns the question of how we make sense of ourselves and the world. It begs the question of how we are able to communicate our intentions to another human being. (Jopling, 1993) In one version, meaning arises in the mind as a store house of incoming data from the sensory world. Mind becomes a container. In a flip side account of meaning, mind organizes the world through an inherent structural capacity to be like a computer. In this case, a pre-wired system organizes a way of structuring mind into meaningful symbols. Daniel Dennet (1987), for example, views meaning as arising from the minds capacity to represent and use language as if it had intentionality when, in his terms, no subjective features of mind actually exists. It is merely what he terms the "intentional stance." Willis Overton (1994) refers to these various Cartesian mind-body dualisms in the construction of meaning as an isolationist strategy involving either a mind- brain split, (functionalism), mind-object split (the social cultural world) or mind-mind split (either/or categories of imagination and inference).(see also Kent, 1991) In place of these disconnected splits, Overton explores meaning in the context of



the embodied mind. In this conception, mind is seen in a "I mean"/"It means" relational matrix. In this system, mind and brain are seen as a unified whole. The biological mind moves fluidly between subject and object pole; between language and culture. In this sense mind becomes "dialogic" emerging out of the "embodied practices that both constitute and are constituted by the manifest world of common sense." (p. 11) This notion of the embodied mind is converging across the disciplines and points the way for new conceptions of research across the domains of psychology. (Edleman, 1992; Lakoff, 1987; Overton and Palermo, 1994; Searle, 1995; Varella, Thompson and Rosch, 1991; ) It is also a corner stone of such hermeneutic phenomenologists as Merleau-Ponty, Charles Taylor, Hubert Dreyfus and literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin; all of whom inform the subsequent chapters. In Searle's view, meaning arises from the relations between mind and language. It is, in his words "the derived intentionality of linguistic elements and is grounded in a more basic, biologically based intentionality." (p. xi) Humans are thus seen as conscious, intentional beings who intrinsically inherit a meaning-making system, which includes but precedes a linguistic capacity. This view stands in sharp contrast to the internal, representational theories which emphasize that meaning arises from "the mapping of rule governed syntactical structures onto defined and fixed world objects." (Edelman, 1992, p. 227) In this view, correspondence to things in the world gives meaning to linguistic expression. (p. 227) Again the lines are drawn between the schools of thought that give primacy to the mind as a meaning-intending and meaning-fulfilling system that ascribes meaning onto the world, and those schools that reduce meaning to an information or functional system. The present work aligns itself with those theories that seek to re-establish meaning as a central concept in psychology. (Bruner, 1986; 1990) Human experience, in this view, is determined by intentional experience and intentional states are realized through culture. Hence, the task of psychology as

Bruner sees it is to describe the meanings that humans create out of their encounters with the world and to propose hypotheses about what meaning-making processes are involved. (1990, p. 2) The verificationist approach to meaning attempts to make sense of human being by looking towards behaviour and causal influences. The intentionalist approach, what Bruner calls "folk psychology," seeks understanding through interpretative modes. Here the concern is with action instead of behaviour and with reasons instead of causes. Meaning is seen as embedded in culture as the reflection and the sculptor of human intentional experiences. In this way, meaning-making can be seen as the process that connects humans to culture through a dialogical interchange which becomes embedded in human intentional and even pre-intentional experience.

### **Imagination and the Metaphoric Capacity of Mind**

Christopher Aanstoos (1987) notes that cognitive psychology re-introduced the subject of imagination for study after it had been previously banished by behaviorism. In what Holt (1964) calls "the return of the ostracized," cognitive psychology was able to demonstrate through the work of researchers such as Paivio (1969), and Shepard (1975), that mental imagery in the form of "internal representations " do exist. In a similar way forward thinking cognitive scientists such as George Lakoff, (1987) Elenor Rosch, (1978) and Robert Haskell (1987) have brought metaphor to the forefront of psychological investigation. They have demonstrated that metaphor is deeply embedded in our every day experiencing of the world. No longer is it seen as a mere poetic device which may obscure or obstruct reality. Rather, metaphor is now seen as human kinds fundamental way of interfacing with the world and as a primary category of thought.

Gaston Bachelard, philosopher of science, considers imagination as maintaining a complementary and coherent duality between science and poetry. (Roy, 1977) Bachelard is concerned with how the imagination works, and looks for the “rehabilitation of the imagination.” (Bachelard, 1942\1982, p. viii) He develops a psychoanalysis of the imagination through the uncovering of the archetypal significance of the elements in our imagining process. This psychoanalysis is not to be confused with Freudian analysis which Bachelard saw as a closed system. Rather, Bachelard envisions an open system that affirms the dialectic between experience and reason. Bachelard’s study of imagination takes him beyond rational boundaries. In fact Bachelard maintains that it is a non-sense to try to study imagination from an objective standpoint. He proposes a “phenomenotechnique” in studying the imagination. Such an endeavour he sees as an active extension of phenomenology; as an archaeology or deconstruction of knowledge. Bachelard discovers what he terms the material imagination and it is from here that he develops his psychoanalysis of the elements. Bachelard sees that the human material imagination (in contrast to the formal imagination) emerges from the deep images created from human beings primordial relationship with the elements, which he terms the “hormones of the imagination.” Hence he encourages a psychological methodology that changes our way of seeing the material world. He attempts to instill a poetic understanding of the world where imagination is regarded as being itself.

### **Metaphor as the Voice of Imagination**

Bachelard regards metaphor as the link between reason and imagination. It is what brings the possibility of imagination into expression. However metaphor theory continues to evolve and has itself undergone a kind of rehabilitation, or rediscovery, as a vital aspect of psychic life and human

communication. Metaphor in this light is now seen to hold the capacity to reflect an aspect of human consciousness that would otherwise escape understanding. One question posed is whether we should attempt to decode metaphors or whether we should participate with them as a kind of "living thought" as Robert Haskell (1987) proposes. Haskell further maintains that metaphor is grounded in human experience and that it is at the very basis of thought. It is also the only way we have to describe inner experience and as such, for Haskell, it is "welded to phenomenology." In other words metaphor becomes the vehicle by which inner life can be described. Metaphor in Haskell's terms is further seen as the "eidetics of Being." (p. 258) In a similar way, it is proposed that participating in the metaphoric capacity of mind requires that we make a kind of leap of faith into an intuitive, interpretative and poetic realm of understanding that is seen to have an intrinsic comprehensible structure of its own. The value of metaphor is that it gives us symbols to organize our world and our thoughts and brings the vast territory of imagination into focus.

A shift into the imaginative space of metaphor leads to a new sense of the purpose and the focus of psychology; one that places meaning at the forefront of investigations and seeks an interpretive understanding of human experience. This endeavour which may now be called hermeneutic, will lay no claim to objective truth. In its place, it will seek to understand the conditions, contexts, and pre-suppositions inherent in such claims. The value of such an approach will be in its demonstration of the dynamic quality of human knowledge and experience. Such a demonstration will yield not only intellectual insight, but will have significant impact on the practical understanding of human interactions. The following chapter will thus venture into this hermeneutic enterprise that shapes the direction of the unfolding study.

## Chapter 3

### The Hermeneutic Foundation of the Enquiry

This chapter ventures into the intentional space of the hermeneutic endeavour. It strives to unfold the parameters of thought that have come to guide the study at hand. This entails four areas of discussion. First we venture into the parameters of the philosophy of hermeneutics in order to understand the epistemological and ontological grounding of the study. Secondly, we carry these notions into the discipline of psychology to justify the place of hermeneutics in this domain and to understand how this thought infuses current psychological concepts and research. Thirdly, the researcher highlights the specific influences on the development of the present work as it unfolds. In this way, the chapter moves through the thickets of philosophical and psychological enquiry to arrive at the signposts which finally guide this journey. These signposts become the parameters that set the course for the study as a work that is grounded in hermeneutic understanding and interpretation. Finally, the researcher having been grounded in theory moves beyond its parameters in order to venture into the realm of creative discovery. Here, a viewpoint framed within a developing methodological construct is explained to the reader. The reader will come to understand that the hermeneutic task of understanding the life worlds of a group of people became a work that focused on the voice constructions within them. In this way, the reader will be led through a dialectical process of discovery, intrinsic to the hermeneutic enterprise and which brought the researcher to approach her subject in the way she did.

## **The Philosophy of Hermeneutics**

### *An Overview*

Hermeneutics is a branch of philosophical thought which derives its name from ancient Greek mythology. Hermes was a messenger god who acted as an intermediary between all the gods and mortals. It was Hermes who had the special capacity to converse in the language of mortals and as such he was able to interpret to them what was, in the language of gods, beyond their human understanding. Hermeneutics, then, as a philosophy and as a discipline at its most basic level, is concerned with understanding. Its aim is to uncover, through a process of interpretation, what lies in mystery, and to reveal and explicate what is hidden. (Dilthey, 1976) Understanding what is hidden is achieved through the human action of interpretation. It is this dynamic process between understanding and interpretation that forms the cornerstone of hermeneutics. In fact, it is this dynamic process which becomes the action of hermeneutics. That is to say, hermeneutics addresses the meanings of human activity and seeks to uncover the ontology of the human state. Hermeneutics, then, is immediately placed in the realm of human science, and is concerned with the meaning of being human. (Heidegger, 1962) Hermeneuticians will discover that human actions must be looked at through lenses that are fundamentally different from those of natural scientific probes. (Gadamer, 1990). A hermeneut maintains that pure science cannot be employed in the explication and understanding of the meaning of being human. Such an endeavour requires an approach that can reach into the realm of human intentional experience. All that we as humans desire, feel, strive for, contributes to this intentional world. It is this "life world" of human action and thought that forms the substance of human investigation. (Husserl, 1970) It is the task of hermeneutics to uncover the meaning of such be-ing in the world as

it continually unfolds through the transformations of inter-subjective, transactional experience.

### *Tracing the Hermeneutic Thread*

It is not possible to justly convey in this work the rich evolution of hermeneutic ideas throughout the history of thought. Nevertheless, an attempt is offered to provide a profile of the hermeneutic thinkers whose ideas influence the present work. In order to traverse this hermeneutic territory, a snapshot of ideas are presented from five prominent figures in Hermeneutic thought. These include Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who turned the task of interpretation beyond the realm of religious exegesis and sought to establish a general Hermeneutics; Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who introduced the notion that interpretation constitutes a method specific to Social Sciences; Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) who brought the question of understanding to the realm of being or ontology; Hans Gadamer (1900-) who disposed completely of the notion of method in the pursuit of human understanding and truth; and Paul Ricoeur (1913-) who attempts to reconcile the rift between understanding and explanation. I will now turn to these thinkers and their ideas.

### *The Emergence of Modern Hermeneutics: Friedrich Schleiermacher*

Schleiermacher's work emerged from the soil of the Romantic movement in nineteenth century Germany. Romanticism opposed the view that Science held the claim to human truth. Instead, Romantics turned to the world of art to uncover meaning and truth in life and saw this capacity of humans to create artistic works as human kind's highest achievement. Artistic expression in the Romantic view always represented an interior quality of intention that could never be quite actualized in physical form. It thus represented a "struggle"

which resulted in a “compromise” between the artist’s vision and the medium itself. (Bauman, 1978, p. 24) In order to understand the art form, Romantics held the view that you must return to the mind of the artist in order to reconstruct their intention. You must gain an “understanding” of their inner perspective. This idea of the symbolic nature of art led to another possibility ; that of infinite interpretations. This notion of understanding the author or artist was thus carried over into the Hermeneutic school which had previously concerned itself with exegeses, or proper interpretation of sacred texts. Schleiermacher, whose work was published posthumously by his student Dilthey, discarded the notion of a Hermeneutics that attempted to decode an absolute meaning and brought the hermeneutic project of understanding into the realm of the human psyche where its proper role was to illuminate the conditions under which meaning arose. Understanding thus becomes an unending historical task that results in a dialectical process or “Hermeneutic Circle.” This notion of the Circle of Understanding was first systematically introduced by Schleiermacher and from here on becomes a vital thread in the evolution of hermeneutic thought. (Palmer, 1969) The circle, for Schleiermacher, comes to represent that all acts of knowing entail a perpetual motion of moving from the general form of a discourse to its particular aspect with a return to the general. In this way the whole of a work requires a return to its smaller parts; the phrase, the paragraph, the word. But a fuller understanding can only be grasped by returning to the whole of the work. Understanding thus becomes an unending dialectical process from the general to the particular and in reverse, from the particular to the general. (Dilthey, 1976, p. 259) But this process of understanding or entering the circle can only be made possible through the inherent capacity of humans to engage in a shared spirit that binds them together. In this way, what allows me to understand another psychological world is my sharing in the same spirit that infuses both



our worlds. All understanding for Schleiermacher thus springs from the ground of affinity or psychological empathy between interpreter and the work interpreted. In this context Schleiermacher maintained that “everything in human history has emanated from the common spirit and everything will return to the common Spirit in the end.” (Bauman, 1978, p. 28) This relationship of intrinsic affinity between subjects within a historical context highlights the circularity between the knower and the known. This brings to surface another important contribution of Schleiermacher to the Hermeneutic endeavour. He proposed that in addition to a grammatical interpretation that focused on the linguistic characteristics of a literary or historical text, there must be a psychological interpretation that focuses on the inner process of the author. Schleiermacher says, “The final goal of hermeneutic procedure is to understand the author better than he understood himself.” (Dilthey, 1976, p. 260) In this way, Schleiermacher’s contribution was to recognize that written works spring from the rich historical, contextual and psychological soil of the inner life of the author.

#### *Hermeneutics as Method in Social Sciences: Wilhelm Dilthey*

Wilhelm Dilthey also emphasized the concept of understanding in his work but maintained that understanding went beyond language. He established understanding as being integral to the process of human life itself and in fact maintained that it represented a “category of life.” This form of understanding, for Dilthey, went beyond language and became for him a “lived understanding” of the social and cultural environment that constitutes “lived expression.” This notion highlights, but reaches beyond the linguistic world to include, the social-cultural practices that constitute social reality. In Dilthey’s terms, understanding emerges from the fact that as humans we express ourselves through a variety of ways such as gesture, voice, movement, and

actions. These expressions constitute what Dilthey termed "Ausserung" or "externalizations" of particular states of mind and provide windows into the individual's inner life. In this way Dilthey maintained the dictum "as individuals express their lives so they can be understood by others." (Dilthey, 1900\1976) But Life expressions, for Dilthey, represent a special class of expressions in that they come to exist independently from the person who carries them. They become part of the social, cultural fabric and include things such as works of art, legal or economic systems, etc. Hence Dilthey thus sought to make understanding a study of lived experience itself, making it an epistemological cornerstone in his philosophy and a primary tool in his theory of social science.

Dilthey further argued for the fundamental division between the natural and social sciences, maintaining that explanation belonged to the former mode of enquiry, while understanding was the property of the latter. In this way, he elaborated his theory on the premise that "man knows man." (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 59) As such, he sought to articulate a method for the Social Sciences that was independent from Natural Science and that was based on a technique or method of understanding that could be as rigorous in its application as the methods used in Natural sciences. Dilthey asks how historical knowledge is possible and further, how human sciences are also possible. He thus cites the task of Hermeneutics as being to consider understanding and interpretation in light of their evolution in the sciences of humanity. But Dilthey turned away from the historicism of the day as much as he did from the intrusion of Natural Science onto human concerns. In their place he proffered a new system of enquiry that sought a fusion between empirical study of humans and historical analysis. Dilthey wanted to find a bridge between historical analysis and current human lived expressions. He felt that such knowledge could only

be gleaned through an act of subjective understanding rather than scientific explanation. Dilthey thus sought to place understanding within a systematic epistemological framework of enquiry and sought to make understanding the proper method of human enquiry.

*Hermeneutics as Ontology: Martin Heidegger*

The hermeneutic endeavour was propelled further from epistemology to ontology with the development of the phenomenological school. Here, hermeneutics became concerned with the ontological conditions of meaningful discourse. Husserl's description of intentional acts (all that we desire, think, feel, wish for), his notion of the life world of lived experience as the ground for inter-subjectivity and his persuasive arguments against the subject-object dichotomy as well as his attack on the meddling of pure sciences in matters of human meaning, all aid the hermeneutic endeavour. (Husserl, 1970) But it is Heidegger (1962) who brings a new meaning to hermeneutics. His principle task was to provide an analysis of human existence in order to formulate an interpretation of the "meaning of Being as such." (1962, p. 21) Heidegger rejects Descartes notion of the ego as the thinking subject and replaces his notion of "I think therefore I am" with the reversal of "I am therefore I think." (Dreyfus, 1991). He thus grounds his concept of understanding in humans "Being-in-the-World," and asks the question, "What does it mean to be?" For Heidegger, understanding is this capacity to grasp one's potentiality for being within the world. But Heidegger's notion of Being escapes definitional analysis. In this way, he describes being as "the most universal and emptiest of concepts." (1962, p. 21) It is the task of phenomenology to make Being transparent. It is thus according to Heidegger a process for letting things be seen as they are. Being lies in being human or what Heidegger calls "Dasein." (p. 26) But the truth of Dasein must be allowed to become manifest without epistemological categories

being placed on it. Phenomenology is essentially concerned with uncovering what is hidden. The hermeneutic task of understanding now becomes a phenomenological inquiry of letting things be seen. But the path to the unseen cannot be through the doors of epistemological knowledge. Rather Heidegger returns to the early Greek philosophers' notion of being in order to pursue the depths of Truth. In this way the knowing of another human life for Heidegger requires a leap into the ontological space of the Being of being human. Hence his notion of understanding goes beyond those of Schleiermacher and Dilthey who respectively saw understanding either as the capacity of humans to grasp and find relation with another life or understanding as an appreciation of the life expressions of human kind. Understanding for Heidegger was thus not an entity in the world but rather part of its structure. In this way understanding is not to be engaged as a mechanistic tool of any kind. Rather understanding provides the grounding, the basis for all interpretation and is realized through a kind of participatory unfolding of its nature. Understanding is thus not to be employed but entered into as a kind of living in rather than an application of. Further, Truth in Heidegger's terms must come to light not through a process of grasping facts but through a process of un-concealment where an apprehending of the possibility of being can emerge. (Ricoeur, 1991) The task of hermeneutics thus becomes one of a phenomenological act of letting things be seen. Heidegger further elaborates the hermeneutic circle to point out the circular nature of knowledge. All understanding, he says, involves a pre-understanding or foreknowledge of what is to be interpreted. The point then for Heidegger is not to get out of the so called circle but to enter into it. He says "what is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way." (p. 195) He continues, "In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing." Thus to understand another life we must throw our selves into the circle of foreknowledge or the proper understanding

of prejudice which will later be elaborated by Gadamer as “the prejudice against prejudice.”(p. 270) The way into this circle of understanding will be through language. But here Heidegger makes a distinction between the “saying” of language and the “speaking” of it. In the first case the saying of a language involves the existential properties while the speaking relates to mundane or empirical aspects. (Ricoeur, 1991) But “saying” first develops from the dual quality of “hearing\being silent.” Thus saying emerges from the ground of understanding which itself emerges from hearing. Ricoeur describes Heidegger’s notion this way: “In other words my first relation to speech is not that I produce it but that I receive it.” (p. 68) Heidegger thus reverses the active process of language into a primary receptive nature that is characterized by an openness to receive the message from another.

*Hermeneutics as Dialectical Process: Hans-Georg Gadamer(1900-)*

More recently Gadamer (1990) brings the whole enterprise of hermeneutics as a method of social sciences into further question. He maintains that hermeneutics is not a method to arrive at truth, but a philosophical pursuit that stands juxtaposed to any technical application in the understanding of being human. Like his predecessors, Gadamer continues the critique of the infiltration of modern science into areas of human concern and develops the notion that human truth is not an object to be captured. It is not a thing as much as it is a process, a dialectic of human understanding. The world of method belongs to science as a set of controls and manipulations. The world of human understanding belongs to the backward and forward motion of this dialectic, where the configurations of reality constantly take new shapes in the unfolding of its history. In this way, any interpretation of history entails that the interpreter projects his or her understanding into the task. Interpreters are thus guided by their understandings as a set of prejudices that they bring to the

interpretation. Prejudice in its rehabilitated sense thus becomes a necessary starting point for all historical understanding because it highlights the fundamental rule that the object to be understood and the subject are not alien to each other but rather stand in a state of relatedness. In this way, Gadamer holds that the aim of hermeneutic understanding is to bring the interpreter into the correct attitude of historical awareness. In this regard he introduces his concept of "experience" where knowledge is seen not as an object to be grasped but as an encounter or dynamic process of authentic relationship. This type of understanding for Gadamer always manifests itself through dialogue which itself is characterized by one of three types of I-Thou relationship. The highest form of this I-Thou relationship Gadamer calls "effective historical consciousness."

*The Re-habilitation of Method in Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur (1913 -)*

Gadamer places the highest possibility of understanding on language. In this way he presents the notion that "Being which can be understood is language." It is therefore through dialogue that understanding comes to its fulfillment. The conversation, for Gadamer, is this medium for language where being can come to itself. But language is viewed as both being influenced by the true state of things as well as influencing what can be called truth. Language does not merely incorporate or transpose an objective world but does itself contain meanings in a symbolic form. In this way, language is not self evident and interpretation is required in order to gain what may be seen as progressive understandings of the meanings contained within it.

Ricoeur's work attempts to re-cover the methodological pursuit initiated by Dilthey and attempts to reconcile the rift between understanding and explanation. To do this, Ricoeur delves further into the medium of language as

the focus of understanding but extends his ideas to embrace a fuller sense of “meaning” that is carried by the notions of discourse, narrative and the text. All discourse in contrast to language for Ricoeur is an “event” in three ways. First, discourse happens in a temporal situation whereas language stands outside of time. Secondly, discourse always refers back to a person whereas language does not ask the question; who speaks? Finally, while language is a precondition for communication, discourse is the vehicle by which human exchange takes place. Added to the notion of discourse as an event is the notion that discourse must be understood as “meaning.” These two ideas form opposite and paradoxical poles in the dialectical relationship between the saying and being said or speaking and writing which in themselves lead to a necessary “distanciation.” This dialectic between event and meaning happens because language which is first realized as an event, surpasses itself allowing meaning to emerge. It is because of the process of distanciation that meanings endure beyond being an event. In other words between the saying and the said lies a realm of distance which allows meaning to arise. Ricoeur places emphasis on the “paradigm of the text” or alternately the “paradigm of life.” The written text becomes “the said” of speaking and in this way preserves discourse and makes it available for “collective or individual memory.”(p. 107)

Writing also invites interpretation and, for Ricoeur, brings to surface its relationship to explanation. Whereas Dilthey tried and failed to make interpretation a method akin to the properties thought to belong to science, Ricoeur seeks a new definition of interpretation that actually incorporates a dialectic between it and explanation. In this sense, interpretation and explanation are viewed as “moments in a complex process that could be called interpretation”(p. 126). In this way, interpretation is seen as a property of understanding and called forth when an explanation is not understood. In

reverse order explanation always reaches completion through understanding. Ricoeur builds on this argument to put forth the notion that meaningful action adheres to the paradigm of the text. Reading a text becomes this dialectical action between understanding and explanation. This relationship corresponds to a necessary tension between "guessing" and "validation." Each lens by which we read a text opens up new avenues of understanding which can be subjected to a process of validation through a consensual community of readers. As well, the reader him or herself becomes a participant in the generation of meanings that arise from the text.

### **Hermeneutics and Psychological Enquiry**

Philosophical hermeneutics is foundational and the starting point for psychological hermeneutic investigation. These basic concepts become the hermeneutic guide for research and clinical practice. However, hermeneutics within psychology is somewhat divided on where to situate itself in relation to having or attempting to have an explanatory power in investigative research. (Howard, 1982; Russel, 1988) There is discussion of the potential use of hermeneutics in psychology as researchers grapple with its intent and its possibilities. Can hermeneutics and empirical research blend, interact or complement each other as Packer and Addison (1989), or Meichenbaum (1988) maintain, or must psychology abandon what Barret and Sloan (1988) call "the specious pursuit of pure epistemology." (p. 133) Can method in psychology be rehabilitated from a hermeneutic standpoint or should it be abandoned? If it is abandoned in the usual sense then what could possibly replace it? How does one define hermeneutics in the domain of psychology? These are some of the questions that are being generated in current debate.



*Situating Hermeneutics in Psychology*

Hermeneutics in psychology has by no means a single vision of how to interpret itself or how to proceed. Robert Russel for example (1988) in responding to an article written by Martin Packer (1988) on hermeneutic enquiry, highlights three main divisions within the hermeneutic camp in psychology. These include: hermeneutic objectivism, hermeneutic reconstructionism, and radical hermeneutics. Hermeneutic objectivism finds its roots in the descriptive psychology of Dilthey. It claims that objectivity in interpretation can be obtained through empathic understanding. According to this view accurate empathic understanding allows the interpreters to transcend their situation and to imaginatively relive the actions or thoughts of the subjects and thereby reproduce them in an objective manner. (p. 130) This form of hermeneutic enquiry therefore attempts to solicit objective descriptions but resists the claim found in other social sciences, to having an explanatory power. Hermeneutic reconstructionism as championed by Jurgen Habermas (1979) maintains that objectivity in interpretation can be achieved through a hermeneutic reconstruction that involves employing empirical strategies within transformational linguistics. This form of enquiry seeks to have an explanatory power in that it attempts to construct theories that relate to aspects of human behaviour that are universally evident in human interactions. Radical hermeneutics is associated with the work of Gadamer and Heidegger. This position rejects the place of objectivity and explanatory power in understanding human intentional life. Rather, thinkers associated with this view attempt to move enquiry to the level of the ontological and seek to uncover this dimension through the doors of an intuitive, subjective understanding. Each of these positions can be considered as typologies within an emerging domain of hermeneutic psychology that address various viewpoints of methodological concerns.

In another vein, Messer, Sass and Woolfolk (1990) compile a volume that outlines a collection of competing theories within the domain of psychological hermeneutics. In their introduction, they similarly outline three competing streams within the psychological hermeneutic camp. These include in the spirit of Dilthey, hermeneutics as a methodology; ontological hermeneutics in the spirit of Heidegger and Gadamer and finally the critical hermeneutics that evolved from the work of Jurgen Habermas. (1979). They explain the divisions within the schools of psychology in the following ways.

Methodological hermeneutics refers to those attempts to broaden the social sciences. In this vein, psychological investigation attempts to incorporate the interpretative hermeneutic viewpoint into scientific methodology. Packer and Addison (1989) for example maintain that interpretative hermeneutic enquiry is the attempt to draw psychological investigation away from strict rationalist or empiricist procedures and instead lead it in the direction of using interpretative methods of enquiry that will address the "thick" contextual aspects of human experience. (Geertz, 1973) In this way they maintain that the method associated with strict positivism should not be taken as the final blue print for method based enquiry in the human sciences. In the positive application of method the starting place of human enquiry is in everyday experience. Practical understanding thus becomes the starting place for interpretive enquiry and begins not from "an absolute origin of unquestionable data, or totally consistent logic, but from a place delineated by our everyday participatory understanding of people and events." Packer and Addison, (p. 23) Such method is not interpretation free but acknowledges that every investigation begins with establishing a point of view and evaluating the account that results. (p. 33)

Ontological hermeneutics recently associated within psychology with such people as Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus moves away from methodologically framed studies in favour of establishing an interpretive movement that aims to uncover the layers of a particular aspect of existence. According to Taylor not only are we constituted by self interpretations, but they also constitute us in the sense that we are embedded within a cultural, linguistic and historical context. Thus in any interpretative account the worlds of history, language and culture must be traversed. This interpretation leads to understanding which is specific to language and forms the essential character of being human. In our human existence we cannot stop the continual dialectical process that understanding entails because in a very basic way we are constituted by it. In the domain of psychology this does not necessarily mean a groundless, arbitrary and relativistic approach to enquiry. Rather according to Richard Bernstein (in Messer et al., 1990) interpretations can be supported by reasons and evidence through what he calls "the logic of argument." (p. 96)

Finally, critical hermeneutics turns its focus to the social influences on human behaviour. The hermeneutic endeavor in this regard thus turns its attention to uncovering the conditions that form the basis for communication and social interaction. This depth hermeneutics thus seeks to reveal the sources of domination that underlie communication. (Woolfolk, Sass, Messer, 1990) In the context of psychology the task thus becomes one of unearthing the socially based constructions that through systems of domination determine particular aspects of behaviour. Social constructionism has notably been described by Kenneth Gergen but has been further developed by a number of other domains within psychology such as feminist theory and disability discourse. (see Keller and Flax, 1990; Woodhill, 1994) We cannot say therefore that hermeneutics within psychology represents a single perspective. Rather we

can say that there are elements of thought that can be considered as currants flowing together that represent an emerging trend in psychology to focus on meanings and contexts of behaviour rather than purely objective data. This new coalition of perspectives perhaps begins with the relocation of subject to object as well as a turning away from what Charles Taylor calls "brute facts" (1979) and an acknowledgment that there are multiple truths. (Mishler, 1986). The possibility of context free knowledge is called into question and a shift from information to meaning takes place. Here culture is given a prime importance with the recognition that shared meanings are embodied in, a culture and that human beings do not "terminate at their own skins." (Bruner, 1990, p. 12) This culturally oriented psychology which Bruner calls "folk psychology" resists becoming meaning free but instead, along with the art of interpretation, makes it central. Proponents of hermeneutic psychology maintain that the purpose of psychology is not to formulate laws of human behaviour but to elucidate the meanings of human behaviour. (Gauld and Shotter, 1977) The life world or the world of every day actions of human beings constitutes the starting place of hermeneutics. Here the meanings of actions given by our intentional experience, our hopes, dreams, fears, beliefs, become psychological concepts that provide the initial framework of hermeneutic investigation. The hermeneutic circle thus, in part, comes to represent the whole of a person's conceptual system, and their psychological make-up. (Gauld and Shotter, 1977) Thus the task of hermeneutic inquiry begins with practical understanding as a starting place for interpretation. This practical understanding is not as Gauld and Shotter say "an absolute origin for knowledge in the sense of a foundation; it is, instead, a starting place for interpretation." (p. 23) This may be called entering the circle. Rather than taking an objective stance, the hermeneutic scientist must be within this circle. They say "only someone who is a participant in that hermeneutic circle can

understand the meaning of that agent's actions, for that meaning is given by the agent's own conceptual and psychological systems." (p. 9) Entering the circle thus comes to mean abandoning the "objective" perspective and placing oneself within their own prejudice in order that one may move beyond it. It means "throwing" oneself into intuition in order to gain further understanding. (Gadamer, 1975)

### *Hermeneutics and Psychotherapy*

Paul Ricoeur introduced the notion that psychoanalysis is a "hermeneutical science" rather than an observational one. (1965/1970) Since that time a number of theorists have concluded that Freud's attempt to ground his theory in empiricism finally gives way to hermeneutic analysis. (Bouchard, 1991; Regan, 1979; Steele, 1979, 1989; Spence, 1982,) Similarly the psychotherapeutic situation is seen as a hermeneutic process of understanding and interpretation. In this light, it is not the facts that a patient brings to therapy that are important but rather the meaning given to them. In this sense the therapeutic process can not be seen as archaeology which aims to uncover the hiddenness of what patients bring to therapy but a narrative reconstruction that is both grounded in the past and the present. (Spence, 1982) In this way, these bring a textual quality which require analysis and interpretation. But not only can hermeneutics represent the interpretive action inherent in the psychotherapeutic situation but it can also be seen as contributing to the therapeutic process itself.

### *Hermeneutics in Psychological Research*

Research studies that claim to represent a hermeneutical approach are not in abundance but they do exist. Packer and Addison (1989) compile, for example, a collection of studies that attempt to integrate hermeneutics into the research domain. Their collection of studies includes a cross-section of

interpretive research in developmental, clinical, social, and educational psychology. In the developmental area, Selman, Shultz, Caplan, and Schantz, embark on a narrative analysis of transcripts recorded from interactions between two adolescents who took part in joint therapy sessions. These interactions were “fixed” as a text by narrative recordings and were analyzed by a set of four hierarchically organized developmental levels. In another study, Theodore Sarbin develops a form of interpretation that looks for “tropes” or figures of speech in accounts of everyday experience of emotions. He attempts to show the narrative structure in emotions with the further aim of demonstrating how narrative guides thought and action. In the clinical domain in the same volume, Donald Spence, psychoanalyst and author of the book *Narrative Truth Historical Truth*, (1982), offers an analysis of a clinical psychoanalytic report. Here he examines the forms of argument used, drawing attention to the “rhetorical” versus “evidential” styles and placing more credibility on the latter style of investigation. Spence favours a narrative approach in his analysis of conversation data but he also argues for a modified qualitative method that steers away from the usual “case report” and is replaced by “a new field of qualitative research,” one that uses narrative but also ventures into the context or “personhood” of the analyst. (p. 220) On this score, Spence suggests that reflections from “countertransference” be routinely included in clinical accounts as a way of gaining further understanding to the material. In the present work this notion is woven into the “findings” of the research. Countertransference, in this instance will come to mean the reactions and emotional memories that come to the surface in the researcher as she explores the world of her subjects. It will be seen as a vital element in gaining access to their emotional and mental landscape.

Still another study in this collection, and one that was highly instructive for the present work is the research described by Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, and Argyris. They describe an interpretive method that they developed and used as a guide to reading interview narratives of moral conflict and choice. (p. 141) They use what they describe as an “explicitly hermeneutic approach to the field of psychological study of morality and moral development.” (p. 141) More will be said about their approach and its impact on the present work in the pages ahead.

To conclude this brief discussion on the emerging tradition of hermeneutics in psychological research, it must be mentioned that controversies and debates about its use and relevance abound. Hermeneutic research in psychology poses an obvious problem in terms of being able to generate what is considered reliable and valid data. Moreover it is questioned whether hermeneutical analysis could ever achieve a predictive or explanatory capacity, (largely what investigative psychology is based on). (Russel, 1988) Nevertheless, arguments are made that what may be called hermeneutic enquiry helps the discipline to forge beneath the layers of statistical truth in order to reveal the meanings of human intentional experience. In this way, mainstream journals have begun to publish what is now called hermeneutic research. (Packer, 1985; Mishler, 1986; O’Grady, Rigby, and Van-den-Hengel; Honey, 1987, D. Taylor, 1990; Tappan, 1990). Interpretive research, largely what hermeneutics is based on, has also begun to show up in an increasing number of doctoral dissertations in psychology and education. The present study is influenced by two particular sources of hermeneutic investigation. Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan’s research on the moral development of adolescent girls has become increasingly interpretive in its methodological focus. (1992) In earlier work, Brown, Tappan and Gilligan (1989) attempt to trace the “moral voices” in the texts provided by

interviews with adolescent girls. In so doing, they created a listening guide whereby they were able to extract the different “voices” that emerge in the text narrative; in this case the care voice and the justice voice. They do so by a series of readings that are each time directed towards a particular “voice;” In this way the readings entailed 1) locating the narrative; 2) “locating the self;” 3) “reading for care;” and 4) “reading for justice.” They identified this approach as hermeneutic while establishing a method that satisfied standardized reliability and validity measures. In their more recent research, however, Brown and Gilligan move deeper into the interpretive perspective and establish what they begin to call a relational method. Here they moved away from standard procedures for analyzing data and towards a voice centered relational approach which becomes more clinical and literary. (p. 20) They began to listen for nuances in dialogue; in the silences and struggles of the participants. Voice becomes central to this approach and is seen as inherently relational. They say, “recasting psychology as a relational practice, we attend to the relational dimensions of our listening, speaking, taking in, interpreting, and writing about the words and silences, the stories and narratives of other people.” (p. 22) In short, they turn towards the subject and explore the meaning of being in relation to them. In so doing they move away from the objective, detached position: “Once we let the voice of another enter our psyche, we can no longer claim a detached and objective position.” (p. 28) But rather than obscuring their judgment with their feelings, they found new avenues for understanding and knowledge. The work of Davidson (1990), also influences the present project. She embarks on what she terms a hermeneutic journey into a spousal homicide. Through a series of “conversations” she gains insight into the psychological processes of a man convicted for the murder of his spouse using metaphor as the primary pathway into such an understanding.



## Entering the Circle: Tracing the Dialectical Process of the Project

### *The Journey of the Question*

My first encounter with hermeneutics occurred in a research course which I took some years ago. The professor had said in passing that he had read a brilliant doctoral dissertation which had encompassed a hermeneutical style in its method of inquiry. Committed to the rigours of "good science" he nevertheless had to admit that this work had offered remarkable insight into the subject at hand. Though this was largely unfamiliar territory to me, despite my early philosophical training, my intuition took hold of the word and revealed to me its meaning at a most basic level. As I later ventured into the word I found that I could demonstrate its application but lacked the clarity to explain it. In a sense the meaning of the word itself came to me hermeneutically through a kind of primordial knowing or intuition that took hold and propelled me further into the process of gaining an understanding into its meaning. Perhaps the first premise of my attraction to hermeneutics was really a reaction to the dogmatism of the so-called scientific method. But more than its dogmatic stance was what seemed to me to be the trivializing of human experience into studies that did not always seem entirely relevant to human stories and human story making. So, my attraction to hermeneutics, like many before me, has really emerged out of my reaction against the pervasive blueprint of natural science on human intentional experience. But such a intuitive knowing must also gain a language that can be translated into theory and practice. And so this project has proceeded hermeneutically. By allowing the backward and forward arch of understanding to be set in motion between the multiple dimensions of intuition, experience, language and discourse, the work, and my understanding, became infused with the hermeneutic process. In this way, I ventured into a modality of thought which began with the self and my intuitions and then moved to the world of consensual knowledge, only to

return again to the subjective process of discovery that affirmed my sense that knowledge and truth are entered into as an unfolding dialectic of discovery. This project thus begins with the intentional desire to move into a conversational space with the people who comprise the yet described study group. In order to set the scene for such a dialogue I begin with the backward motion of the historical journey of this project to show how the definition of the study emerged from the intuitive wanderings of my early questioning and attempt to integrate the philosophy of hermeneutics into its practical application.

### **Listening to the Voices that Emerge from the Ground**

#### *Tracing the Desire*

Several years ago now, I sat in a darkened film studio, perched on a stool asking a series of questions to a group of eight people who had agreed to tell their stories for the purpose of a short documentary film. The idea of the film was to create a venue where people with intellectual disabilities could speak for themselves, in their own voices, and with the fewest distractions possible. Only they, one by one, were presented on camera with a black back drop. As the filming unfolded, I became increasingly drawn into the poignant intimacy of the setting. They spoke with great courage, dignity and with an openness that made them seem like delicate, vulnerable birds sitting alone on the perch of the glaring camera light. At some moments, I felt like an interrogator and thought I could not continue to ask questions. At other times, I felt a deep sense of communion with their humanity and as we looked into each others' eyes, I felt my own humanity grow. The director of this film made the comment one day that he would like the film to present them as if they had a single voice. I thought about this notion of voice, about the oneness of a group of people speaking, like a chorus. But as I listened to their stories, and later in the editing

where I listened and viewed the tapes many times over, I began to experience the value of multiple listenings and began to hear the “polyphony” of voices speaking that I later found in the work of Brown and Gilligan (1992) and following their thread to the literary theorist Bakhtin. (1981) I was struck by the feeling that not one voice, but many voices, from a single person were emerging and particularly that these voices seemed at times to clash with others within them. I decided that I wanted to follow the train of these voices to see where they may lead.

As a beginning, I explored the emerging voices that I heard from the narratives contained in that video. My theoretical readings took me, among other places, to the work of the philosophers previously discussed and the work began to be infused with the hermeneutic enterprise they endorsed as the method for the continual discovery of what being human means. I began on this double mission of approaching the inner landscape of a certain group of people within the poetic boundaries of a truth seeking that entailed the arts of conversation, reciprocity and interpretation and a revitalization of my own sense of inner journey. All of these things merged into what can be called a creative effort to represent and interpret the inner and outer landscapes of human consciousness and human experience. Exploring the voices that I heard in these early interviews led to the working out of an approach to further my research in understanding the inner subjective world of people with marginal intellectual limitations. This early work became the prototype for the 80 hours of in-depth conversations I had with 16 other such people over a period of two years and who comprise the subject group of the present study. My exploration also resulted in what I may call “signposts” of hermeneutic discovery. These became markers of my insights and understanding of the hermeneutic process and were woven into the narrative accounts of the lives of the people I later

describe. What follows, now, is my understanding of hermeneutics in its practical application to the human concerns that will be addressed in the unfolding study.

*The Signpost of the Question*

To ask a question in the hermeneutic sense is to open one's self to being. This was the ultimate hermeneutic enterprise for Heidegger. It is through questioning that we may enter into the fullness of who we are as humans and discover the ontological world of being; that is of being human. Gadamer points out that the question is not an interrogation or a cross-examination. These are the questions of positivism. The question is not a research question waiting to prove a negation. The hermeneutic question does not want as T. S. Eliott (1930\1962) says to "fix you with a formulated phrase" "to pin you against the wall."(p. 5) Rather the question is the journey which is itself the response to the question; the logos. The question is the "horizon" which allows us to see beyond that what we cannot see. Finally, the question is the opening of ourselves to its horizon. To be receptive and eager, as one would be in love, to receive the message from another. The question is not logical as it is passionate in its desire to come to itself. Asking the question, then, is to be led to a state of being which is prefigured by this genuine desire to understand. Here the constraints of hidden prejudice can be lifted to bring us to a new possibility of understanding. And so the question with which I started: that which asks what is the quality and substance of the experience of a certain group of people is shrouded in my lack of understanding, in my assumptions, and my prejudices. Sitting before these eight individuals in the glare of the filming lights I experienced the severity of asking a question. I experienced the privileging of its position and as Lev Vygotsky (1987) pointed out, I became aware of its potential to undermine, to put down, to make one feel inferior. I had to

understand that the question had to be presented in its genuine desire to know, to communicate, and as such to participate in the unfolding of its emotional journey. Sitting there on that privileged stoop, safe in the darkness, and behind the light, I had to experience the intrusiveness of my questions. Only in the forgiving gaze of those who sat before me was I able to be taken into their humanity, and through this taking in, their representations remain vividly sealed within me as part of my inner world.

*The Signpost of Conversation*

Gadamer (1982) says "being is language." (p. 487) Language gives us the possibility of conversation that propels the possibility of the question. Words linking together like box cars of a train construe different meanings than if they stood alone. Indeed pulled by the engine which is the conversation, they are led across the landscape of the horizon. But this train is not bound to its track. Rather, like a magic carpet ride, it flies off into the horizon and is taken by the surge of the winds. In this way the question may unfold in what Gadamer terms the "play of the game" in the journey of the conversation, in the "appropriation" or "letting go," the "dance which is the dancing of it." (pp. 101-134) I had to learn that asking the question in the hermeneutic stance meant abandoning a standard list of questions that predetermined the response in favour of allowing the questions to emerge from the ground, that is from the ground of conversation. Sometimes this sense of dialogue was achieved, other times human habit took me to a formulated list. Fortunately, I discovered that the conversation continues long after the physical event. In this way, I was able to continue to dialogue and re-engage with each person through my inner representations of those I have come to meet in conversation. In this way, I was able to experience the sense of what Gadamer means when he refers to "the conversation which we ourselves are." All of who we are, we are in

conversation, within ourselves and between others. It was this enduring sense of a conversational community within me that allowed understanding to emerge in me and thus pushed interpretation to the surface.

### *The Signpost of Metaphor*

Once on the conversational track, it was necessary to venture into the landscape of meaning and interpretation. The questions had to be asked "How do I understand or not understand the experience of another, how can their experience find expressions that are comprehensible and what is there waiting to be understood" in their inner lives. Given my explorations into the nature of meaning, highlighted in chapter two, I knew to return to the dialogical sense of meaning and thus to bridge the solitary self with the social world. Meaning about the inner lives of the people with marginal intellectual disabilities, if it were to arise, was sure to come to the surface through an interpretative lens that focused on how they experienced the social-cultural world within them. This act of interpretation in turn had to happen in and through language. But it was not a structural meaning or language that would address the questions of meaning that I sought. Nor was it the linguistic, cognitive structure of mind that could bring us to ontology; to the doorstep of uncovering the storied nature of their thought and the narratives that bring them to fulfill their historical and cultural destiny. Rather, this vehicle for knowing had to take a radical departure from science-based logic and linguistic structures. This radical departure had to move in the direction of what Amendo Giorgio calls the paralogical (1993) and into a realm of human experience that can capture the emotional, lived quality of being human in the particular ways we are. In this way the signpost of the metaphor came as welcome vista on this desert trek; one that had previously brought me to wandering through empty canyons of not knowing how to reach the lush terrain below. The metaphor burst forth

like the desert bloom and finally I could feel the infusion of “living thought” into this investigation. (Haskell, 1987) Metaphor came to me as the way to bridge one experience to another, to connect my being to another being in a way that surpasses the logic of our disconnected social worlds. Metaphor provided a way to reach into an imaginative space where I could link and join with others through cultural, collective symbols that make “joint action” (Shotter, 1989) and joint meaning possible. Metaphor, then, in this hermeneutic journey, became the currency for living thought where the act of understanding entails the psychic participation of the observer who by virtue of this participation becomes an observing subject. Metaphor thus bridges the subject and the object in a way that dislocates the meaning of objective knowing. The signpost of metaphor thus became the beacon by which the map of this journey could be seen in the absence of light. It was only through this poetic sense that I could fulfill the hermeneutic quest to leave science behind in the pursuit of another kind of truth seeking.

### *The Signpost of the Forest Path*

As I ventured further into the dialogical space with the 16 people I had invited to participate in conversation, I was confronted by a resistance, a defense within myself, that hung over the whole process of conversation making. I was in fact confronted by the lack of parameters in this conversational journey. I did not know how to ask a question, to create that space of fluid exchange where two people come together, each in the poverty and the richness of their subjectivity. The metaphor of a forest path came to me as a way into understanding and therefore as way to get beyond the impasse I felt within me. I began to understand this hermeneutic enterprise as a departure from the highway of information where preordained signs point the way and the life-world is viewed from a vehicle that hurries across the

horizon. I began to grasp this sense of leaving behind the concrete certainty of objective truth seeking and the notion that to learn about another's inner life world is to venture into an ecosystem that calls upon all the senses of knowing and seeing and not only the intellect. The forest path became a way for me to frame this journey of knowing and not knowing. It became a way for me to unearth the next level of my prejudice by moving further into it and hence moving deeper into the circle of knowledge. I soon realized that choosing the so-called forest path in some way confronted me with the possibility that I was yet another anthro-psychologist in search of "native stories;" ones that I could bring back to the concrete towers of academia as trophies of my esoteric interests. I had to realize that by entering the forest labyrinth I too became one of its creatures and with this I had to allow myself to enter into the sense of depression that many of its inhabitants experienced. It began to make sense that my resistance and lethargy was a defense against the pervasive poverty, isolation and painful life events that most of the participants lived through at various points in their lives. I had to come to terms with the fact that my star rises from the ashes of their often burned-out lives.

### *The Signpost of the I-Thou Relationship*

How does it happen that the distance between subject and object disappears between one person's humanity and another's so that a sense of authentic meeting can occur? I had to learn that such meeting was fleeting at best and that with all my best intentions I could not make it happen. This is how Martin Buber (1937) spoke about the I-Thou relationship. It is also the hermeneutic enterprise that Gadamer developed in his work *Truth and Method*. (1975) Living in the I-Thou relation means allowing the mystery of being a self in relation to others come to the surface. It is in this experience of intersubjectivity where, in the common space between two people, authentic



meeting may occur. In this space, I am able through the vehicle of empathy to experience myself as the extension of someone's world, to feel the separateness of our beings yet at the same time the intermingling of our shared existence within a social reality.

In the counter position, the I-It relationship, the other person is the object of my subject. In this way of relating, I do not participate in the dialogical interplay between myself and another where our common humanity has the opportunity to touch through the affective dimension. Rather, I look upon another's world through the lens of distance and void of this affective relational experience. In Gadamer's terms there exists three levels of the I-Thou relationship. In the first case a person is viewed in terms of categories, types or generalizations. At this level of relating prejudices do not come to light because they are trapped behind the veil of objective analysis. In the second level the Thou is recognized as a person but their experiencing of the other is reflective rather than immediate. In this case, a person may claim to know another's position better than him or herself and there is a struggle for domination or recognition. The third form of the "I-Thou" relation is the highest form of hermeneutic experience. Gadamer calls this "effective historical consciousness" and its realization the "fusion of the horizons." In this form of relating "Thou" is seen truly as Thou because the other's distinctiveness is acknowledged. The other's claim is not overlooked, and the conversation embodies a spirit of openness.

The desire to meet my subjects within a conversational horizon forced me to participate in the conversational journey within my own being. I had to make a commitment to my own process of self reflection which in turn led me further away from any attempt to buoy the relevance of my project by inserting

empirical capital into its currency. In this way I was led to let interpretation and understanding become a free flowing experience in order to test if its own currency of value within the systems of human knowledge could emerge. What now follows is the working out of this process.

### **Setting the Early Parameters for Research**

The emphasis of my initial research was to explore this notion of emergent “voices” in the texts of my interviews with the 16 people selected for my study. Initially, I understood this notion of voice as a construct that could root out the clusters of characteristics that I was looking for in the people whose inner lives I wanted to investigate. In particular, I thought that these extracted voices could demonstrate how the people of my study represented themselves, and how they were represented by the world. I thus began to view them through the constructs of social competence and social disability. I wanted to know if there were aspects of the person, or voices, that spoke in favour of the person’s individual competence or alternately their disability. I wanted to find a way to give up the notion of a single vision of what it means to have a disability and to show that a person is not a disability as such; that they are not the construct that embraces them. Rather, like all of us, they are complex structures of strengths and weaknesses. I wanted to tease out what were those strengths and those weaknesses so that we could begin to speak in a broader sense about the factors that make a person socially disabled or enabled. A person who has no math skills, for example, but is able to use a calculator effectively sheds one aspect of a disabling experience. It was in this Vygotskian enterprise that I hoped to investigate the enabling and disabling experiences of people who had been so labeled as having a marginal intellectual disability. I wanted to know also if the fact that their disability was only marginal and not severe or even

moderate placed them in a special category in life; if there was something special and different to name about their experience.

The method described by Brown and Gilligan (1992) was to be elaborated in an effort to listen to the voices that emerge from the stories people tell about their lives. They describe their approach this way: "Recasting psychology as a relational practice, we attend to the relational dimensions of our listening, speaking, taking in, interpreting, and writing about the words and the silences, the stories and the narratives of other people. Our way into relationship with another is through the avenue of voice..." (p. 22)

Their "listener's guide" (p. 25) was to provide the framework for listening and interpreting the material as it emerged. Essentially, the reading guide is not a rating tool but more of a perspective employed in the analysis of a text. It centres on an interpretative account of narrative and brings to the front the place of subjectivity and perspective in the analysis of human action and discourse. In this way, it focuses upon the relationship between the narrative and the reader and claims that strictly objective analysis is neither possible nor desirable. The reading guide is based on the premise that a person speaks in more than one voice. That is to say, the self is contained of many voices that reflect different parts of experience. Interpretation of a narrative involves the lifting out these voices, and requires a voice sensitive method. This method is based on staying in relation to the subject which can be seen as entering the hermeneutic circle, and then listening through a series of readings for the polyphony of voice. Listening for the story, for the self, and for how they are in relation to others, allows for meaning to unfold, for "a way of tracing and untangling the relationships that contribute to psychic life." (p. 27)

This notion of voice came easily to me as a poetic device to understand the complexity of inner experience. We all have “voices” stirring within us as ghosts or memories from our past. The incorporation of voices within us can be seen as the way we are able to take the world inside us linguistically and to prolongate a representational memory of this world. In a certain way if we did not have voices within us we would have no past. We would be caught in a steady stream of consciousness unable to retain an emotional memory of the landscape of our experiences. There are, of course, more sophisticated ways to describe and document this dialogic/linguistic capacity of mind. (Hermans, Kempen and Van Loon, 1994) I think this was the aim of chapter two to highlight. But ultimately the hermeneutic striving requires that our understanding reach through hard theory as such and into the realm of some kind of “folk” understanding of the inner structure of mind. (Bruner, 1990) In this way, the narrative structure of mind can unfold in the everydayness and what Brown and Gilligan call “the layered nature” of its experience. (p. 11) This is the hermeneutic enterprise; to reveal the hiddenness of what is unusual and remarkable in the everydayness of experience through a medium that captures the layers of emotional and sensorial memories. The notion of voice allows this narrative quality of mind to find expression. It is readily transparent and accessible as a meaning structure that we can all identify with. This sense that we all carry voices within us. Sometimes these voices may seem like selves within a self, other times they carry the tone of another’s voice, sometimes disguised through the voice of the first person, sometimes not.

Brown and Gilligan’s voice-centered approach provided a vehicle to explore this notion of voice in the texts of my conversational journey with the participants. Their method entailed asking four questions: Who is speaking? In what body? Telling what story about relationship—from whose perspective? In

what societal and cultural frameworks? (p. 21) This would involve at least four readings. The first two readings entailed reading for the plot and the voice of the narrator or the self. Here the intention was to listen for the story, to hear it unfold, and to let it resonate within as it touches us in one way or another. Next, the person is located within that story. How do we see them in this unfolding narrative? We try to locate them in their individual personhood, in the attempt to ground ourselves in the I-Thou context. The third and fourth readings for Brown and Gilligan looked for the relational aspects of voice; that is, how do people experience and talk about their relationships with others.

As the present research proceeded, this notion of listening for voice began to lose its early definition as a construct to categorize the inner capacities or incapacities of people with marginal disabilities. Instead these "voices" began to speak on their own terms and challenged the attempt to go only half way in allowing the conversational journey to fly in its own direction. I began to realize that the earlier described magic carpet of conversation could not fly if the strings of empiricism anchor it to the ground. Moving more to the metaphor of a flying kite, the conversational journey must be allowed to be taken up in the surge of the winds while remaining firmly attached to a hand that both yields to the movement, yet pulls back when it threatens to soar too high or dip too low.

The research then began to seek this sense of flying while ultimately remaining grounded so that there would be something useful, empirical, and objective to talk about. It would be no use to talk only of one's experience of flying this kite. The way it would feel as it took its dips in turns, the memories it produced and so on and so forth. I can and must talk about my own subjective experience of holding on to the strings of the kite flying. I can

demonstrate the flying of this kite. It is also there to be seen on its own terms flying high above and inspiring its own thoughts, memories, ideas in others. This metaphor perhaps then describes three things the research hoped to accomplish. To describe subjective experience; to demonstrate the hermeneutic action of interpretative research; and to let the world and experiences of the people included in my conversational study be seen on their own terms.

### **Voices That Emerge From the Ground: Leaving the Compass at Home**

#### *The Juncture of Psychoanalytic Influence*

My searching in this project took me down many other avenues of knowing. One important juncture was the path that opened to the world of psychoanalytic thought. Here lay a vast universe of discourse that lead me further into the imaginative space of the mind. In its negative possibilities psychoanalysis leads us downward towards an archeology of understanding people. In this instance psychoanalysis merely mimics science. But in its more fruitful possibilities psychoanalysis leads us across the horizon into the intentional space of mind. In this context I was able to forge an understanding of how the internal world emerges from within the rich of soil of the mind. The notion of voice constructions could now be understood as this fundamental capacity of the mind to take within itself the representations of others and to split itself in many directions in order to protect its frontiers. Moreover, the abundance of rich thought in object relations, self psychology, and the inter-subjective schools as well as the revision of the notions of the transference-counter transference dynamic furthered my understanding of the possibility of the imaginative space between subject and object. This relational matrix establishes the fundamental psychic interrelationship between myself and the object or person outside/inside myself. Object relations theory brings new meaning to the relationship between self and other and locates it in the

dynamic activity of being human. As a theory it maintains that as humans we are constantly in a relational field between our internal and external environments. The child, and the adult, take within themselves a host of internalized others who become objects in his mental and emotional world. This theory became a useful clinical construct by which to understand in a more technical way how people develop an internal world.(see Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983) But the overall aim of this project denies an attempt to move into the thickets of psychoanalytic theory and as such the discourse remains more at the conversational level of folk knowledge and story telling.

### **The Interpretative Process**

The moment this project was set in motion, interpretation began. It did not occur has a science applied to a problem. Interpretation could not be an analysis pure and simple of the events or narratives committed to text. There was no interest in analyzing personality, sickness, pathology, or deficiency. There was no interest in forming interpretations that added to any particular empirical epistemology in the field of "mental retardation" no desire to make shining discoveries. Rather all these paradigms were meant to be called into question. The interpretation here is not meant to be a deconstruction of personality or psyche, but a de-construction of knowledge and all the institutions of western ways of knowing. The interpretative act is thus meant to be harsh on the systems of assumptions where prejudice is sedimented, and gentle with the humanity that is bound together by them. The interpretative act is thus focused on radical reformulation of what is taken for granted and of seeing things in a different way. We can learn more about the human soul and the human psyche in a Bergman film than we can in a clinical assessment. We do not leave out the poignant, the tragic, the beautiful. Rather this project wishes to go Bergman all the way; to weave through psyche and soul casting muted colours

of light over what is poignant and what is mundane in the hope of revealing some dimension of being human and thus elevating the nobility of lives on the boundary.

The radical interpretation is audacious and gives of the self. It does not hide behind the science of knowing. Rather it pushes one's own vulnerability forward. The interpretation must be transparent of one's own being. This underlines how the texts of the conversations were to be approached. But it also became apparent that a tool must be used to organize the clusters of impressions and interpretations forming from the body of the conversations. I could not rely solely on intuitive process. I did need a method of sorts to structure and give sense to the plethora of material that had been documented in some two hundred pages of conversations that had been committed to the written text. And so I returned to the work of Brown and Gilligan for a way into this conversational reality. They provided a demonstration of a method that showed how multiple readings of a given set of texts or recorded conversations could penetrate through the layered nature of personality and thought. And so the project I embarked on became an enterprise of multiple readings that lifted new levels of interpretation from these multiple perspectives. As author of this work, I move between and within my own voices from first person to third and then at times to the inclusive we position. Sometimes I place myself in space and time in the past, other times my voice speaks in the present and as I move from past to present I create this dialectic for the future unfolding of the project. Weaving between these positions allows me to look from different perspectives and to enter into the multi-dimensional and non-linear experience of reality that a historical consciousness dictates. I am able to enter into a horizon of situated time that moves between the layers of past, present, and future. Sometimes I must



comment from the position of my own subjectivity. Other times I reach out to the community of readers and researchers while in other instances a more distant grounding of the it perspective is called for. In these ways the multiple reading process proceeded and proceeds. The visiting and revisiting of these landscapes produced several perspectives. Each will now unfold in the evolution of this conversational study.

### **Reading for the Story**

I read each text as one would a chapter of a book and then again as a kind of short story unto itself. The hermeneutic circle requires this dialectic from the general to the particular, from the word to the sentence to the paragraph and finally to the full embodiment of the story. In this way, I was seeking to weave through the threads of each life story unfolding before me and then to view each text within a certain albeit limited totality of other texts. In other words, I knew I could never draw the complete story, never arrive at some definitive understanding of lives on the boundaries. I could only describe a certain fleeting landscape that nevertheless offered tremendous opportunities for understanding a particular way of being. Again the premise holds that the particular holds the general and vice versa. To tell one story or 16 in one story does not tell all the stories in a quantifiable sense. But the kernel of being human can perhaps be seen in each dynamic core that is unearthed in the interpretive process. And so each narrative was read in search of the kernel of truth that could perhaps be traced to the wider field of those who have lived on the boundaries of the so called normal world. Each life was a story and together with other stories a tale was told that could reveal what life might be like, in so many different ways, for the people who agreed to join this conversational journey...again, of which we all are.

Tracing each story could have taken so many routes. But like any journey one stream is followed and then another. Decisions are made by the voice of “good judgment” but then threads are lost only to be found again. This is the way the stories were pursued. Each time the question was asked. What theme(s) emerge from this landscape? What story is being told and what are my inner reverberations to this plot. Is it sad, happy, confused? As Brown and Gilligan call for, the who, what, when, where and why of the narrative was looked for. (p. 27) This was accomplished by highlighting words, sentences, and phrases from each transcript that in some way addressed these basic questions. Later all of these were pulled from each text and combined into a single document to be read in its totality.

### **Reading for the Voice of the Narrator**

After reading for the plot, the observer looks for the voice of the narrator. We ask who is speaking, in what landscape of circumstance and from what vantage point. We want to know how the narrator addresses him or her self and how they place themselves within their social, cultural world. In looking for the self, or the “I” in each story, we try to enter into the realm of reciprocity explored by Merleau-Ponty (1945\1981); the “I-Thou” relation where we can view the other as a separate being who is fundamentally connected to my own sense of being. In this way, we do not look at the narrator as disengaged from our own reality. Rather we see our own through theirs. Once again, this means that we do not stand back behind the lights as directors of a play. We join in the playing by engaging in the dynamic conversation with the Thou of their experience. And so in a similar way the texts were read with a view to locate the speaking subject, the I, the Thou, who was in each and all the texts. Again all of these words, sentences and phrases were highlighted and lifted to form the body of a text that spoke specifically to this sense of self.

### Reading for the Voice of Deficit

After reading for the story and the self, understanding and interpretation moved further into the dialogical space of the conversation. Here the voice of deficit emerges. In this case, we look for how a person frames his or her life in terms of the disability they hold inside them. It was earlier observed that in many cases the voice of deficit spoke clearly through the texts of conversations with the people of this study. This was the early observation of the study that was initially framed within a more positivistic understanding of disability. In other words the early enterprise of the research that looked for how people are disabled became an enterprise that looked for how people speak in a voice of disability; in other words how they take their disability within them as a voice, internalized, and perhaps woven into their identity. The voice of deficit, lifted from the text is thus able to be seen as the creature it is; one that embeds itself like a ringworm into the flesh, the host of the being, and then slowly makes itself invisible to the flesh by merging with it. The voice of deficit extracted from the text of being reveals itself in this invasive, invisible quality. And in this fashion, I was able to listen, to read and to then to look for these words, phrases and paragraphs that spoke within this voice. These were extracted, and then as the exercise now dictated were drawn together as the telling of this one perspective, this one tale.

### The Voice of Competence

In keeping with the notion of narrative construction of identity we acknowledge that more than one voice occupies the inner space of our humanity. The voice of competence now so called is able to emerge, for we know that the sacredness of the being holds its integrity in safe keeping and pushes it forward when the terrain is lush while concealing it when the thorny bushes of life press upon its vitality. The visioning of the interpretive guide

now looks behind the thorns of deficit to draw into the open the resilient spirit of life and strength that may have gone into hiding. The voice of competence speaks in muted, hushed tones but only as a tactic of preservation against the abrasive, ambitious voice of deficit and the place it takes in the inner spaces of one's personal identity. The reader of the tale has now trained her thoughts and her listening, and is able to lift the delicate voices within these voices. The voice of competence finds its own chapter in this multi dimensional voyage through time, space and spirit.

### **The Voice of Confusion**

All is not calm on this voyage. The directional winds of the conversation do not always move in harmony. Rather the forces within push and pull, sending the craft into a spin. The person does not know how to situate themselves in this controversy of identity. They are confused and tormented by the Voice that will not tell them what they really are, what their identity can really be. They are intelligent beings in the shell of a backward persona, a body that represents itself as handicapped, or slow or deficient in some way. The world mirrors back this reality in every turn, and glossed store windows that remind them of success and their lack of it. And yet the resilient inner voice of their being, and perhaps other voices from their past grandmother, a friend, a father or mother reassure them that theirs is an intelligent being; one that sees through the nuances of the privileged world and one that can negotiate the terms of this world, albeit sometimes at a cost. The voice of confusion takes its place in this journey and becomes another tale to be told, another viewpoint to reckon.

### **The Voice of the Other**

Listening for the voice of the other allows the reader to observe how culture and the world of others becomes represented within the dialogical space

of the inner world. The voice of other is sometimes integrated into the personal voice, the I, and sometimes it is not. We may hear a mother speak, a sister, a teacher or we may hear any of these persons speak within the voice of the speaking self; the I. We observe that the inner world is inhabited by a community of others and we seek to locate these others in our attempt see how much space they take, whether theirs is a friendly or menacing voice and ultimately whether they enhance or suppress the vitality of their inner world and self representation. The voice of the other thus moves further into the dialogical space; the world which inhabits us. It is a question to be posed how much of this inner space belongs to the voice of the other. For some, the voice of the other is the only speaking voice, the only real self encapsulated in a shell like existence of a being we call a person. On this voyage, we give the voice of other its due and we recognize its power to sail this ship. But we do not claim that it is the ship itself even if it is all of its materials. The voice of the other takes its place in this interpretive work, this voyage, that seeks to chart new horizons of understanding in the lives and inner worlds of the people who participate in this conversational study.

### **The Inner Speaking Voice**

Another voice weaves through this tapestry. It is a voice conjured from the possibilities of imagination. It draws upon the capacity of mind to create and recreate new possibilities for being in the world. Unlike the negative function of the inner speaking voice that has been well documented in the annals of mental pathology, (Firestone, 1987) The current application addresses this function of mind in its resilient capacity. The inner speaking voice in the applied application is not a hallucination or delusion. It does not, in this context, belong to the realm of pathology but to the resiliency of the inner core of the person to preserve the integrity of their being. And so this voyage

stumbles upon this fascinating jewel that comes to the surface simply by listening and then listening again. We listen to the imagination, linger upon fantasy and search for the metaphoric constructions that emerge from the soil from what turns out to be a rich inner world. In this context we look for actual voice constructions to be revealed. Current research has explored the experience of inner voice amongst groups of people and supports the notion of inner voice as a resilient function of the mind. Myrtle Heery (1989), for example, is one researcher who conducted a study on a normal population that claimed to experience this phenomenon. She found that fairly stable categories of inner voice experiences began to emerge. These ranged from inner voice as parts of a fragmented self to the experience of an inner dialogue that provides guidance and finally the experience of inner voice as a means to a higher sense of being or belief system. In particular her study highlighted the adaptive function of the experience of inner voice as well as its relatively common occurrence. In another but related vein an earlier ethnographic study focused on the dream life of a mentally retarded man. (Peters, 1983). This case study revealed that his subject used dreams as adaptive strategies to social circumstances. The present study looks for these voices that speak in an undisguised manner.

### **The Voice of Countertransference**

The voice of countertransference is to not to be understood in its strict psychoanalytic usage of the term. Rather it is borrowed from psychoanalysis as a way to signify what happens in the inner life of the researcher while she is in relation to her subjects. This dynamic of being in relation to another, allows for a point of empathic entry into the world of the participant. As such it is seen as a vital process in the interpretive process. The researcher, interpreter and writer of lives can draw from the reservoir of their own inner experience in

order to understand the inner lives of others. As such, this project attempts to track the voice of the author and records her inner responses to the narratives she receives.

### **The Section Leads and the Chorus Resounds**

We look for all of these voices, one by one, and then we draw them all together to understand the fullness of their sound. We want to hear the individual voices, perhaps as instruments each in their section. And so we set out to hear the voices who will speak through their person three by three. We give names behind the voice, describe their physical and social worlds and the contexts they live in. We do not want this project to describe disengaged, disembodied subjects or subjectivity. Rather we move between the dialogical, social and psychological space and into the world of everyday affairs to describe lives on the boundary as we understand it.

In summary, this chapter attempted to provide in broad strokes the philosophical and psychological principles that came to guide the study at hand. It further attempted to integrate these philosophical premises into a psychological framework and to outline what might be considered a decidedly hermeneutic approach in the understanding of human experience. Finally the chapter attempted to push theory into the background, allowing it to recede and making it silent, in order that a more fundamental creative enterprise can take its place. Leaving the body of hermeneutic theory, the following chapter moves closer to the life worlds of the people who are considered in this study. In this endeavour it will be useful to highlight the empirical aspects of their world from a larger perspective and to present the issues at hand that determine their categorization in the world and how this impacts on their state of being. The

following chapter thus moves to articulate the politics of being labeled or not labeled mentally slow.



## Chapter 4

### **Mild Intellectual Deficiency and Social Disability: An Overview of the Issues**

As with other disciplines, the clinical and theoretical frameworks of current conceptions of intellectual disability have emerged from positivist paradigms that have guided social thought over the last one hundred-years. The field of mental disability has also embraced approaches, conceptual views, and concrete practices that reflect a view of the disabled person as what Lax (1994) has referred to as “reified objects” rather than people whose lives unfold within a rich narrative and contextual community. This chapter explores some of the current conceptions in this field as they relate to the particular definitional, therapeutic and social concerns of people who function at the higher end of the intellectual disability continuum; those who have been designated to have high, mild or borderline intellectual limitations. Typically, but not exclusively, these are people who tend to score in the 70 to 80 IQ range on standardized intelligence tests. It has not yet perhaps been made obvious that this thesis maintains that this group of people has specific concerns that are somewhat different from more seriously mentally disabled people and warrant separate consideration in the fields of research and practice. This belief, of course, has a long thread in my years of “clinical” work with this population. I remember in the beginning when I was introduced to this difference and devoted my energies to a special service for them. To this day there are great political concerns because diagnosis is often equal to dollars and dollars are sadly equal to support and assistance. But at the outset of this chapter and perhaps this entire work I am faced with a paradox that pushes towards a contradiction in the very idea of identifying a sub population and hence “reifying” their experience into yet another objectivistic epistemology. I am confounded by the

vicious circle that is created in the effort to bring out into the open the existence of this group in the hope of contributing to less marginalizing experiences and the fact that I may be widening their marginalization by naming their experience and placing it in a further definitional category. In one breath, this chapter moves to the naming of experience, to choosing definitional categories and diagnostic labels and in the next it explores the social and emotional repercussions of carrying such labels in the portfolio of one's life. The chapter moves then from definition to a rebellion against definition; from suggesting diagnostic categories to embracing the conception of the social construction of such and all categories of human life experience. This vicious circle is consistent with hermeneutic knowledge about the circularity of all knowing and of the prejudice that all-knowing implies. The way to get beyond the enclosed space of this prejudice seems to be in the ever widening strokes of the question and the evolving discourse of the conversation it entails. In this way, this chapter moves from issues of definition and identification to making an attempt at understanding the social underpinnings of intellectual disabilities. In this sense, caution is raised about elevating the experience of the slightly handicapped above those who are more seriously handicapped and in the final analysis we must maintain that the further construction of categories perpetuates the viscous cycles of the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Nevertheless as a less perfect and temporary identification we can work from the edge of marginal disabilities towards an eventual restructuring of the notions of all disability. It is also suggested that all learning is in fact social and that as a prescription for change we must look towards the creation of adequate social learning environments where human relating is seen as pivotal to intellectual development. Beyond this we will consider what can now be termed the social construction of disability and how the social world contributes and creates socially disabling experiences. We will seek these

narrative constructions through the notion of “voice” which will become pivotal to the research as it unfolds. Finally in this chapter we will explore this notion of voice as a framework to begin to understand the largely ignored intra-psychic experiences of the population in question. We will ask what are the voices that emerge in the texts of the marginalized and we will also explore the literal experience of hearing an inner voice. In this light, we will explore the mediums of imagination, of metaphor, and imaginary inner voices as positive, resilient, responses to disabling experiences of the “other;” in other words, the social, cultural world. This adaptive function of the mind will be seen as an effort to protect the resilient core of the person.

### **Is There a Need for Re-Definition?**

It is apparent that present definitions and diagnostic categories of mental deficiency widely applied by health care professionals do not adequately address or are irrelevant to the needs of people who function at the mild or borderline levels of intellectual disability. People who fall into this category represent a distinct subgroup who often escape formal identification, yet remain at risk in society. They escape identification because they do not necessarily exhibit obvious deficits, yet they remain at risk because they sometimes cannot cope with the demands and pressures of an increasingly complex urban society. Traditional definitions have failed to explicitly identify this population because they rely upon psychometric measures that are ambiguous and narrow in scope. IQ scores, for example, generally do not provide a situational or qualitative description of the cognitive, emotional, organic, or environmental factors which can be seen to contribute to a more generalized type of social disability common among people with mild and borderline intellectual limitations. Moreover, standardized intelligence tests are ambiguous in their classification of intelligence levels, particularly for those who fall into the “grey

zone" category of "borderline." Consider, for example, that all of the major psychological and psychiatric associations agree on the definition of mental retardation as being limited to people whose intelligence quotients on standardized tests are 69 or below. And yet it is also known that from a clinical point of view there are no clear boundaries.

### **Defining Intelligence**

The concepts of intelligence and its measurement have been the subjects of wide debate and controversy. One main problem is that we do not all agree on the nature of intelligence let alone how to measure it. Nevertheless, Western scientists since the latter part of the 18th Century have continued on a fairly linear thread in the pursuit of ways to measure intelligence. Two major influences in development of intelligence testing were Charles Spearman who found that a "g" or general factor of intelligence could be determined and L. L. Thurstone who, on the other hand, determined that intelligence could be measured through a small set of relatively independent abilities. Howard Gardner (1983) in his book *Frames of Mind* points out that these theories drew from equally valid statistical models that nevertheless arrived at different conclusions. Intelligence, then, can be viewed as something that is relative to statistical or other interpretations. Gardner himself argues for a theory of multiple intelligences. He says "it becomes necessary to say, once and for all, that there is not, and there can never be, a single irrefutable and universally accepted list of human intelligences." (p. 60) Nevertheless, it is clear that a certain portion of society, and presumably a portion of all societies, functions at a subnormal level. A first question we might ask is whether cognitive subnormality is a condition proper to itself or whether it requires a social or other context. Zigler, Balla, and Hodapp (1984) for example, present the argument that mental retardation exists whether or not someone is so labelled.

These authors hold the view that intelligence and intellectual deficiency can be measured through an intelligence quotient. They argue that IQs remain relatively stable over time and that they represent a fairly accurate criterion for the assessment of mental retardation. The delineation of the boundaries for the assessment of mental retardation for these theorists is very clear; namely two standard deviations below the mean on a standardized intelligence test representing an IQ score below that of 70. They carefully point out that the IQ definition safeguards against the inclusion, and hence the stigmatization, of those who fall into the "borderline" category on intelligence tests. While this may be true, it will be argued that those who fall into this category also suffer certain consequences from being in a kind of no person's land. Another view, and one that is generally adopted as an operational definition by service providers, maintains that retardation is a status that is determined by an interaction between the individual and the environment (Barnett, 1986). Under this view, an IQ score alone is insufficient to determine the presence of mental retardation. The exact definition most commonly adopted by mental health and government service providers states: "Mental retardation refers to significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behaviour and manifested during the developmental period." (Grossman, 1977) This three criteria definition offers more fluid boundaries and avoids arbitrary cutoff points in the assessment of mental retardation (Lundy, 1983). However, it similarly does not address the problems of definition of the borderline category since significant subaverage intelligence is usually determined to be below an IQ of 70. The same Association recently, however, revised the above definition in order to eliminate such an arbitrary cutoff, and to include some people who fall in the 70 to 75 IQ range. (American Association on Mental Retardation, 1991) In the revised definition an attempt is made to abolish the concept of levels of retardation based on cognitive

impairment in favour of levels of support required across four domains. (Schalock, Stark et al., 1994). But the borderline category remains problematic because there is a lack of clarity about how to conceptualize the needs and requirements of this group as well as a reluctance to include them in any category of research. A cross-province Canadian government epidemiological study on mental retardation, for example, did not include, with the exception of Manitoba, the category of borderline in their statistics on prevalence (Minister of National Health & Welfare, 1988). Those who support the multi-dimensional or interactional view argue that small variables can make the difference between being labeled mentally retarded or not. (Zigler et al., 1984) The intention of this view is clearly to devise a system that will unlabel people. Its proponents maintain that mildly retarded people slip into the mainstream of society, shedding the stigma of being labeled handicapped and profiting from the generic resources available to them. (Lundy, 1983; Tarjan, 1973) One investigator refers to the "six hour children" who lose their handicap label outside the classroom. (Lundy, 1983) He reports that studies have shown that the prevalence of the mildly retarded increases steadily through the school years, then dramatically decreases in the adult years. This same investigator wonders whether or not it is the system itself that is to blame for higher incidence during the school years. He says: "One can speculate whether these represent late bloomers who catch up in their later development enough to pass as normal, or whether their impaired adaptive behaviour is circumstantial, more a function of deficiencies in the system." (p. 5)

While the adverse effects of stigma and labelling have been well documented, it is less clear what repercussions have taken place as a result of being "unlabelled" or of melding imperceptibly into the mainstream of society. It is equally unclear whether, for some of these people, their labels have not

simply been replaced by other labels such as itinerant, alcoholic, marginal, criminal, weird, strange, disturbed. (Wallander, Hubert, 1987)

The discussion and debate about the measurement and prevalence of mental retardation is not only of clinical interest. Regardless of what the virtues of unlabelling are, it is clear that political or administrative concerns, and particularly fiscal realities, have as much to do with the defining and undefining of a group of people. The normalization movement, (Wolfensberger, 1973) for example, was largely interpreted by governments through managerial eyes who thought that deinstitutionalization should be "cheaper." These same bodies proceeded to dump thousands of people into the community under the guise of integration and deinstitutionalization; the results often leading to desperate living situations. (Elkin, 1978; Lambert, 1974) The previously mentioned Canadian epidemiological report (1988) admits that the prevalence of mild mental retardation may be underestimated. However, the possibility is offered that the vast number of mildly retarded people are socially-culturally retarded and that "amelioration" during the school years may actually increase their IQ scores therefore eliminating their handicap status. This, despite the wide knowledge that high school experiences of mildly intellectually handicapped people are often seen to contribute to their overall sense of failure, further pushing them into social dysfunction and marginality. (Wallander & Hubert, 1987; Zetlin & Hosseini, 1989)

Another, more realistic, view is that at least some of these "integrated" individuals slip into the blur of marginality once they leave the school system. One post-school follow up study of mildly learning handicapped adults, for example, found that these individuals had no clear course that they were following and that they were generally floundering in uncertainty and anxiety

about their futures. (Zetlin, Hosseini, 1989) In another domain, the World Health Organization (WHO) expert committee on mental retardation (1968) strongly opposed the inclusion of people with borderline IQ scores in the definition of mental retardation, on the basis that at least 16% of the population would be represented. This, they felt would qualitatively alter the services designated for the mentally handicapped and would create a "repository for other conditions." (Clarke & Clarke, 1975)

The question remains, however, as to what these other conditions might be and how they may be described. Can we really assume that the vast majority of these people, who function at a marginal level of intelligence successfully blend into the mainstream of society? The scant research that exists, suggests the contrary. The relationship between delinquency and learning difficulties, for example, has begun to be established. (Crealock, 1987)

Few attempts have been made to systematically describe the characteristics and needs of people who function at a marginal level of intellectual ability. Despite the dangers of excessive or inappropriate labelling, it is important to address the lack of definition and identification of this population, since the lack of definition leads to a lack of preventive and support services, and to the misdirection of existing services and, worse, possibly exaggerates their marginality in society. It is not a binding, stigmatizing label that need be developed; clearly these individuals are already marked with one or more labels. Rather, we need a descriptive, qualitative data base that will be effective and efficient in identifying their needs; one that will produce a profile of their disabling experiences and will aid in the prescription of the social conditions and community settings required to overcome their marginality in society.



### **Characteristics of People with Mild and Borderline Handicaps**

Regardless of where the boundaries fall in the delineation of the levels of intellectual disability, it is clear that intellectual ability or disability are not dichotomous states but gradations along a continuum. At some point however, level of disability approximates the norm in such a way that a qualitative leap is made in terms of the type and level of problems that such individuals present. Individuals who are more clearly retarded often present problems specific to their cognitive impairment. They often need assistance, care, supervision, and training. Mildly and borderline retarded individuals on the other hand, have a compound of social, psychological, intellectual, and environmental factors in their overall disability. Clarke & Clarke (1975) and Macmillan, et al. (1996) make the argument that mild mental retardation should be conceptualized as a diagnostic category. They call for a new term that captures the more localized difficulties in cognitive reasoning as compared to the more pervasive impairments of the moderately or severely disabled. In a similar way, Greshman, Macmillan and Bocian (1996) conducted a study that compared the characteristics between students identified as having learning disabilities and those identified as mildly mentally retarded. They found that while certain differences are apparent between these groups, they have many more similarities. Specifically, the two groups could not be distinguished on measures relating to social competence, problem behaviour or school history. Although studies on this population are generally scant, a growing amount of research is pointing to the multiplicity of their problems resulting from cognitive, organic and social factors. Specifically, research is now pointing to social-emotional deficits as the more pervasive disorder with limited intellectual abilities taking second place. (Epstein, Cullinan, & Polloway, 1986; Reiss, Levitan, McNally, 1982) Despite the fact that prevalence of

maladjustment has been established with this population, data remains limited on the specific problems that this group experiences. (Epstein et al., 1986)

One study, however, investigated the types of problems presented to counsellors by people with mild and borderline intellectual limitations. The investigator noted that little attempt has been made to systematically or empirically identify the actual problems presented in counselling by this population. (Wittmann, Prout, Strohmer, 1989) Their research found that a wide variety of personal and social problems were presented to counsellors by this group of people, with interpersonal adjustment issues being the most salient. Other clinicians and researchers have documented the vulnerability this population shows towards developing emotional disturbance and social maladjustment. (Epstein, et al., 1986; Laman & Reiss, 1987; Reiss et al., 1982)

One study conducted amongst Canadian army recruits, for instance, found that 47% of people with IQs below 75 developed psychiatric symptoms. (Weaver, 1946) Indeed, at the level of mild and borderline intellectual intelligence, it is often difficult to ascertain whether the primary disability is in fact intellectual or emotional. The concept of pseudo-retardation is one example of such a crossover of conditions. (Bialer, 1970 as cited in Reiss et al., 1982) This concept maintains that the retardation, in question, would not have occurred without emotional impairment. It further emphasizes that emotional disturbances can cause irreversible impairments in intellectual functioning. Still other researchers have documented the high rate of depression among people with intellectual handicaps. (Laman & Reiss, 1987)

These researchers found correlation between depressed mood, poor social skills, and low levels of social support amongst people with mild and

borderline intellectual handicaps. They also found a significant correlation between depressed moods and antisocial behaviours such as deception and social manipulation. This study points out the frequent discrepancy between the perceiver and the perceived. Adaptive behaviour problems have been well documented, but the intra-psychic experiences of this group of people have been largely ignored. (Potter, 1965)

### **Clinical and Re-adaptation Issues**

The question of why these people's emotional and psychological processes have been ignored needs to be considered. Why is mental retardation considered to be the "Cinderella of Psychiatry." (Potter, 1965) Several faulty assumptions and prejudices seem to be at work. First, is the misconception that the condition of mental retardation precludes or overshadows other mental problems. It is only in the fairly recent past, for example, that attention has been given to the existence of the dual diagnosis conditions of mental retardation and psychiatric disturbance. (Dosen, 1993) The work of Sovner and Hurley (1983) emphasize the need for better diagnostic techniques with this population. Beyond this lies the prejudice that people with lower intelligence cannot respond to psychotherapeutic interventions. Psychiatrists Paniagna and DeFazio (1983) presented several case studies that illustrate the types of emotional problems that people with borderline intelligence experience. They found that this population, in particular, experience numerous problems in daily living and face considerable stress factors in their lives, without receiving the same benefits or assistance that people with more severe handicaps receive. They also conclude that this group of people have more in common with the non-retarded population in terms of their psychological make-up. They also argue against the heavy use of behaviour therapy with this population who, they feel, are capable of responding to other forms of psychotherapy. Symington

(1988) presents one such case study of a young retarded man who underwent psychoanalysis. This case study illustrates how a traditional model can be modified to make a psychotherapeutic treatment accessible to this population.

### **Mental Deficiency as Social Disability**

The field of mental retardation has largely remained cloistered from the emerging new traditions in social and psychological inquiry, that have been highlighted in previous chapters. It has failed to make significant gains in conceptual developments and relies on the faltering bedrock of behaviourism in its global approaches to understanding and dealing with people with intellectual limitations. In this way, Potts and Howard (1986) claimed that clinicians looked for magic solutions in their adherence to the venerable IQ score which paved the way for the behaviourism and subsequent normalization philosophy that emerged. Such a philosophy draws its roots from the objectivist epistemology of the positivistic tradition through its persistent interpretation of behavioural and quantifiable objectives with very little results. Scotti, Evans and Walker, (1991) for example, in scanning the research found only forty four out of four hundred and three studies that produced positive results from behavioural interventions. Potts and Howard express concern that the equally misguided replacement cognitive approach threatens to be the new paradigm for clinical and readaptation practices in the nineties. They call for increased attention to the psychological issues that such a population face that is, to the chronic lack of self esteem that they experience as well as the disabling conditions that their social world often produces. Rosenthal (1992) for example has found that cognitive deficits and chronic failure influences the psychosocial development of adolescents creating what has been termed secondary effects. Situated within the psychoanalytic framework of self-psychology, he maintains that self object needs are often

thwarted creating low self esteem and a lack of self cohesion. Self cohesion in this perspective emerges from the positive interface with the object or what we may call the "other." The cognitive limitation thus takes on a new and more damaging dimension in light of the disabling experiences that surround the person since its first detection in a social context. In this way, the impairment can be understood as a social disability, one that is perpetuated within a social world. In other words, as the person is introduced into the disabling experience, he or she becomes truly socially disabled. John Miller's (1993) paper is one example that argues against biological reductionism in the case of learning disabilities and seeks to offer alternative psychological explanations and interventions that focus on the social role in disability. Numerous other studies and scholarly works have documented the process of socially disabling experiences and the role that culture plays. Jane Mercer's notion of the "myth of 3% prevalence" as well as Robert Scott, *The Making of Blind Men* (1969) are two examples that highlight the impact of the social world on the labelling process of people with disabilities.

### **Disability as Social Construction**

Social Constructionism grew out of the early work of George Herbert Mead (1934) and has emerged in recent years through the lens of thinkers such as Kenneth Gergen (1991) and John Shotter (1984). It has become a beacon for disability research in its call for greater emphasis on understanding the context of disability rather than on the condition itself. In other words, a social constructionist approach looks for "the extent to which abilities and processes, formerly located in individuals are now seen as products of the human community." (Shotter and Gergen, 1989) Social Constructionism focuses on the obvious point that social contacts are essential to the formation of identity and that without them grave problems may ensue. Beyond this common sense

notion, social constructionism seeks to establish a far-reaching theory of mind based on the social world. It seeks to show how the mind is socially constructed through a dialectical web between language and culture. In the context of disability we can see how the lack of a social world creates disabling experiences for people by isolating them, and on the other hand perpetuates their marginality by constructing categories of differentness. Robert Scott's *The Making of Blind Men* (1996) is one example that showed how people without sight became "blind" once they entered the institution for the blind. In a similar way, people with intellectual disabilities often first learn that they have a limitation when they are confronted with this assessment at some point in their school life. The research to be presented highlights this common experience amongst people interviewed. Social constructionism asks what the impact of society is in the identification of a person as having an intellectual disability. It seeks to unearth the interpretations inherent in the delineation of human categories such as intellectual disability and views such categories as inventions of culture rather than those of science. Social constructionism draws from hermeneutic inquiry in that it highlights the importance of interpretative understandings and the role of context in psychological inquiry. It seeks to ask what are the contexts and conditions that create social disabilities and looks toward the wide contextual space of culture to gain an understanding. Moreover, the hermeneutic aspect of social constructionism looks for the narrative constructions and narrative truths that unfold with the telling of stories. In other words the rich, thick descriptions that unfold as each person tells their story may provide a window into the situational truths that emerges from within the person and their external world. We may see how the person comes to arrive at their particular place in the horizon of being human. We may ask how bringing narratives to the surface may change their condition or improve their lot in life. The answer to such a question lies in the

reclaiming of their position as subjects in the world as opposed to objects. (see Weiss, 1994) Perhaps movements such as "People first" where handicapped people advocate for their own rights is an attempt to shift their experience from the object pole to the subject pole. Unearthing the narratives of people with disabilities helps to shift conceptual constructions or categories and in more practical terms the tendency to treat disabled people and other marginalized groups as objects. Listening to people's stories helps to bring the subject back as a central focus in human inquiry.

### **Culture and Disability**

In light of these emergent intellectual trends in the past decades the role of culture in the understanding of disability has moved to the forefront. Numerous ethnographic studies and scholarly works have made contributions to the understanding of cultural differences relating to how disability and other psychological experiences vary across cultures. McDermott and Varenne (1996), for example, explore three approaches to understanding the relationship of culture to disability. In the first case people are seen as culturally endowed or deprived within a set of fixed universal assets. The second approach considers cultural groups as equivalent but different. The third approach considers the possibility that every culture teaches its members what its standards of excellence are and also how to notice, remediate or punish those who fall short on the scale. In this case, culture is seen as a record keeper of how people are more or less endowed. In this understanding cultures actually organize the category of disability. As McDermott and Varenne say, "there is nothing inherently wrong in describing deaf persons as deaf, learning disabled as LD or people who cannot read as illiterate, but in a social order that is anxious to use disability as a way to stratify and degrade, the categories are in need of constant revision." ( p 114) The eminent Russian psychologist Lev Vyogtsky, (1896-1934 )

a contemporary of Piaget, who has only found his place in the annals of developmental psychology in the last decade, is one forerunner who elaborated a sophisticated theoretical and pedagogical approach based on the centrality of culture in development. His work offers a counterpoint to the Piagetian framework, in that he moves the focus away from innate ability and the readiness of the child to apprehend according to incremental developmental stages, to that of the social environment. In Vygotsky's terms, learning and development share a dialectical relationship where learning precedes development. (Holzman, 1995) In other words, Vygotsky maintained that innate ability is not the main factor in human learning and development but it is the process of instruction in the social environment which invites or disinvites the child into ability or disability as the case may be. Vygotsky places emphasis on the dynamic action of culture to penetrate the workings of mind. Jerome Bruner has referred to this process of invitation as "scaffolding." (1990) In a certain way the adult lends his mind or consciousness to the child. The child thinks through the adult in the words he or she cannot yet form. The child relies on the representational capacity of the adult mind. But he or she is able, prelinguistically, to express a wish, a need, or a command through animate capacity to express meaning that in Vygotsky's terms precedes language. Eventually the child is brought into language as a shift from meaning to syntax emerges. But the capacity of the imaginary world of play is seen as the "leading edge" of psychological development. (Shotter, 1989) It is here where the child participates in the mind of culture through what Vygotsky calls the "zone of proximal development." (Vygotsky 1987, p. 187) Here, in this space in between mind and culture, development occurs. Here, the adult participates with the child, through the activity of instruction, in the emergence of their mental life. This inter-psychological relationship locus of control allows for the child to eventually move to an intra-psychological



control. Vygotsky felt that the social nature of learning and the “instruction” involved in bringing a child into an intellectual life was constrained by an asymmetrical distribution of power and knowledge. In other words, Vygotsky felt that the adult maintains a privileged position with regards to the way that a question is asked of the child. If a child does not know the answer to a question Vygotsky maintained that it was not necessarily the child’s response that was wrong but the way the question was framed. In a similar way, Vygotsky felt that we should look for how disability is socially produced. Gindis (1995) notes that Vygotsky understood disability not as a biological impairment but as “a socio-cultural developmental phenomenon where compensation comes from socialization and cultural enlightening.” (p. 157) Vygotsky argued against an “arithmetical concept of handicaps” referring to standardized tests. (1993) This he felt was viewing the handicapped child as a sum of negative characteristics. In place of an arithmetic concept of intelligence Vygotsky countered with the zone of proximal development. He saw cognitive ability as being measured by the difference between actual achievement and potential ability to learn as determined by problem solving under adult guidance. Vygotsky was most interested in creating zones of proximal development where the revolutionary activity of making meaning takes place. This pragmatic capacity to solve problems and find tools emerges as the essential capacity of humans to make meaning. Vygotsky was interested in this activity of meaning making that he saw as the revolutionary capacity to look at things in new ways, and of transforming seeing itself. He argued that special education should concentrate on developing alternate psychological tools that would address particular needs of the handicapped person. For example, the use of Braille can be seen as an alternate psychological tool. In this way, he maintained that a defect is not perceived as such until it is brought into a social context and that the experience of defects varies psychologically across cultural and social

environments. He says: "Any organic defect is revealed as a social abnormality in behaviour. It goes without question that blindness and deafness are per se biological factors. However the teacher must deal not so much with the biological factors by themselves as much as their social consequences." (1983. p. 102) Vygotsky saw a handicap not so much as a static condition but more as a developmental process. He argues for two classes of defects which he considers primary and secondary. Organic factors may constitute a primary disability but in the second case the distortion of higher psychological functions that are caused by social factors. In this way, Vygotsky searched for handicapping social practices. The main goal of the special education required for the intellectually disabled in Vygotsky's terms is not to compensate for primary defects but to prevent and correct the ravages created by secondary defects. In this way, Vygotsky advocated the creation of learning environments that would focus on the social role in learning and that would emphasize the positive capacities of the handicapped person. The goal of such an environment would be to search for compensating psychological tools that would provide an alternate means to development. He urged increased attention on the positive capacities of handicapped people rather on their deficits and hoped to implement a system of research that he felt would "study people as people" instead of as scientific objects removed from the daily context of living.

### **Disability and Social Semiotics**

Semiotics, the study of the meanings of signs has figured prominently in the late twentieth century. Combined with the understanding that language does not statically represent the world but participates in the unfolding of any reality through the dynamic action of the joint activity of meaning making, semiotics allows the possibility to unpack the messages that are transmitted through various linguistic and cultural signs. Gary Woodhill (1994) explores

the use of semiotic analysis for the creation of new paradigms of disability research. He draws on three aspects of semiotic analysis that are relevant to the discussion of the notion of social disability. They are: metaphor; the communication situation; and the standpoints of voice that are encoded or excluded from a text. All of these notions play an important role in situating the present research which will be described in the following chapter. For the moment, however, let it suffice to say that these ideas have important value in understanding how marginality is created and exaggerated through cultural attributions. Woodhill makes the point that there are many voices that speak through a text be it a popular voice, an intimate voice, a professional voice, a marginalized voice or an analytic voice. He points out that the voice of a person with a disability is often left out. The remainder of this work thus sets as its task to bring to surface the voices that speak within the texts of the narratives of the participants of this study.

## Chapter 5

### Method

#### Population

The research population was drawn from the client population of a Montreal institution that specializes in working with people who have mild and borderline intellectual disabilities. All of the clientele served by this agency were accepted into the service on the basis of meeting admissions criteria which states that candidates must function at the mild to borderline levels of intelligence. Assessment of functioning is determined by historical test information and a functional life skills assessment.

#### Approval of Sponsoring Agency and Consent of Participants

Formal approval of the sponsoring agency was obtained. (Appendix A) A description of the research was read and explained to each participant and a signed consent was obtained from them. (Appendix B)

#### Sample Population

A sample population of 18 individuals was drawn from a pool of 140 people. Material from 16 of the original 18 participants is contained in this study. Eight of the sixteen were males and eight females. The age range of these participants at the time of the interviews was between 24 and 62. Seven participants were between the ages 24 and 30, four between the ages 30 and 40, two between 40 and 50 and three were over the age of 50. Intelligence levels were obtained from case reports. Standardized IQ scores were not available in every case but a range was indicated for each person. Six people were assessed to globally function at the low average range of intelligence (dull normal); five at the borderline level and five were considered to have mild mental retardation.

Case reports show that intelligence classifications differed for some people from one evaluation to another. Several of the study group had a dual diagnosis and other medical conditions including the following: mild frontal lobe brain damage, epilepsy, psychiatric conditions, scoliosis, HIV, fetal alcohol syndrome, personality disorders, hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder, hearing impairment and genetic disorders.

### **Case Information**

Files containing case histories of participants were made available to the researcher. A composite of information was gathered for each person. (Appendix C) Information gathered about participants included diagnostic and medical histories as well as their social, financial, and occupational status.

### **Procedure**

Participants who met the criteria for this study were asked by their main worker if they would agree to participate in the study. Those who indicated interest were met by the researcher who explained to them that the study would involve a series of interviews that would be tape recorded and later transcribed by her. They were informed that only the researcher herself would listen to these recordings. First names were chosen by each participant and replaced their real names. The purpose of the study was explained to each participant as an effort to understand the concerns of people who have "learning difficulties" or are "slow learners" in order that professionals and people in general could understand their difficulties and their strengths better.

### **Structure of Interviews**

The interview process consisted of a semi-structured and unstructured conversational approach. The semi-structured part of the interviews consisted

of a standard set of question areas that covered the life span of the individual. These included three life stages from childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Perceptions of problems, insights and remarkable events were drawn expanded upon during subsequent interviews. (Appendix D)

The interview process was influenced by a model used in a study on stigma and self-concept in people with mental handicaps and was used as guide of practical application in the interview process. (Jahoda, Markoua, and Cattermole, 1988) This model is based on three premises. These include:

1. The research should entail a description of experience or meaning structure, that is, the phenomenon in its lived-in context;
2. Explication of protocols should be concerned with the meaning of data from the participant's perspective;
3. Essential themes should be extracted in their varying manifestations.  
(Stones, as cited in Jahoda, et al., 1988)

These premises were thus woven into an "interview guide." Using the predetermined list of life-span topics, specific themes and trends emerged that were followed up in later interviews with the individual and then introduced as potential areas of conversation with other participants. For example, as the subject of stigma was introduced by one participant as a recurrent early theme, it was later explored with other participants. In this way, the research process contributed to the evolving definition of the research topic. This was the inherent aspect of the hermeneutic project.

## **Interview Process**

Interviews and transcriptions of tapes took place over a two-year period. Most participants were interviewed at least four times and five of the participants were selected for in-depth interviews over a period of two years. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. In all, eighty hours of interviews with 16 people were carried out and transcribed. In some cases, the interviews took place in the home of the participants and in other cases they came to an office at the organization from where they received support and assistance. In general, participants were interviewed for a total average of three hours but five participants had interviews that ranged between eight and nine hours. There was no particular plan how to single out the more extensive interviews. Rather, the interviews unfolded according to the rhythm that was set in each situation. For some people, the interview process appeared to be more stressful and their agreement to participate in the research seemed to come from their desire to please and to be helpful. For these people the interviews dwindled more rapidly. In one case, the participant, whose agreement to participate came as somewhat of a surprise, decided after two meetings that he would not continue. In other cases, I decided that our conversations had reached a plateau in terms of generating material for this project.

For other people, the interview process seemed like a welcome opportunity to share, to feel validated, and to have the chance to be listened to. For these people, the interviews spanned over several months or, in a few cases, a few years according to the stops and starts of life events as well other routines and holidays. The original conception that the more in-depth interviews would provide the main material for the hermeneutic analysis seemed less justified as the interviews progressed. Indeed, each participant regardless of the number of

interviews they engaged in, contributed to the forming of the emerging “voice images” that emerged from the texts of conversation.

### **From the Spoken Word to the Written Text: The Transcribing Process**

The transcribing process was integral to the research and to the lifting out of voices as they emerged in the texts of spoken thought. Spoken words now committed to writing took on the hermeneutic dimension that Paul Ricoeur articulates. That is to say, the written word alienated from the immediacy of speech was saved through a new possibility of exchange between the text and reader. The process of transcribing itself took on an added sense of dimension in the conversational process between myself and those whose words I was committing to writing. For every interview hour, three were spent listening to the nuances and the stops and starts of the conversation as I tried to capture each word in its fullness. The result of this, at times, painstaking exercise, was the sense that I was taking their words and their persons within me in a such a way that their images continued to reverberate within me long after the event of transcribing. I was then able to carry the participants within me as a portfolio of thoughts, images, and feelings that I could return to, over and over again, for new levels of interpretation and understanding. In short, I was able, through this process, to take a representation of each and every one of them within me so that they became active participants in my inner world. It was to these internal representations that I returned to, in order that I attain a fuller understanding of their lived expression, the goal of the hermeneutic enterprise.

### **Location of Themes and Voices in the Transcripts**

The early transcripts were analyzed for two categories of experience which later became identified as “voices” in the material. (appendix E) These were the



category of social competence (the voice of competence) and the category of social disability, (the voice of disability). These two categories remained flexible concepts and were altered or expanded as themes emerged. In this fashion, as interviews progressed, and through the transcribing process, additional themes were identified and extracted from the interview material. Through this process, themes began to develop within the material that took on the quality of “voice” constructions within the individual. In all, six “voices” were located in emergent material and were subsequently further explored in future interviews. These included: the voice of the self-as-narrator, the voice of competence, the voice of deficit, the speaking inner voice, the voice of other and, the voice of countertransference. Criteria for the identification of each of these voices were established and were used as a guide for the final analysis of transcripts. (Appendix F) This analysis required reading each text a minimum of six times.

### **Analysis of Transcripts**

Incorporating the method established by Brown, Tappan, Gilligan et al. (1989) profiles were drawn for each person. Early interviews were analyzed for three voice constructions including the voice of self-as-narrator, the voice of deficit, and the voice of competence. (See Appendix Ga & Gb for a sample transcript and analysis) The process of transcribing and coding led to the recognition of other possible voice constructions and was seen to be integral to the research process. These emergent voice constructions were also, then, gathered for analysis. A clustering procedure involving a colour code system was used to highlight words, sentences or paragraphs according to the evidence of a particular voice construction. (See appendix H) Once a voice construction was identified and highlighted, it was lifted from every text and combined into a single “voice chapter.” This newly created text of combined narratives

provided a way to consider the study group as a whole and to gain insight to their collective dimension.

### **The Hermeneutic Writing**

The radical aspect of the hermeneutic project entailed that the writer joins with the subject through the vehicle of empathic understanding. Such empathic joining is made possible through the mutual fields of imagination and representation. Here it was necessary to move from the position of researcher to the position of writer.

In this attempt to integrate knowledge of another life I was called to enter within my own psychic process and to linger upon image, metaphor and symbol. It was through this literary turn that the hermeneutic writing came into being, as the telling of a tale, a poetic journey, which drew upon the depths of imagination and intuitive knowing. Here a fusion of research and present understanding was able to take place. I was able to gather the streams of “voices” that emerged in the texts and to draw these into a narrative that described the various facets of life experiences and inner landscapes of the participants of this study. What emerges, then, from this conversational study is a series of portraits that attempts to describe their social and intra-psychic experience.

### **Addressing Validity Issues:**

The issue of validity is a critical aspect of any study within the social science domain. It is clear that all research must substantiate its findings before a critical audience. The present work appeals to a validity model that is outside of a positivistic view of what constitutes a valid human study. In other words, the view that generalizability and repeatability is the main indicator of validity.

The current study embraces a method known as a reflexive ethnography. This methodological viewpoint asserts that the scientific observer is part of the setting or context of the observation. Therefore, in this view, the voice of the observer is brought to surface in the ethnographic account. Validity in this context has been given the term "Validity-as-reflexive-accounting." (Altheide, David L. & Johnson, John M.,1994) (Appendix I provides a discussion of interpretive validity in qualitative research.)

### Descriptive Profiles of Study Group

#### *Fictitious Names:*

<b>Females</b>	<b>Age at Interview</b>	<b>IQ or level</b>
Lisa	31	dull normal\low average
Alice	59	mild mental retardation
Betty	63	mild mental retardation
Mary	51	mild mental retardation
Nadia	37	63 mild mental retardation\Borderline
Sarah	25	69\mild mental retardation
Agnes	31	82\dull normal
Jade	25	dull normal\low average
<b>Males</b>		
Jasmin	24	Borderline\low average
François	25	101\average
Sean	24	76\ Borderline
John	26	Borderline
Luke	32	71\Borderline
Ron	25	grade six equivalence
Tom	42	mild mental retardation
David	44	mild mental retardation

*Biographical Information*

**Lisa:** was 31 years old at the time of our first interview. She has been living in her own apartment for the last five years. Prior to coming to the Centre for Transitional Living she had lived with her parents until the age of 27.

Lisa functions at the higher margin of the interview group. Her history reveals that she completed high school and Cegep with the help of her mother and attended one year of university. However, she failed all but one of her courses. She was tested for intelligence in her 20s and scored in the borderline to low normal range on the WAIS-R. Despite her relative intellectual strengths compared to the study group, Lisa's overall functioning is assessed to be below normal. One recent diagnostic assessment found her to have an "organic personality syndrome" and to be functioning at the "moderate" range of mental retardation. She has also suffered from congenital hypotonia, scoliosis of the spine and had perinatal encephalopathy.

Her recent history reveals that soon after her first sojourn into an independent life she experienced an emotional crisis and was treated with an anti-depressant medication. She also has maintained an ongoing imaginary world since childhood. Despite her emotional fragility, Lisa has accomplished a great deal over the last number of years. Before her entry into the transitional program she had spent up to fourteen hours a day in front of the television, was not involved in any meaningful activities and had no income and no friends. Several years later, she has moved away from her parents and into her own apartment. She has an income, a job, a circle of friends, and has had a significant relationship with someone.

**Alice:** was 59 years old at the start of the interview process. She has been living on her own since 1977. Prior to this, Alice lived in a rural institution from the age of seventeen until 1976 when at the age of 38 she was transferred to a “group home” in Montreal that prepared her to live independently. Alice was transferred from the institution after it had been placed under tutorship by the Government. Several other people in the same institution were released with Alice to the same community agency in Montreal. Alice has remained a friend with many of these people. Upon release from the institution Alice resumed contact with her mother and remained close to her until her recent death.

Alice’s developmental history is very sketchy. She reports that she went to regular school until grade seven when she stopped attending. She had lived with her mother and two other siblings until the age of seventeen when she was placed in this institution for the mentally retarded. Alice reports that the reason she was placed in the institution was because her mother had been physically abusive towards her and the authorities withdrew her from the home. There are no reports describing Alice’s developmental history. A single doctor’s note from the institution describes her as “retarded.” Alice has rudimentary life skills. She reads and writes at about a grade three level. She worked for a time in a sheltered workshop but has not been engaged in organized work for some years. She currently lives alone with her two cats. She has a good number of friends and contacts and enjoys a fairly active social life.

**Betty:** was 61 years old at the time of our first interview. She lived with her family until the age of nineteen when she was placed in the same institution as Alice. She lived in the institution for 23 years and like Alice was released in 1976 to the supervision of a community agency in Montreal. The reason for

Betty's placement in the institution is unclear. According to her she was placed there for bad behaviour. In one of the scant notes provided by the institution, a physician describes her as "maybe very mildly retarded." Another note describes her daily routine, which includes washing dishes for 60 children twice a day, two hours of daily work in the laundry and helping with the director's children during her "time off."

At the time of her release from the institution Betty also went to live in the transition home that helped prepare her to live independently. Despite the fact that institution notes indicated that she "might" be able to live in the community in a "highly structured environment," Betty has successfully lived in her apartment for the last 22 years. She has had numerous paid jobs and has worked as a nanny in many households. Betty resumed contact with her siblings after her re-entry into the community. Betty also has a circle of friends and acquaintances. She also keeps in touch with the others who left the institution with her, many of whom live near her.

**Mary:** was 51 years old at the time of her interviews. In comparison to other interview subjects she functions at the lower end of mild intellectual disability. She currently lives in her own apartment after a difficult five-year period of living with her "boyfriend." Mary first entered into the "Training for Independent Living Program" in 1975 where she stayed for two years. After this time she moved on her own but had difficulty coping and subsequently went back to live in a supervised setting. She remained in this setting for some years but eventually found her way back to independence through a higher functioning male friend who invited her to live with him. Eventually this relationship broke down and by the end of our interviews Mary again lives by herself in her own apartment. Little is known about Mary's developmental

history. She attended primary school but did not continue after grade seven. As an adult, her intelligence was recorded in the moderate range of intellectual deficiency. She has very basic abilities and reads at a grade two or three level. Similarly, she has very limited skills in arithmetic and requires the use of a calculator for simple calculations. She has a very poor grasp of the value of money and her judgment is limited. Nevertheless, her skills in other areas are quite good. She is well organized and is able to maintain an ordered life in her apartment. On the other hand, Mary continues to require ongoing support and supervision to maintain her independence.

**Nadia:** was 37 years old at the time of our interviews. She was born to Russian parents who divorced when she was a young child. Nadia was placed in special education at any early age. She was tested as a child for intellectual functioning and received a global score of 63 on the WISC intelligence test. Despite her poor functioning in school Nadia was able to achieve language skills in Russian, English and Ukrainian. She later learned to speak French. Her level of intellectual impairment was seen to be, in part, related to a difficult early home life.

Nadia never went to live in the Transitional Living Home as was intended but went directly to her own apartment at the age of 21. At the age of 22 she gave birth to a son who was immediately placed into long-term foster care. One year later she gave birth to another son who was placed in an adoptive home. A few years later she began to live with a boyfriend and again became pregnant. She and the father continued to live together with the child for one year until the relationship broke down. The father of the child retained custody and to this day Nadia maintains visiting rights under the guardianship of her mother. Despite her significant deficits which make it difficult for her to raise a child,

Nadia has resisted all attempts to undergo sterilization primarily because she is extremely fearful of being put under anesthetic. For similar reasons, Nadia has refused other medical and dental procedures. She has long suffered from severe abscesses in her mouth because of the lack of required dental treatment.

Nadia has lived under precarious life conditions for many years. She is a highly anxious person who has tremendous difficulty in tolerating being alone at any time. Consequently she has been involved in a series of abusive relationships with men who also exploit her financially. She continues to live in poverty and does not attend to her basic needs. She has consistently refused any help except on her own terms. The agency that supports her continues to negotiate pathways of communication with her in an effort to provide her with the assistance she needs. They recently made a petition to have her placed under a public curatorship.

**John:** was 26 at the start of our interviews. He was 22 years old when he was first referred to the Centre for Independent Living. He had been attending a special education school and his teachers urged his application to the centre. John had been assessed at the borderline level of intellectual disability. At the time, John had been living in the apartment he had shared with his recently deceased mother and there was concern that he was unable to cope on his own. John was accepted into the centre despite his long history of difficult behaviour, which included excessive drinking and general dishonesty, which resulted in many problematic situations. While living in the transitional home John was diagnosed with HIV. Shortly after this, John absconded with a bus from the city's main terminus and was arrested in Ottawa. Shortly after that, he again stole a bus and was arrested. He was sent to minimum-security prison for a six-month period. However, on his release from prison John stole another bus and



was subsequently arrested and jailed. Over a five-year period John stole six buses from the city terminus. He was arrested and was sent to prison on four different occasions for this crime. He was also evaluated in a forensic psychiatric hospital and was deemed responsible for his actions. John also suffered a stroke but recovered almost full use of his body. His HIV condition was mostly stable throughout the interview process and was monitored by his doctor. After his last release from prison John decided to move to a small city in order to distract himself from the idea of stealing a bus. He moved to a small city that is known for its maximum-security prison. Once there John made a quick alliance with the AIDS network and became involved in an outreach program to the prison. He also began volunteer work at an army base. John keeps in touch with the people from the centre for Transitional Living. He frequently calls or arrives at Christmas and sends occasional cards.

**Luke:** was 32 years old at the time of our interviews. Luke's history reveals that he is the youngest of five children in a French Canadian family. Luke grew up in a city where the French language is predominant, but due to his academic difficulties he attended an English school. He was not formally tested until his late teens when he obtained a full score of 71 on the WAIS-R. This places him in the borderline category of intelligence. Prior to his having been tested, Luke and his family were unsure about what were his deficits. He had been placed in special classes in high school but had never been formally assessed. He and his parents were frequently told he was "lazy." Luke had many difficulties in his home life prior to his entry into the transitional program at the age of twenty-three. At home his parents had become increasingly concerned because he was virtually living in the basement of their house, refusing to have contacts with other people than his family. He was slowly coaxed to leave his home at the age of 23 and from there began the process to live independently.

**Jasmin:** was 24 years old at the time of our first interview. He went to live in the Transitional Centre when he was 23 years old and moved to his own apartment two years later. He is the youngest in a family of five children. He and another sibling were adopted from Vietnam in 1972. He was two years old at the time. Upon his arrival from Vietnam, Jasmin did not speak and he was withdrawn from activity. It appeared clear to his adoptive parents that Jasmin had been physically mistreated in Vietnam as he had scars on various part of his body. As well, on his arrival, he was found to be suffering from malnutrition, hepatitis, tropical diseases and had had tuberculosis. Jasmin did not speak for a few years after his arrival. His new older sister, also adopted from Vietnam formed a special relationship with him and she helped to encourage his development by making him her play companion. Jasmin made slow gains as a child and was assessed to have borderline to low average intelligence. He was very attached to his adoptive mother who provided him with exceptional attention. Jasmin began to write poetry at the age of ten. His mother helped him to record his thoughts as he had some difficulty in writing. Beginning in childhood, Jasmin maintained a highly developed fantasy life. His mother reveals that as a child he was close to nature and from early on exhibited a sense of poetic depth. He was a very fearful child and as an adolescent kept a knife under his bed in case he was attacked. He also began to identify with the military and frequently dressed in army fatigues. As well, he carried crudely made "weapons" such as "bayonets" and "spears" made with wood and tin foil. His older siblings and, to some extent, his parents became alarmed with his occasional violent discourse but he did not manifest violent behaviour. Nevertheless, he underwent a psychiatric evaluation and was seen to have a schizotypal personality disorder. There was no evidence that he was dangerous. Jasmin went to live in the transitional living program at the age of 23. There was great concern that he would be able to master the demands of the

program and further concern that he would ever be able to live independently. Nevertheless, by the end of our interviews Jasmin had successfully completed a two-year stay in the transitional residence and was preparing to move to his own apartment with his friend François, also a participant in this study group.

**Ron:** was 25 at the time of our interviews together. His developmental history reveals that he experienced grand mal seizures at eleven months of age. He attended regular classes until the sixth grade and was subsequently transferred to special education classes. Upon educational testing, he was found to have average abilities in some areas of scholastic achievement but had significant deficits in oral comprehension. Ron continued in special education through high school and then into Cegep that maintains an innovative “special education” program. This program helped him to find a job as a parking lot attendant but Ron was unable to keep up with the demands of the job. Ron came to the transitional living program through an adolescent outreach program that had been initiated by the Transitional Living Centre. He did not want to identify himself with the “handicapped” world, especially because he was accomplished at such things as driving a car and using the Internet on the computer. He did not view himself as having an intellectual limitation. On the other hand, he readily accepted being included under the umbrella of the agency that opened its doors to him. Ron moved into the transitional home where he lived for the usual two-year period. In the latter part of the interview process Ron moved to his own apartment. He continues to be followed by the Centre for Independent Living.

**Tom:** was 42 years old at the time of our interviews. His early history reveals that he suffered a high fever at the age of two and his development was subsequently impaired. He repeated grade one twice before being tested. Test

results indicated that he achieved a score of 60 on the Weschler Intelligence scale for children.

Tom was referred to the transitional living program at the age of 26. He lived there for a period of two years and subsequently went to live in his own apartment with a roommate. However, after his roommate moved to another city Tom returned to his parents' home. He was very attached to his mother and was fearful of leaving the family home, but Tom eventually returned to the transitional home and then on to his own apartment. He had many difficulties living on his own and frequently returned to his mother's for extended stays. On the other hand, he was highly ambivalent about his attachment to her and frequently felt trapped by their relationship. He also had many difficulties living with other people and had frequent episodes of fighting with them. He has been followed by a psychiatrist for some years for depression. But despite his many deficits Tom has a number of strengths. He was able to work as a janitor of a school for several years and has very good life skills required for daily living. By the end of our interviews, however, Tom no longer felt he could live on his own and he has been placed in a "supervised apartment."

**Jade:** was 27 years old at the time of our interviews. She had lived in the transitional living program at the same time as Agnes, Lisa and John. Jade came to the transitional living program through the initiative of a social worker who had been counselling her for issues related to an abusive and neglectful early home life. Jade also functions at the low average or dull normal level of intelligence. A diagnostic report indicates that as an infant she suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome. This syndrome creates an array of learning problems and personality difficulties. Jade has many areas of competence including her ability to work with children. She has successfully

worked as a nanny and as a day care worker for the last several years. Jade views herself as a recovering alcoholic. While living in the transitional home she started to attend Alcoholics Anonymous and continues to follow this program. Jade's specific learning difficulties are related to reading and writing. She reads at a grade four or five level and has difficulty with comprehension. As well she reports that in school she was always the last child in the class and repeatedly failed her school year. She was placed in special education at the high school level.

In the present, Jade successfully completed her program at the transitional centre. She has since moved to her own apartment. For a short time she lived with a boyfriend (also a client from the centre) who is less intellectually able than she is. Currently she lives in a town house purchased for her by her father and recently accomplished her long held goal of achieving her driver's license. She now has her own car. She does not frequent the centre but continues to maintain contact with her "counsellor" from there. As well, she continues to attend social events that are hosted by the centre.

**David:** was 44 years old at the time this interview process began. David has lived with his family all of his life until very recently when he went to live in an apartment complex that is operated by a mental health organization. This was a very big occasion for David and his parents as he had never lived away from home and is quite attached to his family. David's mother is considered to be one of the local pioneers who developed community services in the mental health field.

David was identified as having a mild intellectual disability when he was a young boy. He attended a regular grade school but did not complete grade

seven. He did not go to high school but participated in activities that were designated for mentally handicapped people. He reads, writes, moves freely about the community and generally maintains a fairly high level of independence. He worked for some years as a mail courier but had to stop after he developed psychiatric problems. David was followed by a psychiatrist and took anti-psychotic medication for some years. However, he has not taken such medication for several years and continues to be stable. But he has not been able to resume working. He spends much of his time painting and visiting various community organizations in the community.

David showed signs of artistic talent from an early age. Over the years he has had numerous exhibitions of his paintings and he continues to show and sell his work. He did not like formal art training as he considered this to put too much "pressure" on him. David has therefore continued to work at his own pace and in his own ways. His artistic activity is uneven. Some years he paints continuously and other times he withdraws from artistic expression for extended periods of time. David also has many social contacts in the community. He continues to frequent the Transitional Living Centre and receives ongoing support from this service.

**Sarah:** was 25 years old at the time she was interviewed and by the end our interviews began to live in her own apartment. Sarah was born in England and lived for a time in Australia. She and her parents came to Canada when she was ten years of age. Sarah had many severe social and emotional difficulties growing up. She had temper tantrums and violent outbursts with her parents, which increased in intensity in her adolescence. She was thoroughly evaluated as a young child and was found to have mild brain damage of unknown cause. She was given the WISC-R intelligence test, which produced a full scale score

of 69. She attended special education classes for the duration of her school years. Sarah came to the Transitional Living Centre when she was 22 years of age. Her parents had exhausted all their resources. In the transitional home Sarah continued to have many behavioural problems. These have slowly diminished over a period of several years. She has reached a certain level of stability in her own apartment. But Sarah has many skills. She reads, writes and can manage most of the daily tasks required to live on one's own. Sarah's main current liability is her volatile emotional behaviour, which causes significant disruption in her and her family's life.

**Agnes:** was 31 was born in France but has lived in Montreal since early childhood. She was born with a severe hearing impairment as well as a genetic disorder that left her with complete baldness. Her hearing loss was not assessed until late in her childhood and she is now considered functionally deaf. However, with the use of a hearing aid she is able to recover some of the hearing loss. Agnes functions at the very low or dull normal level of intelligence. She is a highly verbal and articulate person who leaves the impression that she is more capable than she actually is. For example, she was at first refused welfare benefits under the disabled category when in an interview she agreed with the welfare agent that she was not "handicapped." She attended regular classes until the 7th grade but having failed several times was placed in special education classes in high school. There she associated with adolescents who had behaviour problems and she became, in her view, a "delinquent." However, it was apparent that she herself became a victim of this chosen peer group. Agnes came to the centre as she approached her 20th birthday. At first she refused the assistance because she did not believe that she belonged in a place that was designated for "slow learners" or people with borderline intellectual disabilities. However Agnes returned on her own a year

or so later with a request to be accepted into the Transitional Living Program. Agnes subsequently lived at the centre for two years. She made continual strides in this environment and was able to sustain volunteer work. She was able to align herself with a peer group and made several friends from within the program. Now several years into her independent life Agnes continues to belong to this circle of friends and continues to receive follow up from the centre. Recently her hearing has diminished and she begins to contemplate whether she wishes to be more associated with the “deaf community.”

**François:** was 24 years old at the start of our interviews. His history reveals that he obtained a full score of 101 on the Ottawa-Wechler intelligence test placing him in the average intelligence range. However, François showed significant cognitive deficits related to early epilepsy and congenital encephathology of unknown cause. François was able through repeated attempts to complete high school. His deficits are exhibited by a marked immaturity in his overall behaviour. For example, François continues to “play” with various toys which include such things as army figurines, and other assorted science fiction dolls. As well, François is extremely passive and does not engage easily in social situations. He also has a vast imaginary world, which pre-occupies him. Although no formal diagnosis has been so given, François’ profile shows signs that he functions in the autistic spectrum of disorders. Despite his ability to achieve an average score on a standardized intelligence test, François requires ongoing supervision in his current independent living situation.

**Sean:** was 24 at the time of our interviews. Sean’s history reveals that he first ran away from home at the age of ten and at the age of thirteen was placed in a group home for troubled youth. Sean’s running away was related to



physical abuse from his father. He lived in the group home until his 18th birthday and subsequently went to live in the transitional living home operated by the Centre for Transitional Living. Sean's academic record places him in the borderline level of intellectual disability. He was also assessed to be hyperactive. While living in the group home for teenagers, Sean was often victimized and teased by the other adolescents. He also attempted to run away from the group home and was therefore placed in a "closed unit" detention centre for extended periods of time. Sean was referred to the Centre for Independent Living on his 18th birthday. He was subsequently accepted and living at the centre by his 19th birthday. Because of his relatively young age he was allowed to live in the transitional program for three years. He was seen to make very good progress in the home and readily attached to the holding environment the centre provided. At the time of the interviews Sean had been living in his own apartment for three years.

## Chapter 6

### Entering the Canyons of Voice

This chapter moves towards locating the plethora of identified voices in one of the participants of this study. Lisa is now introduced as the person who brought an articulate voice to the early work of this project. It was her voice that became the beacon to follow and so it is necessary here to trace the threads of this work back to the source found in the discourse of Lisa. Again we are reminded that the jumping in point of any attempt to understand another is arbitrary. There can be no beginning question in itself. All must come forth from the spring of the desire to know another life. The question then must be led by this desire where, in the silence of receptivity, the world of another opens to us. And so as interviewer with a long period of waiting for the question to arise, I became drawn into the inner world of Lisa and the story she told. Once there I was led through a maze of voices that spoke to me about the multiple levels of her psychic life. It was through her that I was able to hear the myriad voices that spoke of her sense of defeat as well as her victories. It was also through her discourse that I was able to hear the voice of confusion that spoke of not knowing where or how to place one's identity in the world. Lisa also revealed to me the life of her inner speaking voice, her imaginary world. And then the voices of others and those of my own also came forth. All of these voices we explore in the pages to come through the narratives of Lisa and later those of others. We have stated that Lisa brought the fullness of voice to light and it was through hers that I was able to trace the multiple levels of identity. We go then to her voice to unearth the presence of many voices in a narrative and to demonstrate the epistemological and ontological possibilities of moving from one voice to many. Again we return to the hermeneutic signpost that leads to the circular path of interpretation and understanding. We

begin with the Parmenidian one with a return to the many, only to again seek out the fullness of the single case. But first we revisit the landscape of voice and explore how these parts of the self have emerged in conversation with the participants of this study.

### **Exploring the Voice Deficit**

As we move through these life stories we notice that the voice of deficit seems integral to the personalities that emerge in the discourse. In their unfolding narratives we hear the voice of deficit trying to name itself. We hear each person struggle to name his or her difficulties and settle on a description that does not define them in some encompassing way. We see also that the voice of deficit is softened by the more acceptable experience of being slow. Many or most on this conversational journey embrace this word as a cushion between the harder blow that more severe labels incur. In their words and their experience, the leap between the normal and deficient world is not marked by a qualitative difference but a quantitative one. They seem to be saying that it just takes them longer to get to the same place. Disability in this sense equals slowness. But the voice of deficit speaks in many tongues and comes forth in the cloth of many disguises. We look then for the dialectics it speaks through, the bodies it presents itself in, and the ways in which it hides in the personality as a silent persecutor. We understand also that mind and body are one and that deficit means being deficient in the world. We seek out this particular being in the world and the physical metaphors that push the face of deficit to the surface. In the voice of François, for example, we will hear that epilepsy gives way to problems understanding and in the narrative of Lisa we will hear that weak muscle tone is assigned as the real handicap. We learn here that the nature of disability at the borderlines is complex and multifaceted. We understand that the world of the physical stands in front of the mental and that

often-physical trauma presses upon the functions of the mind. It is important to identify this, in our efforts to understand how the physical is superimposed on the mental and how the mental is superimposed on the emotional. In this way, we understand that disability is like an inkblot that spreads through the personality, not because of its inherent characteristics but because of the meaning assigned to it by the world. We see also how the person becomes infused with this assigned meaning, taking it in as an encapsulated voice that to a larger or lesser extent presides over the executive of the mind. As we hear the rebellions against the ultimate authority of this voice we witness also its tyranny. We experience its stronghold on the identity of each person. Once again in order to unmask and disarm it, we apply the basic questions of who is speaking, and in what circumstance. We further ask, where, why and how this voice emerges. Taken this way, we hope to demonstrate that the voice of deficit is a kind of force that moves through the personality in a variety of positions from the experiencing subject to the object of one's experience. We search for how the voice of deficit moves from the subjective to the objective voice and thus becomes "thingafied" as a reified abstraction or construction. We search to locate these things that deficit clings to and how it becomes a concrete phenomenon in the life of the person. We sift through the voice of deficit to understand its reign over the functions of being a person, in how it oppresses or inhibits the experience of citizenship in one's local and global community.

### **Exploring the Voice of Competence**

The human spirit is resilient and even in the most battered of psyches we find a stream of living water that carries the creative energy of life to its source within itself. The voice of deficit speaks loudly or cruelly in its obvious mannerisms but the voice of competence never leaves the integrity of the soul unattended. This proposition cannot be proved by logic but must be entered by

the door of being. This Heideggerian entry into being allows one to experience the integrity of the human spirit and those whom I have come to understand. The voice of competence speaks to the essential integrity of the spirit and to the possibility of enabling experiences in the world. Just as the voice of deficit echoes a complex of disabling experiences, the voice of competence comes forth in an array of attributes and talents that speak to their capacities as humans. We venture into these tales that emerge from the life stories that echo sounds of their strength and resilience.

### **Exploring the Voice of Others**

It was not long into this conversational journey that the voice of others came to present itself. It came through this sense that others were speaking through the voice of the narrator in each life story. It came as this intuition that inside each person a cast of others were voicing their views about how they experienced the life of someone who lived at the borders we speak about. The voice of others could also be named the voice of culture for we see how the world is taken within the personality as the shadow of a memory that casts its light upon the way we see and act in this world. The voice of culture and perhaps more locally, the voices of parents, teachers, and so many significant others are taken within. We hear in the voices of disability, the ring of these voices in their harshness and sometimes in their gentleness. More frequently however, we hear damning voices that condemn, judge, belittle. These historical voices, of course, seep into the bedrock of all classes and cultures, not only the underclass of the mentally disabled. We cannot venture into those territories but we keep this awareness at the back of our mind so that we do not sanctify or glorify the lives of people who have become socially disabled. We seek only to reveal how in one particular circumstance the mind of culture becomes imprinted upon the minds of human beings and thus to demonstrate

that we do have some eventual control over the perceptions that we inherit from one cultural artifact or another.

### **Exploring the Voice of Confusion**

The voice of confusion presented itself through a sense that there were sometimes contradictory self-representations in the narratives that was told. We can observe in one sentence, for example, that a person moves from a voice of competence to a position of deficit. It is as if their sense of self is so tenuous that it is difficult to maintain a consistent inner perception of their identity. In this way the voice of confusion becomes a way to reveal through language structure, how someone maintains a conflicting sense of self. They may believe themselves to be “normal” and as John will say feel “shocked” when they realize the world treats them otherwise. The voice of confusion is this battleground of conflicting identity. It is in this voice that they often painfully grapple with their meaning in the world. It is in this voice that they wrestle with the voices of other and where much of their psychic struggle presides.

### **Exploring the Inner Speaking Voice**

The imaginary world offers a fountain of resilience for the human spirit to replenish itself from the harsh introjected world of others. The imagination is able to transform the space within the inner world into a vestibule of comfort and care. We may view this experience as a kind of autistic resolution of the self-retreating to the self. But this retreat offers a way back to the world through a voice that interprets or re-interprets their experience. We venture into this world of voice asking if anyone real or imaginary speaks within.

### Exploring the Voice of Countertransference

This investigator had to use her own imaginative capacity to enter into the dialogical space between self and other. This essential matrix between knower and known required the dynamic field of knowing to be put into play. This meant that the interpretive researcher had to retreat within herself in order to listen to her own autistic voices, memories, images, and feelings. Once there, she had to understand the source of these internal representations. Did they speak only to her experience or did they capture in some way the field of another's.

Having explored the notion of voices as internal representations, the discussion moves to Lisa.

### Presenting A Case Study: Lisa

*Recording Lisa's Story:* The interviews with Lisa began in the spring of 1994. It was a breezy month to begin our long narrative walk together. She was thirty-one at the time and had survived the dreaded thirtieth birthday that she had been sure would lead to her suicide. Lisa describes her life in our first conversation together:

I just want to go and pack my bags and start somewhere new...short of killing myself, an often had idea. Last year around my thirtieth birthday I wanted to kill myself, but I didn't obviously. Now that I am off medication a lot is expected of me. I have to be less dependent on my mom. I walk slow. My friends walk miles ahead of me. It's frustrating. My mom does not like my boyfriend. I used to have a dream that I would be married. I want a place of my own. I want to be secure. I want to be happy. It's frustrating that everybody is pushing me in different directions.

Lisa's narrative begins at a turning point in her life. She stands at this juncture and looks behind from where she came. She tries to see into the

future where she can go and through all of this she feels pulled in different directions. Her words do not sound particularly hopeful but she leaves a door open by telling us that she wants to be happy. She used to have a dream, she says, that she would be married but now she seems more resigned to live something else. Lisa's life in this moment hangs in the balance between hope and despair, success and failure. She would like to have a place of her own she tells us and by this we realize that she has not yet arrived there. Lisa's narrative begins as she ends a second stay at a centre where people with mild intellectual limitations gather the skills to live on their own. Lisa had, at an earlier time, left this centre to live in an apartment with two others who had also been in the independent living program. But Lisa's initial sojourn into independent life was not a success. As the months passed in this initial attempt, Lisa became more fragmented and fragile. She longed for her mother and begged to return home to receive the comfort she needed. Her voice receded to a childlike whimper and she clung to any maternal source that she could attach herself. And so Lisa returned to the centre where, at an earlier time, she had proudly excelled in the changes she had made in her life. Lisa had to suffer a blow to her pride to return. She felt it as a failure. Lisa was struggling with the conflicting images of herself and how others see her. She was coming to terms with her identity and with the limitations she faced. On the other hand she was dreaming of life's possibilities. She tells me:

I want to be independent. I want to be with my boyfriend. But I want kids. I used to have a dream that I would have a little girl. Then I had a nervous breakdown in university and bye bye. I never knew I had a learning disability until I came here. Well I knew I was different in school the only kid to repeat kindergarten twice. The only kid to repeat. Yeah, I had two friends but once I came to this place bye, bye. But now I have new friends. But my mom says I am not as handicapped as they are. She wishes I would break up with Joel but I am happy with him. He is maybe immature but I love him.



Lisa tells us that her life hovered on the normal world before her entry into the Training for Independent Living program. She did not think of herself as having a learning disability. In fact, she tells us that she went to university. On the other hand, Lisa tells us that she experienced the humiliation of being the only person to repeat kindergarten and indeed she had to repeat her stay at the centre for independent living. She also tells us that she had two friends whom she feels abandoned her when she came to the centre where she now lives, because she says, "they thought I was one of them." Lisa brings an important question to the front. Is someone on the margins of intelligence better off left alone from the interventions of others? She tells us that she had had friends until they shunned her because of a new found label that was placed on her. She was normal in her estimation until the band of categorization came down around her. On the other hand, Lisa made new friends under this label and has found a boyfriend. Her life is different than expected or hoped, but she seems to find new levels of meaning and action that support her individuation. Lisa's narrative does not end at the question of how she will cope with the next step of her life; to try living on her own again. Lisa does manage the next step and settles into an apartment. Over many months becoming a few years, Lisa and I collaborate on this conversational project which she now feels is about her inner life and her "imaginary world." With each visit, she is eager to take me to one world or another. She takes me into her social world, and that of her family and her culture. She takes me into her private space and introduces the imaginary characters within her. Lisa also takes me to her everyday world and shows me her fierce need for the dignity of independence. But then she shows me her lonely world and tells me about the long hours she spends talking to an anonymous voice on a telephone help line. A mechanical talking parrot and the television, she tells me, are her best company. All these things Lisa tells me in her matter-of-fact way. More than a hint of humour punctuates her remarks.

Her apartment she tells me is her haven, one that she guards against unwanted intrusions. For example, she imagines getting a cat to keep away an allergic family member who tries to keep tabs on her usual lagging apartment cleaning skills. And when she can't deal with unwanted advice she simply "turns on her answering machine." Lisa's life tells a tale that leaves a reader shrouded in ambiguity about why or how it is that she finds herself living on the boundary. We cannot say that Lisa is any one category of person. Rather she presents a complex and rich narrative that challenges the notion of category. In this way, Lisa weaves in and out of categories. We can understand her internal world as a blending of many selves that speak through one voice or another. It is useful then to explore these facets of Lisa with the hope of understanding how she lives in the world and how the world lives in her. I turn to the voices that emerged in the text of Lisa's life story.

### **The Voice of Deficit: I Was a Lazy Child**

Lisa's awareness of deficit came as a surprise to her when it finally did present itself to her. Until some years ago Lisa's voice, and indeed her life, was coated by the illusions that were created around her. But all was not fine in this fairy tale world that took Lisa down the path of the semblance of a so-called "normal" life. Her quest for normalcy took her to university where she merged with the traffic of other youthful lives. But behind the scenes, Lisa's internal world jarred against the vertical path of university life. We find out that Lisa's family did most of her work for her. Unable to cope, Lisa describes having had a "nervous breakdown" and then retreating to the safety to her parents' home. Lisa was twenty-seven years old when she came to the centre that named itself a place for people with mild intellectual disabilities. She came reluctantly, but also with a hint of relief in her voice as she spoke about the loneliness of her life and the sense of rejection and failure that she lived with. Lisa's parents'

complaint when she first came to the centre was that she slept late into the day, was lazy and filled her life with endless hours of watching television. They could identify no specific disability, yet they had arrived with their daughter at the doorstep of a centre that promised assistance to people who have mental disabilities of a mild nature. They could live with this contradiction because they were now feeling desperate about the plight of their daughter. And so they and Lisa moved reluctantly further into the disability domain. They did not know at the time that moving into this domain could offer a possibility of reclaiming the voice of deficit as a point of entry for its dismantling. This, then, is a paradoxical finding about the voice of deficit. We find that those who have moved further into this sense of disability as a temporary identification are better able to move beyond it.

But we return here to the voice of deficit in Lisa that spoke to me so forcefully, and eloquently in the early days of these interviews. We are reminded here that Lisa's voice of deficit speaks for herself but that it also speaks for the others on this journey. We know this to be so because we have heard and recorded in every conversation the prominence of this voice as an element of each person's identity script. The voice of deficit comes forth as this shadow of deprecation, unworthiness and self-doubt. It spawns an array of inner cultures of malaise within the soul and gathers in clusters of traits that disarm the integrity of the being. The voice of deficit speaks in all of us, through our past encounters with our own worlds of judgment from the institutions that preyed upon our self worth. But we escape this voice in one manner or another through love, achievement, material wealth, or social status. We find a way to sublimate or surpass the chalk room. We find a way to leave behind the repressive corridors of our youth where, by historical necessity, we have been repressed in the under class of childhood. But this is

not so in the lives of the truly mentally slow. It is difficult, if not unlikely, to escape the long corridor of categorization that lines their lives from the moment of recognition until they reach the grave they fall or are shoved into by a society that diminishes their worth.

In this way, Lisa's voice of deficit did not speak by itself but came to the interviewer in the hushed tones of a self-criticism that pronounced judgment over her. We hear then the voices within a voice. We hear the voices of defeat, humiliation and self-deprecation within Lisa's sense of deficit. All of these are brought forth by a cascade of introjected ideas about the self that merge with her personality and become inner self-representations. Here is how Lisa describes herself in the terms dictated by her voice of deficit:

I am thirty-one and I act like a three-year old. I was watching Barney yesterday like a four-year old. My mother says what are you watching? I watch Mr. Dress up. I find it funny. My attitude is bitchy because I am frustrated. I just want to pack my bags and go somewhere and start new, short of committing suicide. An often bad idea. I have to be less dependent on my mom. I walk slow. The gang walks miles ahead of me. I knew I was different in school, the only kid who repeated kindergarten twice...I am lazy. It's all laziness and motivation. Being the baby in the family, I got spoiled rotten. Pampered you know. So yes I am lazy. My mother even said my only handicap is that I am lazy. Like you know even at home I got my mother to get the fruit. She would be eating an apple; I'd stare at her knowing that she would give it to me. My sister would say why don't you let her get it herself. Even on my own I wouldn't take the initiative to get it myself. If I want to I can walk very fast. I just don't. Because at work the moment I see my coordinator I start walking faster. It's just laziness and motivation. I may have weak muscle tone but with effort I can do anything. I was a spoiled baby. My sisters agree I was a spoiled brat. I had three mothers bossing me around telling me what to do and pampering me. I had three friends, then I came to this place and good-bye. They never called back. They thought I was one of them. Then it dawned on me, Lisa is a retard.

Lisa's narrative searches to locate her disability. She tells us that she is 31 years old and yet she finds herself enjoying the play world of a child of three. Lisa understands this as a contradiction in her life. She thinks and feels as a woman and yet she is able to enter the uninterrupted stream of being that childhood fantasy calls forth. But Lisa's life on the boundary gives her a kind of aerial perspective of her behaviour in the world. She views herself and she views others viewing her as they comment or criticize on the child qualities that remain at the outer edge of her psyche. Lisa takes part in the critical commentaries that chatter around her and joins in on their chorus of deprecation. We can imagine Lisa as Cinderella and indeed Lisa tells me on one occasion that she feels like her. Lisa tells us that she is lazy, that it's her only real handicap. If only she would walk a little faster, work a little harder. If only she didn't expect others to spoil her. Perhaps, she tells us, her only real problem is that she expects to be treated like a princess. We can then imagine how Cinderella would have described herself. We can imagine similar tales of herself as lazy and pampered. We imagine three bosses who alternately pamper and render orders. And then Lisa gives us a small window into the painful journey of her disabling experiences in the course of her life. She tells us about weak muscle tone and we would be tempted to leave it at that if we did not suspect there was indeed more to unravel in this thread of her narrative. We can see that Lisa's narrative of deficit is complex, multi leveled and torn between conflicting images of self-identity. Lisa tells us of her desire to run away and start anew; to leave behind all or any of the labels she has incurred and perhaps merge into the traffic of life. But, alternately, Lisa thinks there can be no escape from the script of her identity and so she contemplates suicide. Finally, we hear that Lisa is confronted by a label she never considered, "Lisa is a retard," she tells. In another instance Lisa tries to sum up her sense of having a disability.

I was listening to my voice on tape; it sounds like a two-year old is speaking, like a little girl is talking. I know it's me. It doesn't sound like a girl of thirty-three. It sounds like twelve. I am a thirty-three year old woman with the mind of a teenager. Oh yeah, it reminds me of my mother who is always saying you can't be that old. It's only on paper...That's what happens when you give birth to a child with congenital hypotonia. That is what you expect.

As we meet over the unfolding months that span a two-year period our conversations wind through the thorny bushes that cover the lonely stretches of her early life. She wanted to tell me about her "imaginary friends" and the role they played in her life as a child and their continuing presence in her adult life. She began:

Well, I must say, if you want to talk about my imaginary world...the way I survived. It all started when I was two or three. I had no friends. I was pretty much an outcast. I had no one to play with. No one would play with me. Maybe that's why I developed an imaginary world. I used to pretend that I had an imaginary horse and I would gallop to school. And some kids found out, some mean bullies found that weird. So I was picked on. I walked like Charlie Chaplin. It was then as a child that my handicap really showed.

We can easily imagine Lisa striding down the corridors of childhood; We can easily imagine the snickering children throwing pebbles beneath the hooves of her dreams. We have all been there. We can envision Lisa's reaction to go further in the lush terrain of fantasy life where people are re-invented. But now Lisa is an adult and she chooses to invite me into the thickets of her dreams and fantasies. Indeed Lisa takes me to this terrain and shows me the healing properties of her fantasy life. And so I was able to trace this current of inner fantasy in the narratives of others on this journey so that the voices speaking within could have their own tale to tell. Lisa's life in the every day world seems fraught with small and large obstacles. In her apartment, for example, she tells me that she struggles to have "the illusion of clean" and indeed when I visit Lisa I am confronted by clutter and disarray. Everywhere I

can see small heaps of disorganization that lead me to think that Lisa 's fragile psyche spills over like a sloppy stew onto the requirements of daily life. In this way, Lisa has difficulty containing the flow of her unstructured mind. It is as if Lisa's world is a palate of colours colliding and she has difficulty to give her life structure and form. And so she calls upon the resources of her fantasy world to shore up her ego. She recruits her imaginary friend "Bob" who tells her when to shower, when to sleep and whether or not she should stay home from work. In one instance she tells me, "I wasn't feeling one hundred percent to go to work, so I didn't go. I had a cold or something. "Bob" said I could stay home. And I think he made the right decision because I was sick."

But Lisa's deficit is perplexing because in some ways she is so adept in her analysis of life and in her ability to use words. Lisa can talk about poetry, music and relationships. She is able to describe her life with a vocabulary that includes words such as, outcast, scenario, and diversions. But then without batting an eye Lisa describes her work world. There she sits at a table with five or six other people and rolls steel wool for packaging. Lisa does not find this work menial or without challenge. She aspires to "roll" as well her co-worker. In the next breath Lisa describes her disappointment at not being "allowed" to finish university. She wonders what her life might be like if she had been granted this possibility. But despite her protests, Lisa has settled well into the disability world. She has a circle of friends, all who share in the designated "slow learner" disability label and she has a boyfriend who, by all accounts, is less intellectually endowed than she is.

### **Voice of Competence**

Lisa's voice of competence came swiftly and with force. It did not have to be rooted out from under the rubble of deficit. It came as hidden but in a deliberate

way. Lisa understood the menace of deficit and she sought ways to counter balance her sense of disability. One way she did this was by turning to her imagination. In this way, we have found that imagination emerges time and time again as the caretaker of the integrity of the human spirit. Lisa's imagination takes her to a literary world and to the creation of characters that play on the stage of her mind. This is how Lisa describes her imaginary world:

It's funny about myself I am a writer. I mean I haven't written a book but I did write a play that never got published. That could be why I have an imaginary world. I'm always wanting to write. I have written poems. Having an imaginary world is no big deal. It isn't something I should be condemned for. It's the way I survived. Bob is imaginary. He is basically my conscience. I see the good in people and I imagine how I want them to be towards me. That's how I did it, to make myself comfortable and I found it worked.

Lisa's imaginary world includes a host of imagined characters who she calls her imaginary friends. She turns within herself and to her imagination in order to re-interpret her world. But Lisa's imagination is not an inward retreat. Rather it draws her out to the world and to her social environment. In this way she is able to re-interpret the circumstances of her life. Her imagination helps her to cope with her perceived negative world. It is this ability to create a rich texture of an internal world that helps her to manage the challenging events in her life. But she knows she must live in the real world of others. Lisa lives in this world. She manages an apartment on her own, travels daily to her work, maintains a regular circle of friends, including a boyfriend, and copes with the isolation that living alone can entail. After telling us she is lazy and doesn't try, Lisa's voice of competence comes to her defense and says "I have to clean because I want to clean, not because of other people and to be honest I don't care. I said to myself my friends came to see me, not my apartment."



In the emotional sphere she also counters her voice of deficit. After speaking of her sensitivity, her emotional vulnerability, she tells me that it's "just a weekend thing" and that there is "stress but not as much stress as..." I interpret this to mean that she is coping, and though her job is difficult she "loves it." Lisa's voice of competence also helps her find her anger so that she can feel "irked" when an injustice is done to her. Though her life can be lonely, she tells me she likes living alone "I can do what I want, there is no pressure it's quiet and I like it even if it is depressing." Lisa comes to terms with the difficulties her life imposes. She likes her life even if at times there is depression. She tells me that she is "happy" and that she has "come a long way" and that she "has freedom." I am reminded here that the life of a person who feels controlled is an imprisoned life, and that people who have handicaps often feel imprisoned by the so-called caring people around them. Indeed as I converse with Lisa, over the span of our conversations I watch her grow in confidence and independence. I watch her move into her own apartment, get a job, a boyfriend, a circle of friends. I watch her gain confidence in setting limits with her family who press their concerns about her onto the business of her life. Commenting on the changes she has made in her life, Lisa says:

Yeah, well I have grown up. Who would have thought that I would be in my own apartment? My dream was to have an apartment like Mary Tyler Moore and have a career. I have an apartment; it's a two and a half. Here I am, I've got my training. I am free and on my own. So what if I have an imaginary world. It's a plus. All the better. I am not alone.

### **Voices of Other**

As Lisa engages with me she peppers her conversation with various Yiddish expressions that bring fullness to her words. Lisa is a child of survivors of the Holocaust. But when I ask Lisa about her identity as a Jewish person she draws a blank and insists that she does not really have a sense of her Jewishness. As I

press further, I ask Lisa to describe her culture from her point of view. She responds

I am Jewish but I have my own understanding. I feel my mother suffered enough and as a Jew I hate Hitler's guts and thanks to being Jewish I lost all my family. I don't have any grandparents. The people at the old people centre are my family.

We readily see that Lisa protects her cultural identity because in some way she feels being named could further destroy her family. But as I encourage Lisa to explore with me her sense of cultural identity she opens up a little and tells me "They say Jews are good listeners and they are funny." "Where do you think these traits come from," I ask. She replies:

Yeah, well with what they went through they would have to be funny. There is an old saying if you don't laugh you'll cry. We all have hardships. I don't think you have to be Jewish to have a sense of humour. But we Jews are sympathetic, caring, funny, good listeners. That's it, I never stereotyped.

"What do you think other people say?" I inquire.

They stereotype them. We are money-lenders, just because they say we are rich which isn't true. Judging from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* that's what Shylock was. He wants a pound of flesh. He was a money-lender. It's not true but that is what the stereotype of Shylock was. People say we are rich.

Despite Lisa's insistence that she holds no particular meaning to being Jewish, as our conversation unfolds, she tells me the story of her parents internment and the impact it had over her family experience. She tells me of her visits to the Jewish home where she does volunteer work and visits with her beloved friend whom she calls "my mouse." She sings Jewish songs to her and as she says finds a connection to the grandparents she never could know. It

is clear by our conversations that Lisa is proud of her Jewish identity and that it very much influences the ways in which she perceives the world.

### **Perceiving Self and Others**

Lisa has a sense that she comes from a strong family. When I ask her to describe herself. Lisa tells me that she is strong, independent, sensitive, creative and funny. She tells me she shares these characteristics with her sisters and her mother. When I ask her who are some weak people she tells me the names of two men Harold and "maybe my father." I ask her to tell me about how she sees herself and other women. She says:

Now-a-days women are tough. In our society today women are liberated. We are forced to handle situations. Not every woman has a man. And we are different. We are more educated. There was a time when women were only barefoot and pregnant and couldn't vote. Couldn't do nothing, and now we have a brain, we are allowed to use our brains; doctors, lawyers, dentists, whatever.

And men I inquire? "They are thoughtless, immature, at least that is what I heard my friend say." Lisa shows her relative poverty of understanding of the position of self and others. For example, I ask her about other cultural groups, and how she sees or understands them. At first she claims to have no opinions. Finally, at my prompting, she tells me about her view of the Irish. She tells me:

"Well they say the luck of the Irish. I do wear green on Saint Patrick's day. They are friendly. My sister herself kissed the Blarney stone. There is magic about them, I think. I believe in leprechauns. I know there is the IRA but it's not their fault."

We see in Lisa's narrative pockets of her intelligence but also her naive and sometimes-clichéd understanding of the world of self and others. Lisa often polarizes her sense of self and her sense of others into valued and devalued objects. This is particularly so when she describes the status of one's being

disabled or limited in intelligence. In this way, it is clear by her narratives that academic achievement has a high importance in the values of her family. She includes herself in this category of the well educated only to remind herself that "My mother took me out of university," meaning that she lacked the raw abilities to extend the family tree of education where all family members had managed to achieve. Lisa describes her and her family's reaction to the world of disability

I had a friend and we played together quite a bit but once I came to the centre by I had three friends good-bye. I called one in the fall: she never called back. The minute I moved here. They thought I was one of them. They thought I was a retard. My mom says, "you are not as handicapped as them." She wishes I would break up with my boyfriend who she says is too low intellectually for me.

### **Perceiving Others in the Self**

The voice of other in Lisa came as this sense that the words she spoke about or against herself through the voice of deficit actually originated from external voices. It came as this sense that voices of others were speaking in a kind of chorus that somehow remained outside the core of the self, the speaking subject, in a way that left the impression that she was being spoken about. Sometimes the presence of this voice came through the first person of the speaking subject, the I, while other times the distinct voice of another person could be heard. In either case there was this sense that this interior presence was not yet fully taken into the integrity of the speaking subject. At some point and in some way the voice of other is ultimately taken into the fibers of the personality either as a harsh voice, a gentle voice or one that is neutral in the wages for or against self esteem. Lisa's own voice of other was easy to identify and generally remained outside her core sense of herself. In other words, Lisa knows what others believe about her. Sometimes she is able to resist becoming

infused with these voices and sometimes she is not. We recall the words from her earlier narrative.

I am lazy. I was always spoiled rotten—pampered you know even at home I got my mother to get the fruit and my sister would say why don't you get it yourself. Even on my own I wouldn't take initiative to get it myself, if it wasn't served to me. So yeah, I am lazy. My mother even said my only real handicap is that I am lazy. If I want to I can walk very fast. It's just laziness and motivation. I may have weak muscles but with effort I can do anything. Because I was the baby of the family. Everyone said and my sisters agreed I was a spoiled brat. I was spoiled. I was a baby. I had three mothers bossing me around, telling me what to do and pampering me.

In this instance Lisa is unable to distance herself from the voices of other. She accepts their evaluation of her and moves towards taking their position into the core of her personality. Lisa believes that her laziness is the cause of her inabilities in life. But in other instances we can hear Lisa taking distance from the negative valuations which she feels others try to impress upon her. She says:

I like it when people appreciate me and say good job. Ann and Debbie always criticized me and so has my mom and my sisters. My sister worries about me because I am on welfare...course I lie to her and say I am on time for work. I just want peace. On my own I have to decide to be on time for work. It all depends on me. Whenever I was at home Bev was always finding things wrong. I like it when someone says well done. I guess it's my handicap—my mom and sisters always think I am too fat. People say I should lose weight: my mom said when you see the nurse please be your miserable self, don't put on an act. I was visiting my mother, my sister made me put out the garbage at one in the morning. She agitates me. Goody two shoes. She treats me like I am six years old. Maybe she is the reason I have an imaginary world and when I was visiting she would say you are watching garbage on the TV. She would tell her friends. I felt like saying, don't put me down in front of your friends. So I have a messy apartment. It's still my place. I don't want them to come here. I am afraid they will criticize me: she would say how come you have dishes in the sink, clothes on the bed. She would say how come you have a dirty floor. My mom is so talented, this is her reward,

but this is my home. I can shut on my machine. I don't have to talk to anybody. Often I don't. People say it is wrong for me to have an imaginary world, to talk to myself, I am thirty years old for God's sake, my mom says why are you talking to yourself? I keep saying I am not talking to myself, I am talking to Bob, and the whole family says stop talking to yourself, and that hurts because I am not doing that—my friends find it strange, but they accept it.

In these fragments of Lisa's narrative we can hear her struggle with the position that the voices of other takes in her life. In one moment we hear her almost giving in to the voice of other. She calls herself lazy. In this instance the voice of the other and the self are close to merging. Lisa and other are nearly one. In other moments, we hear Lisa struggle to retain autonomy from these external voices. She resists their judgments, calls their assessments of her into question and finally finds ways to barricade herself from their intrusions by, for example "shutting on the answering machine."

### **Inner Speaking Voices**

In the earliest stage of this journey, Lisa told me almost immediately that she had an imaginary world. Did I want to know more about it? she inquired. She seemed happy and willing to present this world to me. She wanted me to know about it. She wanted to take me there. And so with a great deal of skepticism I ventured into Lisa's narrative about the voices within her that spoke to her on a regular basis. These voices, she told me, were not real voices but creations of her imagination. It was here in conversation with Lisa that I began to understand the resilient, restorative capacity of imagination. The "imaginary world" in this context is often seen in its pathological dimensions. Perhaps we fail to understand the meaning and value of the function of imagination to protect the integrity of the psyche from the onslaught of attacks on it. We see it as weakness in the psyche instead of a human strength. I began to understand, through Lisa, another perspective of this world; one that is seen

less through a developmental or psychiatric lens and more through a narrative perspective. I began to appreciate the cast of characters we all carry around. The voices that speak within us through memory and imagination that fuse to create a vast and complex inner world of a community of others. Lisa explained to me the origins of her imaginary world. It was the way she “survived” she told me. She explained:

It all started when I was two or three. I had this really big bedroom. I would make up scenarios and I became imaginary friends with Colleen O’Donnell and I forget who else. But they soon faded away until high school when they all came back again except this time they were based on real people. I invented a guy named Bob. I wasn’t in love with him. He became my foster brother Bob. I had him for a while as my brother. I used to pretend, I still do, that I was an agent like “Get Smart.”

I asked Lisa to tell me more about Bob who seems to have a central place in her inner world. She continues:

He is basically my conscience. I know he doesn’t exist but he is there and when I first came to the (Centre) all the other people became a part of my imaginary world. Not only were Anne, Joe, and Frank in my imaginary world but they became agents too. I made believe we were all on assignment to help handicapped people.

I pressed further into Lisa’s account of her imaginary friends who were on assignment to help handicapped people. “How do they help handicapped people?” I inquire. Lisa tells me, “they are there to resolve how you guys are doing. To give an idea how the Centre is handling things.” And then Lisa adds, “that’s how I did it, to make myself comfortable here, and I found it worked.” Lisa explains to me in this narrative how she reinvents a difficult situation to her favour. She is not sure she trusts her new surroundings in the centre for handicapped people and so she enlists her imagination to go on “assignment.” But Lisa also tells me that her imaginary friends are there even when things

are good in her life. She says: "Oh they are all there even when things are good. They are my conscience. Bob is a principle factor because he is my foster brother. But the rest are there too."

I inquire of Lisa how these imaginary persons become her conscience. She tells me, "he (Bob) tells me what I am doing right or wrong. He tries to make me see reason. I know it's me. Many times he tells me: 'You know I don't exist.'"

I wonder aloud with Lisa if she hears this voice within her. She tells me emphatically, "I am the voice, it's me talking." She continues:

It's my security blanket. He is out there watching over me. And he has always been there and that's why I am afraid if I go to a psychiatrist, they are going to make me get rid of him. And I don't think he should fade away because he doesn't do me any harm. Only I do harm to myself.

Lisa views her imaginary companion as an ally in life. She fears that this ally may be taken away from her if she is too open about her fantasy life. Lisa takes me further into her fantasy domain. There a cast of characters comes to life. Sometimes her narrative sounds like a historical romance, other times there is intrigue and mystery. As Lisa speaks a jumble of characters emerge. Each she calls by name and explains their function in her life. Usually, they represent someone real in her every day life. She enlists them as characters for a fantasy life that she uses to shore up the walls of her tenuous position on the boundary where she lives. Here is how Lisa describes a segment of the rolling fantasies within her:

They are all part of myself. Bob is the one I love the most because he never leaves me. Charles is no longer. The last time I heard about him, he was in Vancouver. But I still have a part of him in my heart.



They are all the best of friends. They discuss situations and observe behaviour. But we don't do that anymore. We are sort of floating free, but we are still all together. That got me sort of secure here. Bob is married but his wife is on assignment. I sent her on assignment.

I try to explore with Lisa the function of these characters, how they help her or guide her through life. She explains to me that "Anne, Bob and Gary" represent how she wants people to be. They are mature, she tells me, and they never let her down. Moreover, she never fights with them. But Lisa tells me she does on occasion have arguments with Bob who represents her conscience. She says:

For example if he thinks I am doing something wrong he tells me to do things I don't want to do, like get up, or cook when I don't want to cook, clean when I don't want to clean, do the fridge when I don't want to do the fridge. Take a shower. Sometimes he is able to push me and sometimes he is not. I still need him but lately I've become more independent, on my own. He is still there, but he believes in me, as they all do.

Lisa tells me that "they are her family, her security blanket and that they understand her." Bob "was there," she tells me, "in her hard times." "He knows," she tells me, that she had reason to dislike her father. But then Lisa tells me something else. Somehow her trusted imaginary friend abandoned her at a very difficult moment in her life. She tells me:

Somehow he wasn't there when I had my operations. You know I was on this kind of iron sandwich board, so long on one side and then they turn you upside down. One night it got the better of me and there was this nurse who promised to say goodnight to me and she didn't and I was upside-down calling her name. And they were telling me to go to sleep. It was frustrating. And I forgot they existed. Only when I went back to high school I remembered them.

Lisa's imaginary world failed her at a most lonely time in her life as she lay suspended upside down strapped against a board. We can imagine the well-intentioned but forgetful nurse and the painful journey of a young child

through the night space of a world that seemed upside down. Lisa's imaginary life only returned to her when she was reintegrated into the everyday world. We can understand this as the failure of the imagination to ultimately deter the harsh effects of a trauma. In the end Lisa was left alone to face the misery of her situation. But the voice of imagination returned to her as a buffer to the average everyday world. Here in all the petty nuances of life did Lisa need and obtain protection from the dull ache that a constant dose of rejection dispenses. Lisa applied her imagination as an armor. She knew very well its function and use. She knows in the present day when and how to apply it. Lisa is not out of touch with reality. She does not live only in her imagination. Rather she successfully, and skillfully, balances her two worlds of imagination and reality, keeping them in tune with each other and calling upon each of them to offset the other's limitations. In Lisa's view, this world is a useful, rational instrument that helps her cope with every day life. She explains:

People say it's wrong for me to have an imaginary world, to talk to myself, to believe I have an imaginary world. I am 33 years old for God's sake. My mom says why are you talking to yourself and all this. I keep saying I am not talking to myself. I am talking to Bob. Maybe if she would listen to what I am saying to him instead of cutting me off, she would understand me better. The whole family says stop talking to yourself and that hurts because I am not doing it. I know it's MY VOICE talking. I am not saying that sweater does not look good. I am saying this sweater does not look good, BOB. That's a difference.

Lisa explains that her family confuses her talking to herself when she is really talking to "Bob." She seems mystified by their lack of appreciation of this difference. Lisa's words seem to convey that she is unable to distinguish the reality from the fantasy. But as I attempt to understand the apparent contradiction of her attributing a voice to an imaginary character and her sense that she is not talking to herself, I ask Lisa if she knows they are in her

imagination. Lisa responds and explains, "Of course. They never hurt me. I am not possessed by them. I know it's me talking—but I am not alone even when I am alone." "Does "Bob " use your voice," I ask?

Of course. I would be totally nuts if it wasn't. I can't imagine speaking in another voice. It's me. I mean I am not schizophrenic. I know they are there. They don't control me. Well maybe to a point. He (Bob) wanted me to stay home but I said I have to go to work. I have a cold so I should have listened to him.

Lisa seems very realistic about her imaginary world. She has given it a lot of thought. In this way, Lisa is able to stand back from her imaginary experience to observe her inner life. She comments about herself. "Well let's ask the question. Does Lisa have an imaginary world because she is lonely? Answer. Well of course! Because her friends don't understand her really so she can't open up to them. I find the sound of my own voice very soothing."

Lisa brings an articulate voice to this project of understanding inner imaginative experience. She unabashedly shares with me the voices within her. We converse about these various personas and as we continue I find that I am able to relate to these facets of her personality. I can imagine the Bob of her conscience guiding her actions, encouraging her accomplishments and trying to keep her on a steady path through life. There is no sense that menacing voices press upon her inner world. The judgment and harsh introjections that do emerge seem to come from the world of others. As Lisa speaks she easily conjures the world of others. She speaks in the voices of her mother and other family members. She speaks in the voice of former employers and in the voices of her peers. She speaks in her own voice against herself. It is through these voices that we find the harsher attributes of Lisa's inner life. And so as Lisa points out, it makes very good sense that she would seek the resilience within

herself through a counter world that fends off the attacks from the real world. The inner speaking voice becomes for Lisa her “conscience.” It becomes the trusted guide and internal regulator of her experience. In this way, it holds a high place in securing her otherwise tenuous hold on the demands of the external world. Lisa’s “imaginary friends” bind her psychic life and provide a psychological sense of community. That is, she incorporates within herself a world of psychic others who invite her to participate in an inner community of acceptance and support.

### **Returning to the One**

We have located various voices in the narratives that Lisa brings to this conversation. We see that her mental life moves between various positions and perspectives about where she situates herself in the world. We see that Lisa’s inner world is multi-dimensional, complex and rich in texture. Lisa is not the sum of the voices within her, nor is her inner life one-dimensional. The lifting of voices within the text of Lisa’s narrative perhaps allows us to understand the complexity of her inner landscape and to see how competing forces within her influence, for better or worse, her experience of identity. We can begin to see how the disability label permeates Lisa’s life but also how she escapes it. She does this by keeping it contained within certain inner boundaries and by the creation of new categories within her experience of herself. Lisa’s life in totality cannot be taken as an average Canadian life. She lives in somewhat marginal circumstances. Her physical stamina is not the best. Her physical and social surroundings also suffer somewhat. She experiences isolation and loneliness. She suffers tacit rejections from her family. She works at a menial job and retreats into an imaginary world in order to escape the social demands from a world that she cannot quite cope with. These are the elements of Lisa’s life that seem to paint a bleak portrait. Yet

taken in their separateness and their totality we can see that Lisa's voices also present a portrait of success, dignity, courage, and tenacious achievement. We may ask what saves Lisa from the heavy odds that are placed against her? What things bring success and meaning to her life? In answering this question, there are at least two elements of experience that raise Lisa's status and quality of life: the experience of her autonomy and the experience of equality within a supportive community. On the one hand, Lisa was able to gain liberation from the restrictions that others had placed on her and on the other hand she was able to experience the strengths gathered from a collectivity that allowed her to reclaim her own voice, in all its poverty and richness. Such a reclaiming could only have happened through a like community of others who in their collectivity offer affirmation. Lisa's narrative thus leads to establishing these elements of autonomy and community as important therapeutic ingredients in assisting people to integrate and recover the power of their many voices. I will return to the implications of these notions once the voices of other participants on this conversational journey have been presented.

We move next then, to the community of others which surround Lisa. Some of these others know Lisa and she them. Others are from outside her experience. We move to this collective dimension to gather life stories, to listen and to hear what their narratives tell us. In this leg of the journey I did not listen as much for voices that emerge as I did for their stories. I wanted to know how their lives have unfolded on this boundary. I asked the questions to myself: What are their life circumstances? Are they happy, lonely, isolated? Where do they live, with whom and for how long? What are their relationships like and do they have friends? I further wanted to know how they understand and experience their lives in its distant and current perspectives. These are some of the questions that guided my conversational

exchange and that came to frame my understanding of their various life perspectives. I turn then to these stories and to the layers of voices that speak within them.

## Chapter 7

### **Situating Narratives across the Life Cycle: Telling Life Stories**

We cannot draw the full narratives from the life stories that have unfolded in this conversational journey. Rather we dip into the pool of this vast sea of lives that we have encountered as an arbitrary point of entry. We throw ourselves into this sea of conversation, in the way that Gadamer describes, where images, feeling tones and representations of how a sampling of people have lived their lives come to the surface. It will be an utterly incomplete and inadequate description, as all tales of the sea are. But hopefully the reader will be able to capture a sense of lives as lived in this particular conversational voyage. In this incomplete way, we move across the life cycle, taking snapshots of life stories from the perspectives of later, middle and younger adult life. We ask how these perspectives differ and what questions they evoke from their standpoint. We further ask if there is anything different to be observed through the passage of time. In other words do identity scripts remain stable or do they change. Another question that comes to the surface is whether there are differences or gains made in the social profiles across the generations of people who are represented in this sample of people.

#### **The Untold Narrative of Parents**

In the first leg of this journey we are led to ask what happens to the weak in our society as they age and as parents die or they leave behind the youthful reserves of strength they may have had? The story of parents will not be told on this journey. If they were we would hear an incredible array of ordinary acts of courage and dedication. We would hear deep worry, and concern about the unknown abyss for their children. The walls of the institutions have come down. Now empty alleys of homelessness become the imagined sights of fear

for those who helped to crush the mortar of the old ways. The bricks lie as rubble only to be replaced by illusions of straw cottages that threaten to be blown apart at the first cruel wind. Here in the beginning of this leg of the conversational journey we pay homage to the visionaries who now face the limits of their efforts; those who looked for new ways to gather a people without binding them to stigma, restriction or persecution. Many of the parents who stand by the shores of this journey were leaders who sought new parameters to gather people in ways that did not limit them from extending beyond the boundaries of categories. And so we keep their acts in mind as the background—the horizon of conscience behind the work.

### **Telling Life Stories**

Perhaps in reverse order, we start at the end of the life cycle to understand its beginning. We move backwards to trace the steps that have come before so that we can understand the local history of a people who emerge as a community. In order to do this we must make a foray into the institutions of the past. There we listen to the voices that speak of sad and surreal tales. We then go to glimpse the lives of the next generational group; those who may be considered the post-institutional generation. They have mostly lived in the mainstream but know well the specialized setting. Finally we turn to the younger voices, those from “generation X.” We would hope these people represent a post institution, post mainstream attitude that reflects a move towards greater internal and external integration.

### **Three Pioneers: Alice, Betty and Mary**

#### *Alice and Betty: Breaking Free*

Alice and Betty are respectively 59 and 61 years old. Both of these women live in the same community in nearby apartments. They are not close friends



but they share a past that binds their identities together. In a way, they are the survivors from the days of institutionalization. They are not alone on this journey. There are others, Marian, Jack, Bill, John, Christine. They presently all live in close proximity to each other in nearby apartments. Married or living alone, they share a psychological space of having been through a particular experience together. They share together a kind of familial experience of silent memories that bind them. They were all there in the institution before the government came and took control away from a single family who were the owners and operators of a vast rural institutional setting. To tell the stories of people who are the pioneers on this conversational journey, we must look inside the institutions of the past. We believed these institutions to house the most hopeless of our society. We believed the institution was a last resort, a haven for the utterly unprotected. We never imagined that they were filled with the human tragedies of a weakness disposing society. We at least never imagined that these people included fairly average individuals with an intact intellectual and emotional core. We imagined only sub-human life to be behind those walls. We of course were misguided. We need not look too far back in the annals of history to locate our collective guilt. The institutions of our own recent past contain a library of contemporary shame. Alice and Betty take us to this landscape. They do not speak from a standpoint of bitterness. They do not now live as victims but have re-claimed their lives in the community as "average" citizens. Alice tells me her unfolding story of incarceration and liberation.

### *Alice*

My meetings with Alice began in the heat of the summer. She was not a stranger to me. Indeed none of the participants of this project were. But I was in fact rather surprised that she had agreed to participate in this conversational

study. I had known her to be stubbornly independent and distrustful of others distant to her. But evidently Alice did not consider me as a distant person because she eagerly agreed to participate in the study. I went to her apartment for our first meeting. Her crooked smile greeted me as she opened her door and invited me into the sparse environment of her home. But stepping over the threshold of the doorway I suddenly froze as the scent of rancid cat smell swelled around me. Sensing my discomfort, Alice politely urged me in, shutting the bathroom door and apologizing for the source of smell. Taking courage from the warmth of her greeting I ventured further down the hallway to her living area. Her apartment looked rather like an impoverished institution or abandoned building from days long since passed. A film of dust seemed to hang from the air and settled on places such as the wooden chair and small table, which stood in the middle of the room. A single bed with a covering of a single worn blanket seemed randomly placed. But there was an air of neatness and order in this shelter. In this dusty museum we settle at the small table and begin our talk together. Alice talks to me in half sentences, her eyes shifting away from me as she looks around the room for relief from my gaze and her self-consciousness. She tells me that she does not want to talk about the institution but continues anyway to venture into her story remarking occasionally "but that was a long time ago." Here is how Alice recounts her story to me:

Oh yeah, I went there (the institution) for 22 years. No good. It was like a prison. Marian, Jack, Betty, they all went there. I want to forget it. I was sixteen when I went there. Its better on my own. I ran away four times from that place. But I always got caught. I hitch hiked to Montreal then they came to get me. You know what they did when you came back? Hit you with a wooden spoon and shaved your head all bald. They did that to me and Betty, oh yeah she used to hit me with a fly swatter. My mother came to see me by taxi once and they wouldn't even let her see me. They didn't want her to see that I was all bald. She hit me the first day I

arrived. Once I hit her back but she put my head under water. I told her why don't you drown me and be done with it. Then she tied me up in bed. You couldn't go nowhere, and you were locked in your room and once the government came and told her to take the locks off the door. And she waited until they was gone and then she put them back on. The people who worked there...once they had to sleep there so we had to sleep on the floor. It was bad. I ran away five times but I always got caught.

I asked Alice if she felt she had done something wrong to be placed in the institution. She explains:

No my mother is the one who did something wrong. She hit my sister over the head with an alarm clock and the welfare found out and took us away. She got fifteen stitches for no reason, just for sticking up for me. She chased me with a fire poker. She is dead now. She was epileptic.

Alice tells me that hers is a story of abuse and neglect from an early age. But it is also one of amazing forgiveness and devotion to her mother whom she took care of while she was dying of cancer. She tells me "I was there when she died at 2 p.m. in the afternoon; bone cancer. She was 72 when she died. If she were living she would be 73 this month. As Alice reveals this to me she quickly looks away and changes the subject. "Is there going to be a shared supper this month," she wants to know. This is a regular event hosted by a volunteer group that offers a meal and a chance to meet friends. Alice does not like to linger on these sad events. She wants to move to the present; to her cats Blacky and Tiger whom she frequently looks at during the interview and tries to include in the world of our conversation. Alice's world seems desolate by an average standard. Her small lightless apartment is stuffed with garage sale memorabilia all of which she contains, in "the bedroom." The main room contains her bed, her chair, a dinette set. Several bureaus line the grim walls. Over the window dusty drapes hang slightly lopsided, shielding a view that looks onto a rickety old fire escape. Alice has left the institution to arrive at

poverty. Yet Alice tells me that her world is rich. And indeed in the hallway her world alights as she is greeted by neighbours who genuinely seem to like her. Alice is not lonely. She goes to concerts and movies with her friends. She roams the nearby shopping mall. She does not worry about money and does not feel she is poor. She tells me she can always eat at “the soup,” an abbreviation she has given to the soup kitchen she frequents. Alice is in the twilight of her life. She has found her cherished independence. Alice is a crusty soul, the kind of older woman who shakes her stick, and hides her dollars in obscure places. Her wry sense of humour jumps out at me as she speaks, even though she describes the difficult details of her life. “Once I tried to hide in the laundry truck to run away,” she says in a playful moment. Peels of laughter slip from her mouth. Alice is only sixty, yet her body moves like that of a woman much older. She uses a cane or walker to get herself around. Indeed during a winter snowstorm, I observe Alice inching her way along a snow piled street using a walker to plot her every next step. But Alice would not call herself courageous. Indeed I have the impression that she would view this as an indulgence to her rather straightforward life. Alice does not ask for special treatment. She has no great expectations from others. Once when I asked her what she would wish for, she intelligently retorted that “wishes do not come true.” Alice’s story is one of resilience and adaptation of spirit. As I am about to leave she takes me into her “garage sale room.” She opens the door to reveal the stacks of its contents. “Would I need to buy anything?” she wants to know. As she says this she is laughing and her eyes twinkle with mischievous delight. Alice is an entrepreneur and a survivor.

*Betty: Diary of Anna*

Betty also is seen from this pioneer landscape. Like Alice her life course took her to the institution for many years. Betty still does not understand why she

was sent there. She believes it was because one time she did not respect her parents' curfew to be home and she went missing late into the night. She says:

Well I would not study. I never went to high school. I went to sixth grade. After that I stayed home. I was eighteen when I went to the "the Home," one thing led to another and I was sent to the Home. I went out and did not tell my parents. I told my sister to tell them but she didn't. It was her fault and so I ended up in the so-called school.

And then Betty reveals her shock about the nature of the home.

But it wasn't a school it was a mental institution for children. And I didn't even know what mental retardation meant. I didn't know anything because I was brought up normal. And there were retarded babies, and the families used to bring them because they couldn't care for them. I was there 23 years.

Betty further explains.

It was a farm, they made it into a little hospital in memory of their son. And parents would leave chocolates, candy and things. And she would keep it all in her room. She used to have a little incinerator. She used to burn all the letters and everything. It wasn't government land. It was her own land. There were two of us working at first and then maybe eight or nine. We used to work hard. The staff was there but they got paid. There were a lot of children and adults in the institution. But we lived in the same house as the family but like in a dormitory. She used to lock the door at night. At six in the morning we would get up and work till eleven or twelve at night, for the children. Change them, read to them until the staff came after sixteen or seventeen years.

Before her entry into the institution Betty had no sense of being "retarded." She was in her account a normal, regular person living with her family. Even when she entered the "Home" it took a while for the implications of her stay there to sink in. Betty recounts a conversation with a visitor:

She said 'they wouldn't have sent you here if you weren't mentally retarded. You are retarded. I am telling you the truth. You are retarded and that's why they sent you here.' I said; 'Am I? How am I

mentally retarded? Why am I?' ' It's something you are. Nobody knows.' I asked, 'how severely retarded am I?'

But Betty never believed this to be so. She learned to play the game, to be inconspicuous, so as not to draw the ire of her caretakers. "So I let it go. I never believed them. But I couldn't talk back. They tried to make me believe it but I am not." Betty also confirms the mistreatment described by Alice.

Sometimes the kids were very very sick on their deathbeds and there were two doctors who were very good friends with the owner and a child would die and the doctor would give a death certificate saying the child died of natural causes. That wasn't so because there was a girl who tried to hide behind a door to see what Mrs. A was doing because every day a baby would die. And she said she saw Mrs. A put a pillow over the baby's head until it was dead. Then the next day oh the poor baby has died, they had three floors, and some of the kids go in cages if they were bad or disturbed the others. You had to keep quiet. If she didn't like a thing I said about her husband, I would get a slap right in the face. She didn't say anything just Wham.

Betty also tried to run away but was caught and so eventually tried to settle into the life set out for her as a caretaker for the many retarded children that lived within the institution walls. There she found a kind of vocation.

I love kids. I can relate to kids, babies. I can go to their level. And older kids. I read to them. But now I take care of normal kids because retarded kids I have had so much of it. I remember Marie Louise she was a Mongoloid. There is a type of retardation a very severe. They are in bed and have to be fed by a tube. You have to have a lot of patience and I have a lot of patience.

Betty has now lived away from the institution almost as many years as she was there. She is reluctant to look back on those years and wishes to close the chapter on that part of her life. Her sisters also urge her to forget. Yet Betty is also drawn back to those memories and over and over again in our conversations she takes me back to this landscape. She wishes to write a book about her experience and hoped that my conversations with her would make

this possible. When exploring the type of book she would write, Betty brings in her Jewish heritage and more information about a difficult past. She weaves this into what kind of book she would like to write.

They used to call me names like dirty Jew, or Anna the banana it's like that story with the Jewish girl. Anna, the one where she went to a concentration camp that was a good book. I have in mind to write a book. But who could help me.

Betty confronts her interviewer each time they meet. She wants to know what she will gain from these conversations. She is looking for monetary gain. She is looking for her book to be written after mine. She does not mind that I may succeed writing mine. She thinks I deserve it. But she wants fairness in this project.

### *Mary*

Mary's narrative moves away from the story of institutionalization and its devolution, to the homes of families who in her day received little support from the community at large. Mary is in the same age group as Alice and Betty. She tells her life story from the perspective of those who were able to resist the calls of "experts" to place their children in "homes." Mary too has come a long way in her own life. She too has achieved her cherished independence. It is not without its risks. Here is how Mary's story unfolded to me:

"I went to ten special schools in my life," Mary says as she casually recounts to me the significant events of her life. There is an air of pride in her manner as she speaks. It reminds me of war stories. I thought about this for awhile. Imagine going from one school to the next in search of the right place to be, each time trying to fit in somewhere. She continues,

It was mostly for math and...then I worked in sheltered workshops and then my first real job in a factory. I worked almost a full year. But in the beginning my mom taught me at home because there were no schools for me until a certain age. It was nice I did work around the house, ironing. We were busy.

Mary also tells me about her early family life and the difficulties they encountered as they tried to cope with the needs of her sister who she tells me was "handicapped." She tells me:

My father was a printer. That was all in the past. I helped my sister who is handicapped...like when she had a seizure. She was in her own little world. But we fit into her world instead of our world. Like she couldn't adapt to our way of living. She found it very hard. When she was a baby we almost lost her. It changed our whole family. My parents didn't have a social life. My mom died shortly after my younger sister.

Mary informs us that her early life has faced a lot of hardship. The strife of her parents is held in the background and we implicitly understand that they carried a heavy burden. Not only that but we are informed that Mary's mother died shortly after the birth of her younger sister. We now learn the plight of her father who was not only prematurely widowed but was left to care for two mentally disabled children and a new daughter.

But presently Mary is now a long way from her early life. She is now in her fifties and has other things on her mind, like menopause. She is trying to understand this life event; its meaning for her, the changes it brings her body through. She wants to know why she didn't somehow know it would happen. "My feelings are like in an eggshell," she explains to me. She continues:

I try to figure out all the different answers why I am changing. Everything is happening too fast. I talked to the doctor. I never had breast cancer. Sometimes I get a pain but it goes away. My dad is not well, it worries me. He doesn't know if he will make it to the next year.



People speak of walking on eggshells but Mary speaks as if she lives in one, or lives in the feeling that within her eggshells are tread upon lightly. Mary mixes her metaphors but in so doing leads us to a path of understanding what life is like for her lately and perhaps usually. Mary is at a particular juncture in her life. She faces new challenges, obstacles that are worrying. She is not perhaps untypical of other people in her age group and yet each life stage brings a new dimension to her so-called handicapped status in the community of others. Each experience for her is puzzling, frightening, something else to cope with. And what of Mary's father? He does not know if he can make it another year; meaning he does not know how long he will last for his daughter. But Mary tells her story from the vantagepoint of a certain wisdom and maturity. She is an elder, one of the pioneers amongst a people who forged a path where none was. In the beginning, Mary stayed home from school she tells me, because as she says "there were no schools for me until a certain age." But her story is also one of emancipation and overcoming hard times and gaining freedom in her life. Getting a job, and living on her own are two accomplishments that Mary can boast of. And yet there are huge areas of tyranny that she lives under. At the time of this interview Mary shares an apartment with her boyfriend/friend and describes their life together in terms that ring alarms of concern. She has pursued the freedom to be like everyone else and yet her achievement brings her to the doorstep of emotional abuse. Mary's story is a kind of sixties women's story. She has achieved a certain success. She has a man in her life even though, as she states, they go their separate ways. But as we embark on the conversational path, Mary and I, she brings a dilemma to the discussion. Should she stay in an abusive relationship or should she leave? She tries in vain to understand what went wrong.

I thought I was there for him all along. I tried to understand. It just built up over the years. Mostly it's my fault. I am trying to put

everything back together again. We used to go out for a Sunday supper or to a movie, go dancing. Things have changed. I don't know if I am jealous. I told him I understand. I've always had respect for him. If I have done something wrong I mend it right away.

In many ways Mary's story, and the current dilemma she finds herself in, is as common as the ordinary cold. She finds herself in a loveless relationship; one where she feels oppressed and on her guard. But Mary also gives evidence that her relationship is an abusive one. In one instance she says;

Yeah, like trying to understand him, and don't put pressure. Trying to find the words sometimes he likes to be quiet or he wants to have his time. Ah, space...that's the word I am trying to think of. I seem to be more out than in trying to give him space. I go out in the morning for a walk, then come home for lunch then I go out again, or I go to the malls. I come home for supper. He spends most of the time in his bedroom. The odd time we sit together. We eat separately. I have to remember to go and see if he is okay or ask if he is doing anything special, how his evening was, things like that he would say "you can't be there for my feelings" everything is too late. He would say you can't be there for my feelings and sometimes when he talks I interfere, like I start to say something and he says it's rude, very impolite. He reminds me that I should wait until he finishes talking before I say anything. I should listen to what he has to say, and if I don't do it right away, he reminds me. He wants everything right away. I try to keep up but it's not easy.

We glean from Mary's story that she grew up in a protected environment surrounded by diligent, resourceful and caring parents. They probably never foresaw her living on her own but when the time arrived, her father was faced with few choices. Mary was thrust into her own apartment after her period of "training" at the Transitional Living centre had been completed. She was 30 years old at the time. By all accounts, Mary's initial venture into the community was fraught with difficulties. She was lonely and vulnerable to the exploitation of others. And so Mary returned to stay at a "community residence" where she was provided the supports she needed. But as Mary

matured in her life she rebelled against the confines of this home. She wanted her independence. And so Mary met up with Mark, an unlikely suitor some fifteen years younger than her and with much more savvy and street sense. Mary and Mark found an apartment together. They enjoyed certain activities together such as dancing, rug hooking and listening to music. Mark is not a "bad" person. He too has been a "client" receiving support from the same organization that follows Betty. He too has learning difficulties. And in many ways he has helped Mary to experience new horizons in her life for example taking her out dancing at a club or out for supper. He has taught her to ride a bicycle and helps her to learn to read. But we also know from our visits to Mary that she lives under his domination and control. Once, for example, we learn that he "counts the pieces of bread" upon his return home to see if Mary has been sneaking food. He is trying to "help" her control her weight we are told. But other motives are also suspected. Another time, it is learned that he often disappears for days and is enraged when Mary is not home to greet him when he returns. On the other hand when he is home she is made to leave for hours at a time so he can have his "space." We also know that he tries to convince Mary to hand over her welfare check to him so he can "manage her money." Mary has no money sense. She cannot even perform simple arithmetic and has no understanding of the value of money. She does not for example understand that money runs out at the end of the month. She would like to keep on buying things for Mark. For this reason Mary's counsellor from the centre controls her finances; an arrangement of which occasionally enrages her. Mary also cannot effectively read or write. Yet she is frequently seen pouring over a novel because Mark loves to read and is waiting to discuss the book with her. Lately, however, Mary begins to question her relationship. She finds herself in a dilemma as she begins to allow herself to admit that abuse is taking place. We see in her narrative the fluctuations between blaming herself for her "failings"

and expressing open dismay about the demands that Mark places on her. Mary's hollowed out sense of self has allowed the power of another to occupy her personality. It remains unclear whether she will be able to find her own voice in the face of the domination from another.

As the stories of these three women are presented we may ask what they share in common from the perspective of their generation. Clearly the institutional setting loomed over the lives of people with marginal intelligence during the period of their formative years. It is interesting that many of those who were subjected to sometimes-horrific incarcerations in the institutions of the 1940s and 1950s are now finding their voice through class action suits and demands for apologies from their government.

But we can also ask the question whether the institution played any role in helping their adaptation to life. Did the institution offer any positive results to Alice and Betty? Did Mary and her sister fare better in the setting of their family home? In many ways Betty and Alice can be considered as well-formed people. They know how to cope and survive. They know how create structure in their lives. They manage their affairs quite well and do not need help to manage their money or plan out their days. They are paradoxically quite independent people. As well, they have a community of peers with whom they grew up in the institution all of whom now live in close proximity to each other. When I ask Alice, for example, whom she would turn to for help and whom she trusts, she cites her long-standing "friends" from the institution. This community of friends remains intact despite the fact that it has been at least 20 years since they were released together to the charge of the community agency that still supports them in the community. But Mary too brings this well-structured quality to the description of her life. Her apartment is well kept; she follows a

daily routine, and generally manages, with guidance, to attend to the functional affairs of her life. But what of their sense of "self?" It seems that it is here were the institutions and institutionalized thinking of the past, of which Mary was surely subject to, have foraged and left their mark. There seems to be a striking sense of the loss self with all three of these women. They seem to convey a sense that their person and their personality have been vacated by the imposition of an "institutional voice." Alice can not think of wishes because the dream world has perhaps been "trained" out of her. Mary attempts to achieve the cliched persona of the "delicate woman." She is caught in a time trap of a "fifties woman." Living in the feeling that she treads on eggshells, she tries in vain to understand her man. Betty too seems tied to an external voice from the past. She does not seem able, finally, to dis-identify herself from the institution of her past. She speaks of the past as though it were the present. We can not conclude conclusively that these institutions have pervasively removed the sense of self from all people it cloistered. But it at least seems likely that these types of non-surgical lobotomies of the self were routinely practiced on originally vibrant life.

### **Life in Midstream: Nadia, John and Luke**

We move away from the landscape of the older person's experience and from the days when the institutions loomed to the suburban lawns and urban centres from where the people of the next section of this conversational journey merge into the mainstream of society. We hear the life narratives of people who are in the bloom of their adult life. We listen to their preoccupations, hopes and concerns about how they assess their own life journeys thus far and we ask in what ways their lives differ from their elder peers. Theirs is also a story of emancipation from a past that is often fraught with small and large humiliations, rejections, over and under protections from

families and teachers and other professionals who themselves tried to grapple with the non definition characteristics of "the grey zone." These people can be considered within a post institutionalization context. They did not particularly benefit from the "normalization" movement, which was originated in Scandinavia and later imported to America by Wolfensberger (1972), and others. Their lives did not need, particularly, to be normalized because they did not live absolutely in the class of the disabled world. Rather they hovered in the mainstream of the normal world under a variety of nomenclatures such as misfits, slow learners, deviants, odd, strange etc. The list went on and everybody had their own say in the matter. "The kid is just lazy" or perhaps mean, or disturbed. Again, we will not be able to tell the story of their parents or siblings on this voyage. But we could not help but hear the echoes of their worry, dedication, shame, love, anger, and sometimes of the retaliation from their misdirected anger against the very children they sought to protect. With this we acknowledge that we cannot offer a balanced view of lives on the boundary. We acknowledge that I leave gaping holes in the story. But then again, as we have said, we do not try to portray a comprehensive portrait. Snapshots are a poor replication of the landscape. On the other hand, the visitor of this terrain takes within her some essence of the totality of this particular way of being. She pushes her learning forward and enlarges her capacity as a storyteller so that the wisdom may be carried in this storied aspect of thought to the adjacent travelers on this side of the shore. The stories to be told next are not average stories, nor are they obscure. Rather, they reflect the myriad experiences of average lives that are all brutalized in some way. We do not claim, then, that these people suffer more than other human lives. Perhaps there is a need to hear all kinds of stories about lives on other boundaries from a developmental perspective, whether from intellectual, emotional, criminal, or social perspectives. In this context, we would consider not what is one's

category in life but how has the context of their life hindered or helped their development as people. From this perspective, we can begin to think of corrective developmental contexts that would push each person's potential forward.

*Nadia: On the Outer Edge*

Nadia lives on the margin of the margins. This means that amongst the marginal life of her peers, her life is still more marginal. Nadia's life is fraught with anxiety but not apparent despair. Her social world is a whirlwind of constant motion and she pulls people toward her like she is the matriarch of a small feudal society. Nadia presides in this domain, feeding, giving shelter and friendship to those who live within her vortex. But it is a spiral downward to those who look from the outside because this communal life reveals their primitive interests. Nadia lives in squalor, eats sporadically and exists in dubious health conditions. She measures her life from one cigarette to the next and although she quickly pays her rent on welfare day, the remaining funds are allotted to the group needs of the small contingent that follow her, and to her boyfriend's alcohol habit. Nadia is this person whose life is in constant motion. She moves through the midurban streets where she lives in search of the needed ingredients for her survival: cigarettes, food for her cat and then herself, alcohol for her boyfriend. No one knows how Nadia, in some ways, continues to thrive. Her mouth is often afire with ulcers from biting her own tongue and from the infections boiling over from the abscess in her mouth. Her stomach is wrenched from the constant dose of aspirins she takes to dull the pain. Heroic efforts are made to aid Nadia. But she resists all. She refuses dentists and medical interventions in general, as much as she resists any form of help with her financial planning. She protests her freedom whenever a

guiding hand comes her way and she recoils in desperation to resist any attempts to control her.

Nadia utters her story in short sentences. It is for this reason that my own voice moves into the telling of her story. I speak for her through my interpretations of how I understand her life concerns. Nadia exudes a sense of warmth and maternal caring for others. She is far from unlikeable though her street-smart survival skills take her below the surface of any kind of typical notion of morality. She lies or steals as she needs to, but just as easily shows great humanitarianism towards her personal world and the greater world beyond her. Nadia has a keen sense of justice and compassion for others who suffer from hunger or injustice.

Nadia is of Russian descent and her mother still makes frequent trips to her former country. Nadia herself has visited Russia and shares a strong identification with its people's current plight. She recounts her understanding of their situation and compares her own life.

They have no food, no chewing gum; my mom brings that over. Right now they chew tar. I know that is disgusting but its not their fault. I wish they would come down to Montreal. At least we have food. I wish Russians had enough food. Here we can get food vouchers, Christmas baskets. If I had my way I would send them to my cousins. I don't mind me starving; it's just them. I would give the food out my own mouth to feed them.

Though Nadia counts her good fortune for living in a country that is abundant with food, her worry about this basic need for survival filters through most of our conversations together. In one of her fond memories of Russia she recounts: "I know that a long time before they started this business of not having food, they had bread coming out of the oven, my grandfather



used to go there, hot bread out of the oven. We would get cheese, bread. It was good.”

When I ask Nadia why the Russians are so poor. She replies, “because they have no jobs.” And then she draws the link with her own life “If I would be able to have a regular job I would be able to manage my own money. I want a regular job to get off welfare. I wish I wasn’t handicapped.”

Nadia tries to confront the meaning of her handicapped status and the contradiction that she fears being denied welfare because she does not have a proper identification as an outwardly handicapped person

I heard on TV that people over 30 will be cut off welfare. You have to work unless you have a doctor’s paper. I have asthma but I think people with asthma can still work. People who are blind don’t work, aye?

Nadia draws the main distinction between people who are handicapped and those who are not in economic terms. In this sense, Nadia’s story moves the narrative to the political.

Well they (handicapped people) don’t work in regular jobs. They work in workshops and other people work in good jobs.... The handicappers can still work. People are people. It doesn’t matter if it is a workshop or a regular job. They still get paid. They get 43.60 every two weeks but its better than nothing with welfare. I would like to get off welfare earn minimum wage. I know it’s peanuts.

Nadia’s narrative moves like a whirlwind through the landscape. Much like her life, she touches on one thought only to swiftly move to another. Her thoughts at first seem disjointed and hard to connect. But then as one listens for the salient themes we realize that Nadia’s present narrative is about survival on the more outer limits of the boundary. Nadia knows that a few

more steps away and she will be homeless. She knows that her dependence on the state is tenuous and dependent upon the political will of any particular government. She knows this because in the history of her own people she has seen the emergence of poverty so desperate that people literally starve. In a vague way, Nadia draws out the political landscape and asks the very important question about whether handicapped people represent another lower class amongst the systems that Russia's hero Karl Marx sought to expose. We can ask aloud whether there can be any justification whatsoever for the paltry earnings of the disabled class who are housed in workshops doing the most menial of society's tasks. We can also ask whether any of this is the business of psychology. And to this we can answer a resounding yes. We need only scan the rich literature of the previously mentioned Russian developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky to find this justification. Nadia's life narrative also has its moments of significant losses and gains. Nadia gave birth to three children who were each taken from her at their birth. There would likely be more children if it were not for the monthly injections that she agrees to undergo in order to prevent pregnancy.

In between the blur of her scattered life, Nadia is able to settle for just a few moments to let the clarity of the painful loss of her children to be revealed in the conversation. She wants to talk them; her two sons who she refers to by the names she gave them but who she has not seen since birth and her daughter who she does see on occasion under the supervision of her own mother. Her daughter she says is "nice" and like Nadia was, she is also in special school. We learn that a second generation of disability is unfolding. Nadia's daughter lives with her father in another municipality close by. Occasionally Nadia brings her daughter to a special event held by the centre she frequents. She wishes she could have her daughter live with her but she reveals the extent of her

limitations when she offers that the main tasks of her care would be to “dress her, make her lunch, walk her to the bus.” But Nadia also shows her great maternal capacity when she outwardly worries that her daughter lives in an area where drug dealers frequent. In this moment her mothering capacity seems intact. She cannot manage the day to day requirements of bringing up a child but her desire to protect her daughter is evident.

Nadia’s life narrative takes us to the borders of the homeless. She is about to lose the apartment that she has transiently lived in for several years. She and the people who surround her may be looking for another place to rest. Her mother, herself seriously ill, despairs about her daughter’s future. On a chance meeting with myself she crumples before me in tears of hopelessness and reveals to me her fear that her daughter will end up in the “gutter.” Again, Nadia’s story seems neither extraordinary nor typical of those who live on the boundary. But her story does embody a recurrent latent fear that emerged in the narratives of becoming homeless. This fear itself has helped Nadia to remain on the inside perimeter of the boundary. Each month she can be counted on to pay her rent. But how does it happen that a person crosses that perimeter to the other side? Nadia is safe for now but in ten years time there is a reasonable fear that without supports she will cross the perimeter to the outside boundary of the homeless.

*John: One Man’s Courage*

John first came to the center for disabilities at the urging of his teacher from his special education school. He was approaching his twenty-first birthday at the time and they were fast losing their patience with supporting his enrollment in the school. Concerned that he would become a “lost soul” they urged his family to secure supports for him. His mother with whom he had

lived and taken care of for several years had recently died in her sleep and John was now on his own. John's siblings and father expressed concern about his well being but they were equally outraged with his chronic irresponsible and somewhat delinquent behaviour. It was John's sister-in-law who first came with him to the Centre for assistance. Her anger and fatigue seethed through the first interview and she made it clear to all concerned that her own family intended to cut ties with him. John's narrative thus unfolds in the context of a young life plunked on his unsteady feet. From this moment he was trouble waiting to happen.

John's initial narrative took me to his early life when his parents separated, and in his words he felt he had to be "the new dad in the family." He told me of his school life and located the moment of his awareness of living on the boundary. He says:

Well when I was young, I was always...do this, do that. I guess what really happened was...what I am really trying to say is that when my father and mother separated it was pretty rough, very rough. I was like the new Dad in the family. She expected me to do things that a Dad would normally do. Shop, take care of the house, go pay bills.

I inquired: What about School?

I never got a fair education because I was in a school for disabilities, for slower learners than anybody else. I'll give you an example. Instead of having a grade ten reading and writing I would have a grade four.

"Do you remember when you first realized that you were a slow learner?" I ask

Oh yeah, starting in high school. I knew I was going to a special school. Before that I thought school was normal. I thought that

was the procedure. We were treated equal in learning everything, and I guess we weren't. I ended up in special education and well I learned some things and then I didn't learn some things.

I continued: "When you first had the thought that you were a slow learner...."

It was a shock I thought I was a normal elementary student growing up and wanting to go to high school like everybody else, when you realize that you're not its like something just crashed on you, and then you have to try and dig your way out.

John is a person who likes a good joke. His sense of humour jumps out at you, a credit he gives to being Irish. And yet John is not Irish through birth or his adoptive parents. But John has embraced this origin as a flag for his way of being in the world. He explains:

Well I am not actually Irish I had a Ukrainian name at birth before I was adopted so I guess I would be classified as Ukrainian. But I am Irish though. It makes me proud of being Irish. Irish people like to show it. There is going to be a parade. I like Irish stew, they have beautiful songs and just the colour green is nice

I inquire about Irish personality:

"Oh yeah, you often hear a Irish man say don't get mad, get even. Most Irish have the intensity of getting even like a time bomb some of them like if you punch the wrong clock." Are you like this I ask: "Oh yeah, I would much rather get even than get mad. Like lets say you burn my house down, instead of getting angry I just go and burn yours down, that's all." But then he adds. "But really, getting even, is that the answer?" He explains: "The IRA, they have a big problem, they are just crazy, killing other people at a stage when they should make peace instead of war, they are just doing the opposite."

The conversational voyage with John moves us through the complexity of his inner life. He takes us through the corridors of a victim's past and shows us how a body and spirit becomes battered and then how it again revives itself. He shows us his own brutal character and then like a limp babe he falls into our arms from the strain of too much bravado. John's life is somewhere between psychopathic and innocent. He moves us to anger and then to compassion. His affection gurgles to the surface but then he cannot resist a slight sadistic twist to some weakness in another's personality. He is engaging. Some would say he is manipulative.

Then John offers his understanding of justice: "I often sit down and think is this right or is it wrong." He describes his life:

I feel more of a person. I feel more secure of society knowing I am not being abandoned or left out of the picture. Having been out of society...I feel society has given to me a lot and I'm trying my best to give something back in my own ways through the courts looking forward to the future to see what it brings.

I'm the type of person that makes everybody laugh, get them going. Being happy, my personality is somewhat funny. I can be a mean guy, I can be happy sad. I have always dreamed of making it on...always having a good job, nice home, good friends, companions. Working on the railroad is my biggest dream, fantasy I should say...when I was a little boy, when I first got on the train I had that dream. Well I tried but I guess I never had the grades for it. Also I guess I felt I came from a different world. I never got a fair education because I was in a school for disabilities, for slower learners than anyone else. I will give you an example. Instead of having a grade ten reading and writing I would have a grade four.

John's narrative took me from doctor to courtroom to prison, to hospital through a roller coaster of events, tragedies and endless resurrections on his part. Soon after his entry into the center John was diagnosed with the aids virus and soon after that, John began his decline into the justice system. John's

problems began to pose a moral problem for the center. Do others around him need to be protected from him? The discussions were heated and complex. In the end John stayed. At the time of the first interviews I had gone to see him when the steel doors shut behind him at the hospital for the criminally insane and then at the prison which he was now calling his "home away from home." We continued our sporadic "in person" conversations in between his various incarcerations. John's crime repeated over and over again, was his penchant for stealing away Greyhound buses from the city's main terminus. He managed to do this six times and became known for his daring feats which on one excursion took him as far as Ottawa, right past the prime minister's house. John loved to steal away a bus after he learned how to drive one while working as a cleaner on them. He described to me the thrill of rolling down the highway. Indeed on one of his later outings John arrived at the door of the centre where people with mental disabilities frequent. He was trying to get them on the bus, for a ride. As he describes these events John breaks out in a huge boyish grin. He sees the immense humour in this spectacle.

John was at the prison when riots broke out. Placed in D wing with the more vulnerable inmates he was taken under someone's protection and told to hide under a bed. He was terrified, he later told me. But in other ways John loved his life in prison. He told endless stories about the food, as much as you could eat it seemed. Each visit or telephone call I would hear the latest menu: hamburger steak, potatoes, peas, Jell-O or Caramel pudding. Prison became a haven for John, something he could depend on when the world seemed just a bit too overwhelming. He loved to refer to his haven as "Bordeaux beach" in reference to the relative luxury he felt he lived in. In prison John always worked hard in the laundry as he did each time he was released. He always worked wherever he was. This was John's ethic; you have to earn your keep.

But John's joy ride has its tragic moments. The AIDS virus took its toll. He struggled with infections and ailments. Once he suffers a stroke and is paralyzed. But in his resilient way, he rises up again. When I ask John to choose a name for this voyage he says okay "call me one man's courage." When I inquire why he would choose such a name he explains that it was a description given to him in his new life in another city where he now lives and does volunteer work at the local army base. He explains:

That was my commander (he said) it's so good that you've got the courage to come here. Get yourself settled, get your health back on track. Come to our base and making a difference by being a volunteer. What he needs is one man's courage. That's how he referred to me. The past six years have been nothing but prison being in and out. I said its time to pick up and start all over.

John's narrative ends with his re-location to another city. He keeps in touch by telephone. He wants to know how the interviews are going. Can I come to visit him there so we can continue, he asks. But John does return to this city and we meet on occasion.

*Luke: A Reclusive Life*

Luke's life narrative flows onto the pages of the text drawn from our discussions. He tells his story in a straightforward manner that calls to be placed at the front of the telling of his own story.

Okay what would you like to know, anything? Okay well I don't have much of a background. I don't know anything about my childhood, not anything at all. I think my mom knows. But I was okay growing up. School was not that good. I did terrible at school. I used to fail. I tried hard: it's a long story. I can't do the work. My biggest problem is French class. I can't speak it or learn it. And the French teacher knew and every time she saw me doing nothing, her job was to help but she didn't even bother. And so she ignored me, and then I would just cut class and then she would ask me for a note



and then she would tell me to go to the principal's office and then they would call my father and I would get into trouble.

I had a lot of problems. I was in special education classes and I had to do typing and I did miserable because I couldn't keep my fingers on the keys and look at the book. So I failed in that and like I've been failing all my classes and then one time they wanted me to go to Cegep and I couldn't believe it. So I called my mother and she told me it was special education classes. So I said forget it and I never went back to school again. So I started looking for work. But I can't even keep a job. I tried. But I just keep backing out of it and people find me a job and then and I just try it once and then I turn it down. And it's been going on like that for a long time. Let's just say I am a total screw up.

Like working, I keep turning them down and I feel really bad about it because if I keep that up they are going to end up forgetting about me. I can't keep saying no. I am trying to stay with it. I don't know what to do I have been like that for ages, decades. I don't want them to know the truth. That I don't want to work. I just don't have the nerve to say it.

Luke tells the story of his failure to live a life that he feels is productive. He is emerged in his life history as if there is no separation between himself and the events he has lived. For Luke, his life is adjoined to school or now in its place, his life is adjoined to the symbol of work. He does not see beyond this identity. He speaks of his school life as if it were in the present, even though it has surely been many years since he left. Luke is now in his mid 30s, yet he still ruminates about the unfairness of his French teacher as if the event had happened just the other day. Luke lives in this past narrative. He does not seem to differentiate between his life as lived then and his life as it is lived now. His words convey how an identity script can serve to repeat negative cycles of failure.

Luke has incorporated this sense that he is a failure, "a screw up" and he takes this notion with him to each new endeavour. Luke's life story merges with the sense of deficit as a distinct voice within him. This voice of deficit has

its own narrational tale that will be the focus of the next chapter. But in this instance it is difficult to separate the voice of deficit from the story itself. Luke's voice of deficit and his life story can not be differentiated. Luke takes us further into his landscape:

I learned nothing in Special Ed. I was hoping for a normal...decent class. Special Ed is for the birds. I didn't feel I belonged there. I've been living on my own for quite a few years. At first I didn't like being attached to (TIL), being there was on the half-and-half side. It was scary at first, but then after a while you like it. I felt more independent. No one telling you what to do. It felt great. Your own boss. I am not lonesome. I go out and I am not at all lonely. Even though I don't go out because I have my cat. I like being alone. But then I have these moods. I am a very private person. I don't like having things in the open. I don't like having the blinds open. I hate people looking in. I am not private with people I know. I listen to music, watch TV. And talk to my mom on the telephone. I should be lucky I have my parents because once they are gone that's it. They help me a lot. They help me with my order (groceries) with budgeting. Once they are gone I will be in deep trouble. I may have to depend on you guys and I'd rather leave town than go and see you guys

Luke lives a semi-reclusive life. His world consists mainly of his parents who continue to surround him with support. He trusts them and makes it clear that he trusts few others. And yet Luke has let me into his home and to some extent into his internal world. He welcomes me at the door to his apartment. He shows me his pictures on the wall, presents his cat to me. Luke has welcomed me into his home. And yet he clearly identifies me with the dreaded "other." I am lumped in as "you guys;" meaning teachers, psychologists, and all "others" who have contributed to his despised sense of self-identity. We have labelled him "Special Ed" and we are to be avoided. Again Luke's narrative contains a rich display of voices to be explored in other chapters. It is this sense of disconnection, contradiction, competing senses of who he is in the world that emerges from the narrative of Luke's life. He is

reclusive and yet not. He doesn't need people yet he does. He wishes not to work, yet he hopes he will succeed. He dreads depending on anyone else other than his parents, yet his voice indicates that indeed he will look to others for help if and when he needs to. Luke's narrative is a story of pride. He wishes not to be a "Special Ed" person, to be identified and so he goes into hiding, behind his draped windows. Yet Luke has invited me into his home and with this I understand that he in some way invites me into his inner world.

These descriptions of life in the middle period do not really capture the spectrum of stories and life narratives gleaned on this conversational trek. They capture perhaps only a glimpse of what it may be like for some people who live on this particular boundary of intellectual disability.

In the lives described, we see Nadia, John and Luke tenaciously holding onto their rafts in the rough sea of their lives. We cannot say their lives are particularly similar. Yet it is clear that their stories emerge from a common ground of living within a community. In the positive sense it is this intact community that holds and binds them together. In the negative implications this binding targets them to be an out-group in the society at large. They do not, any of them, wish to be held apart or to be seen as different. They state in so many ways that they are like any other human beings. And yet there are positive possibilities for a community that emerges from their marginalization. The narratives of lives on the boundary reveal this positive holding experience of belonging to a community. Perhaps we also perceive a richer sense of self-developing with this middle group. The institutions have not touched their mark of identity, as they seem to have with the older generation. On the other hand their lives seem to be more fragmented, chaotic or isolated. They seem less contained than their older generation.

### **Generation X: Jasmin, Ron and Sarah**

We next move to the description of lives from the perspective of those who are in their early adult years. We wonder if those of this generation X have things in common with their peers who do not live on the same boundary of marginal intelligence in life. We wonder if the quality and substance of their internal lives and that of their external existence is in any way different from the older participants of this conversational study. We want to believe that a new confidence emerges and that these lives have progressed from the previous days of institutionalized thinking. Other marginalized groups of people have made considerable progress in breaking free of the many chains that have bound them. But we wonder what progress has been made, if any, to release and encourage the development of people who live on the particular boundary of marginal intelligence. We wonder if they have even been noticed on any conversational landscape. We conclude at the beginning of this narrative telling that there is some evidence that Homonovus (new man/being) emerges at all level of society. But we are led to conclude that as a people, those on the boundary of normal intelligence suffer rejections even from the most magnanimous and forward thinking of our social leaders. The tyranny of intelligence presses on.

#### *Jasmin: Shock Wave*

To tell Jasmin's life story is tell the story of a warrior poet. This is how he expresses himself, how he sees himself and how he places himself in the world. In order to understand Jasmin we need to leave behind objective knowing in place of a more non-linear experiencing of his narrative and being in the world. He tells his story:

I choose the name Shock Wave for this story, either that or Sub Zero. Shock Wave means highly explosive, energetic, lot of life and energy

at times; Sub Zero calm, always cool, maybe even cold blooded a bit with my response. There is a third one; Dark Horse. For me the dark horse keeps things in, not express myself very well. My own experience is that I never let myself be attached to emotions, aggressions, love, hate, feeling sorrow or sad...I was angry at myself, angry at the world for letting me live in this world...as I got older I built an emotional wall around my heart, no one or nothing can touch me. I have learned a lot since ten years old. My first poem was then. " Shy times Think before racing Quiet and Shy. A great deal of paranoia." Who am I?

You heard about the bombing at Polytechnique. I just said in my cold-blooded explanation; so nobody lives forever...I am a visual minority. I am an Anglo and I act differently. The skinheads, and all the race hate, the Ku Klux clan, they are all connected. They all hate people who are different than they are. I accept that I am Vietnamese Canadian. I have no memories from the war horse. I came here in 1974 at the age of two.

Jasmin has no memories of his past but he offers these thoughts on death: "I learned the hard way that death is a natural thing. To me death is always the constant memory of everything. I was scared of it until I saw more and more death."

Jasmin takes us to landscape of his victimized past and describes for us the history of his emotional evolution. Jasmin's story is one of being plucked from war torn Vietnam at the age of two. He does not remember the war, but it is remembered in his body and in his words. Jasmin is at odds with his emotional landscape. He has taken violence within him and he wonders if he too is cold blooded; perhaps like the soldiers who no doubt killed his family. Jasmin's narrative bears the scars of this war. To listen to his life narrative is to witness how a brutalized past implants itself onto the contours of his personality.

Jasmin fears he is angry, explosive, perhaps even violent. He faces this possibility courageously and openly. Yet Jasmin also expresses a poetic gentleness.

There is also the wise-man style, which everyone has noticed. That I always think, even my parents notice that I keep calm. I perceive things, weigh things... If I hit someone then I expect them to hit me back, for every action there is a reaction.

Jasmin speaks of the violence he feels inside him, of the dark horse, Jekyll and Hyde character that splits his personality into two. On the one hand Jasmin feels he is cold blooded, a "dark warrior" who would attack "without second thought." On the other hand he offers "I am not violent by nature," and if he were going to be violent it would probably be for a "good reason." He says, "But if a person attacks me I have no choice. Then I would attack to kill."

Jasmin's narrative must be seen in the context of the war he was born into, in Vietnam in 1972. He carries this war to the present and, though he claims no identification with his Asian roots, Jasmin personifies oriental values. His entire physical style, in the way his body moves; in the way he clothes himself, his way of speaking, and in what he speaks about, all move together to portray the image of oriental beauty and simplicity juxtaposed within an image of violence. Jasmin's life is a moving photograph. We see the war through body. On one day he glides by me dressed in a red kimono, a fan tucked in his closed hand. Jasmin is a dancer. I have seen him, donned in black, moving with the shadows of his life. His ancestors guiding the grace of his body. Jasmin is a poet. He writes of his life:

I stand alone, so alone  
 in this darkened soul  
 in an empty home  
 none will save me in the end  
 stand alone, so alone  
 in an empty home.

On another day, Jasmin arrives in full American army combat fatigues. He carries the semblance of a bayonet crudely made with a stick and aluminum

foil. On this day he is a warrior. He is trying to protect himself. Jasmin reveals the origins of the warrior poet within him.

In my childhood here and there, made me realize I am only mortal. I have been living in my own little world ever since. The only way to tell it is by walking, living it for me to explain to you what it's like to be in that world, that empty feeling, you would have to walk the same path that I have, to be picked on the way I was picked on, to be emotionally here and there destroyed bit by bit by the world I have been living in....

And then Jasmin identifies the war he faced, not as being in his homeland of Vietnam, but in the peace and prosperity of his new country. He tells us that he became a target of a psychological warfare waged against him by the children who were his peers. He says:

I learned to be a lot tougher than others psychologically because I was always picked on by other people. I was the target of psychological ridicule because I act different. A certain amount of people at my work, school. When I wore glasses they called me four eyes, the French called me pong. Sometimes I was beaten up for no apparent reason. I learned to be psychologically tougher and more cold-blooded.

Jasmin's narrative also tells of his rich imaginative life. This is where Jasmin finds solace. Here in this world, Jasmin plays as an unspoiled child would. He does not leave this child-like world behind but rather takes it with him as a kind of armour to the adult world he must now somehow live in. Jasmin's imaginative world introduces another finding about many lives on the boundary. Imagination was found to be a rich haven of protection and psychological nourishment for many people who participated in this conversational study. The healing aspect of imagination capacity deserves its own voice. It shall thus be given this opportunity in a future chapter that reveals the inner speaking voices found on this conversational journey.

*Ron: Surfing the Net*

Ron brings us to his landscape as a young man who has recently set out on his own. Ron was anxious to graduate from the centre where he lived that helped to prepare him to live independently. In fact most of the conversational participants at one time lived in this centre. Like many, Ron is conflicted about his association with this centre. In many ways Ron's life narrative is a series of repetitions of these conflicted scenarios. On the one hand Ron feels at home at this centre. He feels it has helped him to grow and gain confidence. On the other hand Ron rebels against the label that brought him there. He manages this dilemma by naming himself a volunteer or helper in the centre. Ron is able to do this because he has valued computer skills and is able to assist the teacher in teaching others the same skill. Ron describes the history of his dilemma:

I was fourteen in grade seven. Only the school board knew my age. I acted like a twelve-year old. I was small. My only friends were in shopping malls, the employees who worked in stores where I would go. Ten years old and talking to an adult woman who was working in the lottery booth. I ended up being a loner. In many areas I wanted to achieve. I wanted to be a policeman, a doctor. When I entered programs for the intellectually handicapped. I opened myself to talking to them. In a way I felt more at home. I wanted to be around intellectually handicapped people. I wanted to try to help them, open them up, get them in a good mood. Not try to change them, maybe to have a friend since I never had any. I see myself as having limits. I don't see myself as intellectually handicapped. I don't see myself as having that label put on me. It hurts to have that label. I drive a car. I make my own decisions, to pick myself up if I fall. Unfortunately I have been told by my father. He really enforces it. That has really put me down in a sort of depression area.

Ron's life narrative is caught up with the dilemma of his categorization in the world. But he is able to find a receptive community of others who believe that he is intelligent and respond to him in this way. Ron has become proficient on the use of a computer and his community of friends extends to



this virtual world. There, he is able to find his confident voice, to be articulate and intelligent in ways that seem to escape him in his direct contact with others.

For some living at TIL, lets say the borderline intellectually handicapped, I give myself a higher grade, a higher level, that I am able to comprehend. My talking is of someone who is of a higher nature, a higher level. In talking on the BBS they don't see that I have a handicap at all. I told them that I have a learning disability. I told them in plain English. They read all my messages; they answer me in plain English. In school I was slow and that is where it stays. It only stays in school. I am a computer whiz. When I type they don't see my learning disability, my very acute disability. The computer helps me think. It helps me to communicate; it gives me words in my head. Feels like I have a Master's degree in writing, although I don't.

Ron 's narrative refers to his "very acute learning disability." But in light of his verbal strengths and his computer skills the observer is puzzled what this means. We often have the image of disability as a pervasive stamp that provides a single representation of the person. Ron's narrative defies this image. It shows us the possibility that a person may be both limited and capable at the same time. Ron himself has found a way to circumvent the label that has been attached to him. He has entered a world where he is seen as competent. A world where his disability is not seen or is irrelevant. Ron's expression of competence demonstrates this strong voice of achievement that will be highlighted in other narratives of people in this conversational study. Ron's life narrative also struggles with the voices of deficit. This too will be examined more carefully in the pages to follow. But for the moment we see how these voices are woven into a totality of the unfolding narrative of how one lives one's life. Ron speaks in this voice:

Well my teacher she grabs me real hard. Tells me to look at this example of a dog named Mr. Mugs. There were questions on what he did. She says the example over and over again so I would learn

it. I was thinking why is she grabbing me so hard. Why is she yelling at me? So in my life when someone does that I tend to cower. It hurts. I walk away feeling anger.

Ron's life narrative struggles between the voices that direct his inner world. He cannot make sense of the meaning of the label attached to him by teachers, parents and the outside world in general. He asks how he can be considered to have a disability when for example he is able to drive a car and use a computer. This dilemma brings another voice to Ron's inner life, that of confusion. And with these questions Ron's life narrative leads us to another interesting point to consider. We ask what effect can technology have on the status of one being identified as a disabled person? Ron tells us that while communicating on the Internet no one identifies him as learning disabled. The virtual world reforms Ron's relationship to others. There, his status is raised to at least the average world and mirrors back his own self-perception that he is intelligent. But in Ron's narrative, the world of other's perceptions also figures prominently and he struggles with the position their voice takes within him.

I was in a workshop area. I had to tape these boxes. They had to be perfectly straight. I felt judged. I sense things, I am very observant. I sensed she was being judgmental saying that I was more handicapped than meets the eye. It puts me right down. She puts me in a spot where I am not high functioning. And she (the instructor) is putting me down. Putting me in a category where I am not so handicapped that I can not function, but she is putting me in an area where I can't do anything unless someone is there showing me...My feelings get hurt, my anger does come out a lot. I felt like this woman was the high lord, very smart, smarter than the average person. A very high IQ. It hurts. I have been told that no one is smarter than the next person and then she comes along and okay well, I AM POWER. Where does that leave me as a mouse or someone lower on the totem pole?

Ron is at the juncture in life where he struggles to find a place in the world of work. This forces him to re-visit the land of humiliation that he so often visited as a child and teenager. "Mr. Mugs" has been replaced by rows of boxes.

The teacher has become a “high Lord,” and he a “mouse.” But Ron invents ways of coping with the outside world. We will see that Ron calls upon an intricate balance of inner speaking voices that help him to manage his desires and the demands of a sometimes-critical world. His inner speaking voice will be revealed at another point in this conversational study.

### *Sarah*

Sarah sits before me dressed all in black. A loose tee shirt hangs on her like a tent draped over a thin pole. Black socks are neatly but strangely rolled down to the crease of her feet creating little donuts around her ankles. Her long legs and thin arms protrude from the baggy blackness. White against black, they seem like unwieldy willows of awkward grace. Sarah sits before me, ageless, or could I say in the body of someone who seems to be at varying moments the age of six, then twelve, then sixteen and then every once in a while the woman she is. Sarah’s youth pleases her. She does not relate to her 25 years. She does not want to grow old or older and to prevent this she pries herself into the persona of her past, which by many standards was one of privilege. Today Sarah arrives with her hair coloured a soft orange. She is trying out new styles, new ways of being that provoke the Pollyanna past of her childhood. Sarah has rejected frills in favour of androgyny. And yet her delicate features lead us back to the feminine, back to the lacy pillows of her story book childhood. This is Sarah. A boyish girl woman with natural grace and style etched all over her personality. But Sarah’s idyllic youthfulness and the privilege of her past are tainted by a sunshine of blackness, evidenced in the symbol of her clothing. The lily-white field of her life stretched out before us is eclipsed. Sarah’s life is this lily in bloom, standing fragile in the black light of a cold sun. We take Sarah in like the freshness of spring and we are not quick to see her malaise. We want to go with her into her world and we are drawn to embrace the

images of her past from our own lost dreams and ideals of what childhood could or should be like. We cannot help but like Sarah as a reflection of our own longings to capture innocence in an undisturbed capsule of perpetual time. Like Leonard Cohen's Suzanne, Sarah leads us to the garbage and the flowers. Hers is this story of an untouched sweetness eclipsed but not destroyed by the passing shadows cast from a brain that will not work the way she wants it to. Sarah tells her story:

I have a learning disability but I don't know what it is. I don't like telling people that I have learning disabilities, cause if I do then I get teased like I used to be. I kind of blame my mother for my brain damage but its not her fault. It's not my fault either. My brain is slow. I always blamed my parents for that. When I was little I didn't realize that I had brain damage. I'd like to understand why I have these problems, temper tantrums, crying fits, liking older women, bothering them.... I still miss England very much. I have been to England, Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand. I travelled a lot as a child and now I don't want to do it any more. In China they eat with chopsticks. I love to see them dress in fancy clothes. I went to so many schools and not one of them I enjoyed. I went to schools in England, private schools, Montessori. When I was a child I got lots of attention, but now that I am older I don't seem to be getting that any more.

Sarah takes us to the green meadows of her childhood

In England I used to have a conker tree, we had couple of cars, a big house, a dog, a big backyard, a pool, an apple tree, a vegetable garden. I went to ballet school. I did gymnastics. In England you drink tea at half-past three. The hospitals are very different too. A lot smaller. I had an operation on my eyes. They were cross-eyed or something.

Sarah's narrative weaves through what seems like the lush terrain of her life. She takes us to the high streets of London atop two-storey busses and then over to the thorny rose bushes she encounters in Australia. She remembers, there, drinking coke from a beer glass, which pleases her immensely, and stealing her mother's delicious garden chives. But then the fairy tale picture

shatters in a whisper's breath by the violence of her own words—brain damage. Suddenly the magical child-woman seems dangerous and deranged. She cautions us with her words; temper tantrums, crying fits, liking older women, following them. We are all perplexed by this strange spectacle before us. Snow White suddenly takes on the characteristics of the angry, envious queen. Still, this is Sarah's dilemma. She is forever cast in this portrait of goodness, perhaps split off from the darker sides of her personality. Sarah's eyes can turn in a moment's notice and with this we see before us the unleashing of her torrents of her rage.

Sarah has left the protection of her privileged environment. She is strangely, or perhaps not so, oblivious to all the creatures of material wealth. It all means nothing to her. She now lives in a kind of self-chosen exile in the dormitories of a shelter which house otherwise itinerant women. Sarah has become street-wise and she now walks in relative comfort past alleyways that hide the shadows of dangerous men who easily prey. Once she is lured into a house by a man with ill intentions but then it is he who tries to escape the wails of her protest as she lies prostrate on the pavement of his driveway. In these situations, Sarah's smartness comes to the surface. Yet we are all afraid for her because we know the limits of a dangerous game. Sarah shares this experience of her discomfort in the world and the reasons that she now lives on the borders of a precarious world.

I have had this problem for a long time since elementary school. I was ten years old. She taught kindergarten. I was in grade four. I just wanted to be with her all the time...maybe one thing I did; I wouldn't call it a criminal thing. I would call it dishonest, cause I was trying to help her cause I don't think caring about her should like be a problem and I don't think that's right. And I don't think it should prevent me from living here and I have to move again. I know I have a problem with these two women but I don't think it should effect where I live; maybe a suspension. To be taught a lesson.

Maybe I over did it. Maybe I was really mad. But it really effects my life because I don't know if I have the strength to move again.

### **Drawing the Landscape**

The stories that unfold from this array of lives have not been told, as much as they have been etched like series of drawings. We attempt to engage in life studies which are open ended. In this way a series of drawings before us leave us with many impressions, fleeting perhaps, of these lives lived on the boundaries of this world we enter; the world of people who live within the particular realities of marginal intellectual abilities. What can we thus far glean from these stories? It is impossible to say how each impacts on the readers who now become infused with conversation of this journey. The researcher herself has now become an instrument, a vessel. She contains all these stories within her. They are second nature to her now. No longer are testimonies committed to pages of the written or recorded word. They have become internalized in the very fabric of her mind. She feels the eyes of others looking through her own, and for this reason she cannot produce an objective accounting of their tales. She only hopes, in some way, to pour forth a sense of their being in their world within the body of the stories told. She hopes that the singular voices present themselves in full light while the body of their collective identity emerges as a facet of human experience shared by others. Has this been achieved thus far? The community of others must be the judge, the literary critics who decide if this world of others presents itself in some novel or interesting way. We move then to the next league of this journey; one where we can go further into the landscape of being human in the ways that concern this endeavour.

## Chapter 8

### **The Chorus Resounds: Tracing Voices from the Community.**

We cannot draw out the full repertoire of voices that emerge in the conversations of this journey. We cannot present each person and the many voices that come to surface in the textual understanding of the lives they bring to this project. And so we select portraits from various individual landscapes. In this way, we hope to explore the worlds of meaning that these participants inhabit. We hope to be drawn into their representational reality through the dimension of our own ability to imagine. Through this possibility of empathic imagination we are able to experience the lives of others as moving photographs within us. In this way, we may be able to replace reified ideas, assumptions or prejudices into active, flowing images that create new possibilities of imagination, and hence new ways of seeing the world and others. The chorus of voices reflects the many facets of this journey and the many ways of seeing and hearing life stories. We venture now into the backdrop of the lives of this work.

#### **The Chorus of Deficit**

*Tom: A Crack in my Brain*

"They gyp you in stores now," Tom tells me as he opens the conversation this first day of our interviews. He continues "you go to the cash and you don't always get your money back. I have difficulty counting money." Tom's eyes shift across the noisy cafeteria he has brought me to. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a paper folded in four and pushes it across the table for me to read. On this first day, he brings me immediately to his world of deficit. He understands this to be the purpose of our interview. He is looking for relief from his suffering and he hopes perhaps that I can help to change his situation. Indeed it is clearly also the hope of

someone else, for the note he has brought to me consists of a series of questions posed by a third person and his responses. It reads:

"How are you?"

"Not very good. I am scared by myself. Scared someone is going to get me. I don't know who. I am scared by myself. I wonder who is coming to my window. I live on the first floor and I have a balcony."

"Do you feel better living with your Mom?"

"I feel better. I am scared of the bus. I look behind my back. I don't feel safe in my apartment."

"What do you do in the morning when you get up?"

"I take a shower, have a bowl of cereal. I go for a walk."

"Where do you go?"

"I don't know. It's kind of scary by myself. I don't know where I can go for help for this. That some one may come out and kill me...this and that. My mother is in poor health. Who is going to help me out my brother? He has a very bad temper."

We see that Tom's voice of deficit merges with his fear. We understand this fear as the expression from a paranoid inner world. Tom thinks the world of others might kill him. He senses menace behind his footsteps even on a morning walk. But then as Tom takes us further into this world and as we see his fear a little closer we realize that he has an accurate response to the threat his deficit presents him with. He says: "Someone is out to get me. My mother is pushing me to get a job but my nerves...I can't take the pressure. I used to work. They were all pushing me telling me this is not done properly, do that again."

Tom's voice of deficit echoes the harsh criticism from an incorporated voice from the outside world. He says "Oh yeah, fancy car like my brother. He has a house, has a nice pool, he says I am paying your welfare." Then without prompting Tom describes his disability as he understands its origins.



Yeah, when I was small, I was dropped on my ear. I had an ear infection and there was damage in my brain. I was paralyzed waist down when I was a baby. I went to hospital. It's hard to explain. When I was younger I had to do tests, puzzles and blocks. It was long. I had a screw up in my brain. I had a crack in my brain. I did not know maths at all. I was in school. I erased one and one is two. I erased it. I was wrong. The teacher was scaring me. My mother was yelling at me every time. In maths I was really poor. Teachers would ask me two and two is five...wrong answer. Teacher would hit me. Then the principal was hitting me all the time.

Tom's voice of deficit searches for its origin. It moves between his fears, his self-doubt and his accurate perception of his inability to put certain pieces of the world puzzle together. His situation is such that he cannot know when he is cheated. He goes to a store, he holds out his money and has no idea if he is shortchanged. His deficit brings him to the mercy of his world which, by his account, has treated him with disdain. It moves him to doubt what he does know; "She (the teacher) was yelling at me, why did you erase it for? It was the right answer." With this we understand that the voice of deficit acts as inner judge, regulator, and definer of one's being but that it also draws from the resources of the outer voices that press upon inner life. The voices of others will be explored in the pages to come but we return here to understanding how Tom speaks from within the sense of deficit that overshadows his life.

But Tom also embraces his deficit as a flag that he waves before the world. Each time we meet he wants to talk about what he can't do, his fears and inadequacies. He wants to present his fragility to me and refuses to acknowledge the strengths he does have. He doesn't want to know about the functional parts of his life. The fact that he lives on his own, cares for himself, manages his money, travels on his own to foreign countries. There is the sense that Tom would feel robbed of his identity should some of these strengths surface. In this way, Tom clings to his disability. It is all he knows about himself, all that he can trust as familiar. On one occasion, I ask him to tell me something of his strengths and

talents. I ask him what he likes about himself. So pervasive is Tom's sense of deficit that he can not think of anything he likes about himself. He cannot think of any talents or abilities he may have. Each time I meet with Tom I ask him how he is and each time he responds "not so good" and his puffed cheeks sag with the weight of his sadness. And yet moments earlier I had observed Tom smiling out at the world. Unaware that the world was also observing him, Tom let his joy slip through the cracks of his depressive armor. On other occasions, Tom is seen sitting in the waiting area of the centre, which he frequents, looking dejected and withdrawn. He draws others to inquire about his state, to which he always replies "not so good." The voice of deficit in Tom echoes this sense of not so goodness in his life. Tom will have no car, no pool; no children to mirror back his worth. But Tom's voice of deficit speaks not so much about his cognitive failures but about his inabilities in the social space of the world. He is "fat," "porky," and "talks too fast." He compares himself to senior citizens. "Yeah, I see seniors, kids treat them like dirt." And yet Tom is also attached to this identity. He resists all efforts to help raise him to level of the strengths he does have. Tom refuses these strengths. He is afraid they will deny him of some status in the world; that he will be robbed of something. But we are perplexed as to what this may be and we cannot understand Tom's commitment to his pervasive negative identity. He says:

Depressed. I cry a lot. I have a psychiatrist. I think people are out to get me every time. It is difficult when things are not clear. I think about these things. I go out for a walk at night and think people are out to get me. They call me names, fatso, porky, teddy bear. My mother embarrassed me several times by asking for a big size for a fat person. Some times I do hear voices to harm myself or I am suicidal. I wish I were smart but my situation is that I am really slow, like I talk too fast all the time.

But then we consider the ties of deficit that bind Tom to his mother and she to him. We understand that deficit is experienced within a family and sometimes serves as a function to maintain the equilibrium of the family structure. Tom

cannot leave his deficit behind possibly because this may mean leaving his mother behind, thus robbing her of some aspect of her identity. And so we realize that the voice of deficit is a very complicated affair whose dismantling may shake many identities. The world needs the voice of deficit much like the rich need the poor. This is the action/reaction sequence that we earlier heard the narrative of Jasmin. Tom is deficient but he knows on some level that his deficiency is needed by others, perhaps by his own mother who for her own historical reasons may need Tom's dependence on her. But we should not minimize the real aspects of Tom's need or dependence on his mother. The echoes of deficit in many of the narratives bring forth this interlocking dependence between parent and child and in particular between mother and child. We are left to wonder if deficit creates this dependence or if it is itself prolonged by it. Again the voices of parents are silent on this voyage. We can not judge the historical culture of any family. But we observe that the voice of deficit often voices a sense of dependence on parents and echoes the fear of parents and their vulnerable children, that their death will leave them unprotected.

*Jade: A Loser Retard*

When Jade first came to the centre for disabilities it was not at all certain that this was the place for her. She seemed more like an acting-out teenager than one with a significant mental impairment. Indeed in some ways, Jade presented herself as "smarter" than the mainstream of people who presented themselves to the centre for assistance. But strangely, or so it seemed, Jade very much wanted to come and live at this centre to learn skills for independent living. The staff was in a quandary. Did she or did she not have a cognitive limitation.

Jade's eyes scan the room and the faces around for the details she relies on to master her life. Jade has this kind of intelligence. She knows how to size up a

situation and to see beneath the skin of people. This was the way Jade came to her conversations with me; assessing, observing, weighing her words, looking for my own weaknesses. Jade spoke to me in hushed whispers. Her voice lulled me into this depressive sense of her world. I could feel myself sink into her described black despair each time she came to see me. I can feel her eyes on me now as I recall our encounters, trying to pierce my world, trying to locate my own voice of deficit. Jade is not really a disabled person. In some ways she projects a certain kind of street savvy. Yet in other ways, like Tom, Jade clings to her identity as a person with an intellectual limitation. She wants to make you believe that she believes she has no worth. But as we venture into conversation with Jade we realize this is a trap. Jade is testing us to see if we will concur with her self-deprecation. She wants to know if we are enemies or allies. So Jade pretends she has no intelligence. She is like the Socratic foil who leads you into her deficit so that your own fool can be revealed. Jade's voice of deficit is a kind of pseudo voice that protects the integrity of her inner capacities. And so we listen to Jade's narrative with this understanding in mind. In one instance she says:

Well lately I am not very happy, not very strong. I am a loser. I am a retard. I am telling myself sometimes that I just want to end my life. Sometimes I see myself as a retard and sometimes I don't. When I don't see myself as a retard I see myself as stupid. I don't want to be on welfare all my life. At school I always got into trouble because of my big mouth and my attitude. I remember I was the only one who couldn't tie my shoes and I coloured badly.

As we flow into conversation I press into Jade's narrative on her account of being stupid. I want to know if she ever sees herself as smart? "Not lately," she tentatively offers. She wants me to know there is a ray of hope in her otherwise gloomy self-portrait. But Jade wants to keep me at bay. She is not sure if I will "judge" her. This is what she says people often do to her. Jade tells me this is what she fears most, such as the time she was fired from her after-school job when a

social worker tactlessly informed her boss that she had a learning disability. But when I ask Jade if she sees herself as having a learning disability or whether she thinks she has a mental handicap she says “yes there is a difference,” but then she quickly adds “this is a tricky question.” By this I take Jade to mean that she thinks I am trying to trick her. She then says “I see myself as others see me, as stupid.” I press further. “What are stupid people like?” “Nu Nu, stupid people are nothing. I feel I can’t do nothing. Whatever I achieved, it’s all in the garbage. I am very close to getting my driver’s license and I just quit. In a relationship I feel used. I can’t finish my high school.”

As these interviews unfold, the meaning of Jade’s distance from me reveals itself. Jade is trying to outsmart her interviewer and so she offers up her way of being “stupid” as a way of drawing me into her charade. She calls herself a Nu Nu, a stupid person, and waits to see my reaction. She wants to see if she can trick me. She wants to know if I am labelling her like all the others before have. Jade asks me point blank “How do you see me? Handicapped?” I confess to myself that Jade presents me with my own confusion about the meaning of designated labels. I see Jade as smart and as limited. I see how this dilemma presents a serious conflict in her inner life by the mixed responses of her world that under or over estimates her capacities. Jade’s voice of deficit reveals her uncertainty in the world. But Jade’s voice of deficit mainly speaks about a troubled past. It speaks of alcoholism, abuse, and parental divorce. It speaks about her own past troubles with alcohol. But again we are not sure about the accuracy of her self-imposed label—alcoholic. I am puzzled as to why Jade seems to need labels of deficit in her life. What benefit do they bring her? I think about this for a long time and then I realize that Jade’s labels bring her to a community of others that she can identify with. Jade is able to feel contained by these communities. They provide her with the emotional holding she may have never had. And so we recognize that Jade’s real voice of deficit is

located in the poverty of her emotional history and not per se in the hardware of her brain. We understand Jade to maintain this kind of pseudo retardation as a disguise and a protection that both points to and conceals more essential vulnerabilities within her. Jade's attachment to this sense of community offers an important vista on this conversational trek. We see how a community of others springs up from the ground of needs. We see how it develops in fertile soil, ripe with possibilities in its capacity to hold and strengthen vulnerable people where the strongest link is held in place by the weakest. In exploring the voice of deficit we note this intriguing possibility so that we may return to study it at another moment.

### **Voices in Common**

We have heard the voice of deficit from various perspectives. It is difficult to say how well they represent the community of voices that comprise this conversational venture. In fact they do not capture so many particular strands of deficit found in the experiences of those at the borderline of intelligence. They are many and varied and we cannot give voice to each of these experiences. In fact what we notice is that there is no single profile of the voice of deficit. There is not one voice but a construction of many put together by as many different life experiences. In one voice, we hear the ravages of paranoia, in another brain dysfunction and in another we hear of deprivation. We have heard these three voices speak about the inadequacies of their being in the world. We have heard them assert their flaws and openly express their failings. I myself have rooted through their words searching amongst the rubble of their difficult lives for their inadequacies. We are left to ask how many other professionals have sifted through these lives looking for weaknesses to string together in order to justify our pronouncements of judgment about their humanity. The voice of deficit speaks loudly and boasts itself. The voicing of deficit brings the person further into its

domain by creating a second layer of itself. The deficiency is named, labelled, identified, and then it is judged before an introjected jury who condemns their psyche to the realm of quasi personhood. So damning is this jury that we hear over and over again in the narratives of this community, the compelling urge to end one's life. This call to suicide is seldom acted upon and yet it remains within many as a constant call to surrender to the world persecutor taken within their identity. The voice of deficit in the companions of what now has become my own journey, speak not then about their disability in the world as about their lack of value amongst the commodities of human worth. This then is the most damning aspect of their deficit. Should we venture further into the experiences of our participants we would enumerate dozens of disabling experiences and their causes that bring doubt to the notion absolute categories of disability. In place we must search for exact categories and we must search for, as Jerome Bruner suggests, the enabling and disabling experiences of people who for a multitude of reasons have found themselves at the boundaries of society. We can thus envision a view that sees most failures to thrive as fundamental failures of development in the social world. As Vygotsky urges, we can then look for those enabling conditions that can reroute the path of development towards more adaptive possibilities.

### **The Chorus of Competence**

#### *The Voice of Competence and the Freedom of Mind and Body*

It is this tenacious holding onto freedom of body and spirit that came across so forcefully in Lisa's and others' narratives of strength. The assertion that above all, the freedom to live one's life as one wishes must be maintained. We saw in the narrative of Nadia the demise of her well being. She hovers above the gutters of the life she has created. She lives in precarious health and poverty and filth. And yet she chooses her life and is able to defend this right to its perhaps sad end. None of us can stop her. We who look from the outside may feel pity, anger, disgust, and

frustration. But we must also feel admiration for the great dignity her life affords her, in her strength of character and will. Sarah too takes us to levels we do not comprehend. Why does someone choose to live so far on the boundary? Sarah could travel the world, and rest upon the lacy pillows of her storybook past. But Sarah chooses the alleys of poverty instead. She chooses life with the downtrodden, and the dispossessed. She carries her life in one shopping bag or another like so many of the homeless we see. We stretch to understand why she would be chose her life to be this way. For Sarah, Lisa and Nadia we must answer that freedom of body and spirit is held above fortune or feelings, or even physical well being. It is this desire for freedom, this rebellion against restraint that surfaces again and again in the narratives of competence which carry so many lives forward with the integrity their being requires.



### Other Ways of Competence: Voices of Creativity and Play

We do not have to venture far into the surf of these lives before we are taken into laughter by their spontaneity and sense of joy. They, like the great clowns of our century, Chaplin, Skelton, Keaton, bring to light the pathos in being human. We see their humanity and through theirs we see our own in a way that allows us to re-remember the visceral laughter from the bodies of our childhood.

#### *David and Sarah*

When David arrives, he is always dressed the same way. He wears a white dress shirt tucked into his navy pants, always sporting a tartan tie with a clip of an airplane. David is a heavy-set man with a big round belly. He combs his slick hair down over his forehead forming a peak above his eyebrows. David is a comical figure and has a remarkable resemblance to Stan Laurel from the Laurel and Hardy comedy duo. He is the embodiment of this image of an Irish leprechaun or perhaps a rotund Friar Tuck. Indeed his Irish eyes twinkle outward, creating little sparks of warmth and humour on the path of any person's day. Their blueness dances with mischievous delight and prances around whatever preoccupations they are met with. David greets me in this usual way. He looks down at his tie for my approval, and then stroking it like a pet cat, he announces its presence. "I'm wearing my tartan tie," he says, his face beaming, as he tucks his smile into his chest. And then he chuckles within himself so that his body ripples with small implosions. David has a thing for tartan clothing. It seems to remind him of who he is. By now his eyes are squinting with delight. David finds this whole greeting process extremely funny. He looks for my own laughter which he receives, perhaps appealing to my own Irish sensibility, and together we share this tiny moment of innocent humour, the exact reasons for which I never know. David has this effect on others too. Sometimes David is not in a good mood and on these days various complaints roll out of him. But his complaints are themselves funny and

again we cannot help but laugh. David does not seem to mind this. In fact he himself is drawn into the humour. David laughs at himself and, one has the feeling, at all the small eccentricities of being human. One time he brings something he calls his "complaint book." In this book he records his daily pet peeves. In it he complains about politics and religion. He complains about the weather and the declining dollar. It reads like a Tao of Zen truths with a rationality that is as non-linear as it is amusing. David announces his complaints a bit like the town crier. On one day he bellows out, "I am a born complainer" and then repeats it again as his eyes scan the room for the reaction of his audience. He continues "it's just human failings. We're just human beings," he says, drawing long on the word human "because," he continues, "we are all just natural born complainers."

I inquire, "what is it that we complain about?" He tells me simply "because you can't change human nature." And despite his stated bad mood more ripples of laughter rumble out of him. David and I have just engaged in what seem to be these profound discussions about the weaknesses of being human and yet together we find these human eccentricities very funny. David is this embodiment of smiling Irish eyes and salt-of-the-earth goodness. He regularly traverses the streets of his community, greeting familiar faces and touching them with his humanity. We all enjoy greeting David because he makes a sometimes strange and hostile world seem familiar and kind. David allows us to embrace ourselves and to feel at ease with our own eccentricities. He reminds us of some cozy part of our past, an aunt or uncle, a neighbour, a school mate; someone who by their oddness and openness to others left us with an impression of humanity at its best. But David's humour could be misunderstood by ears that are not sensitive to the nuances that flow from his comments and observations about people and life. We could miss this spark in David if we were out of touch with our own capacity for humour. David is this archetypal mystical clown, straightman, Joey, that we all

have inside of us. But David has not only the gift of humour. He is also an artist. One day he brings in a whole year's series of watercolour sketches for me and others to see. Muted, pale colours of green, purple, and pink move together to create and capture small moments of beauty in the landscape. A Village nestled against soft mounds of green mountains and a hazy grey sky create the image of a fairy tale, while a single white lily marches forward from a pale pink backdrop. I ask David how he chooses his colours and his subjects but he does not seem to know. He doesn't really like to talk about his art or to have any "pressure" put on him about it. David's artistic capacity comes from within him. It, like the sparkle in his eyes, has always been there.

### *Sarah*

It has been a long journey for Sarah since she left childhood and entered the rough terrain of adolescence and early adulthood. It has also been an ordeal for her parents who desperately searched for a place that could help Sarah to contain herself in her most volatile moments. Everyone was concerned for Sarah's life outcome and few if any were successful in containing her anger or her obsessions with the women selected as targets for her attachment. Sarah was always very frank about these attachments to women. She wanted them to mother her and shower her with affection. But Sarah's tenacious pursuit of these women landed her in much trouble. She found herself in front of a justice system that did not understand or care about her plight. She was forced to leave two homes where she had lived and then moved from shelter to shelter until one was found that could match her needs. But finally Sarah did show us her strength and her ability to survive. She showed us the way to her vast reservoirs of strengths. She showed us her ability to connect to others through her wonderful sense of humour. In this way, Sarah was able to reach out of her unhappiness and to allow her capacity to play to come into being. Her British wit takes hold and reinvents her life story.

Suddenly we see the charm and grace of Sarah; a kind of Eliza Dolittle who dots her life with mischievous pranks and coy glances. We cannot help but forgive her angry side nor feel affection for her. One day as we are meeting she looks across at me with a sideways glance. Finally after giggling to herself she lets it slip like a hint of a smell from a subtle cologne. Sarah chirps, "at half-past three the English drink tea." She is pleased with the roll of these words and continues. "I used to have a conker tree." Somehow her rhyming is reminiscent of the poem written by T. S. Eliott, *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*, where he notes the things there is time for, "before the taking of toast and tea." Sarah, like this famous poet, lights upon the trivial to unearth the subtle flavour of humour in our practices of being human. She laughs at her British self and finds her waif-like being amusing. Suddenly we can imagine Sarah as a character from Charles Dickens. She likes that she wears rolled down socks, and brightly-coloured nail polish. She likes the effects it has on others and particularly those with British sensibilities for proper behaviour. Sarah enjoys the oddities of life. Sarah is also a kind person and she uses her humour to express this gentle side of her personality. One day she tells me about the things she thinks she is good at: "writing, making people happy, having a sense of humour, making everybody laugh." I inquire, "Have you been told that you have a sense of humour." "Everybody can tell" she says and continues

I have a bad side but I have a good side of me as well. I care a lot about people. I like to help people and right now I help a lady who is sick. She is tired a lot. It makes me feel good to help her. I do the garbage, feed the cat, do photocopying, get the mail, make her tea, make rice.

Sarah's humour gives us this bridge to meet on. She in her world, and I in mine, we are able to come together in our amusements about all the little eccentricities about lives on all the various borders of life. On another occasion, we meet in a restaurant in a shopping mall. Sarah is munching on her grilled cheese sandwich. There she sets the scene for the mother-teenager argument scenario.

“Oh, I’m so fat,” she says, peering from behind her coke glass and adding along the information that she weighs “only ninety pounds.” But Sarah can no longer take herself seriously. She cannot contain her laughter from gurgling to the surface, wiping away any attempt to alarm me. Sarah’s adult side shares with me in the amusement that her more immature side brings to our conversation. There we sat laughing together at the amusing antics of the child within her that was trying to push its personality to the center of our conversation. Outside in the mall, Sarah tries again and threatens to “faint” on the floor. But after assuring her that I would leave her behind, we once again laugh together at the possibility of such a spectacle occurring. With this Sarah waves me away and I leave with a vague feeling that she had been teasing me all along.

### **The Chorus of Others**

#### *Three Voices of Other: Identity Scripts and the Infusion of Culture*

##### *Agnes*

Agnes came to Canada as a child from the south of France, and brought the grace and charm of this countryside with her. Agnes speaks in a deliberate way, with force, eloquence and pride in her manner. She glides through a conversation with the ease of a refined dancer. Agnes likes all the best things in life; caviar, pate compagne, champagne, cheese. She speaks of these things as she savours the memory of the enjoyment they bring. She has never been to England but would like one day to visit an English garden, sip tea by a pond lush with life, perhaps stroll along a London avenue. Indeed, Agnes greets me in her humble apartment with the graciousness of someone royal. Together we sit at her round melamine table, off to the side of her living room. She receives me as her guest and I am taken into her hospitality. Agnes exudes this sense of the polite as we engage in conversation. We are speaking French, her native language, a fact that seems intrinsically important to who she is. We are talking about the world of disability

and Agnes is sharing her observations and insights. As she speaks, her eyes narrow in shrewd scope. She is looking into human nature, commenting on the prejudice she has seen and witnessed against people with disabilities. Agnes has this sense of perception. Perhaps it is her skills in language that allows her to be so discerning of the words of others. Agnes describes her life to me. She recalls the difficulties she faced as an adolescent when she felt held apart, ostracized by her peers.

*François and Jasmin*

François is a kindred spirit to Jasmin. Together they live in their own worlds bound by their understanding of the other's need to live through their imaginative capacity. Jasmin speaks to us in poetry, and François uses parables to convey his meanings. Like Jasmin, François presents himself as a kind of sage and offers us bits of his wisdom in a random conversation. He often uses animals as metaphors for his thoughts. He tells me he is like a fox because he is sneaky when he plays chess and that he was born that way. Like Jasmin, François traverses the land of culture. He views culture from his standpoint where he has often found himself victimized by the other. He tells me:

When I was in my childhood I had a rough time. I did not know how to act. I got rejected a lot. I had problems that I did not know. They did not know how to deal with my problems so they kept me out and I was by myself all the time. I was always in the corner by myself. They could see I was strange. I was slow maybe because of my epilepsy. They called me names. You could say they had a reason but I did not like how they solved the problem. They could see I was strange. They could treat me like an extra terrestrial. In secondary school I still had enemies but that was because the school I went to was half Greek, half Black, Africans, people all around the world. There was always fights. But then I went to another school and it was almost 80 percent francophones and I did get along with everyone, very friendly. It's easy to get along with your own people. One thing I like about French Canadians its all the same religion, Catholic.

In François' narrative we hear how the world of others treated him badly as a child. We hear that he was ridiculed and that he seems to agree with their assessment of him as "strange." But François' narrative moves beyond a generalized experience of other. He pinpoints for us his experience of particular others for us and inadvertently takes us into the dangerous minefields of culture and ethnicity. François' unfolding narrative of his sense of culture, the world of others, seems to jar against the gentle spirit that he clearly is. François, like Jasmin speaks of the spiritual qualities of life. He resolves to be fair and kind in his approach to humanity. He embodies a kind of wisdom about life and people. And yet François' narratives on culture and on how he experiences the cultures of others seems at times shocking and transparent in its reflections of the prejudices that dare so often not to name themselves. In a way, François gives us window to the mind of society. We can see that François echoes his words from a world that has fed these ideas to him. Reluctantly, we venture into François' narratives on ethnicity. François' narrative on ethnicity begins innocently. I ask him to describe his nationality. He begins to tell me the unfolding saga of the French /English split in Quebec and Canada. He begins by saying that anglophones and francophones do not get along very well. He says:

Anglophones and Francophones don't get along very well. Not the culture but the language. English want to speak English and Francophones want to speak French. Ontario and Manitoba they don't want to speak both languages they are kind of on the weak side. They kind of hate Francophones.

I encourage François to describe The Quebecois people. He tells me that Quebecois people are "friendly and understanding," "easy to get along with and be friends." Here, François' narrative quickly moves to his experience and his viewpoint of the ethnicity of others. He tells me:

I spent seven years in secondary school in the Protestant school. There is Greek, black people, Spanish people. There was always fights. There was five percent Quebecois. The only person I could get along with was the Vietnamese, Chinese and all the other Quebecois and the Canadians. The Greeks are all together, the Spanish, they are always thinking about themselves or other Greek people. It's boring. Because when I went to a school for dropouts and it was eight-percent francophones and I did get along with everyone. Very friendly. It's easy to get along with your own people. One thing I like about French Canadians it's all the same religion. Catholic. And if you want to go to church you do and if you don't it's okay too.

"How is this different from other religions," I inquire?

Because the difference they want to put their religion in our society. What I do feel is that the refugees or someone outside Canada should adopt our religion, not necessarily our language but our religion. And in our religion there is freedom, you could decide.

I explore further with François how he views others outside his culture. He tells me:

It depends who. My social worker came from another country. Very nice. I think she was European. They are friendly. Irish and English too. It's not the language. I believe people all over the world are friendly but the difference of culture makes it different. So, I ask when you speak of these immigrants who do you speak of. Greeks, Africans, Asia. I believe there were a lot of fights. Greek with African. A guy from Israel. That kind of culture is a big problem. The Greeks could be friendly. They don't have a big culture. The culture is Catholic.

"Are there some unfriendly groups?"

People like Haitians, black people from Africa. In a group. They say you could talk to a black person alone but in a group they might trash anything. Like I said Africans do believe that white people slaved them a thousand years ago. They still have that in their head psychologically and of course all the politicians who fight for their rights, Malcolm X. There is always a gang person who is going to defend their rights. In other countries slavery is still legal but here it is not, so what is the problem?

"Are there then some ethnic groups that seem bad?"



A lot of them are not bad but kind of careless. They make a person mad. They won't stop and say sorry or hello. They are not very polite. But they could be friendly. They could be Jewish who don't apply their culture. I met French Jews. He was born in France. He was not quite Jewish.

What would make him Jewish or not?

To be a real Jew you need to be born in Israel. He was born in France. His religion is part Jewish, part Catholic. These type of Jews are not Jewish Jewish. You could have a lot of fun with them.

Who are the Jewish Jewish? "The people with the long hair and hats. They wear the same clothes every day. He did not wear the same clothes."

You prefer if they wouldn't dress the same?

Not the same but they could at least consider our culture. If they would consider our culture. If they would be more than welcome to come. Of course the Greeks are willing to accept all cultures. They could speak French with us.

The conversation with François moves to aboriginal culture in Canadian society. He describes his understanding of them as a people.

I never met one. I cannot imagine. Some Indians we call savage. They paint their faces, archery. They still apply their religion but some of them are civilized, you could say, come from the city and have the same religion. But the ones that come from the country are orthodox. They live their own way.

As François speaks to me there is no sense of animosity in his voice as he describes his impressions of the various cultural worlds. He simply describes his experience from a kind of naive standpoint. His school life was such that he found himself not only on the borders of a normal world but also the cultural ones. François seems lost in this world. He cannot find his place. Indeed he feels like an "extra terrestrial." But François' narrative also innocently projects a screen of the

deep prejudices sediment into our societies. We realize that François takes within himself these prejudices, in a naive way. Clearly, the dominant powers of society have left their imprint on his mind as internalized voices that he unwittingly adopts as “understandings” about the cultural world around him. But they do not impede on the way he relates to “others” in his personal world. François would not feel he is “prejudiced.” He would not purposely want to exclude the “other.”

In Jasmin’s narrative, we heard how as a person of Vietnamese ethnicity, he was ridiculed and called “pong” by some of his classmates. Jasmin also tells us about his fears in how he experiences the Quebecois culture in which he lives. In one instance he says, “When I came here in 1974, Canada was the only country I knew. If Quebec separates then there are two separate states.” Our conversation leads me to ask him if he fears violence in the event of such a separation. He responds:

I would not be surprised, look at Russia. When communism was there crime was down and when Russia separated there was a violent streak. Probably most of the violence would be due to right wing French people. They will choose sides who is good and who is bad, probably skinheads will infiltrate easily in Quebec and say all the bad French people or visual minorities and also gays and lesbians and (TIL) would be dragged into it too.

“ Why would TIL be dragged in,” I inquire? “Because,” he answers:

We are not exactly normal people in the normal society. I was trying to say to a friend that the difference between normal and unnormal people, I told him to have a good look at my skin colour is different, my hair colour is different from him, my eyes and my attitude is different. At least I don’t hide the truth about being different psychologically and race wise.

Jasmin shows us his fear that some day he may find himself singled out as a target of right wing persecution. But Jasmin has a fairly secure view of Canadian life and he locates his fear north of its border. Canadians he says are a little closer

to the North Pole and are well known for our hockey. He continues to say “We have Eskimos and maple syrup,” and then swiftly Jasmin moves the narrative to the political. He says, “And so far we don’t intervene in foreign politics. Like during the Vietnam crisis. We are not what other people call the United States. Imperialism.” He continues:

Canadians don’t have guns in their homes and the United States have. They have a strange gun policy and a strange justice system for protecting their homes. They don’t advertise their justice system to the rest of the world. They don’t advertise that if you trespass on one person’s land that person has the right to shoot you. They don’t want to say that.

As Jasmin ventures further into his narrative on his view of Americans, his words shift back to the metaphorical realm where he finds comfort. He tells me about the “dark territories” of his inner life and about the “war horse” that came upon him as a child. He worries about American justice and tells me that if he had “lost his slipper” in their territory that they probably would shoot him for “opening his mouth.” He continues: “and they would probably shoot me again for being on their land. That is the American Justice system, giving people the right to be judge and executioner.” I ask Jasmin if this frightens him and what he thinks might happen to him should he venture over to the United States. Jasmin locates his fear in a news event that told of a foreign student, a Chinese man, who asks for directions and is shot for no apparent reason. He tells me that the “guy wasn’t even arrested.” He continues, “just a pat on the back and they said good work.” Jasmin also considers his understanding of relationships with other men. He tells me that he is bothered and frightened by “macho men” who seem different from his more quiet way of being.

He further tells me that men “don’t show their emotions too much” and that they “drink tons of beer” coming home drunk “denying everything the next day.”

“At least,” he says “women are not as chauvinistic “ and don’t “drive eighty kilometers an hour with their windows open screaming and howling for men to see.” Jasmin again locates his experience of these types of men in the United States where he remembers seeing groups of young men celebrating their summer at a New Hampshire beach. It seems clear that in Jasmin’s mind the “war horse” of Vietnam has lived on through his perceptions of his neighbours to the south. Jasmin seems to have a chain of associations in his mind that string together right wing politics, nationalism, military, skinheads, Nazi ideology, Americans and mob mentality. We see how Jasmin’s view of the “other” is steeped in the trauma of his past. He brings these latent fears to his perceptions of his own immediate environment and imagines the worst in the event of radical political change. He imagines right-wing groups finding ways to purge the society of unwanted classes of people. He tells us “look at my eyes,” “look at the way I am.” Jasmin makes reference to his awareness of Hitler’s purge of “devalued people” Gypsies, Jews, homosexuals, mentally retarded and otherwise handicapped people. He intuitively conveys his fear that the tide of a society can turn against those who are weak or devalued. Jasmin’s fear is not unfounded. The evidence is tacitly found in the narratives of other people on this conversational journey. Nadia spoke of her worries that the government will take away her welfare money. Tom fears that others will take advantage of him because he “cannot make change.” Jade speaks of being fired from her first job when it was discovered that she was a “slow learner.” Lisa also tells us she was fired from baby-sitting when it is discovered that she cannot accurately make change with money given to her. Betty and Alice have lived through their own experiences that seem hard to believe or to comprehend. They experienced first hand the quiet death making apparatus’ that appeared in institutions of our past. If “the butter box babies” of Nova Scotia could meet such a fate, why not those who are feeble and forgotten. On the whole, then, we must say that the global experience of “other” for those who have participated

in this conversational project is one of fear of rejection, oppression and in some vague way, annihilation. In turn, it seems that they often take within themselves hyper stereotyped notions about other groups of people. Nadia intones that she is not a "Martian, or Portuguese." Joe thinks the Irish people "wear green," "drink a lot" and "don't get angry but get even." Jasmin seems to view his own sex as predominately brash drunken soldiers who he labels Americans. He names the evil people in the history of mankind: "Hussein, Julius Caesar, Hannibal, Hitler, skinheads, George Bush, Nixon, Parizeau." We see the extremes of a kind of logic based on predicates, rather than subjects. Hitler was a leader. Hitler was a nationalist. Hitler was an evil man. Parizeau was a leader, a nationalist and therefore also to be placed in the ranks of other evil men.

Exploring the experience of other in the lives of these subjects brings us to another conclusion about their internal worlds. Contrary to the stereotyped notion perpetuated about people with mental limitations, that they have a poverty of thought, we see that indeed they have rich and full insights about themselves and others. Not only do they perceive the world, but they also perceive the world perceiving them. They are able to move within their own psyches from the subject position to that of the object. How painful and perhaps, at times, amusing this may seem when they encounter a world that treats them as if they are not conscious or as if there is some essential part of their humanity missing. We see, on the contrary, that they indeed take the world in and dialogue within themselves on its meaning for them. We shall also see that they often experience this dialogue with the world as voices that emerge within them. These voices rise up as buffers and shields against the devaluing messages that the world pushes upon them. In a way the world of voice becomes translated into a language that is more acceptable for their fragile egos to incorporate. These voices within, we maintain, arise from the

resilient, imaginative capacities of the mind that redirect trauma into creative pathways of knowing.

### **The Chorus of Inner Speaking Voices**

*Sean: A Whisper in my Ear*

Sean's narrative of inner voice is traced to the battlefield of his childhood where he is able to nevertheless recall the sounds of screaming delight from the playgrounds and amusement parks of his memory. Indeed, in the present, Sean, now 24 years old, lives for his summer excursions to the amusement park. In one instance he tells me:

I remember going on the merry-go-round with my mother, around and around and be happy. Now I only go on the rides, but I make an exception for the merry-go-round. If I am by myself, I go on it but not with friends. The merry-go-round is old, the paint is chipping, it's been there for twenty-eight years. It has that old merry-go-round music. The old-time carrousel. I go up and down, round and round. It just relaxes you.

Sean craves to hear the sounds of other's screams as they roll by him on a terrifying ride of pleasurable release. He craves also to let his own screams come to the surface to unleash his own pent-up energy. He tells me that going to the amusement park makes him feel good and that he goes there every day of the summer if he can. What Sean likes most about going to the park is the chance "to experience all the new voices." It's not the same he tells me "if you go to the amusement park and you don't hear screaming." He continues:

It's not like the winter. The summer is hot, you hear people scream. People enjoy it. That's why you go to the park so you can scream your head off. I need to do a lot of screaming. I can scream and enjoy my screams and nobody can tell me to be quiet or don't scream.

“Really abandon yourself,” I remark to Sean. “ Yeah,” he responds. But then Sean takes me down another path of memory. He tells me about his experiences in getting “lost” from his mother at the amusement park. He says:

I always got lost with my parents. The security guard would have to bring me to the office. Now I go where I like and I don't have to worry about getting lost. I didn't like getting lost. I managed to get over it, to stay close to my mother so she wouldn't forget I was there and leave me there in the park by myself at five years old. But I managed to stay as close to her as I can. Now I go by myself.

Sean's is a narrative about losing his voice and then finding it. It is a narrative about getting lost, or being abandoned, and then finding his way and learning to cope and survive on his own. Sean remembers the good times of being with his mother and the bad times of being lost from her. But Sean claims a victory over his terror. His screams of fright are turned into the gleeful releases that every child is capable of. Sean returns to the grounds of his abandonment and reserves a special place for the time carousel that takes him up and down, round and round the dreamy memories of a mother who held him close through the soft rolling waves of the prancing painted ponies. But Sean's childhood and his youth were derailed from the gleeful sounds of summer and amusement parks. Sean has “bad memories” from childhood that he tries to forget but that never go away no matter how hard he tries to push them from his memory. Sean lived under the tyrannical reign of an abusive father and a loving but violent mother. Only his grandmother stood by him, bringing him little gifts and offering him a sense of calm through the storm of his family life. Sean first ran away from home when he was only ten years old. He ran to the streets of Montreal which, over the years, he traversed in a never-ending search for calm. He lived with others in the rafters of buildings. He endlessly travelled the streets by bus from one end of the city to the other. Each time Sean “ran” he was caught and returned to his unchanging abusive home until finally at the age of thirteen, he was placed in a group home for troubled

teenagers. But Sean's situation did not really improve much there either. He found himself at the mercy of brighter, tougher and more dangerous boys. His learning difficulties, though somewhat disguised, could not be hidden from the savvy and sharp observations of the other boys. Sean had to learn how to manage this situation. He tells me about his life during this time:

Well in the detention center I am the youngest person there. And I am locked in a unit with killers and thieves. They are always asking you why are you in here. Then in group homes you have a lot of problems there too. Everywhere you go you have to have permission. Some of the kids are okay, some are picky. They don't want you sitting beside them and they say: "what are you doing, go sit somewhere else." But I managed to survive for five years. My grandfather said if people pick on you just let it go in one ear and out the other. If people say you are stupid. I don't keep it. I think, maybe you are the one that is stupid. Everyone has their own problems. One would say oh yeah, I am in here because I beat my mother to death, another would say oh, I am in here because I can't stay home...they drag on and on. You pretend you are listening when you're really not because you don't want to hear how someone killed their mother or beat their parents. You would be surprised. There are people who go around killing their parents. When I was in that place, I feel scared. I don't know if someone is going to come after me. People would say why are you in here. Oh is that all, I stole a car or I killed my mother. I try not to remember those people. I had to pretend to listen, to play games with them, whatever. I try to forget those places. I know how bad they were.

Sean's narrative takes us out of the present and into his past. And yet Sean lives in the present as if it were the past. He confuses what was then with what is now. Indeed on the face of it we do not know immediately if Sean speaks about a life in the past or in the present. His experiences seem to merge into undifferentiated time. Only the context of his speech tells us that he speaks of his life as a boy. We can surmise that Sean cannot leave his past behind him. As he had said, no matter how hard he tries to push away the bad memories, they keep coming back to him. But Sean, like so many others on this conversational journey, invents a unique way to manage the menacing voices that press upon his internal world. He calls upon the voices of his past that gave him comfort. In particular he



calls upon the voice of his grandmother who he turns to for comfort and advice in his daily life. Sean tells me with frankness about the voice of his grandmother. He says:

My grandmother died at the age of sixty-nine. Very young. I manage to live with it. I still remember her as if she were right now beside me. That's the one person I can't forget about. And she is giving me ideas...that's what it feels like. Like she is whispering in my ear.

"What does she say?" I inquire.

Oh, you would be surprised. All sorts of things. Like...why are you causing all these problems, buying things you can't afford. She just blabbers on from there. When I go to bed at night she is right there beside me patting my back, saying at least you're trying, you're not poor, you're not rich, you'll manage. She is still with me even though she died. I tell her. I say to myself, I want this and she says okay look at your finances, if you can afford it. If I were here I would give it to you. You only have my presence. It's pretty good.

Sean's inner guiding voice, the voice of his grandmother, provides him perspective and balance in coping with every day life. Sean tells me that his greatest problems in life are about money and loneliness. He must learn to live on the meager existence provided by his welfare income. Sean does try to work at various times but his life has been brutalized in a way that does not allow him to cope with the demands of the work world. Sean sees his dilemma. He understands the meaning of the life of poverty that is likely ahead of him. On the other hand, Sean thinks his biggest problems have to do with feeling alone in the world. The fact that people rarely visit him in his apartment and that the friends he does have are all much younger than he is. Sean acknowledges to himself the challenges he must now face in his life in order to make it on his own. We see his inner resources come to his rescue through the voice of his grandmother. She will be present for him. She will sit by him at night rubbing his back, soothing his perhaps beleaguered spirit. Sean has lived in his own apartment for a few years now. It is

lonely and difficult but he is not tempted to “run” for the streets. Sean does not wish to be itinerant. He does not wish to lose the battle to the numbing experience of the homeless world. Sean is in touch with his losses and his liabilities. His inner world and the soothing voices of his past are able to come to his aid. In this way, we see that at least one positive voice has been allowed to take hold in the inner world of Sean. This will no doubt prove to be one of his most useful tools in a life that is destined to be fraught with enormous challenges for the body and the spirit.

*Ron High Voice Low Voice*

Ron resurfaces in this conversational study from the earlier life narratives. We remember that Ron found his community of others through the virtual world that his computer could offer. There, Ron was able to merge within the mainstream of the computer world. There, the despised boundary he lives on loses its meaning. But Ron cannot live completely in this virtual world and he must contend with a real world that challenges the integrity of his personal identity. And so to cope, Ron too enlists the aid of the world of inner voice; one that he creates to help him manage and counteract the depreciating voices of others that press from within and without his inner world. Like Lisa and Sean, Ron's world of voice helps him to manage the practical demands of the real world. He enjoys this world of voice and was pleased to bring me into conversation with this aspect of his inner life. Indeed a sense of relief could be felt from all of the participants who spoke about their inner worlds and the fact that their narratives were met with curiosity and acceptance. Ron's world of voice takes the form of a dialogical and dichotomous counterbalance of wishes and needs within him. In this way, Ron spoke of having two voices that work in collaboration to help him fulfill his dreams and cope with the realistic demands of life. The "high" voice in Ron represents the more expansive side of his nature. This voice allows and encourages him to grab the things he would like in life, such as a new stereo. It is a voice of ultimate possibilities and great fun. In this voice, Ron feels and acts "free." It is a voice of enjoyment. One that makes him feel "good" and makes his self-esteem "go high" where he is "always thinking positive." On the other hand, a "low" voice comes to his aid and rescue in the more serious moments of life. This serious voice may ask him if he is able to afford the new stereo. Its function, Ron tells me, is to control the high voice "in case it goes too far." Both of these voices work in tandem to maintain some kind of equilibrium in the balancing of his needs and strivings in life. But Ron's narrative on his inner voices is rich with the clarity of his

explanations and so we go directly to the conversations that brought his words into written expression. Ron introduces his world of voice:

I hear my high voice. Now I can hear my low voice. They say good things, some negative things come out in my low voice, more serious stuff. I have to get this done and the more negative hits and then I don't get it done and the more serious side hits. The high voice is more procrastinating. The low voice more serious. The high voice tells me good and bad things, but more good. Like it tells me that I am thinking positive, that I'm always having fun and always ready to work, what ever. The low voice is on the serious side saying you have to get this done, it's mandatory. Be serious with yourself. Ask yourself the question does it really have to get done right away. Can it wait two or three days? Get it done. So I will wait two or three days and then the low voice will come out and say okay you have to get it done.

I ask Ron if he hears a actual voice counselling him. He tells me, "Yes and I love it. There is a saying out there. I talk to myself. But the question is: do I ever answer myself? And I guess to a point I do answer myself, inside but on the outside I don't answer myself."

"What sort of questions do you ask yourself?" I inquire. "I ask myself, am I going to be okay today." "Your low voice answers and tells you?" "Yes, but if something does hit I have to bring out the positive." "Does the low voice protect the high voice?" "Oh yeah, on the serious both are." "And critical?" I inquire, "Yeah. I see that but its true...why are doing it this way why are you writing that." "The low voice wants you to succeed but it is critical," I interject. "Unfortunately, yes," responds Ron. "It's like a love/hate thing," I wonder aloud to Ron. "Well the low voice, I love it but there are times when the high voice comes out like right now. I guess you could say there is no conflict between them. Why has the low voice come out now?"

I guess to show you that I have a low voice and a high voice. To prove to myself that I am not lying to myself or to you. The high

voice and the low voice run into each other, like they are playing a game with each other. When I bring out my low voice it's basically a situation and when I bring out my high voice it's another situation.

"What would those situations be?"

Well joking around, but when I am in a serious voice I tend to be with my parents and talk in a low voice or like with the problem I have with my roommate and the door slamming situation. It brings out my deep voice, my very deep voice. Or my high voice may say get used to it. Like for example, let's say I need some milk. My high voice will answer yes, whereas my low voice is more in the budget area.

"So the low voice is realistic." "Yeah, the high voice is the fantasy." "What is the fantasy?" "I would like to blow all my money. The low voice is like you have to budget. The high voice will spend extra money and the low voice says don't do it again. But they work together. The voices come out in a situation that may arise." I ask Ron if he has ever spoken about this experiencing of voice before. He tells me: "No it's the first time. I love it. My self-esteem is building up. There is no bad side and it's like they are trying to guide me in the right area, like my conscience comes out."

We see from the narratives of Lisa, Sean and Ron that their experience of inner voice acts as a kind of regulator for their thoughts and actions in the world. Each in some way refers to the voices within them as their "conscience." These voices are their tools to manage the frightening demands that the world and the internalized voices of others place upon them. We see also in their narratives their fear of disclosing the existence of such voices within them as well as the relief the such disclosure brings. Ron tells me that talking about his inner voice makes his esteem go high. He feels valued and listened to and that his inner life has many interesting facets and qualities. Ron and the others know the pathological implications of "hearing voices" within them, but they resist this interpretation of their own

experience. For them their experience is a normal and helpful way of being. The world of inner voice now can, in this context, be seen as a natural aspect of inner life. It can be understood as the mind's capacity to take within itself the representation of the world of others. In other words, to live in conversation with oneself and with others. Lisa, Sean and Ron perhaps make transparent a hidden aspect of being human, one that has often been neglected, denied or pathologized. Namely, that our inner life is comprised of ancestral stories and voices. Narratives which emerge from the characters within us from our distant and near past and from our local and distant cultures and histories. In a very simple way, Lisa, Sean and Ron help us to see the multi-dimensional nature of thought and the mind's capacity to reach through time, space and history. These experiences of inner voice lead us to reconsider the strict boundaries between pathology and creativity. They lead us to consider the resilient function of this capacity in those who may otherwise be considered fragmented. In this context we can understand the inner speaking voice as the mind's capacity to use imagination as a protective device whose function it is to safeguard the essential integrity of the person.

### **Summing Up the Landscape of Voice**

Choosing these various voices amongst the texts of the lives of the participants followed a somewhat arbitrary course. We could have looked for or heard other voices speaking. We could have framed our search in another way. For example, we could have enlisted the voice of science and rooted out the empirical observations in our conversations. The voices that have been selected to speak are not meant to provide definitive or even tentative truths about the lives we have been listening to. Rather these voices that have been called upon are meant to bring to light a multi-faceted portrait of the lives we have explored. They are meant to show how all thought is intricate, complex, and multi-layered and how

these multiple levels of complexity are relevant to a group of people who have often been given the bad press as being one-dimensional. Hopefully this demonstration of multiple voices shows that humans are not equivalent to the voices within them. Rather it is the inner dialogue itself, which gives expression to the essential self. Once this is understood we can then move to exploring how we can foster and develop the dialogical self in all of us. In this way a person with any kind of disability can begin to embrace themselves more fully as a human being with a variety of capacities as well as deficiencies. The use of voice as a map to the minds of this group of people provides a tool to help the practitioner and the person to open up the possibility of new ways of being and acting in the world. But we have reserved the last voice, the voice of the counter transference for the next and last chapter of this work. This voice works through the mind of the author, the clinician or the observer. It is this imaginative capacity which allows humans to reach beyond themselves and into the world of others. This capacity to enter into the dialogical frame of conversation allows us to come into the field of reciprocity and empathy with others. It offers not only a gateway to understanding but also offers an epistemological foundation for inquiry into the sources of human knowledge.

## Chapter 9

### Leaving the Canyons : The Transformation of Voice into Narratives of Change

And I have known the eyes already, known them all-  
The eyes that fix you with a formulated phrase,  
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
Then how should I begin  
To spit out all the butt ends of my days and ways?  
And how should I presume?

(T. S. Eliott, 1917)

#### **Recounting the Journey**

The deconstruction of the text that elicits the voices that come to the surface does so through the possibility of the imaginative space between the narrative and the author. But these voices cannot be left as butterfly trophies pinned against a wall. I do not seek esoteric interests but aim, through the representative capacity, and its poetic realm, to bring to light novel perspectives and further novel ways, of being in the world with others. In this way, the interpretative act seeks fulfillment of the outcome of its intentionality. In this way, the project attempts to bring to life the desire in relation to what is desired. I sought to enter into the current of the intentional world of our subjects. I sought to understand the flow of the meaning intending structures of their inner lives. And so I entered the stream of intentionality mid course, not knowing where or if I could arrive at the banks of any shore of knowledge. I was carried by this stream, through its twists and its turns. Sometimes I waded through waters shallow with the poverty of my journey; the poverty of not knowing. In these times the jagged rough surfaces of an anyway bottomless river scratched against my sensibilities. At other times I was taken by the surge of the winds and, careening around corners of swift currents, I merged with the



dynamic flow of the energy. I became, in fantasy, joined with its source; the logos, the question. But the real question of any journey of the imagination asks whether I arrive at any particular destination of truth or knowledge and whether I arrive with having changed anything in ourselves or others along the way. Do I arrive with anything novel to offer the world in the practical application of being human in a better way? I have maintained that the realm of the imagination can not only serve the delights of the personal world but also the social one. And so I wondered how the imaginative capacity of the author and her subjects could advance the practice of living in the ways that concern this project. To answer these questions I first turn to the imaginative space of the author to see how her own inner world is altered by the voices she has lived with on this conversational journey. I further ask if the changes in her own imaginative relationship with her subjects can in some way be returned, through an act of reciprocity, either to the intentional or pragmatic world of others. In other words, does the expansion of the author's intentional horizon in synchronicity with the subject, offer the possibility of change in the lives of people who are represented in this work. I have seen this possibility as the Vygotskian enterprise, as the "zone of proximal development" or in other terms the I-Thou relation of Martin Buber and the Reciprocity offered by Merleau Ponty. I have answered in the affirmative to these questions and to the potential of bringing to focus the inter-subjective relationship between self and other. Equally, I ask about the impact on the social world around? How does a narrative understanding of identities on the borderlines contribute to advancement in the fields of social understanding and practice? Each of these questions of practical application will be explored in turn. I begin with the voices incorporated within the author, and then I move to the inter-subjective realm between her and her subjects. Finally, I move to the larger social space to see what changes may evolve in the greater community of others.

### **Exploring the Voice of Counter Transference: The Imaginative Space of the Investigator**

By now the boundaries between narrator and narration and between author and subject of this conversational work are permeable. They are neither fixed, as the realm of science would ensure, nor are they so loose that there is not a distinction between the lived experience of the author and her subjects. Clearly the work is not about the author, but she uses her own being human to understand the being of others. She submerses herself in the feeling narratives of her constituents in order to re-emerge with a reconstituted voice of the other. This re-constituted voice now belongs to the world between the author and her subjects. It is neither an objective voice, nor purely subjective. It does not claim to speak with authority about the "beingness" of those on the boundaries, but merely aspires to enter the circle of understanding by allowing the voices of self and other to collide within the conversational space in what Shotter called "joint participation and joint action" (1989). Here in the "thrownness" of conversation that Gadamer (1990) describes the author's words and thoughts flow into the narratives and inner lives of the people she has been engaged with. She reads her own words but sees the words of others. She reads the words of others but sees her own words spilling onto the page. She struggles in the state of ambiguity that is cast between subject and object. She is the reader and writer of a life. She reads the lives of others and interprets their meanings. But as she engages with their thoughts, her own inner life joins in with the meaning making process. She becomes an author through the words of others, yet her own language, and thus her own life, spills onto the pages that unravel before her. She struggles with the boundaries of language and loses her sense of time and person. She forgets momentarily in what tense she writes or in which person she speaks. Often she starts a sentence with the voice of another only to arrive at her own voice. Many of these times, as Gadamer warns, her voice overtakes the truth sought in another's. Her voice becomes a

method. The work then slips into inauthenticity. But recognizing this, she is able to withdraw into a period of silence and waits for the state of the presentness of the question to re-emerge. She retreats into a state of rest or absence, so that the dance of conversation may become lived within her, and her movements may become silently infused with its meaning. But the state of frustration this process invokes is often difficult to tolerate, and the investigator longs to retreat to the safety of objective knowing. At times, then, her words edge away from the forest path she has chosen as a metaphor to follow, in favour of the metaphor of the highway of information. But having strayed, she feels the longing for the rich array of creatures and colours that any forest may bring. She continues in this way, weaving in and out of authentic knowing and authentic relating. Her subject matter is also at times difficult to hear and she spends long hours avoiding the depression that emerges time and again in the narratives before her. She spends endless hours, half immersed, half deadened, to the droning of conversations that are spun from the wheels of her transcribing machine. As she continues this process, she cannot escape the words that ring in her, long after the machine has been shut down. The lives of her subjects are committed to her memory. She lives with their sighs, their slow forming words that edge to the surface of her own inner conversational life. She implicitly knows that she absorbs the lives unfolding before her, but she struggles to give representation to these lived meanings within her. She moves to the poetic to capture the experiencing of their lives within her. She experiences this to be a way that their representations can gain greater fullness in the written word. She also locates her own thoughts and feelings in relation to the subjects before her. It is through her own metaphors that she is able to capture the metaphors of others and to connect with their internal world. It is also through her own fantasy life that she is able to move into the space of another's imagination. This at least is has been her thesis: that

another mental life can be understood through the subjectivity of one's own. And so the author bathes in the bedrock of her own words and her own voices so that she may locate these in the inner lives of others. She searches also in the realm of her affective life where her internal interpersonal representations become encoded with emotional memory reactions. The world of others is presented to her and at this moment, a chain of historical, emotional memories are fused with the present. (See Zavalloni and Louis-Guerin, 1984). This counter transference brings the perspective of the other into being. It is this which allows the author to move into the inter-subjective realm of empathic understanding. If however this realm of psychic intermingling is not achieved, she remains steeped in her prejudice and perhaps harmful unconscious interpretations of the world of others. In the latter mode of perceiving, she remains in the I-It relationship described by Buber in relation to another's inner world instead of the inter-communicative I Thou realm of interpretation. The author of an authentic work has no choice but to enter the murky backdrop of her own life. So too as a clinician, she locates the vast reservoir of understanding another through her own inner voices that mingle and touch upon the voices of the subjects she takes within her.

### **The Author's Narrative Diary: Reflections from her Own Experience**

The author moves into a narrative with her own voice as a muted backdrop of the work. But like silence, the breath of the author infuses the work as an invisible life behind the life. It is perhaps the craft of the author and the clinician to achieve this invisibility. Each must bring to surface the life worlds of others while their own world rests in a state of suspension. And yet they must dip into their own emotional and representational experience and into their field of empathy in order to commune with and represent the worlds of others. This paradox of understanding another point of view is perhaps an

implicit literary truism; one that has a certain taken-for-granted status in the performance of one's craft. We do not necessarily demonstrate the tools of one's craft in the performances of it. Rather these tools become implicit and hidden to the observer. They become taken for granted. The hermeneutic enterprise brings to light the hiddenness of our actions. It calls us to consider the voices inside the voice so that we may stretch further our understandings about the subject and its life.

For this reason the author of this work recorded her own voice in dialogue with some of the voices she has recorded as a demonstration of the intersubjective quality of human consciousness and as a way to gain access to another's perspective. Hopefully the reader, in turn, becomes a participant in this interactive process and ever-wider circles of understanding are created. What follows next then is a sampling of these dialogical interchanges that emerge from within the researcher herself.

**Understanding others through one's Own Voice:  
Situating Participants and Author in a Shared Horizon**

*Diaries of Conversation*

*Nov. 1995: Meeting Lisa*

Went to Lisa's today. Arrived after five p.m. The dark night closes in as I approached the row building where she lives. I'm not in the building yet, and I already feel a sense of depression. I was thinking about the poverty I expect to see. I'm in the building, but Lisa hasn't come home yet, so I wait by the elevator. There is a chair and some magazines. Not so bad I think. There are mirrors on the wall. Kind of middle class. Lisa arrives, smiling. All is well I think. Then we go up the elevator together. All these times I have seen Lisa in my work world and here I am a guest in hers. I feel very polite. We go into her

apartment. Again immediate depression sweeping over me. A one-room apartment, clutter everywhere. Dark and faded. The sight of the kitchen off to the side especially makes me feel sad. The light is dim and none of the cupboards seem to be on straight. Dishes in the sink and on the small counter. I have my little tape recorder with me and feel a little awkward about using it. Lisa doesn't seem to mind though. We settle down at the table. Lisa seems perky and happy to have me there. She offers me tea. She remembered that I like tea. She gets up and prepares it. She opens a new little box of tea and some cookies. I realized she has bought these things for my visit. So we sit there drinking tea out of china cups she has taken from somewhere. We are talking about different things about her life. She wants to talk about her imaginary friends but we are also talking about other things like the different stuffed animals in her apartment. A mechanical parrot that talks. Lisa is particularly fond of it. For some reason, as we are drinking the tea together, I feel touched and feel tears coming to my eyes. Something about her graciousness. I leave that night back into the cold November evening. I feel thankful to be going home but also feel slightly warmed from our conversation. One interview down and about one hundred more to go. It will be a long stretch. It feels already very lonely.

*Re-Situating Lisa:*

I think about this visit with Lisa and why it touches upon my emotional world. The act of offering tea, a simple gesture, yet rich with some kind of generosity. I remember moments from my past when such single moments of generosity and simplicity were etched inside me and somehow changed my world-view a little. These experiences and the people they involved each expanded my representational world. They changed in some way my understanding of the world of others and added dimension to my own

personality. Lisa's simple gesture of offering tea expands my view of the other and is now included in my repertoire of acts of human kindness. But I had not previously paused to consider how she experiences my being with her. Do I impart any act of human kindness? Do I touch her humanity in any way? Does my being with her in any way expand her representational world? Or to the contrary, does my being with her diminish her in any way? This is the fundamental question that human research must address: does its enterprise enhance human being in the world? If it does not, should it continue?

It is now a few years later since our first conversation, and Lisa continues to live on her own. Lisa managed many of the hurdles she spoke to me about in the course of our conversations that spanned two years. She recently moved to a larger apartment that now has a separate bedroom.

*Dec. 1995, meeting Betty*

Visit to Betty's. I arrive a little late. Betty is wondering where I am. She is there with a little girl that she is baby-sitting. As I walked in I noticed pictures on the wall over a desk by the door. I instinctively looked at them. Betty is they're smiling with different family members at one event or another. It struck me as incongruent with what I know about her past, coming from the institution and all. Nevertheless there she is, beaming out as her family is tucked around her. Betty took me around her apartment. I look around with curiosity and just a touch of feeling nosy. She has a homey kitchen. My own usual favourite spot. There are home made potholders hanging from the wall, knickknacks placed in various corners and ledges of the kitchen. Her clock, I notice, makes what seems on this day a comforting tick-tock sound. I think Betty seems like my grandmother. I feel like I am in my grandmother's kitchen. I take in the comfort. Betty offers me tea. It seems amazing to me how many of

my interviewees are aware of my tea habit. Betty goes one step further. She wants to know if I have had breakfast, and then she is up making me toast. It then occurs to me. Betty is taking care of me. But we finally turn to the task of talking. The little girl sits on her lap. It doesn't take Betty any time to get into the subject of my life. I knew she would go there. I was prepared for these advances, but I did squirm a little at one moment or another. Betty kept repeating to me "you want me to open up to you and tell you about my life. But you're not telling me about yours. Don't you trust me?" Then she was talking about us being friends and that there were things she could tell me when she trusts me more. She repeated that we had known each other for a long time. I was feeling cornered by Betty's questions. She turned to the subject of writing this "book." She wanted to know if I would help her write one too. She wanted to know if there would be money from this book and what would be her share. On the other hand, Betty told me I deserved this "book." I had worked hard enough at what I do to get the "recognition." Betty has this idea she wants to tell her story about the institution, but her family wants her to forget about it and move on with her life.

*Re-Situating Betty:*

In some ways, I am able to reach far back into Betty's past. I went to visit the institution she was released from shortly after the government took control of its operations. I saw first hand some of the things she spoke about. I saw, for example, the remains of the "cages" that stood to hold back or punish patients. I was led through ward floors where rows of beds still contained adults who lay in diapers and who were tied to their beds. I remember that the smell in those corridors was so terrible that I did not think I could stand it a moment longer. I remember also visiting a pavilion where a dozen or more love-starved children clung to us and hung off us like a pack of desperate chimps.



My visit with Betty brought me careening back to this memory. I knew that the essential part of her narrative bore the truth. The halls of memory also took me to the institutions of my own past. I am faced with my own recollections of the corridors of my childhood and youth. I understand in a small way, the experience of incarceration, abandonment and injustice.

I could never forget these small moments frozen in time of encapsulated anguish. They inform my present existence, and in some way bring the other's perspective to my life. Betty tells me many times that "it's all in the past now," but my own memories tell me otherwise. I wonder how and if Betty's visual memories circle back to those times of her incarceration. I wonder if her memories escape representation becoming instead memories of the body. This being the case, I wonder how we reach such body memories in people who have lived traumatic experiences or whether we need to? Do we let sleeping dogs lie?

Betty stirred more than my own memories. I experience her narrative in the present and am confronted by a sense of exploitation in the situation. Betty feels I am exploiting her. She wants to know how she can exploit me. Betty wants to see me squirm a little. She wants to hear my secrets because her life was so exposed when she was robbed of her privacy and given an institutional gown. I am confronted by other sources as well. Once an anthropologist-turned-fiction-writer bluntly tells me that my project exploits these participants. I continue to hear Betty's voice assessing my motives throughout this project. I worry about the exploitative motives of all psychological research. I tell myself that my own risk taking with this project is a way to counter the exploitative tendency inherent in all research in the Social Sciences. In the present, Betty has just turned the age of 65. I hear very little from her now that our

conversations have ceased. I imagine she lives an ordinary life, just as the rest of us. We all have a past.

*January 1996, meeting Jade*

Went to Jade's today. She is happy to see me it seems. Gives me the tour of her apartment. Pictures of family in metal frames neatly placed around the TV. Jade has a small kitten and brings it out to see me. We settle in the kitchen. Jade calls me by the pet name she has given me, "Dick Tracy." But once the tape is turned on, her voice becomes barely audible. She speaks in a slow deliberate manner. I feel she is assessing me. She is trying to figure out what I am trying to get at in these interviews. But Jade also seems very willing to talk with me. She seems glad to have the time with me to share her thoughts. I proceed very carefully with Jade.

*Re-Situating Jade*

Jade confounds me. Her eyes have a searching intelligence that attempt to intimidate. She peers into me with this defiant gaze, as if she were telling me something important about myself...some vulnerability she sees in me. I am sure that Jade will, at any moment, turn me away and tell me to stop probing into her life. I am prepared for torrents of her anger chastising me for my thoughtless intrusion of her life. But Jade does not do this. On the contrary she invites me to speak with her many times again and phones me when I have neglected to set another appointment. Jade wants to talk. She seems to enjoy my attention. But once settled in the chair across from me, she retreats into lapsed silences and suspicious questioning of my questions. Jade often turns the question back to me. I locate Jade in the memories of my youth when the world of adults was suspect to me. I remember my own adolescent gaze of insolence, onto the adult world, and how I would feel offended and misunderstood if

anyone actually withdrew from me because of it. I realize then that my discomfort with Jade is that she takes me back to myself. I understand Jade's defiant gaze as her attempt to control a world that has seemed unpredictable. Jade asserts her strength through the motions of her body. She uses her eyes to try and "see" into me. If I were to listen only to these bodily gestures, I would not approach Jade. I would stay away. Indeed, Jade's bodily barriers create considerable resistance within myself to continue our conversations together. In order to not retreat from Jade I return to my youth. I remember one person, a priest, who reached behind my resistance and pulled me from the chains of myself. He often spoke about the great potential of youth if they were only given enough challenging opportunities. I realize that Jade's defiant gaze is in place to protect her potential as a leader. Jade is clearly a leader amongst her peers but has not been given such acknowledgment by the "adult" world of her past. Jade's presence in me speaks to me about the dense boundaries of distrust and the desire to be understood by a sympathetic other.

Jade has evolved a long way since we set off on our conversational trek some three years ago. Recently she came to see me in the new car she drives. Jade succeeded in passing her driver's license despite her earlier protestations that she was a "loser" and a "retard." Not only that, but Jade has recently moved into a new house which she now owns through the dubious but appreciated generosity of her father. She works at a day care and hopes to go to school to get a child care diploma. Jade agrees with me that she no longer needs the disability label. She agrees that she probably no longer needs to see a counsellor at the Disability Centre where she has frequented for some years. Jade is leaving behind her disability status but she still likes to "visit" the Centre. In fact she recently brought her whole family to a Christmas party there. This included her mother, brother, his girlfriend and two of her nieces.

Although she no longer needs the Centre and no longer needs the disability domain in general, Jade nevertheless feels an attachment to the community she has found there. Her attachment to this group of people despite the threat of stigma brings to light the value of creating communities of support for people on the boundaries of life. Jade does not need the disability domain but she does still need to feel held by some kind of community.

### *Meeting Jasmin*

Jasmin visits me at the office. It's a dark evening. He settles in his chair across from me and opens the conversation, "so you want to talk about the war horse," "let's just say I'm a little cold blooded, and I'm not of afraid of death if death wants to come and take me." Jasmin is sitting there dressed in army fatigues, his head slightly bowed, he peers upward looking for my reaction as if from behind a bush. He wants to see how I will respond to his strange talk about evil and death. At one point he tells me that if provoked, he would not think twice about "throwing me out the window." Luckily we are sitting in a basement, I think to myself. I caught myself feeling swept into my own fearful fantasies about what Jasmin could do. Is he kidding? Is he role playing something, or is there some dangerous behaviour lurking at the surface of his personality? Jasmin also probes my life. He doesn't ask me any questions about myself but occasionally throws out a general comment about life or love or losses and then looks for my reaction. I'm feeling like Jasmin is a sage of some kind. I get the feeling he really can read my mind, read my heart. It's me who feels like hiding behind a bush from the reading presence of Jasmin's gaze.

### *Re-Situating Jasmin*

Jasmin has a kind of fluidness about him. It's as if his mind is his body and his body is his mind. I wonder to myself how Jasmin has arrived at his way of

being. How has he become the poet warrior that he is? Sometimes when Jasmin arrives he greets me by coming very close to me so that our foreheads are almost touching. Then he gently taps my forehead with his. It's a greeting that I have come to accept and appreciate as a gesture of trust and closeness. It reminds me of the gesture made in the novel *Stranger in a Strange Land* whereby the characters of this science fiction tale "grok" each other. (Heinlein, 1961) They reach out and behold the other in some intimate gesture of understanding.

Jasmin takes me back to my own poet warrior days. He takes me to a time when I believed I could read the truth in others' eyes. A time when a child uses all its senses to understand and predict its environment. Jasmin's sensuality is grounded in this need to test the safety of the world around him. It is by returning to my own world of experience that I am able to understand Jasmin. It is by returning to my own experience that I am able to connect with the experiences with all of these participants. In this way I do not, must not, carve away my emotional memories from theirs. The dictum "Know Thy Self" seems paramount in this process of knowing others. As has been shown, as I venture into the texts of other lives, I arrive at my own. This hidden process usually remains in partial concealment, in order allow the voices of others to bloom. But in this project I demonstrate the lifting of the author's voice in order to understand the necessity of listening to her own voices in this hermeneutic process of interpretation and understanding. We see that the memories and feeling states of others lead us to our own. We see that venturing into our own voices provides a pathway into the minds of others, and as such, is an important tool in study of all human concerns.

Jasmin has now left the Center where he lived for a time. He now lives on his own with his friend François. He struggles in his new life of independence. He finds it hard to go to work and to keep his apartment in order. He finds it hard to with his roommate. There seems to be little that holds their separate worlds together. Jasmin feels drawn to return to his parental nest. He does not feel quite secure on his own yet. And so in the still early stage of his precarious journey into an independent life, Jasmin shows signs of stress. He will need a life long advocate, if not many. His parents know this too well. They worry about the recent rejection of Jasmin by some of their other children who do not have trust in Jasmin. They are afraid of his at times seemingly strange behaviour. They do not want to leave their own children alone with him. Jasmin's parents recently read the narratives contained in this collection. They believed the story of their son had been justly and humanely conveyed. With Jasmin's permission, they asked their other children to read this interpretation of his life. They wanted them to understand the struggles that Jasmin has faced. Some of them did understand. Jasmin's sister, for example, herself adopted from Vietnam, found that the portrayal not only described the inner landscape of Jasmin but that of her own as well. She too identified with Jasmin's sense of marginalization. But Jasmin's story seemed to only confirm his other siblings' fears about him. Currently Jasmin's parents feel desperate and confused about the rift that has taken place in their other wise close knit and progressive family. On the other hand, Jasmin's narrative served to bring the family to the point of discussing their fears and hesitations in the open. In fact they have all agreed to come together to discuss these fears with a counsellor. Jasmin's story and his family's current crisis bring to light the need to find ways to extend support to parents and siblings of those who have intellectual or emotional limitations. In particular siblings seem to need to be able to give voice to the

fears and resentments they sometimes harbour towards their less endowed sister or brother.

### *Meeting Nadia*

Nadia comes to my office. She sits across from me only a few feet away, her hands neatly tucked between her legs, her hair long and stringy and looking like it hadn't been washed in a long time. Her eyes seem haunted and sad. She is telling me all about life in Russia. She is telling me about her need for food, shelter. She wants to work "someday." She tells me "Handicappers are still people." This phrase is haunting to me. Why does she feel that she has to remind me of this? "We're not Martians," she continues. As I sat and listened to her and probed her life, I could feel this deep sadness stirring in me. Nadia seems hopeless to me. Her life is close to living in some "gutter" where her mother fears she will end up. And yet there is Nadia telling me "she is not poor," she "could get food from the food banks."

### *Re-Situating Nadia*

Of all the participants, Nadia's presence flows into my mind most frequently. There is something about Nadia that embodies the pathos of life. There is something about Nadia that holds on to dignity despite the extreme conditions she lives in. Each time Nadia visits me I am confronted by her desperate poverty and I witness the ravages that life has had on her. I am confronted by her appearance, by her unclean body; her clothes soiled and tattered, her teeth blackened, and sunken cheeks falling beneath the dark circles around her eyes. Nadia looks to me like death waiting for its moment to arrive. I look to her feet and feel pained by the poverty of her shoes on a cold winter's day. Her hands red and chapped reveal ripples of puffed, swollen wrinkles across her knuckles.

Tonight Nadia sleeps, I know, on a soiled mattress that sits on a dirty floor. Her head lays on the abject filth she calls a pillow. No matter that we may feel sad about this. Nadia sleeps. Her life does not change except by the way of decline. Over these years I watch Nadia fall down another notch and then another. Her life does not improve. It declines more rapidly lately. And Yet Nadia continues to refuse help. She is unwilling to relinquish control of her life or her finances. And so the agency's tenuous relationship continues with Nadia. She comes to the Centre mainly for the community it offers and the affection from others that she herself shares so freely. Despite her unwillingness to relinquish control, the centre offers her boundaries of safety.

Our control of Nadia's life is relinquished. We learn with Nadia to accept that we cannot "control" others lives. Instead we learn to look for bridges to meet on. Recently however, the Centre has sought government guardianship of Nadia. Her plight is intolerable to the professionals who watch her life from the sidelines. Nadia too needs a life long advocate. Nadia rallies to counter this intervention by the Centre. She finds herself a lawyer who will defend her from the people who are also trying to protect her. The Centre staff, knowing that she will find it difficult to negotiate the legal system, wonder if they should help her. In the end they do not, and Nadia is left to her own resources. Her attempts fail, and the curatorship passes. One day on a chance meeting with Nadia, she cheerfully tells me that the curatorship has been won. She does not seem distressed about it in the least.

### *Meeting Mary*

Mary came to see me at the office today. She is sweet and elegant and charming in her ways. Mary sat before me making bashful glances. Her slow forming words, her sighs and sad eyes press upon me. I felt invited into her



secret bubble of life. Mary is one of the “slower” participants. Her connections and thoughts seem very young, like a child’s but at the same time she seems so mature, so well spoken and so broken by a relationship that she could not have in the way she wanted it. Mary spends much of the time talking about her boyfriend and about what went wrong. They are in the process of breaking up their shared apartment. Mary will try to live alone, even though many people have concerns that she will find it difficult to manage the demands of life on her own. As I sat there listening to Mary recount the events of her relationship I felt anger welling up at me towards her boyfriend.

### *Re-Situating Mary*

When I first came to the centre, many years ago, Mary was there. She soon moved on her own and I went to visit her in her “first” apartment. A tiny room in an attic over a house. I remember climbing the narrow metal steps crushed against the side of the house and entering into a small space. One basic room with a small kitchenette and a small sun room as a porch. I remember the heat of the sun pelting down on its windows and the suffocating atmosphere of a too small, too hot, space. Mary’s future seemed to unfold to me as a kind of desert. I imagined she would live in the oppression of this heat for the rest of her life. Mary’s father it seems shared the same belief. He did not believe that she should or could live on her own. He was right. A few years later Mary returned to live in a “residence.” A few years after that, as her earlier narrative describes, Mary again moves to her own apartment with the assistance of her helpful but exploitative boyfriend.

At the time of the interviews we heard that Mary was struggling with the decision to leave her boyfriend. Eventually Mary does move away from him. She now lives in a tidy three-room apartment. I went there one day to see her.

She showed me her prized possessions; beautiful laced tablecloths and tapestries that she has embroidered, a hooked rug that she still works on. Mary's life is full these days. There is a new group organized around a circle of people her age, many of whom she has known for a long time. It has become a community that is trying to forge new ways of supporting each other. In this group she has renewed old friendships and belongs to a small circle of people who keep in touch and help each other. It was started by the very parents who initially organized the Centre for disabilities that Mary first came to. These parents many in their 70s and 80s have returned to re-invent the very community that they had pioneered some 40 years earlier.

Mary's father died last week. She telephoned me at home to tell me the news. When I answered the phone I heard her delicate voice announcing herself "this is your friend Mary speaking," she said. "I want to tell you that my father died." I had expected this news. Mary had told me the week before that her father was in a coma and I had asked her to let me know when he passed away. "Are you okay?" I inquired, expecting a crumpled spirit in a voice to reply. But no such voice spoke. Instead she intoned "I am fine." Words spoken with confidence, maturity and a certain serenity. Mary was not falling apart as I would have imagined. I went to the funeral home to see her. Again I expected to find her to be forlorn and lost. But Mary was not. She greeted me with grace and confidence, held my hand for a few moments and then gently slipped away to greet someone else.

*Meeting John:*

Met John at the YMCA, the half way house where he is staying. It seems strange and foreign to me to be here with the men and their visitors. There are a lot of girlfriends, wives and their children. Everyone looks poor and tired.

The children seem completely comfortable with the whole situation. John also seems completely comfortable in the milieu. He seems to have embraced the identity of inmate. He seems changed to me from past encounters. He is harder somehow. We went into a small room with a table separating us. John is glancing at me sideways during our discussion. I sense he is looking for my vulnerability.

*Re- Situating John*

John 's narrative brought me to hallways of the courts and then to the various prisons; Parthenais, Pinel, Bordeaux and finally the "half way house" at the YMCA. I retain a kaleidoscope of images from these visits but what now impresses most now for some reason is the memory of the sound of metal doors clanking behind and around me. In the detention centre the visitors are herded past a checkpoint. We stand in line waiting for our turn to be allowed entry. We are ushered forward in small groups onto an elevator which takes us to the visitor's floor. Standing together in this elevator there is a feeling of camaraderie generated amongst us. We are all together in the misery of the situation. Still there is an air of nervous good humour and jokes abound. I carefully keep myself distanced from the group. I do not want to be associated with criminality. Once in the "visiting area" we are ushered to windowed booths. John appears and sits to face me behind the glass. Our voices echo through a metal voice plate. John speaks to me in brave talk. He laughs and giggles, calls me by my last name and reminds me that I am a "bloody Irish." But only as he stands to leave does he show the extent of his fear. John weeps as he is ushered out of the room. Leaving the building I feel changed somehow. Suddenly I feel solidarity with the people I have encountered. For a very brief time I have entered into the perspective of the other. The criminal world suddenly exposes itself as a repository for human suffering and humanity gone

wrong. Safe in my car, I cry for John and for not being able to protect him from himself or his more savvy roommates. I did not yet know why John tugs at my emotional strings. He reminds me of something from afar. I locate John in my memory of a young boy I met some years ago in Scotland. Billy was a blond-haired boy with eyes the colour of bluebells. From the moment he stepped off the school bus that brought him and a group of inner city children from Glasgow to a children's camp, I was drawn into his tiny life. The moment I saw this small heap of a boy crushed against a stone wall I knew I could never forget him. His dirty face was streaked by tears and his tiny hands clutched a torn Adidas sports bag revealing to me in an instant his poverty and his pride. This tiny bundle of a tragic child whimpered the words "I want to go home." His Scottish brogue was thick with the poverty of the inner streets of Glasgow and I immediately grasped the history of this small boy. For a short time I took him under my wing until finally a social worker removed him from the camp for bad behaviour. He was sent back to Glasgow. I watched as he climbed into the back seat of a car that seemed to engulf his tiny body. Like John, Billy, too, was defiant until the very last moment and only as the car pulled away did I see him fling himself against the back seat. This tiny tough little boy no more than six or seven, with a dirty face and eyes the colour of bluebells, wept. This moment of helplessness is frozen within me. I can still see the blond bob of his hair crushed into his hands as tears streamed out of him. I had let Billy down. I could not protect him from himself. Soon after, his brother, a red-haired, freckled boy whom I called puss-in-boots ran to his bed after Billy's departure. He told me as I comforted him that Billy would be beaten by their father on his return. Watching John disappear through the metal doors that day I again felt the anguish of a helpless moment. And so Billy informs my understanding of John as well as my understanding of myself. I can remember my own back seat rides of frustration and lack of control over the adult world.

A short time after my visits to John in the local jail, I went to see him in the forensic psychiatric centre where he was undergoing an evaluation. Again I remember the image of glass and metal doors opening and closing. I am very impressed by the efficiency of glass doors opening and closing in synchronicity making escape seem near impossible. This time we are together in a room. A guard shares our space. John is more buoyant. He feels relieved to be away from the mainstream criminals and to be in this protected environment. He thinks he would like to stay there for a long time. But John does not stay there. He is sent to a prison. One, two, three times. I go to visit him there as well. The main doors at this place give the illusion of a virtual fortress. Large castle like doors open to incoming prison vehicles while the average visitor enters through a small opening to the side.

I think about the images of all these doors opening, closing, keeping people in, keeping them out. I wonder why of all things these images stay with me the longest. I think about the door as a barrier. I think about the door as a boundary. I think about the expression of going “inside” and of being on the “outside.” John’s narrative takes us to this boundary between the inside and outside. John seeks the safety of an inside boundary. The outside does not contain him. I wonder whether it is possible to bring the inside closer to the outside. In other words can we make John feel the safety of the inside while he is on the outside? Do we need physical doors to contain people, or can we find psychological boundaries to hold those who feel fragmented?

### **Summing Up Counter-transference Experience**

I have entered into my own voices in this conversation. I have brought the reader to my own fields of intentional experience. In this sense I have become a subject for myself to consider and perhaps to that of the reader. I have

embarked on my own internal conversational voyage in the hope of experiencing my fundamental connectedness to the other that is spoken about in this endeavour. The desire to enter into a relationship of depth between myself, the subject and the reader is what guides this project.

Venturing into my own emotional and representational life, which are both conscious and unconscious, brings me to further understand the experiences of others. This is the position that the present work has postulated and tried to demonstrate. I presented the position that as an author, clinician, interviewer, writer and reader of a life, I must not carve away my own fields of meaning and experience. Rather I must bathe in my own response to push the understanding of the other into focus. I must not stay in this position but must learn the craft of moving between and within positions and voices within myself. I must move from being an observer to observing myself all the while staying in relation to the other. I must move backward and forward in time and across the representational space between self and other. In this way this work has inadvertently ventured into the territory of psychoanalytic discourse. It had not sought to enter into a psychoanalysis of the problem it presented; that of the quality and substance of the experiences of people with borderline intelligence. Never the less the work has arrived at such a juncture where it is now seen as a vehicle for understanding and expressing the meaning intending and meaning fulfilling experiences of inner life. No longer does the wide domain of psychoanalytic thought set its sole focus on a topographical understanding of conscious-unconscious experience. No longer does the field of psychoanalysis strictly point downward to drives and impulses. But areas of it now reach into intentional experience through the representational pathways of language and symbolic thought. At least one area of current thought reaches into the inter-subjective space between self and other and

locates the "other" in the self through the constellation of "inner objects." So too the notion of counter-transference has undergone a re-invention and radical transformation from its solitary position of being in reaction to another to that of a more positive understanding of the interactive process between subject and object. Listening to one's counter-transference can now be taken as listening to the emotional reverberations within one's self, while staying in relation to another, in order to understand and emphatically join with their experience. In this context, counter-transference is not a reactive mode of experience but an essentially interactive one that reveals further depths of the psychic fields of both subjects. In other words, through a field of reciprocal influence, one humanity is expanded by another. Listening to one's counter-transference thus becomes a medium to experience the inner worlds of others. If I locate my own reactive voice within the voices that I take within me I will be better able to understand myself in relation to another which in turn gives me access to understanding the position of the other. This may occur in an even more complete way than the subject is able to have access to in his or her own psychic life. If I am able take within myself and reflect upon the silent voices that I locate in the text of another's life I may then be able to mirror their own hidden voices back to them. This then is the therapeutic aim of a conversational journey such as has been presented. It is also the aim of the human endeavour itself; that is to say to continue to strive towards ever widening circles of understanding and awareness.

### **Conclusion: Gathering Lessons Learned**

We are nearing the end of this voyage through conversation. Along the way we have listened to the emotional histories of a people who are not terribly well known or understood by the world at large. The reader has hopefully heard and taken with him or her a new perspective of the other. As the

investigator, I have forged into this territory of conversation and into the field of mind with a map of anthropology. I have attempted to bring anthropology to psychology and to the study of mind. This then is my final thesis and general conclusion about the vehicles and methods that attempt to shed light on human meaning systems: We must place in the background the dogma of expert knowing systems and employ the vehicle of the naive stance. Such a position will not abandon objective knowledge but will bring curiosity to the forefront in order to create avenues of openness to others. This is not to be seen as a retreat into romanticism but a call to explore the unknown capacities and boundaries of mind through ambiguous but compelling entry points. This anthropology of the mind will hold great observational power on human experience precisely because of, and not in spite of its call to subjectivity. In this way, the answers we seek to human needs are elusive and variable. The stream of humanity we find ourselves in will not be fixed to reified formulas of inquiry. We must rely on our specific human endowment of subjective and inter-subjective experience in order to grasp the meaning systems of human kind. We must at the same time accept that all empirical observations are fleeting moments of tentative and eventually erroneous conclusions. We return again to the notion that the question is the entry point into the circle of knowledge. The question searches for its answer but having found it, returns again to its self. The question is thus never in subordination to the answer. Rather it controls its own destiny. This is the final hermeneutic circle that we must enter in order to escape the vicious epistemological circle. The fact that we ourselves are immersed in the field we wish to study; the field of human being. Rather than fleeing from the circle we must learn to find ways to place our self within it while not becoming lost to its inherent state of ambiguity. All of the above is said with a view to arriving at some conclusions to this conversational study, for as stated early on, this work seeks to be useful to the



local world. It seeks to enter into the world of praxis. In other words in order to be of value narrative understandings and interpretive work must find a way into the practical realms of every day life.

### **Clinical Observations**

#### *Encountering a Group of Fighters not "Losers"*

The lifting of voices brings the complexity of these participants' inner worlds to light. It also brings out the struggles that they experience in order to survive in life. In a world that promotes and adores winners in the game of life, these people often personify the experience of losers. But we also find a new image that emerges in the texts of their discourse as one of fighters who wage a descent battle against the formidable oppression they live under. Contrary to many assumptions that they are weak or unable we find, in contrast, that they are resilient and capable in many areas of their life. They are able to re-bound from the vast disabling experiences they have encountered. Noticing their capacities and their resilience, encourages the world of others to re-cast the mentally disabled as fighters instead of characterizing them as losers.

#### **Encountering Multiple Selves**

We learn also that the study group does not have a one-dimensional existence. Contrary to stereotypes that portray them in a one-dimensional way, we find, as the voices suggest, that they like all people have a multiplicity of personal selves that are context based. It is misnomer to speak only of their incapacitated selves when so many other facets of their personalities and qualities come to light through a lifting of their many identity scripts that surface. Indeed it becomes clear what many of them are trying to say in their texts is that living as a disabled person does not explain or describe the totality

of their being in the world. Over and over again the participants have said that being a handicapped person is only something that they have been called, not what or who they are. In other words, they do not find complete identification with the descriptions placed on them. Often the participants refer to themselves as “slow,” which in their opinion is quite different from being “retarded” or “handicapped.” “Slowness,” in their view, does not mean absence of something. To them it means only that it takes longer to understand. One of the participants cautions me, saying “we are not from Mars, we are not Martians.” She captures the chronic feeling that they have been treated as if they were not human, as if they were non-persons. Listening through the layers of their texts we witness that they have been treated at times in this manner and we see the devastating effects that being treated as if one were not completely human can have on the development of their potential as humans.

### **Encountering Social Disability**

In reading the texts that describe the lives of the people of this study, we hear the tragedies and sufferings these people have endured. We cannot deny that they are vulnerable at an early age to many kinds of social, physical and emotional breakdown. For this reason we do not say that their lives are without significant deficit. Indeed they have enormous areas of disability and disadvantage not the least of which is poverty and deprivation. However, we acknowledge that the most disabling experiences are those which emerge secondarily to their primary disabilities. These secondary deficits come into being largely from the social world. We heard the harsh world of others spoken in the discourses of the participants. We observed how the “other” becomes infused within the executive function of their personalities. We saw at times how the person becomes one with this voice, turning others’ criticism against themselves. We saw at other times their resilient resistance against this voice.

We need to explore the sources of these disabling experiences and how they press upon the inner resilience of the person. We need also to explore this remarkable capacity for resilience and from where it draws its sources of strength.

### **The Experience of Time: Living the Past in the Present**

This study brings out an interesting clinical observation of confusion in the dimension of time in the internal experience of our participants. Often participants seem to experience the past as if it were the present. We heard Luke, for example, move from the voice of the past to a present voice in his description of his school experience. In one moment he speaks about school life as being "a long time ago," but then he switches to the present and leaves the impression that his school situation is current. We heard this confusion come to surface in many other of the narratives that were told and particularly in those that recounted painful or traumatic experiences. Sean, for example, frequently uses the present tense to recall his difficult experiences in the past when he had been living in various group homes. We can wonder if having a past trauma is perpetuated by an inner perception of undifferentiated time, so that it constantly re-occurs through memory as current experience. Perhaps the sometimes-unsophisticated language patterns of our participants reveals this phenomenon which in more sophisticated discourse is lost behind the corrections of grammar. In this way, we can see that narrative discourse reveals much about the mind. Oliver Sacks (1985) is one neuroscientist who has demonstrated how linguistic patterns reveal neurological functioning. In light of the advances in Cognitive Psychology both in theory and clinical application it may be fruitful to pursue these memories in the present, as cognitive systems that entrap past experiences in the present. This being the case it would be interesting to pursue the possibility of helping people identify the layers of

their narratives so that the place of the past can be re-structured in the present. White and Epstein (1990) are two such narrative therapists who try to deconstruct and unearth layers of inner thought. White (1991) further describes a therapeutic process of “externalizing conversations” where a person can identify their “private stories and the cultural knowledge they live by.” (p. 29) In the case of people, such as those described in this study, it could be beneficial to them to help them find a way to unearth the self narratives they live by so that they may move on to changing definitions of the self. This requires clinical and social interventions, which are sensitive to the layered nature of the interactions between voice, thought and lived experience.

### **Lifting Voices as Therapeutic Means**

Many times in their conversations, participants expressed the feeling that they had not been well understood by others. They had tried in one way or another to tell us that they were “just like everyone else,” but somehow this message seemed to fall on deaf ears. They often felt that they were not believed or given credit in evaluating their ability to participate in the world of thought and action. Often they had the sense that they were treated as if they were without thoughts or an inner life, and as if they were somehow regarded as non-persons or in a state of perpetual childhood. Again and again, we hear in their narratives their pleas to be understood. It was indeed striking that all of the participants so willingly shared their life stories with the investigator. Contrary to her fears that she would be experienced as intruding, invasive or pushy by those interviewed, she was met with an openness of spirit and an eagerness to share their life stories. Indeed, participants seemed to look forward to our next meeting. We can understand from this receptivity that they experience a hunger to be listened to attentively, emphatically and without criticism. This then is the first learned lesson of the journey. Namely, that

people who have been marginalized, or who live a disabling experience, need to be acknowledged and treated as cognizing subjects instead of empty objects. In the process of re-claiming their individual integrated voices, they need the re-enforcement of recurrent situations where they are listened to and where they are heard.

### **Enabling the Voice of Competence**

The narratives of this group of people described reveal important parts of themselves that reflect positions of competence. It is crucial to develop ways of promoting their voices of competence that will rescue them from the underbrush of their frequently lived experiences of deficit. For those who are well entrenched in their positions of deficit, they need to be helped to identify their own voice of competence. For those who are too young or not yet born, there needs to be a way to allow its natural evolution. In both cases, enabling experiences that can re-route the path of development must be constructed. This means that the intellectually challenged must experience themselves in successful situations. They must hear about their successes so that they may incorporate this external voice into their own sense of being.

### **Coming to Terms with the Voice of Deficit**

It is unrealistic to imagine the abolition of the voice of deficit. Therefore, we must speak in terms of taming it to a point that it may become integrated within the larger context of the self. It must be treated as one aspect of the self and not the self itself. People with an intellectual disability need to experience that they are not their disability and that it is only one facet of their lives. This disability must like "all human frailties" be managed and worked with. In these participants we saw that working with the voice of deficit was accomplished by creating situations that helped them to move temporarily

further into the disability domain. By owning their difficulties and bringing them to the surface of social interchange, they are able to shed much of the shame and fear in having their weaknesses openly revealed. This paradox is consistent with the hermeneutic adage that moving into the field of prejudice allows us to surpass it. This notion has important implications for the current pervasive philosophy of mainstreaming in schools and society in general. Should educators, parents and clinicians encourage the disappearance of "special education" or other specialized programs? The clinical data of this project affirms the point that people with marginal intelligence need social opportunities within and without their homogenous group. Within their peer group, they need to be able to adopt a kinder, more accepting approach towards their own and others' voice of deficit and to experience the strength of their affiliation with other voices of deficit. This is otherwise known as the process of re-claiming one's voice from its previously marginalized position and shifting it to a position of strength and value. This groups also needs to be affirmed in the world of others through appropriate forms of integration. How should this be achieved? In some ways the answer can be by "more of the same." That is to say that the social movements initiated in the 1960s have brought the socially disabled forward to some degree. They are no longer housed in institutions. The use of words such as "imbecile," "dunce" and "moron" have been banished from the textbooks of professional thought. There has indeed been a growing awareness of the plight of the mentally disabled in general. On the other hand those who hover at the margins of intelligence perhaps fall too far into the mainstream. They are often the poor, the sick, the lonely, and the despised. Perhaps we can think about many human problems using a developmental perspective. We would then ask not what per se is their category in life but what is the context of their category. In other

words, how does their category effect their lives and can we help to re-situate the context they find themselves in?

### **Bringing Clarity to the Voice of Confusion**

Confusion can give birth to a fresh experience or it can perpetuate a state of anguish and uncertainty. As a positive possibility, confusion can be used as a guide to uncover the source of a problem. Confusion is the wound that shows itself but does not know its origin. Many times in the narrative segments we saw that confusion reigned in formulating identity statements. We saw this, for example, through the grammatical structure of various identity statements when the past was confused with present and also by contradictory statements contained in a single sentence. Narrative analysis serves to highlight these areas of confusion by teasing out contradictions of thought and placing an emphasis on the meaning structure of phrases.

### **Softening the Voice of Other**

The voice of other, as we have seen, is often a harsh inner commentary towards the self of one's being. It is different from the voice of deficit in that it has not moved to the core of the personality but rather speaks from a position of observation. The rejecting voices of parents, siblings, and others in general seem to create echoes of disappointment and devaluation that reflect back to the person a perpetual mirror of failure. Sometimes this voice is believed by the person and sometimes it is resisted. Therapeutically, the question becomes how we can help to soften the harsh voice of other. The answer partially lies in surrounding the individual by a more positive and nurturing context of the other. The answer also lies in addressing the needs of the real other—in other words the social and familial world of the person. In the first case, the individual can benefit from a social environment that is created with the goal

of repairing the damaged experience of the other. In this environment of peers, helpers, and advocates the person can, over time, develop a new sense of the other within them. The negative voices of others can be re-routed to more distant points in one's inner experience. Similarly, the person can be assisted to evaluate and neutralize these negative internal voices of other. But there is benefit in helping the real others in the person's life to adopt a softer position towards their sibling, child, pupil, or community member. Often they are working with their own forces of the internalized negative other. It is important to point out that there are of course positive voices of the internalized other. Of particular notice are the voices of people who are perhaps a step removed; grandparents, deceased parents, or an old teacher or friendly neighbour.

### **Valuing the Speaking Inner Voice**

The prevalence of the imaginary world and inner dialogues in these narratives of imaginary speaking voices who guide, nurture, and emphatically join with person is striking. Too little attention has been paid to the resilient function of inner voice experience. Too often this experience is pathologized. We saw in these narratives that the experience of inner voice is a frequent experience amongst this group of people. There needs to be further study of this experience as a resilient force in one's life.

### **Prescriptions for Change**

#### *The School Experience: The Practice of Social Disabling*

This journey finds the voice of deficit taking root at the doorstep of one of our most important social institutions, school. We are struck on this conversational trek by the devastating experiences that our participants have



endured in the process of their school life. Indeed much of their adult lives seem to have been spent recovering from these effects. How can it happen, we may ask, that an institution meant to foster development actually impinges upon it in the case of people who so badly need enriched enabling experiences? Is it possible that these more vulnerable people actually leave the school systems more damaged than when they arrived? Sadly, in the voices of this study, the response appears to be a resounding “yes.”

Again I cannot proclaim an empirical outcome. I cannot “prove” by this study of voice that such systematic devastation occurs. But the stories that have been collected in this study offer a “folk knowledge” that the fostering of disabling curriculums of study for the less intellectually endowed is a common practice. Indeed most of our participants found that they were under-challenged in school, having to endure repetitive, simplistic lesson plans that are trivial and fill the school space with meaningless activity. Though our claims fall short of proof, the stories we glean warrant empirical evaluation of the validity of these suspicions. In this case we can rely on empirical studies to make an accounting of the schooling practices for the mentally slow to determine whether there is any truth to the claim that these practices contribute to disability rather than diminish it. Such a study could enter into the social space of the school and extract the current narratives of all concerned. The investigators would have the opportunity to engage in conversations and lift voices that are fresh and without the added distortions of memory. We would be able to see in close view the current narrative experience of school life rather than the memory of experience on which my own study was based.

## Preventing Social Disability

The ideal goal in addressing the needs of a group of people who face any particular disability should be to maximize their full potential as human beings. But, at the very least, we need to find ways to prevent their breakdown and marginalization in society. Primary disabilities cannot always be prevented but the adverse meaning given to them certainly can be. In this sense it is the meanings or attributions of the disability which become most damaging to the integrity of these people and it is the meanings ascribed to their experience which must be worked with in order to prevent a generalized social disability. Many times the narratives revealed how the participants had experienced themselves in a stream of unreflected consciousness. They had not considered themselves "handicapped" or deviant until this meaning had been ascribed to them. They had understood that they were "slow" but did not consider that this made them fundamentally different from their peers. We recall John's words describing his feelings as "the whole world crashing down" on him when he finally realized the meaning of the word deficit that had been placed on him. So too Betty informed us of her shocked reaction when a visitor to the institution "informed" her of her status as being..."retarded." Changing meanings ascribed or meanings internalized is a long process. It is perhaps at the heart of the mainstreaming movement in the schools and, on a larger scale, the deinstitutionalization of psychiatric facilities. But too often integration has translated into marginal participation on the fringes of the main group. The notion of inclusion on the other hand, promotes fuller acceptance of a person into a main group. Inclusion means being considered as a valuable participating member of a group or society. It means inviting and valuing the perspective of a less dominant member or group. It therefore means providing conversational opportunities for these perspectives to come to the forefront. To be listened to, to be heard and to be valued in this process are the necessary

ingredients needed in order to help erase the unnecessary effects of secondary disabilities. In this safe, respectful, validating environment negative attributions are likely to erode and more positive identity scripts can surface. We saw for example that many of the participants in this study were able to shed old notions of themselves through positive reframing of their life situations.

### **Creating Social Learning Environments**

It has been a basic premise of this research that social adaptation and social competence supersede any functional definition of abilities or the lack of them. In other words, for those who have fewer functional abilities it is most important that they develop a certain degree of social competence. The life narratives revealed in this study lend support to this claim. Therefore, it is to the social milieu and the social process itself where we can look for answers in how to help people with mild functional disabilities to develop avenues of competence. This emphasis in social learning was earlier highlighted as the Vygotskian enterprise. In a practical sense this means using the social process as a tool for learning to take place. In this context, learning as a dynamic action and the social process itself become inseparable. Placing the focus on social development requires a shift from a traditional teaching\instructing approach, with its emphasis on the generation of information or rote skill learning, to more socially contextualized learning experiences. The main criteria of success in this learning curriculum is the degree to which one learns to draw upon a social network. In this framework of social competence it is important for a person with intellectual deficits to be offered a learning environment with a strong social basis. This means using social process to facilitate learning. Creating social learning environments is premised on the value of human exchange and interaction and on the notion that personhood is an invitation

into being through the vehicle of social process. The more I am engaged socially, the more I am a person. This does not only mean having an adequate network of people in one's life. But also enabling the person to gather within them important "inner objects" or internalized others that they can continue to draw upon throughout life. In effect this means finding ways to promote an active inner life that is peopled with important others. These internalized others constantly inform us and bring us to higher levels of competence in our lives.

Environments where social learning takes place are those where a community of instructors, peers, and sympathetic others form a powerful force for growth potential. These environments offer a counter position to the perpetuation of negative secondary disabilities, which have resulted largely from an internalization of a harsh social world. Establishing social learning environments means drawing upon a community of others and developing collective ways of being. It means promoting collectivity and community over the rugged individualism that western tradition has embraced. The social process must not, then, be construed to mean instituting mere "social skills groups" as one would a technique. Rather this form of social exchange resembles more the art of conversation that Gadamer describes. That is to say, it is this more dynamic sense of conversation and interaction that we need seek. It is in this attitude of approach, a way of being with others, that the full potential of group experience can be realized as a powerful force for developmental change.

### **Creating Transitional Spaces**

It was essential to the research that the focus of this study maintain clarity in its purpose and vision in bringing to light the inner worlds of people with

marginal intellectual disabilities. Therefore the context or backdrop from which this study emerged was not brought out in the open. But as a second mission the research points to the possibilities that emerge from the field of experience, social praxis. In other words, these conversations offer a record of a group of people who have been gathered under the umbrella of a social-therapeutic intervention program. The narratives of this group reveal the need to maintain and develop specific programs of intervention that facilitate their developmental process. In particular, their stories reveal that as they leave adolescence they need a transitional process as a bridge to the adult world. Very much in the sense that Winnicott (1971) used the term, the transitional space allows the individual to forge autonomy by providing him or her with the safe backdrop of an adequate supporting environment. Here in this in-between space, which may also be seen as Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development," a person's capacity is enlarged by the capacity of others who share in the psychic\social interchange. In other words, a person's capacity is enhanced through a process of participatory instruction which leads the person forward. This type of instruction in Vygotsky's words "marches ahead of development and leads it" (1962, p. 188). In this way, instruction reaches into the field of potential and does not linger on the backdrop of past achievement. The social process itself is the vehicle which carries the person forward to new levels of development.

### **Creating Communities**

Despite the possibilities for development that the social learning space allows, it is not always a sufficient frame to foster a lasting holding environment for the vulnerable person. What needs to follow or to be included in the social learning process is a framework for creating enduring communities of support. Such a framework aims to create a psychological sense

of community by inviting the person into a social network. (See Seymour Sarason, 1974). Again, this initiative can not be translated into a kind of behavioural science or administrative intervention. Rather, fostering a psychological sense of community means drawing from the natural social environment of the individual and allowing the local context of their lives to emerge. In order to encourage this sense of community one must work from within a Community Perspective. In this situation, the professional does not dominate the supporting structure but stands behind it or where possible participates in it as one point in a circle of involved people. But it is not possible to present the fullness of the dynamic sense of this community through the means of mere explanation. Rather the fullness of a community comes to light through description and through actual demonstration. In the Heideggerian sense the dynamic experience and culture of a community emerges through the door of being.

### **Personal Reflections**

As I was about to begin to write this thesis I embarked on what was for me a most important walk through the northern Canyons of Arizona. At the time, I felt I needed to be in the midst of this vast terrain as way to begin my walk, my journey through this writing project. I hoped to reach within the poetry of nature so that I could locate within myself the representations that I wished to bring forth in my experiencing of the lives that are contained in this project. In fact, the lives in this project and my own life are inextricably interwoven by virtue of my own historical journey through the recent and more distant canyons of my own life. I can not say what forces have brought me to be forever drawn to these borders of life. I can only say that the desire has always been there. Walking down the Canyon slopes and into its many crevices was a way to return to my early ways of knowing. Walking through these ancient

avenues of light, I indeed could feel the tides of poetry rise up in my being. There, my own memory soared through the emotions of my early life when I wished to be a native, poet, explorer. The adult was returning to the child's desire. But this trek also brought me to see a brutal reality when, at the bottom of the Canyon, I followed the path through the village of the Havasupi people. In this moment, poetry met poverty and my desire was crushed by the injustice of the surroundings. There was I, the poet explorer casually walking through this broken, desert community and the eyes that looked at me told me I was a mere tourist. No matter that I did not believe that I could ever be a voyeur into their culture. Their expressions told me otherwise. And so I sadly went forward pondering how I could communicate my sincere desire to know and understand their ways of being, and my desire to be taken among them. Somehow I wanted to communicate "I am with you, I am native in spirit, I am not white people." And yet I know that I can never be a native person no matter how much I feel drawn to the poetry of their psyche and landscape. And so I continued my walk through the canyons, as a white person, a tourist of nature. Yet also as someone who was somehow changed by the landscape. Indeed as I walked up the trail to leave the Canyons at the moment of dusk, I felt as though I were walking from of a photograph back to the hurried blur of life. But as I approached the northern rim, frightened by the nearness of night, tired and sick from the heat, I was met, not by a specter but a human native man who somehow understood my struggle and simply said to me "You did good." I knew at this moment that my walk here would carry me through the inner landscape that I so wanted to explore. And so this journey did carry me forward to the inner landscapes I wished to understand and where I lingered for a full year in reflection, in writing and in action. But as the conversations between my self and my conversants wound through written expression, I once again felt drawn to find closure through a physical landscape. I knew there

were words within me that were trapped behind unlived experience. And so I again sought this lived experience in the form of another long and difficult walk along the rocky shore of the Pacific Coast on Vancouver Island, a landscape also known for its Native legends. I walked for eight days and as chance would have it on the first day I met a companion, a native person who introduced herself to me by saying "My people are the Okanagan people." Through her, I became aware of my own culture, and accordingly my love for the art of story telling and my belief in the power of a story to convey the rich texture of all lives on all boundaries of life. On this trek, I also acutely experienced my limitations and my failed pride at often being the last and weakest in a chain of people. On this forest path I indeed became a creature and understood the experience of falling behind. Once while crossing a shallow river I fell and as others looked on I was plucked by the scruff of the neck to safety. I had to endure the humiliation of this tiny defeat and I felt grateful to be at the back of the group where no eyes could be upon me. At this moment, my thoughts and emotions turned to the people of this study. They had become a conversational community within me and I could suddenly identify with their defeats and struggles. At the moment of experiencing my own limitations I gained insight into theirs.

This rocky-shored trek brought me to the end of my current journey with this group of people that I have come to know over the years. As I walked, I came to terms with this ending and I thought long and hard about where I had started and how the peopled landscape over time had changed the contours of my inner life. Now as I write, I can not help but draw the uncanny links between the two journeys that have framed the beginning and ending of writing of this thesis. The fact that the ending of one journey mirrored the beginning of another. I went to the Canyons to feel inspired by the landscape



and I left there with the encouraging words from a native spirit in the form of an ordinary man. I went to walk on the West Coast as a way to integrate my learning and to find closure to this project and I was met by a native person who walked with me through wild forests and shorelines. I cannot help but remark on these events as symbols of change and movement within me. On the one hand, I left a landscape with a certain exhilaration but also a fear that I was a tourist of nature and culture. Only on my departure was I offered a symbol of acceptance and encouragement. I began my next journey with a certain amount of fear but I was soon joined by a person who taught me and shared with me the experience of her culture. I could not have been more fortunate to have had the opportunity to walk with her and learn in the ways that I did. In this instance I was not a tourist but a companion and participant in a shared journey. I learned much about the native culture that I have always felt drawn to. I learned much about my own culture and my need to experience the poetry in landscape as well my desire to reveal the landscape through poetry. In short, this walk, this journey, this project, brought me to affirm my love of language, my desire to understand human being in the world and my wish to be involved in relevant human action. This project also brought me to the conviction that the personal, the passionate, the emotional, the intuitive and the spiritual, are all legitimate avenues of discovery in the realm of human science. Let us again become listeners and tellers of stories. Let us listen to the lives of others so that we may understand them and by this, offer healing to their having been misunderstood. Let us also listen to ourselves so that we may tell our own stories and by this grow in spirit and humanity.

In the beginning of this work I bought a painting that I hoped would inspire me to face the challenges of this thesis. It was a painting of a forest path with a single shaft of light showing the way. It was painted by a native artist.

Recently I bought a photograph that awaits me as a gift to myself for completing this project. It was taken in the northern Canyons of Arizona. A single shaft of light illuminates a darkened crimson canyon. These show me that the uncanny and the unconscious are always at work. The beginning and the end are always the counterpoints of a continuous circle of knowledge. The hermeneutic circle celebrates this event and invites us to choose any entry point to join in the ongoing dialogue of human conversation and human being in the world.

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## Appendix A

WHEREAS Avatil serves people with mild and borderline intellectual handicaps;

AND WHEREAS its mandate is to promote their interests and to provide services for their social and personal development;

AND WHEREAS there is a lack of knowledge and services for this population;

IT IS MOVED BY \_\_\_\_\_ and seconded by \_\_\_\_\_ THAT the Avatil approve the implementation of a qualitative research project involving individuals who have received its services. The said research project will examine the characteristics, experiences and social functioning of the Avatil clientele.

Dated:

President:

Vice-President:

## Appendix B

Dear Participant,

(AVA/TIL) has agreed to sponsor a research study on the needs, problems and experiences of people who are considered to be slow learners and who have received services from AVA/TIL. During the research, information will be taken from participants' files, such as what types of problems they have experienced, whether or not they work, or are married, as well as information from test scores. All of this information will be kept confidential and names will not be written on any report. Instead, each person will receive a coded number. The researcher and the individual counsellor will be the only people to know who the participants are by person. During the interviews, which will be tape-recorded, each participant will choose a name other than his/her own. The name will be used in any written reports.

The interview meetings will involve some tests to assess each participant's skills and emotions. Again the results of these tests are considered confidential.

The interview meetings will also involve a discussion on each person's experiences, thoughts and feelings. These will be recorded, later written down and the audio tapes will be then destroyed.

The research study will also involve the researcher conducting interviews with the counsellor assigned to each participant and their parents.

After all of the information is gathered, a committee will meet to evaluate and organize what has been learned about each participant. Again real names will not be used.

Finally the researcher will write a large report that may be published. It is hoped that this research will help AVA/TIL and other organizations to understand better the needs of people who have slight learning difficulties.

The above was read to me by the researcher Margaret O'Byrne.

I understand what has been presented to me, and agree to participate in this research project.

Signed:

Witness:

Researcher:

## Appendix C

### Subject Information Profile

Code:

- 1) **Demographic Information**  
 Sex :  
 D.O.B. :  
 Socio-economic Background:  
 # of siblings :  
 Position in family : 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
 Present income range : <8,000; 8,000-10,000;  
 from all sources 10,000 - 15,000; +  
 Marital status :  
 Present living situation : Independent Family Other  
 (Specify)  
 Date of entry to program :
  
- 2) **Cognitive/Educational**  
 Cause of disability :  
 Age at onset/discovery :  
 IQ score :  
 Last completed grade :
  
- 3) **Medical History**  
 Presence of  
 Physical handicaps :  
 Other medical conditions :  
 Psychiatric diagnosis :  
 Followed in psychiatry  
 outpatient :  
 Reason :
  
- 6) **Employment Record**  
 Present employment status:  
 Longest length of competitive employment:  
 Type of jobs obtained:

## Appendix D

### Subject Interview Guide

#### Childhood

Family life  
 School life  
 Social life  
 Emotional Life  
 Memories of thoughts and feeling

Friendship  
 Stigma and self concept  
 Competencies & achievements  
 Limitations & disabilities

#### Adolescence

Transition to  
 High school experiences  
 Family life  
 Friendships  
 Thoughts and feeling

Problems  
 Stigma and self concept  
 Competencies & achievements  
 Limitations & disabilities

#### Adulthood

Transition to  
 Employment experience  
 Problems  
 Emotional life  
 Family life

Social life  
 Stigma and self concept  
 Competencies & achievements  
 Limitations & disabilities



## Appendix E

### Factors for Competence and Disability

#### *Factors for Competence*

- Achievement of a degree of autonomy in the community
- Self-supported financially—welfare or employment
- Ability to maintain secure living environment
- Employment or productive interests
- Existence of personal support network
- Belonging to a community
- Circle of friends
- Ability to maintain minimum social and legal norms
- Significant others
- Ability to maintain and develop interests
- Contributing to the community: helping others

#### *Factors for Deficit*

- Anxiety problems
- Phobias
- Self-concept problems
- Interpersonal and social adjustment problems
- Lack of assertion
- Problems with aggression or anger
- Sexual problems
- Social withdrawal
- Schizophrenia
- Work related problems and behaviour
- Exploitation of or by others
- Social isolation
- Adaptive skill deficits

## Appendix F

Criteria for voices

Coding symbols

: the self as narrator

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The self as narrator tells the story within a social, cultural, historical context. It presents who is speaking within a temporal, physical, social, world.

: the voice of deficit

[                    ]

The voice of deficit emerges from the individuals historical past, and from their repeated experiences with failures and deficiency. This voice is introjected from external voices (voice of other) and is imperceptibly woven into the representation of self.

: the voice of competence \

//

The voice of competence exists along side of the voice of deficit in a dissociative way. It is capable of holding an entirely opposite view of the voice of deficit. It originates from the early positive experience with other and may be retained as the "true or hidden self."

: the voice of other

(                    )

The voice of other is experienced as a voice within that has the distinct quality of other. It may be partially introjected (self may align with other) or it may retain its external reference e.g. mother says I am lazy!

: the voice of confusion

colour coding

The voice of confusion represents a blurring or clashing between the internal parts of the individuals experience. There is the sense that conflicting views of self or other are competing for the primary position.

: the speaking inner voice colour coding

The speaking inner voice is the actual perception of a voice speaking within. The inner voice can be seen as the intra-psychic communication between one level of the psyche and another. (Van Dusen, 1981).

: the counter transference colour coding

In hearing the Polyphony of Voices the listener, reader, interpreter's own voices emerge and interchange with the text.

## Appendix Ga

### Interview with Lisa

- Lisa: I am a little frustrated at the moment. There are a lot of things going on in my life that have to get settled. I'm tolerant but getting impatient. I have lost most of my patience. Sad but true.
- Interviewer: Tell me more about how you see yourself.
- Lisa: I am lazy (giggles).
- Interviewer: Lazy?
- Lisa: Oh yeah, definitely.
- Interviewer: What does that mean to you?
- Lisa: It means not caring enough to do something. Knowing that you...the dish towels are a good example, I was supposed to do them on Saturday.
- Interviewer: So people who are lazy are...?
- Lisa: Are people who don't want to do things they are supposed to do. People who don't want to get up in the morning, like me sometimes; especially on a Friday. I'm always late for work because I don't get up too late or I don't get up at all. But I get up during the week, because my guy Harvey comes to get me and we leave for work together.
- Interviewer: So this being lazy, where do you think it comes from?
- Lisa: I don't know, being the baby of the family I was always spoiled rotten. Pampered you know, even at home I got my mother to get me the fruit. I wouldn't get it myself. She would be eating an apple, I'd stare at her knowing that she would give it to me. And my sister would say why don't you let her get it yourself. Even on my own I wouldn't take the initiative to get it myself, if it wasn't served to me I just wouldn't eat. So I am, yea (lazy). My mother even said my only handicap is that I am lazy. If I want to I can walk very fast. I just don't. Because at work is a good example. The moment I see my coordinator I start walking faster. It's just laziness and motivation. Those two things are very important in my job at Lethbridge. You know...so
- Interviewer: So lazy is a word you have heard often

- Lisa: Oh yeah and its true. I may have weak muscle tone but with effort I can do anything. I actually cooked something for my mother last night. Nobody told me to do it. She discussed that she was going to make it the night before and when I got there I just started cooking. And she was very pleased that I took the initiative and surprised.
- Interviewer: But you still see yourself as lazy.
- Lisa: Oh yeah, I can do anything once I put my mind to it, but if I don't want to I don't do it. My room is a very good example.
- Interviewer: So laziness was kind of theme growing up
- Lisa: Oh yes, I was spoiled rotten. I only took turns with the dishes when I was told.
- Interviewer: But what gave you the idea that you were lazy.
- Lisa: Because, I was the baby of the family, every one said...my mom said and Um my sisters agreed, I am a spoiled brat. I was spoiled, I was a baby. I had three mothers bossing me around, telling me what to do and pampering me.
- Interviewer: At the same time?
- Lisa: Oh yeah.
- Interviewer: So one price for being pampered was having three bosses.
- Lisa: Yeah, that's why around here I tend to be bossy and that's why I used to love baby-sitting so much because I got to boss them around.
- But I try not to boss around Gabby(her roommate). I try not to. Because I was bossed around as a kid and I never got the upper hand until I was sixteen when I baby-sat and then I became.
- Interviewer: So older people had the upper hand
- Lisa: Oh yeah. I never had a baby sitter except when I had an accident.
- Interviewer: You had an accident?
- Lisa: I fell down the stairs in grade two, so I had to be watched. No I had an operation, and it wasn't in grade two it was when I was older; when I was fourteen, on my foot.

Interviewer: What was wrong with your foot?

Lisa: They were trying to correct the way I walked. I walked like Charlie Chaplin. Of course it didn't do much good because the doctor was a quack and by the time I was sixteen I got operated on my back

Interviewer: You were operated on your back?

Lisa: Yes for scoliosis. I have weak muscles, that's my principle, my real handicap. I mean last night I was just walking across the street and I couldn't stop panting. And my mother said what are you panting for.(here subject breaks into rather long description of why she was running)

Interviewer: Tell me more about yourself

Lisa: Well, I must say that, if you want to discuss my imaginary world.. the way I survived...that it started when I was when I was two or three...when to a little girl I had this really big bedroom...kingsize and I became imaginary friends who didn't exist Laurie Mackay, I forget who else, and Id make up scenarios, and my sister would tease me and say she had a friend who was Laurie Mackay. I used to go crazy. But they faded away I don't know when, I guess when I started going to school.

Interviewer: So they were like child hood imaginary friends

Lisa: Yeah, but when I was in junior high school back they came again except this time they were based on real people. Well I wasn't in love with this guy Bob but I invented him, he became my foster brother Bob. I had Bob for awhile as my brother. I used to, I still do pretend that I am an agent, you know like get smart. You know even in elementary school I used to pretend that I was an agent, with this guy Ross. he was more worse off than me. Because we had the same math tutor

Interviewer: How so?

Lisa: He was more mentally stable...unstable, more unspoken than I was. Even the math teacher said he was, that I was more intelligent than he was.

Interviewer: So you had an imaginary world

Lisa: Yea they were all based on real people and then Bob came

- Interviewer: So your real friends became part of your fantasy world?
- Lisa: Yea but they were real. Bob was imaginary and he still is.
- Interviewer: So tell me about Bob, your foster brother.
- Lisa: He is based on Bob when I was in high school. He is basically my conscience. I know he doesn't exist but he's there and when I first came here, Angelina, Norman, James also became a part of my imaginary world, only they were not who they were, they were the agents again. I made believe that I was on assignment to help handicapped people and they were from another firm or agency from Boston. Angelina is Ann Ward and she is married to Gary Ward. James is John. Andrew is my boss... I see the good in people and I imagine how I want them to be towards me,.. Angelina, Norman. And not speaking French, don't ask me how. And in my imaginary world Norman is Jewish, half and half.
- Interviewer: So in this fantasy you help handicapped people
- Lisa: Sort of, we try to resolve how you guys are doing.
- Interviewer: How so?
- Lisa: It gives other people an idea how TIL and other people are handling things. That's how I did it, to make myself comfortable here, and I found out it worked.
- Interviewer: So when things are difficult the imaginary world..
- Lisa: Oh they are all there, even when things are good. They are my conscience. Bob is a principle factor because he is my foster brother. But the rest are there too.
- Interviewer: What do you mean by your conscience?
- Lisa: He tells me what I am doing right and what I am doing wrong, he tries to make me see reason. I know its me. Many times he tells me you know I don't exist.
- Interviewer: So it's like a voice within you.
- Lisa: It's my security blanket, I am the voice, its me talking. He's out there, watching over me. And he is always been there, and that's why I'm afraid if I went to a psychiatrist, they are going to make me get rid of him. And I don't think he should fade away because he doesn't do me any harm. Only I (emphatically) do

harm to myself. Make mistakes and god knows I make quite a bit.

Interviewer: So you see these characters as part of your self.

Lisa: Oh, they are all part of myself, well maybe not Annie and Gary, but Bob, Yea. Bob is the one I love most because he never leaves me. Bob is no longer. The last time I heard about him he was in Vancouver. But I still have a part of him in my heart. And its funny how my own boyfriend is not in my world. I can't fit him in out. Even though I love him very much I can't fit him in. I replace him with John.

Interviewer: So these parts of yourself do they argue.

Lisa: Oh no they are the best of friends. They discuss situations and they observe behavior. But we don't do that any more. We are sort of floating free, but we are still together. That got me sort of secure here. Bob is married but his wife is on assignment. I sent her on assignment.

Interviewer: So these parts of yourself, what do you think they represent to you.

Lisa: Annie, Gary and John represent how I want people to be. They are mature, and they never let me down and I never fight with them. Maybe I argue once in awhile with Bob.

Interviewer: You argue with Bob about what things.

Lisa: Well, for example if he thinks I am doing something wrong he tells me to do things I don't want to do, get up or cook when I don't want to cook, clean when I don't want to clean, do the fridge, I don't want to do the fridge.

Interviewer: So Bob would tell you to do those things.

Lisa: Yeah, I wouldn't...take a shower...no I don't want to take a shower. Sometimes he is able to push me and sometimes he is not. I have been able to become more of my own person lately. I still need him but I've become more independent on my own. He is still there but...He believes in me, as do they all.

Interviewer: In what ways?

Lisa: Because he knows, he's like my family, my brother. He lives, he sees what my father was like because he was right there. He has always been there. Kind of like a security blanket you could say. He knows how I feel he understands. He was there and he

knows that I have reason to dislike my father, and everything I have been through. He was there. But somehow, he wasn't there when I went for my operations. But when I came out he was right back.

Interviewer: Did you feel abandoned?

Lisa: Oh no. I had a lot of attention, a lot of care. Too much I would say. There was one time when I wanted too much attention. You know I was on this kind of iron sandwich board, you so long on one side and then they turn you up side down. One night it got the better of me and there was this nurse who promised to say goodnight to me and she didn't and I was upside down calling her name. And they were telling me to go to sleep. But it was frustrating I couldn't not get up. And I forgot they existed. Only when I went back to high school I remembered them.



## Appendix Gb Analysis

### I. First Reading: The Story

Relationships, repeated themes, contradictions, images, metaphores

#### A. Relationships

Relationships are clearly very important to Lisa, both in her lived life and her fantasy world. She speaks of her two sisters and one has the impression that her relationship with them is difficult. She speaks of "three bosses" and of her sisters' "teasing her" and commenting on how "lazy and spoiled" she is. Lisa expresses abivalence towards her mother in the sentence when she describes her mother asking "what are you panting for." One has the sense that her mother is alternately critical and coddling, as demonstrated by the phrase "telling me what to do and pampering me." Lisa also speaks of a real life boyfriend. He seems to help her find motivation to get out of bed in the morning. She says she "loves him" but finds it strange that she cannot "fit him in" in her imaginary world. One could interpret this as having a satisfactory relationship in the "real world." She has no need to "invent" him or "transform" him in her imaginary world.

Lisa also talks about her "friends" and their importance to her. It is interesting that it is her friends who generally provide the backdrop for her imaginary friends. In her imaginary world she is able to change the characteristics of friends that may be offending her. She makes them her allies.

#### Recurrent Themes:

In this narrative there is a repetitive theme about the meaning given to having physical and alluded to intellectual disabilities. Laziness, lack of motivation, stubbornness, "being the baby," "being pampered," become the signposts for her disabilities. Several times Lisa seems to say she is not

handicapped, she is “lazy” in spite of her poor progress in school and the physical problems she describes.

**What does the narrative describe:**

This narrative centres on the origins of Lisa’s perceived laziness and shifts into a description of her imaginary world.

**B. Contertransference Response**

I was the youngest child in my family, with two older sisters. My memories go back to being bossed around. Also when Lisa recalls how her sister “teased” her about her imaginary friend, my mind lingers upon the image and I recall the humiliations of being teased or the butt end of jokes and pranks. I, too, recall the largeness of my bedroom as a young child. I remember my little bed and my stuffed monkey named Cheeko who was my friend (my security blanket).

**II. Reading for the Self**

**Self in Relation**

1. How does the narrator describe self in relation to action.

"I am lazy...I was spoiled rotten...I tend to be bossy...I was always spoiled rotten...I wouldn't get it myself...but with effort I can do anything...I walked like Charlie Chaplin...I have weak muscle tone...I see the good in people and I imagine how I want them to be towards me..."

**Summary/Interpretation**

She seems to equate her disabilities with laziness, with being spoiled. One can only surmise that she was told this many times. On the other hand, she seems to have some inner sense that she can achieve things with effort.

## 2. In relation to others

I actually cooked something for my mother last night...but I get up during the weekend because my guy comes to get me...I was the baby in the family...I got to boss them around but I try not to...I never got the upper hand...I became imaginary friends...I wasn't in love with this guy Bob, but I invented him...I had Bob as my foster brother...I used to pretend I was an agent with this guy Ross...I was more intelligent than he was...I was good in people and I imagine them how I want them to be...

Bob is the one I love most because he never leaves me...it's love my boyfriend...I have reasons to dislike my father...there was this nurse...and I was upside down calling her name.

## 3. Voice of Deficit

Does the narrative "voice" deficit.

I am lazy...It means not caring enough to do something...are people who don't want to do

things...people who don't want

Her relations with others can be seen in light of four groupings: her family, her boyfriend, her friends and her imaginary friends. She quite readily admits that she transforms people's flaws into more nurturing imaginary friends.

Family relationships seem ambivalent and the source for childhood pain. I am struck by the relative richness of her object relations. She loves her boyfriend, has no need to include him in her imaginary friends.

Yes.

I am struck by the "spoiled rotten" metaphor. Emphasis is

## Appendix H

### Coding

Commenting on her apartment she says: It's very rare that this place is neat or the illusion of clean as I call it, I mean last week was the first time my counsellor and I were able to sit down and have our session without having to get me to clean. Sometimes it's hard for me I am tired during the week. [I am lazy.] [I don't really try] I try to keep it clean by (usually it's forced.) (I mean V was a very good incentive to keep it clean). At that time H and I were living together more or less full time.

I: So you find it helpful when someone comes in encourage you.

Yeah but like my sister always says I have to do it for myself.) [I can't have a... all the time.] \I have to clean because I want it clean for myself not because other people are going to see it. I mean it's funny how my friends to be honest I don't care.// In my opinion, the first time they saw my apartment it was a mess... dishes in the sink, the bed was not made it was ten times worse than it is now. \But I said to my self... my friends said I came to see you not your apartment. But since then I have improved a lot. It's pretty good.//

\I lost fourteen pounds. Since I've given up coffee, and given up fat.//

I: you want to lose weight.

(People say that I should. That I don't look very good. And...)

I. People?

(My mom, my sister was always saying I was fat.) \I once went on a diet and lost eight pounds but now I just want to cut... if I have to, a balanced diet. I gave up coffee because it was bothering my stomach.

I: so you have been having some physical complaints.

Yeah and emotional I would say. \Not as bad as last year.// My (counsellor doesn't want to hear about me going on medication)

\but it's just a weekend thing.// [I feel overwhelmed when I waste the day.]

I find myself crying for my mother and she is out of the country and there is nothing she can do. (And when I call her she says count your blessings your doing all right.) I thought a vacation would work but (I'm back at work and everyone is talking behind everyone's back.) (The boss is yelling left and right at people.) I'm like the English so they call me and four others "tête carré", square heads and it's upsetting. (One of the workers has a temper just like my father did.) It's like sometimes when there is no work I daydream and I heard someone say something and you know [I am sensitive.] [There is stress.] \Not as much stress as ...// But I love my job. I was glad to get away for a week but... now I am very upset because I when my friend came to the shop.. there was a supervisor there and he was transferred and before he had recommended me

to be the assistant but now this other person is doing it. [I was the assistant but now I am no longer.] And it's really upsetting I mean I haven't got accepted yet [I am still on probation.] \It makes me feel very irked you know.// But there is going to be this big meeting and it's very confusing... I mean I don't know what the heck is going on...

As far as my world goes it's still there. I often have dreams. I had a dream about John, (and in this dream he apologized.) I am a little angry at him about some things he said. It was only a dream but it's weird. I don't want to talk to him but I miss him and I say to myself why are you brushing him off he is dying. I am very confused. He is in jail and he is coming out and someone said why don't you stay with E and he said [(E can't be responsible for changing her own underwear.)] What an insult but you know another time something really embarrassing happened to me and he was there and I asked to not repeat it and he never did. \But this other person who he said this to I have written her off.// (No one makes me feel bad like she does.) \Friends like her I don't need.// That's why I put my machine on I don't want to talk her and last night I was really bad I put it on at 9 p.m. I didn't want to talk to anyone.

I: so what's it like now living by yourself.

Well it's lonely but \I'd rather be here than the hell I was in before,// [that caused my nervous breakdown.] It was terrible living with them loud music, no respect. I'd rather just have my boyfriend sleep over for the week. \And it's quiet and I like it.// I can do what I want and there is no pressure. I would rather that than have a roommate. \That's why I am not too eager to live with my boyfriend right away.//

I: So living alone is okay.

Yeah well even though it's depressing. \I mean once I do something, once I say today I did something a load of laundry, defrosted my freezer no matter. Once I do one thing I feel better.// And when I have supper and watch T.V. I feel good. \I am happy.// And you know last weekend I was crying, missing my mother, and she called me and I said I have been waiting for your call... and she said don't wait for my call so now \this weekend I didn't wait I just went out instead.//

I: So you learn and change.

(Yeah it's always been that way, I am the youngest what can I do. I am always learning, I am 1 always being taught I mean it's funny everyone keeps teaching me things, especially my older sister.) I haven't been seeing her for a long time I haven't wanted to. I don't see anybody. It's a good thing my friend Lucy was supposed to visit tonight but she cancelled. She cared enough to see me... of course she changed her mind but tats beside the point.

We have been friends for awhile. We work together and I call us the Royal Family because we \are good workers we are a good gang//. But we are pretty close but we don't have much time to talk any more. She has her own place now. We are all on our own it's weird. So whenever I go back to TIL and we

meet in that old apartment it's so weird to remember that my boyfriend and I first made love there. \I've come a long way and I am glad I have the freedom to do what I want.// [Part of me wishes I could go back living at my parents] \but you can't go back, what freedom did I have.// But I still dream about my father whose been dead for two years but one time I told him daddy you are dead and he never came back again.//

But I am not over it, not having a father. Other people had good relationships with their parents but I never did with my father. I think his death caused my breakdown. And I still can't pass a graveyard. [I probably never will get over it]. \I mean I have come out of the breakdown and it's a mild thing it only happens on weekends//. \It doesn't last long.// [I start crying, missing my mother]. \But then I snap out of it//. It's strange. I feel very weird. That why when friends complain about there fathers... (European fathers can be a pain in the ass.) It's funny but my father and my boyfriend's birthdays are a few days apart. It's weird. It's funny.

I: So you're seeing a connection there.

Well yes... I guess. I consider sex is one of the things I didn't have with my father.. not that I wanted to but there was no love. I would kiss his cheek on his birthday and that's it.

\But I find having my friends that don't exist they give me strength.// I mean I don't have Andrea any more but I have Annie... I don't see John any more but I have Jim. I don't really have time the only way I can really talk to him is through John. Well he speaks through Bob or Annie.

Living on my own I don't know, I don't know at least technically I am not alone I've got my imaginary ... I've got Annie and my brother. I feel better. They are all still there. John isn't here, he is in jail.. so Jim (his imaginary counterpart) away doing research. It makes me feel comfortable that John won't die because there is Jim. I told you that all of them are studying handicapped people and that they have been doing this for a long time. Well not much is happening now because since we have all moved out of the home we can keep an eye on them. But even though we have all moved out. Annie isn't there because Andrea has moved out and Gary, well Nick isn't there either so. But even though we are all on our own I still have their support. But if I see Nick, obviously Gary and I will talk.

I: So the person in real life becomes transformed sort of into an imaginary kind of person.

S: Right the real person but not always. I know what Andrea looks like. \But I do that transformation.// I am closer to Nick than I am to Gary. Just like I am much closer to Jim than I am to John. It's conditional love.. we have been friends for ... well friends that don't exist don't fade away unless you want them to. And like I told you many moons ago when Was a child I had an imaginary friend... and there were others. But she faded away. [But I guess in adolescence because I didn't have any friends I developed them.] \And I don't want them to fade away. I thought once I fell in love they would all fade away, Bob and everybody.// But he is still there, keeping me company encouraging me to

move on, encouraging me to live when sometimes I want to die when I am so depressed and I say to him can I die and he goes No (laughing). Sometimes I don't know what is going on why are the weeks too short, why are the weekends so short. It's like I am going through a roller coaster. But they all the friends are all based on reality.

I: They are there to encourage you.

S: \Yeah, to stick to my guns, look out for number one.. and you know to speak up.//

I: Well are there others that are not so encouraging.

S: \All my friends are positive,// I never had them as a bad evil and as I said before had imaginary world caused me harm I would want to give them up.. \but they serve as my conscience.// It's not like I am possessed like some people think they have the devil inside them or something and they don't make me do bad things. It's a good thing not a bad thing. And sometimes I say to an imaginary friend help me with this and they say to me I can't I don't exist and you have the contact the real person. (laughs) I don't want them to fade away. If I wanted to get rid of them maybe I would go to therapy but I see no reason to get rid of them.



## Appendix I

## 30



Criteria for Assessing Interpretive Validity  
in Qualitative Research

DAVID L. ALTHEIDE  
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POGO could have had students of ethnography in mind when he stated, "We has met the enemy, and it is us." After decades of academic and paradigmatic politics, ethnographic and qualitative research finds itself in an astonishing position. This is unanticipated by all, especially by those closest to it, who were for so many decades accustomed to its devalued, unappreciated, marginal status. There is a remarkable new interest in ethnographic and qualitative research. It occurs even in disciplines (such as education, justice studies, clinical work, legal studies, policy analysis) where the practice is underdeveloped. This growing interest has been observed by others. Evidence for the trend can be gleaned from many sources. Yet, as Pogo suggests, students of ethnography have become their own worst critics, often resurrecting epistemological issues about the problematics of "objectivity," "purpose of knowledge," and filtering through new insights about communication contexts, logic, and formats.

Unprecedented criticism of ethnographic or qualitative method, substance, style, practice, and relevance has emerged. The criticism emerges not from the traditional enemies, the positivists who fault qualitative research for its failure to meet some or all of the usual positivistic criteria of truth, but from the insiders to the ethnographic movement. This trend is consistent with a newer

and more extreme "reflexive turn" by ethnographic practice about 20-25 years ago. This reflexive turn has added much to our understanding of how qualitative research is actually done, but has additionally raised hitherto unanticipated dilemmas about representation and legitimation (standpoint or voice). More specifically, important questions have been raised about the role of the ethnographer in the reports produced, the basis for knowledge claims, and how a relativistic perspective in ethnography can produce solid findings.

Our purpose in this chapter is to address some of these dilemmas as we have encountered them in our work, and to offer suggestions for judging ethnographic products. Our purpose of clarifying the domain of meaningful existence poses special problems, as we have abandoned the positivists' formula for objective knowledge. A critical question is, How should interpretive methodologies be judged by readers who share the perspective that *how* knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to *what* the claims are? Our position is this: As long as we strive to base our claims and interpretations of social life on data of any kind, we must have a logic for assessing and communicating the interactive process through which the investigator acquired the research experience and information. If we are to understand the "detailed means through which human beings

engage in meaningful action and create a world of their own or one that is shared with others" (Morgan, 1983, p. 397), we must acknowledge that "insufficient attention has as yet been devoted to evolving criteria for assessing the general quality and rigor of interpretive research" (Morgan, 1983, p. 399).

Our main conceptual vehicle is "validity" and related issues. We set forth a perspective for assessing qualitative research, but our main interest is in establishing some working boundaries for approaching the problem. We examine points raised by a number of thoughtful critiques, particularly some of the more recent writings of "postmodernist" scholars. Following an overview of some alternative views about validity offered by these critics, we set forth a different position on the issue of validity. We suggest some general guidelines for assessing ethnographic research and examine a key issue for grounding alternative plans for this classical approach to social science, establishing a goal/purpose/grounding for an *ethnographic ethic* that can be located within an ecology of knowledge. We then focus on a model of ethnography, *analytic realism*, based on the view that the social world is an interpreted world, not a literal world.

### Ethnography in Perspective

For as long as scholars have conducted qualitative or ethnographic research, they have studied the research process. At the turn of the century and in the decades immediately following it, knowledge and insights about the processes and problems of qualitative research were published, but were also communicated orally. In anthropology, Franz Boas and his students orally communicated their vigorous and vibrant ethnographic traditions. Indeed, anthropologists and sociologists, although differing historically in their respective preferences for "exotic/foreign" peoples or "the urban underclass," nevertheless were quite similar in their approaches. In sociology, Robert Park and the many qualitative researchers of the Chicago school communicated their insights and reflections to insiders and neophytes. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a more pointed critique and analysis of ethnography, *a reflexive turn in qualitative research*.

One meaning of *reflexivity* is that the scientific observer is part and parcel of the setting, context, and culture he or she is trying to understand and represent. After the reflexive turn, increasing numbers of qualitative researchers began to appreciate what this meant for the validity of ethnographic or qualitative research. There was a new appreciation of the older problems and issues in eth-

nography, as more and more scholars began to realize that the traditional problems of entrée or access to a setting, personal relations with the members in a setting, how field research data were conceived and recorded, and a host of other pragmatic issues had important implications for what a particular observer reported as the "findings" of the research. This growing recognition contributed to a vibrant and creative period of self-criticism and self-reflection among ethnographers.

For the contemporary qualitative researcher who is sensitive to the research process, the past 25 years, in particular, have included many publications that seek to analyze the intimate relationship between the research process and the findings it produces. There are numerous reports dealing with research processes, from "membership roles in fieldwork" (see Adler & Adler, 1987) to "leaving" a research setting (Altheide, 1980). Many ethnographers have addressed these problems of validity and verisimilitude with straightforward honesty and integrity. As a result, we now understand much more about the complexities and nuances of the qualitative research process, and how the resolution of pragmatic research questions bears upon the important issues of validity and field research (see Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1973). John Van Maanen's contribution *Tales of the Field* (1988) reflects an effort to do for sociological ethnographies what the Clifford and Marcus collection *Writing Culture* (1986) has done for anthropological ethnography.

These works and others have led to heated debates about the nature of ethnography, particularly as they are read by younger scholars and others unfamiliar with many of the groundbreaking analyses of reflexivity that were published by symbolic interactionists, ethnomethodologists, and phenomenologists in the 1970s (see Jorgensen, 1989). Included among the more recent issues concerning ethnographic research are *representation*, or the problems of showing the realities of the lived experiences of the observed settings, and *reporting*, or how the language used by a social scientist may necessarily include rhetorical features. Cutting through both are related issues of *interpretation* and *voice*, or whose point of view is taken to report the findings (Snow & Morrill, 1993, p. 8). From this vantage point, ethnographies represent "stories" or narrative "tales" that are told, in part, to fit the genre of storytelling. The problem, then, is that if a different style or genre is selected in giving an ethnographic account, we have a different view or story presented. What, in short, ethnographers are claimed to be doing in such cases is providing a "text," which in turn is read and interpreted by readers or audiences, who, because of their own interpretive and sense-making capacities, will derive their own unique meanings or "readings" of the text.

Taken as a whole, we can say with confidence that these more recent writings have sensitized us to the fact that there is more to ethnography than "what happens in the field." Another important part of it is what takes place "back in the office" when the observer or researcher is "writing it up."

### The Quest for an Interpretive Validity

The traditional criteria of methodological adequacy and validity were formulated and essentially "owned" by positivism, the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological perspective that has justified the use of quantitative methods in the social sciences for most of the twentieth century. Promoting the nineteenth-century model of science-as-the-physical-sciences, positivism seeks the development of universalistic laws, whereby actual or real events in the world are explained in a deductive fashion by universal laws that assert definite and unproblematic relationships. Through the use of techniques that produce the numerical data presumed to reflect true measures of objective categories, the positivist opts for sense-directed data, giving the "empirical science" its meaning. The perspective includes the common assertion that "reliability," or the stability of methods and findings, is an indicator of "validity," or the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings.

Ethnographers usually took a different approach. Few doubted that there was a reality that could be known. Most ethnographers focus on the processes that members used in constructing or creating their activities, and how they found or established order in their activities. This focus on what some have termed the "definition of the situation" was oriented to meanings and interpretations of members who lived in specific historical, social, and cultural contexts, and faced numerous practical challenges and limitations. It was on descriptions—including descriptions of language, nuances, and, of course, routines—that ethnographers based their reports. As the anthropologist Laura Nader (1993) comments about a collection of field studies:

The concept "ethnography" has been gradually reduced in meaning in recent years and in proportion to its popularity. . . . Ethnographic is not ethnography. . . . Anthropologists are less preoccupied with being scientific than are their social science colleagues, more intent on recording and interpreting another people's way of life—ethnography we call it. Ethnography entails deep immersion and is seldom accomplished in short periods of time. It is a special kind of description, not to be confused with qualitative and descriptive

studies of another kind. The goal of ethnography, as Malinowski put it, is "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world." *Anthropology is a feat of empathy and analysis.* (p. 7)

A key part of the method, then, is to see firsthand what occurs; failing that, ethnographers would ask informants and others for their recollections, points of view, and interpretations. Although the predictability sought by positivists was not the issue, ethnographers argued that their approach provided knowledge as understanding, rather than control. Even though ethnographers realized that the contextual and often emergent nature of their work made precision beyond a reasonable expectation impractical, they wrote—and spoke—authoritatively about their accounts before sympathetic audiences.

The nature of these contexts, goals, and perspectives, and the nature of relevant audiences have been questioned in recent years. The social fact of ethnography is that it is conducted by human beings who witness numerous contexts, layered one upon—and through—the other. Time, purpose, approach, language, styles, and loyalties are all implicated. A small but growing number of critics argue, therefore, that the essential reflexive character of all ethnographic accounts renders them not only "nonobjective" but partisan, partial, incomplete, and inextricably bound to the contexts and rationales of the researcher, contexts he or she may represent (albeit unknowingly) and the rhetorical genres through which the flawed ethnographic reports are manifested and held forth.

Positivism answered the validity question in terms of reliability: Reliable (repeatable, generalizable) methods and findings were valid ones. The current widespread awareness of the social construction of reality, the confusion in coming to grips with "reflexivity," has ironically led to a radical antifunctionalist position. This stance claims that knowledge, even the knowledge process, is without grounding, without authority, and therefore, many things "go." That is, "knowledge" itself is no longer the criterion, because all "knowledge claims" are based on various assumptions. Most critics would agree that an "assumptionless" science is not possible, while they would also maintain that research and inquiry are desirable. What has changed is the purpose of research, and what those standards for assessing the purpose might be. Research is no longer coupled with knowledge, but has been given multiple choices (such as liberation, emancipation, programmatic politics, expressive "art"). Depending on one's choice, research is defined accordingly. For many scientific ethnographers, however, Hammersley's (1992) view remains cogent: "An account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of

the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorize" (p. 69). For many others, however, this vision of "realism" is no longer compelling.

All knowledge and claims to knowledge are reflexive of the process, assumptions, location, history, and context of knowing and the knower. From this point of view, validity depends on the "interpretive communities," or the audiences—who may be other than researchers and academics—and the goals of the research. Validity will be quite different for different audiences. From another point of view, the one we suggest, a narrower conception of validity is tied more to the researcher/design/academic audience(s).

Different moments in the validity quest/critique have been examined by observers stressing *power*, including culture, ideology, gender, language/text, relevance/advocacy. Numerous writings by students of culture, including those associated with ideologies, including feminism, have sought to identify the unstated grounding and assumptions of validity/knowledge claims. Sharing in more ways than they differ, these points of departure often converge. Central to many of these arguments is that validity should be either abandoned altogether as a viable concept or radically qualified, or "hyphenated." Many of the following depictions have been cast in such phrases as *successor validity*, *catalytic validity*, *interrogated validity*, *transgressive validity*, *imperial validity*, *simulacra/ironic validity*, *situated validity*, and *voluptuous validity* (see Atkinson, 1990, 1992; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; Guba, 1990; Hammersley, 1990, 1992; Lather, 1993; Wolcott, 1991). The main positions on validity are depicted below.

*Validity-as-culture* (VAC) is well known to social science students. A basic claim is that the ethnographer reflects, imposes, reproduces, writes, and then reads his or her cultural point of view for the "others." Point of view is the culprit in validity. The solution entails efforts to include more points of view, including reassessing how researchers view the research mission and the research topic. Atkinson (1992) suggests that ethnographies can be mythologized, "but the sense of class continuities is hardly surprisingly stronger in the British genre than in the American which is more preoccupied with a sense of place" (p. 34).

*Validity-as-ideology* (VAI) is very similar to VAC, except the focus is on the certain specific cultural features involving social power, legitimacy, and assumptions about social structure, such as subordinate/superordinate.

*Validity-as-gender* (VAG), like VAC and VAI, focuses on taken-for-granted assumptions made by "competent" researchers in carrying out their conceptual and data collection tasks, including some issues about power and domination in social interaction. One concern is that these asymmetri-

cal aspects of social power may be normalized and further legitimated.

*Validity-as-language/text* (VAL) resonates with all the validities described above, particularly how cultural categories and views of the world, as implicated in language and, more broadly, "discourse," restrict decisions and choices through how things are framed.

*Validity-as-relevance/advocacy* (VAR) stresses the utility and "empowerment" of research to benefit and uplift those groups often studied—relatively powerless people, such as the poor, or peasants.

*Validity-as-standards* (VAS) asserts that the expectation about a distinctive authority for science, or the researchers legitimated by this "mantle of respectability," is itself suspect, and that truth claims are so multiple as to evade single authority or procedure. In the extreme case, science ceases to operate as a desirable model of knowledge, because it is, after all, understanding rather than codified, theoretically integrated information—as knowledge—that is to be preferred.

The hyphenated validities described above are offered as illustrations of the range of attention the "problem of validity" has received. Common to most formulations is an abandonment of any pretense of linkage or adequacy of representations of a life world within a broader context. Rather, the general model seems to be that validity should be relevant and serviceable for some application of knowledge: Is knowledge useful? Does it, for example, liberate, or empower? These, in our view, are useful arguments to clarify issues and to caution researchers, subjects, and readers (audiences) alike. Insofar as they enable audience members to engage in the dialogue of evaluating and reflecting on research reports, this is good. However, there will be no satisfactory view about quality ethnography without a clear statement about validity that goes beyond the researcher's purpose or ideology.

Qualitative research, as many of the chapters in this volume make clear, is carried out in ways that are sensitive to the nature of human and cultural social contexts, and is commonly guided by the ethic to remain loyal or true to the phenomena under study, rather than to any particular set of methodological techniques or principles. Although the positivists' experience is now widely acknowledged even by its practitioners to have serious shortcomings in being unable to produce valid results through their quantitatively driven methods, it has been the notion of validity (especially external validity) that has contributed to current "major reconsiderations" by its staunchest supporters. Hammersley (1992) notes some of these relationships in ethnographic research:

For me, research is a process of inquiry which is collective not individual; and it is geared towards

the production of valid and relevant knowledge, rather than to the solution of practical problems. . . . The great value of research on this model is that it produces knowledge that, on the average, is likely to contain fewer errors than knowledge from any other source. This arises from the role of the research community in checking the results of particular studies, and the fact that it deploys, or should deploy, a more skeptical form of assessment than is typical elsewhere. The orientation to routinely skeptical colleagues is the main distinguishing characteristic of research, as compared with other sorts of inquiry including the sorts of everyday inquiry that we all occasionally engage in as practitioners of one sort or another. (p. 131)

Any attempt to set forth meaningful criteria for assessing the adequacy of qualitative research must begin with a sense of the goals of ethnography. What is ethnography committed to, and what forms might this take? The frame we choose to delineate our perspective on these important topics is an ethical and humanistic one, rather than conventional scientific parameters of idealism or realism. In short, before setting forth "how to assess" ethnography, we prefer to set forth "what we intend by ethnography."

### Principles of an Ethnographic Ethic

An ethnographic ethic calls for retaining many long-standing and taken-for-granted canons of ethical ethnography, including the critical commitment to search for the members' understandings, contexts, and so on, of the settings studied. *Validity-as-reflexive-accounting* (VARA) is an alternative perspective to those noted above. It places the researcher, the topic, and the sense-making process in interaction. Works and criteria suggested by Dingwall (1992), Hammersley (1990), Athens (1984), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Guba (1990) have been particularly helpful. In keeping with the position of analytic realism, based on the view that the social world is an interpreted world, not a literal world, always under symbolic construction (even deconstruction!), the basic idea is that the focus is on the process of the ethnographic work (see Athens, 1984; Dingwall, 1992):

1. the relationship between what is observed (behaviors, rituals, meanings) and the larger cultural, historical, and organizational contexts within which the observations are made (the substance);

2. the relationships among the observer, the observed, and the setting (the observer);
3. the issue of perspective (or point of view), whether the observer's or the members', used to render an interpretation of the ethnographic data (the interpretation);
4. the role of the reader in the final product (the audience); and
5. the issue of representational, rhetorical, or authorial style used by the author(s) to render the description and/or interpretation (the style).

These five dimensions of qualitative research include problematic issues pertaining to validity. Each of these areas includes questions or issues that must be addressed and pragmatically resolved by any particular observer in the course of his or her research. The ethnographic ethic calls for ethnographers to substantiate their interpretations and findings with a reflexive account of themselves and the processes of their research.

Analytic realism is an approach to qualitative data analysis and writing. It is founded on the view that the social world is an interpreted world. It is interpreted by the subjects we study. It is interpreted by the qualitative researcher. It is based on the value of trying to represent faithfully and accurately the social worlds or phenomena studied. Analytic realism rejects the dichotomy of realism/idealism, and other conceptual dualisms, as being incompatible with the nature of lived experience and its interpretation. Like pragmatism, it cuts across conventional questions about ontology, truth, and method, and instead redirects such concerns to the empirical world of lived experience. Analytic realism assumes that the meanings and definitions brought to actual situations are produced through a communication process. As researchers and observers become increasingly aware that the categories and ideas used to describe the empirical (socially constructed) world are also symbols from specific contexts, this too becomes part of the phenomena studied empirically, and incorporated into the research report(s).

Our general approach to evaluating ethnographic work can be stated as follows: The process by which the ethnography occurred must be clearly delineated, including accounts of the interactions among context, researcher, methods, setting, and actors.<sup>1</sup> Hammersley's (1992) notion of "subtle realism" is akin to our analytic realism in terms of the stronger emphasis we put on verifiable knowledge about the interpretive process as a way of knowing:

This subtle realism retains from naive realism the idea that research investigates independent,



knowable phenomena. But it breaks with it in denying that we have direct access to those phenomena, in accepting that we must always rely on cultural assumptions, and in denying that our aim is to reproduce social phenomena in some way that is uniquely appropriate to them. Obversely, subtle realism shares with skepticism and relativism a recognition that all knowledge is based on assumptions and purposes and is a human construction, but it rejects these positions' abandonment of the regulative idea of independent and knowable phenomena. Perhaps most important of all, subtle realism is distinct from both naive realism and relativism in its rejection of the notion that knowledge must be defined as beliefs whose validity is known with certainty. (p. 52)

This approach, tied to naturalism, identifies four general criteria of ethnographic quality: plausibility, credibility, relevance, and importance of the topic. Hammersley (1992, p. 62) appears to be more comfortable with the first two, committed to the third as a way of justifying our public response, and quite ambivalent about the fourth, importance. Notwithstanding the political contextuality of each, his explication of scientific—that is, disciplined—research as distinctive from everyday thinking and observing is noteworthy.<sup>2</sup>

Within the province of analytic realism, an ethnographic ethic encompasses these dimensions. Distinct from “ethical ethnography,” an ethnographic ethic integrates many of the traditional concerns and perspectives of ethnography with more recent insights gleaned from the reflexive turn noted above, as well as tacit knowledge and reflexive accountability, which we will examine below. Throughout, an ethnographer’s commitment is to obtain the members’ perspectives on the social reality of the observed setting. Of course, we now know that many settings in modern life have many perspectives and voices, which means that ethnographers should faithfully report this multivocality (or cacophony) and, if possible, show where the author’s voice is located in relation to these.

Central to this ethic is the renewed realization that all knowledge is perspectival, so the ethical practice of ethnography demands that the author’s perspective be specified. Ever since the Enlightenment, there has been a long-standing ambivalence and tension between “scientific” and “historicist” perspectives (Diamond, 1964; Maquet, 1964), which essentially involves where a given observer puts the decisive weight or emphasis on the contextually particular or more general patterns of a particular observed setting. Many of our most famous ethnographers (including Kroeber, Sapir, Benedict, Mead, and Tyler) have decidedly straddled the fence on this issue, wanting to have both substantive particularity and processual abstraction, and usually concluding with neither.

The perspectival nature of knowledge is an obdurate fact of ethnography. The approach of the ethnographic ethic acknowledges this, and provides the reader with an explicit statement about “where the author is coming from,” which is the ethnographic version of truth in advertising, an ethical responsibility for those who elect to exercise the social science power and authorial voice. The tension inherent in this problem is useful, inevitable, and provides floating stepping-stones for the creative investigator, not unlike the “science/art” tension celebrated by theoretical physicists.

In my view, the immediate audience for research must be the research community, even though the ultimate aim is to produce knowledge that is of value to others. Therefore, communications to policy-makers from researchers should draw on multiple studies and on the necessarily always provisional conclusions of the research community about their validity, rather than reporting the outcome of a particular piece of research. (Hammersley, 1992, p. 132)

This audience has special interests, including the necessity of distinguishing data from analysis, a capacity to promote theoretical sampling (e.g., comparisons and contrasts) as well as an accounting of its research design (see Dingwall, 1992).

The classical ethic in ethnography begins and ends with commonsense members of the settings studied, with real persons (not “Man/Woman” in the abstract), which is why many ethnographies are so commonsensically appealing to laypersons and nonethnographic social scientists alike. The goal of an ethnography is understanding, and a corollary assumption is that understanding is ultimately useful, even in some unknown or unknowable sense. But this classical ethic is no longer shared, as the ethical pluralism so evident in the larger society now characterizes scientific practice as well, embodied in the theoretical and paradigmatic specialization of the latter. With the newly legitimated agendas of theory-driven and action-driven ethnography, ethical practice asks a specification of these purposes so that readers and audiences (who no doubt approach such works at this moment in historical time with assumptions and expectations of descriptive realism and externality) will have a more truthful introduction to what they are about to buy.

### Research Design, Methods, and Problems

How a researcher accounts for his or her approach to certain aspects of research, including

the routine sources of problems, is key for evaluating the work substantively and methodologically. The existing methods literature shows that certain problems are inevitable and unavoidable in the conduct of ethnographic research, problems that inevitably influence the observations, findings, and analyses (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Any particular observer must achieve some pragmatic resolution of these dilemmas, and his or her research observations and field experiences are thereby influenced in some unknown manner by whatever practical resolution is achieved. Given that the society we seek to study and understand is so complex, pluralistic, and changing, and as so few of us have any personal experience in the wide range of settings we read about in ethnographic reports, one criterion of verisimilitude useful in assessing ethnographic reports is learning about how a given observer resolved the inevitable field problems.

For example, reflexive ethnographies illustrate that each and every setting, without exception, is socially stratified. The stratified hierarchies vary from one setting to another, and the stratification has different consequences in one setting compared with others, but all settings are stratified in some manner, and commonly on the basis of gender, age, race, and/or ethnicity, or social class/education/occupation. Because a setting's stratification will be related to its categories and classification of membership groups and alliances, the personal qualities of a given ethnographer will "fit" or "not fit" somewhere in this schema. The quality and validity of the information thus obtained from ethnographic research will be related to how a given observer met and resolved these issues for the particular setting studied. The problem is, in some manner, inevitable and unavoidable, and cannot be transcended by the ethnographer's heroic diligence or empathic virtue. As we discuss more fully below, claims of full membership or "becoming the phenomenon" do not adequately resolve this dilemma, except perhaps in the most narrowly homogeneous social groups, as in small cults, for example, which are highly exceptional rather than commonplace in contemporary society. Most of the settings of our ethnographic interest are very complex and stratified, with differing and shifting member perspectives, allegiances, and loyalties. For this reason we continue with some criteria for accounting for ourselves, which will then be followed by some notes about accounting for the substantive findings.

### Reflexive Accounting for Substance

As we learn more about other significant and essentially invariable dimensions of settings, such

as hierarchical organization, these are added. In order to satisfy the basic elements of the ethnographic ethic, the following "generic" topics should be included in ethnographic reports:

- the contexts: history, physical setting, and environment
- number of participants, key individuals
- activities
- schedules, temporal order
- division of labor, hierarchies
- routines and variations
- significant events and their origins and consequences
- members' perspectives and meanings
- social rules and basic patterns of order

These dimensions provide a template for the investigator as well as framework in which a prospective reader of the report can understand what contributes to the *definition of the situation*, its nature, character, origin, and consequences.

Our experience suggests that the subjects of ethnographic studies are invariably temporally and spatially bounded. That the range of activities under investigation occurs in time and space (which becomes a "place" when given a meaning) provides one anchorage, among many others, for penetrating the hermeneutic circle. A key feature of this knowledge, of course, is its incompleteness, its implicit and tacit dimensions. Our subjects always know more than they can tell us, usually even more than they allow us to see; likewise, we often know far more than we can articulate. Even the most ardent social science wordsmiths are at a loss to transform nuances, subtleties, and the sense of the sublime into symbols! For this reason we acknowledge the realm of *tacit knowledge*, the ineffable truths, unutterable partly because they are between meanings and actions, the glue that joins human intentionality to more concretely focused symbols of practice. As we will discuss further below, the key issue is not to capture the informant's voice, but to elucidate the experience that is implicated by the subjects in the context of their activities as they perform them, and as they are understood by the ethnographer. Harper's (1987) explanation of how he used a photographer in a study of a local craftsman illustrates this intersection of meaning:

The key, I think, is a simple idea that is the base of all ethnography. I want to explain the way Willie has explained to me. I hope to show a small social world that most people would not look at very closely. In the process I want to tell about

some of the times between Willie and me, thinking that at the root of all sociology there are people making connections, many like ours. (p. 14)

The ethnographer, of course, would add that what one sees and directly experiences is also important.

### Tacit Knowledge and an Ecology of Understanding

Good ethnographies display tacit knowledge. With apologies to William James, Alfred Schutz, and others, we focus on the dimensions of "an ecology of knowing." Contextual, taken-for-granted, tacit knowledge plays a constitutive role in providing meaning. Social life is spatially and temporally ordered through experiences that cannot be reduced to spatial boundaries as numerous forms of communication attempt to do, especially those based on textual and linear metaphors. More specifically, experience is different from words and symbols about those experiences. Words are always poor representations of the temporal and evocative life world. Words and texts are not the primary stuff of the existential moments of most actors in what Schutz (1967) terms the "natural attitude." They are very significant for intellectuals and wordsmiths who claim to represent such experiences. Yet, as those word workers have come to rely on and represent words and other texts for the actual experiences, their procedures of analysis have been reified to stand for the actual experience. Therein lies much of the problem that some have termed the "crisis in representation."

Capturing members' words alone is not enough for ethnography. If it were, ethnographies would be replaced by interviews. Good ethnographies reflect tacit knowledge, the largely unarticulated, contextual understanding that is often manifested in nods, silences, humor, and naughty nuances. This is the most challenging dimension of ethnography, and gets to the core of the members' perspective or, for that matter, the subtleties of membership itself. This is the stuff of ethnography referred to above in the quote from Laura Nader (1993): "Anthropology is a feat of empathy and analysis" (p. 7). But, without doubting the wisdom of Professor Nader, it is necessary to give an accounting of how we know things, what we regard and treat as empirical materials—the experiences—from which we produce our second (or third) accounts of "what was happening."<sup>3</sup>

One approach to making ourselves more accountable, and thereby sharing our experience and insights more fully with readers, is to locate inquiry within the process and context of actual human experience. Our experience suggests that

researchers should accept the inevitability that all statements are reflexive, and that the research act is a social act. Indeed, that is the essential rationale for research approaches grounded in the contexts of experience of the people who are actually involved in their settings and arenas.

The context of experience is our domain. Tacit knowledge exists in that time when action is taken that is not understood, when understanding is offered without articulation, and when conclusions are apprehended without an argument. The nature of meaning and its unfortunate location between language and experience produces an imperfect fit. The issue was cast by William James (and by others, in different terms) as the interplay between the "kernel" of an idea or experience and its "fringe," or the symbolic awareness that helped define borders of an experience as part of others. Thunder, James wrote, is recognized as "contrasting-with-silence." We do not apprehend anything without connecting it to something else, and that "else" turns out to be everything in our life world and its appropriate zones of relevance.

The array of contextual understanding and information is always simultaneously too much and too little for optimum intersubjective understanding. As Schutz argued, we rely on certain routines to connect various finite provinces of meaning to a situation, and mine may not be commensurate with yours. Over time, however, we concede the differences for the purpose at hand, a project of action, and we draw on recipes, typifications, and taken-for-granted understandings and assumptions. These, Schutz taught, constitute the world of the natural attitude, the basic wide-awake orientation of how we engage the world and others.

### The Implications of Tacit Knowledge

Words are like weapons that can be used to produce discontinuities in our experience. The equation of meaning and text destroys the ineffable linkages between our raw experiences and their poetic interpretations (see Bauman, 1988). Tacit knowledge includes what actors know, take for granted, and leave unexplicated in specific situations, things that may have been "learned" in some formal or semiformal sense at some earlier time, both substantively and procedurally. Tacit knowledge may also include deep structures from the *emotional memory* of past generations, enabling responses and actions deeply ingrained in human emotional and physical survival. Social scientists share with societal members some or all of these features of tacit knowledge, those aspects of *common sense* that provide the deep rules and deep substantive or cultural background critical



for understanding any specific utterance or act. Social scientific analyses not only make use of these commonsense resources, but often analyze them as topics, too.

There are varieties of tacit knowledge, of course. Two general distinctions can be offered between general cultural knowledge and more specific situational and experiential knowledge. Our intent is not simply to list a variety of examples, but rather to suggest some analytic elements of tacit knowledge that may be useful in the current debate about the nature of our subject matter as social observers, or the "knowers," on the one hand, and the subject matter, or the "known," on the other. It is our contention that any claim to treat the subject matter of social science as merely "discursive" or "textual" materials overlooks the subtle and significant role of tacit knowledge. Indeed, we would further suggest that often such errors of omission are made because the observer takes for granted the central role of tacit knowledge that joins him or her to the subject matter. As it is not regarded as problematic, its constitutive role is not considered, and therefore remains outside of the central discourse of analysis, despite its significance for the subject and topic under investigation.

The most critical component of tacit knowledge is what it contributes to the definition of a situation. The temporal and spatial components are clear. For example, is this a new or different situation from the one I was in a moment ago, or is it quite similar? Has this changed? This largely nondiscursive knowledge is employed in an instant and shapes the discourse about a topic or situation that will follow. For example, bureaucratic settings have numerous occasions for what could be termed "bureaucratic tacit knowledge." This includes understandings about written and verbal communications, different accounting schemes and language. Any experienced bureaucratic worker recognizes, for example, that control is communicated in various ways, including the amount of talk one performs in certain settings, such as meetings. Moreover, anyone recognizes that there is a directory of legitimate and illegitimate terminology. For example, within social science departments today, any discussion regarding hiring someone almost never includes an explicit statement that "hiring this person will make us look good to the central administration," or "I will support this hiring decision in order to gain points with my colleagues, whose support I will need soon on another matter." In short, the language is always one of quality and excellence, even though, in numerous instances, faculty members and others who publicly postured one way will admit that the "discussion" was a ruse for another purpose. It is this sense of "other purposes" that directs our sociological gaze to tacit knowledge.

An issue related to tacit knowledge is the problem of communication. By and large, tacit knowledge is nondiscursive, whereas textual and many other symbolic forms of communication are discursive. The problem, then, is how to talk about what is seldom spoken about, and, indeed, one of its features is that it is beyond words, seemingly more basic and pervasive than the spatial configuration of spoken words, and especially written words, allows. More is involved here than simply positing that "to speak of something changes it"; we believe that, but this is a different issue. The issue, again, is how something that operates in existential moments and has a distinctive temporal form can be adequately communicated.

The difficulty with tacit knowledge is that it is not easily compatible with what we term the *bias of communication*. We refer to the more public and shareable communication form and logic. In general, this means that time is replaced by spatial assignment of symbols; space and place come to supersede temporal dimensions of the subject matter. More specifically, communication permits—indeed, demands—that shareable and nonidiosyncratic understandings and meanings be constructed through rules of grammar, syntax, and orderly formats of expression. The communication form, like all formats of communication, makes the invisible visible, reproducible, and memorable. The mechanisms and procedures have their own logic, and press content into its shape. Make no mistake, this process has such an impact on subsequent behavior and communication that it has been heralded as the foundation of the symbolic interaction process, with which we are so familiar. This has implications for how we might assess the appropriateness of the reporting style and approach of an ethnography.

It is the nature of different kinds of experience in everyday affairs that is important for current debates about the relationship between the knower and the known. This nexus between what we know and how we know it forges a critical linkage for the analytic realist seeking to fulfill the ethnographic ethic to turn his or her attention to the nature and criteria for assessing the adequacy of the research process itself. Accordingly, we approach the researcher's activities and perspectives.

### Accounting for Ourselves

A key part of the ethnographic ethic is how we account for ourselves. Good ethnographies show the hand of the ethnographer. The effort may not always be successful, but there should be clear "tracks" indicating the attempt has been made. We are in the midst of a rediscovery that social

reality is constructed by human agents—even social scientists!—using cultural categories and language in specific situations or contexts of meaning. This interest is indeed welcome, because it gives us license to do yet another elucidation of the “concept of knowing.”

There is a distinction to be drawn between interesting, provocative, and insightful accounts of ethnographic research and high-quality ethnographic work. Given our emphasis on the reflexive nature of social life, it will not surprise the reader that we prefer those studies that enable the ethnographic audience to engage the researcher symbolically, and enter through the research window of clarity (and opportunity). Although no one is suggesting a “literal” accounting, our work and that of many others suggests that the more a reader (audience member) can engage in a symbolic dialogue with the author about a host of routinely encountered problems that compromise ethnographic work, the more our confidence increases. Good ethnographies increase our confidence in the findings, interpretations, and accounts offered.

Our collective experience in reading a literature spanning more than 50 years, along with our own work on numerous topics and projects, suggests that there is a minimal set of problem areas likely to be encountered in most studies. We do not offer solutions to the problems we discuss below, but only suggest that these can provide a focus for a broader and more complete account of the reflexive process through which something is understood (Altheide, 1976; Denzin, 1992; Douglas, 1976; Johnson, 1975). Such information enables the reader to engage the study in an interactive process that includes seeking more information, contextualizing findings, and reliving the report as the playing out of the interactions among the researcher, the subjects, and the topic in question.

Suggested items for locating and informing the role of the researcher vis-à-vis the phenomenon include a statement about topics previously delineated in other work (Altheide, 1976, pp. 197ff.):

- entrée—organizational and individual
- approach and self-presentation
- trust and rapport
- the researcher’s role and way of fitting in
- mistakes, misconceptions, surprises
- types and varieties of data
- data collection and recording
- data coding and organization
- data demonstration and analytic use
- narrative report

More detailed accounts could be offered as a subset of several of the above. Consider problems of communication with informants: misinformation, evasions, lies, fronts, taken-for-granted meanings, problematic meanings, self-deceptions. We do not claim that attending to the relevance of these issues in a study makes the study more truthful, but only that the truth claims of the researcher can be more systematically assessed by readers who share a concern with the relationship between *what* was observed and *how* it was accomplished.

The idea for the critical reader of an ethnography is to ask whether or not any of the above were likely to have been relevant problems, whether they were explicitly treated as problematic by the researcher, and, if so, how they were addressed, resolved, compromised, avoided, and so forth. Because these dimensions of ethnographic research are so pervasive and important for obtaining truthful accounts, they should be implicitly or explicitly addressed in the report. Drawing on such criteria enables the ethnographic reader to approach the ethnography interactively and critically, and to ask, What was done, and how was it done? What are the likely and foreseen consequences of the particular research issue, and how were they handled by the researcher? These dimensions represent one range of potential problems likely to be encountered by an ethnographer.

No study avoids all of these problems, although few researchers give reflexive accounts of their research problems and experiences. One major problem is that the phenomenon of interest is commonly multiperspectival; there is usually a multiplicity of modes of meanings, perspectives, and activities, even in one setting. Indeed, this multiplicity is often unknown to many of the official members of the setting. Thus one does not easily “become the phenomenon” in contemporary life. As we strive to make ourselves, our activities, and our claims more accountable, a critical step is to acknowledge our awareness of a process that may actually impede and prevent our adequate understanding of all relevant dimensions of an activity.

### Ethnographic Writing

Ethnographic reports reflect some of the criteria the researcher had in mind when the research began. One of our aims in this chapter has been to set forth one distinction based on an ethnographic ethic and grounded in what we term analytic realism. One of the points stressed above is the narrative account, or style, of the report. In a

sense, the "type of story" told, as Van Maanen (1988) and others have noted, can essentially "frame" the work and take it over; the content of the ethnographic report may be racing to keep up with the story structure. As Fine and Martin's (1990) analysis of Erving Goffman's classic *Asylums* suggests, humor as a form can show the horrific sadness of everyday routines:

We read *Asylums* as a political tract, aimed, in part, as unmasking the "fraud" of mental hospitals and psychiatric practice. It does not aim to demean individuals, but it does take on this system and those elements of the outside world that are being inconvenienced by the existence of the system. The mental institution is functional like the institution of slavery is functional, it makes life easier for some at the expense of others. (p. 110)

Underlying analytic realism is the assertion that the perspectival nature of knowledge is an obdurate fact of all ethnography, and thus an ethical approach acknowledges this and provides the audience with explicit statements about "where the author is coming from." For those who choose to exercise the social science power and authorial voice, this is one of the moral imperatives of ethnographic reportage.

### Ethnography as Text: Interpretive Validity

Within the ecology of knowledge, analytic realism acknowledges that how findings are represented is very important for claims making and assessment. The broad issue is "representation" and in what form or genre the ethnographic report is presented—for example, in a "realist" tale, "confessional" tale, or "impressionist" tale (Van Maanen, 1988). It is also important to note, as Dingwall (1992) advises, that there is a clear distinction apparent in the text between the data or materials and the analysis. The nature and process by which communication is organized is central to how ethnography is produced as a document. Fortunately, previous work (see Altheide, 1985; Altheide & Snow, 1979, 1991) in the area of *media logic* and especially the nature and use of *formats*, or how experience is defined, recognized, organized, selected, and presented, helps us anticipate many of the problems that have been noticed in recent years by postmodern writers and others.

Postmodern critics, apparently in agreement with some of the literature noted above, observe that the most critical feature of representations (e.g., reports, data) are their logics, metanarratives by which they are presented as though de-

rived independent of a researcher's context, rhetoric, discipline, and narrative style. This, of course, is an issue of format. What many of the changes in representation essentially amount to are different formats. One of the recent students of ethnographic writing to notice this is Paul Atkinson, whose *Understanding Ethnographic Texts* (1992) cleverly applies many of the arguments presented above about formats of ethnographic writing. After noting that "society is not a kind of text" and that "textual formats make the social world reliable" (p. 11), Atkinson writes about how postmodern ethnographic accounts challenge conventional formats for order, representation, and integration:

The standard literary formats of academic monographs (chapters, sub-headings, titles, indexes, etc.) are also arbitrary forms of classification and codification. . . . Postmodern tendencies replace the familiar formats of realist writing with a range of different types. (p. 14)

After noting that some ethnographic accounts, such as M. J. Mulvey's *The Word and the World: Explorations in the Form of Sociological Analysis* (1985), are presented through one-act plays and giving the book its own "voice," Atkinson nevertheless urges caution, advising researchers not to go to extremes. Implicit in his insights is the critical point that we can say something narratively only through metanarratives, and these are, essentially, formats. Even though postmodern writers often aspire to be "evocative," they do so by implicitly being representational (e.g., people have to have some idea about a common referent to participate in irony): "From the point of view of the extreme 'textualist,' ethnographic writing refers to itself and to other texts. It does not report a social world that is independent of its textual representations" (p. 51). Atkinson (1992) then adds, "But we should not and need not therefore assume that they have no capacity to represent and reveal aspects of the social world."

For Atkinson and others, then, formats as metanarratives are important to identify in our efforts to "unpack" ethnography, but it is neither intellectually cogent nor practical to suggest that "all is text."

It would therefore be quite wrong for a reader of this book to leave it with the view that there is "nothing beyond the text." Such a view capitulates the mistaken separation of Science and Rhetoric. It was wrong to celebrate science and ignore rhetoric. It is equally wrong simply to reverse the emphasis. Scholarship is rhetorical in the sense that its arguments are shaped, illustrated, and explained to audiences of readers. Its practitioners must use the methods of representation that are to hand. But that is not a dispensation for irresponsibility. On

the contrary, just as the researcher must take responsibility for theoretical and methodological decisions, so textual or representational decisions must be made responsibly. We do not have perfect theoretical and epistemological foundations; we do not have perfect methods for data collection; we do not have perfect or transparent modes of representation. We work in the knowledge of our limited resources. But we do not have to abandon the attempt to produce the disciplined accounts of the world that are coherent, methodical, and sensible. (Atkinson, 1992, p. 51)

Analytic realism acknowledges that the anticipation of reporting (and even narrative frameworks) can inform what it is one "grasps" in a setting, and "how" that is to be done. The ethnographer is not committed to "any old story," but wants to provide an account that communicates with the reader the truth about the setting and situation, as the ethnographer has come to understand it. For the ethnographer, the notion of validity does count, although it is acknowledged that other researchers at different times may come away with different interpretations. However, not all observations and interpretations will be equally problematic; any ethnographer will be able to identify those features of the setting that became a conceptual grounding for the work, such as perhaps some physical settings, demographic foundations, or scheduling of particular activities. Given these considerations, and prior to more detailed discussion about the problem areas of ethnographic work, some discussion about related dimensions of validity may be helpful, particularly sorting out the relationship between what we find and how we report it.

Another important problem has less to do with avowed similarities and differences between social science and literature, and that is the distinction between the writer and the audience. All accounts are produced with some audience in mind. (A writer cannot neatly be separated from "the audience" because he or she was an audience member before becoming a writer.) Thus, in a sense, every writer presumes some version of a "generalized other" for whom the account is intended. However, elementary social psychological research has confirmed what the Scottish moralists and others have argued quite eloquently: Because perception is active and thereby contributes to any experience, everyone may see and interpret things a bit differently. In terms of reading, this means that each reader will bring a context of meaning and interpretation to an account, or text, and will interpret it accordingly. This interpretation or "reading" may or may not be commensurate with what the writer intended. In this regard, the social scientist is no different from the novelist. Both produce texts for others

to interpret and re-create. The upshot is that social scientists are also claims makers and "tellers of stories," albeit of a different sort. We insist that what separates ethnographers from the others is not so much the objective truth of what is being stated as it is the *process* or *way of knowing*. We should continue to be concerned with producing texts that explicate *how* we claim to know *what* we know. It is precisely the difficulty of intersubjective understanding that demands that social scientists as claims makers be clear and precise in delineating the basis for their claims.

Cultural messages are made meaningful within situations of use. A valid interpretation of text without a context is impossible. Symbols and their meanings are interpretive and relational. Although few would deny this claim, there does seem to be some clear disagreement about the notion of relational, in terms of what, extent, and significance. For example, any account of the "meaning of *Dallas*" or some other cultural product, whether a TV show, an icon, a commercial advertisement, or something else, without some general location of a point of reference is interesting, but always incorrect. If any such interpretation strikes a chord in us it is because we can locate it within our own experience. To make general claims without knowing how the message was produced or, probably more significantly, how the audience member was situated to interpret it, is to make a gross, but interesting and often provocative, error.

It is the context that provides for interpretive meaning. Good sociological accounts point out the multiplicity of meanings and perspectives, and the rationality of these perspectives, by setting forth the context(s). This is not obvious, particularly when more and more scholars are taking it for granted—indeed, insisting—that text can be "read" through a set of interpretive procedures and decoding books, usually produced in the confines of academic offices or libraries. But we do not want to imply that one cannot generalize beyond situations. Rather, there is a more fundamental point that should not be misunderstood: Meaning is put together and packaged, as it were, through nonverbal, usually nonlinear, and "invisible" features of context, often commonsensically referred to as tone, emotion, history, or experience.

Understanding context is important for intelligibility and comprehension. The significance of context for interpretation and understanding, and the inevitability of reflexivity for all sense making, offers ethnography an additional resource for its authority. Field-workers place themselves in the contexts of experience in order to permit the reflexivity process to work. Experienced ethnographers, then, do not avoid reflexivity; they embrace it. A good example is Manning's (1987)



study of police call codes. Although Manning does a sophisticated analysis of what certain codes reflexively index, it is only his in-depth awareness of the police and organizational culture that provides the knowledge for the meaning of the message. He knows the work, the language, and the situations, typical, routine, and unique. As he clearly acknowledges, he could not have rendered a valid sociological account without this awareness.

The general impact of the bias of communication is to disqualify anything that does not meet the requirements of the communication logic. There are numerous other communication logics that are less discursive, more private, and encoded as symbols within symbols. As Schutz and others have argued, intimates, especially lovers, have this unspeakable, nonpublic, and seemingly "electric" awareness of feeling and mood—all without a spoken word, even without a noticeable symbolic body-language shift. We would simply reiterate that the meanings of things are not always contained in what is communicated in a text, but rather, the context, awareness, and experience as tacit knowledge sets the tone.

The claim that we are all "telling stories" has led many analysts to move away from sociological analyses of topics in favor of looking at how we tell the stories, which, by implication, is more invariant and therefore more significant than the sociological experience of sense making. Moreover, the status of sociology, science, and any sense-making effort comes to stand or fall on the rising epistemic status of storytelling as a form of truth seeking. Although we certainly should reflect on how we make sense of our research experiences, and how we may transform them—indeed, constitute them—through the process of "telling" or "reporting" these experiences, we should not become trapped by sociological logic. For example, although we can analyze sociological accounts through story and narrative forms, it is equally true that we have for years analyzed narrative accounts—stories—through a sociological perspective.

We would like to offer a different slant on the problem of storytelling in order to improve our awareness of tacit knowledge. Our perspective is that we are not compelled to tell stories, but to give accounts of our research experiences and ideas. All accounts are not stories, unless we define them circularly as such. We can, of course, tell stories, realizing that the structure of such accounts may be analyzed through the logic of particular genres that are deemed to encompass our particular "stories." But we can also settle for clear, coherent accounts (reports, vignettes, findings, essays, or the like) that may be open to ambiguity and uncertainty while still making a claim. We should not, in other words, privilege a cultural format of communication—"the story"

with capturing and misrepresenting other claims, including those of tacit knowledge.

## Conclusion

Reflexive ethnography has taught us much in two decades, and the next decade will undoubtedly offer more. But the lessons to be drawn from its teachings are not unambiguously clear. We have attempted to present some of the key issues and most engaging critiques of ethnography, along with a framework for reformulating validity, interpretive validity, as well as some general principles or rules of thumb for assessing qualitative and particularly ethnographic research. The literature points out, illustrates, and documents the wide range of personal, interpersonal, political, ethical, practical, economic, occupational, and rhetorical influences on scientific problems, research, and products. It is clear that individuals draw different conclusions from all of this, and make different commitments as a result. This is a chaotic but exciting and creative time for ethnography and all of its newly emergent forms. On the one hand, we wish to celebrate this period of creative endeavor and say, "Let a thousand blossoms bloom." On the other hand, our growing wisdom tells us that the new era requires a new skepticism in the reading of ethnographic research. As we have stressed, one is not logically driven to accept solipsism simply because research and reason indicate that "bedrock objectivity" is untenable when human beings driven by meanings and perspective—science—attempt to study systematically the activities and meanings of fellow humans! Nor do we accept the contention of some that the "problem of reflexivity," which has been seriously investigated by social scientists for at least 30 years (and quite longer by philosophers) denies the researcher superior authority over all knowers, even when specific criteria and questions direct inquiry.

Among the key problems to be discussed by ethnographers and all qualitative researchers are issues about ethnographic loyalty and commitment, whether this is to the people/settings we study or the audiences we seek to influence with our reports (e.g., policy makers) or an ideological commitment to "higher goals" ("liberation" of "oppressed" groups, relevance, and so forth). We anticipate additional discussion about issues involving the utility of "discourse analysis," "semiotics," deconstruction, and other methods for analyzing cultural symbols and markers of social life. Perhaps most challenging during the next decade will be careful analyses of the role of new formats for defining, selecting, organizing, and presenting

information, as well as their relevance for communicating issues about validity. Will social science audiences, for example, extend poetic readings, one-act plays, and dramatic presentations the same legitimacy as "conventional" formats? These issues and many more now define the ongoing dialogue about ethnography.

The challenge remains to think about the work and how we do it, but, above all, still to do the work of understanding and presenting various life worlds and their important participants. Just as surely as everyday-life participants negotiate and resolve their uncertainties about their own knowledge and criteria of knowing, so, too, can ethnographers reflect on our purpose at hand and celebrate one of our meaningful activities, that of clarifying the nature, context, process, significance, and consequences of the ways in which human beings define their situations.

### Notes

1. This position is similar to formulations by other researchers who have pondered the criteria of good ethnography. A few whose insights we have found helpful include Hammersley (1990, 1992), Atkinson (1990, 1992), Dingwall (1992), Athens (1984), and Silverman (1989). However, our position differs in important ways from at least some of the criteria offered by others, such as Guba (1990), who calls for the reports to be meaningful ("demystifying") to the subjects themselves, for the researcher's prior theoretical understandings to be modified, and for the research to start with a realist ontology. Our elements also do not include a criterion of relevance or "importance" because we concur with Hammersley (1992, pp. 119, 124ff.) that the "policy criterion of validity for ethnography" is fraught with problems.

2. This is more significant in view of the claims of many postmodern detractors that all grounds of authority—expert and layperson—are plausible and, in the face of the problematics of validity, equally tenable.

The key difference [between science and everyday claim checking] . . . is that researchers specialise in inquiry, whereas in everyday life inquiry is a minor and subordinate element of other activities. And the other side of this is that the publication of research findings involves a claim to authority; and such publications are often accorded more authority than the judgements of nonresearchers. The justifications seem to me to lie in a form of social organisation that subjects claims to a more severe level of routine validity checking than is common in most other spheres of life and involves sustained attempts to resolve disagreements by debate and further inquiry, rather than by other means. (Hammersley, 1992, p. 62)

Hammersley then adds that all findings must be subject to communal assessment in an effort to resolve disagreements by seeking common grounds of agreement, that scientists must be willing to change their views, and that the scientific community must be inclusive, and open to anyone to participate who is able and willing to operate on the basis of these principles.

3. To do it well may be a gift, but to be able to account for how we did it, and to provide a broken line for others—such as students—to follow, is part of our challenge, and we must attend to the issue. In this sense, we think Snow and Morrill (1993) are correct, that sociologists have been more careful about some of our ethnographic claims, and have done better at "debriefing" our approaches—at least insofar as we put ourselves on the line—than have anthropologists. And it does matter. We need not assume our methods will be completely transparent, but we can at least take steps to cut through the professorial and perspectival haze that can choke future analyses and generations of fieldworkers as surely as Southern California smog can distort a Pacific vista.

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