PART THREE: PRACTICE

CHAPTER EIGHT

AGAPE AND ORGANISATION

This Chapter follows the same format as Chapters Four, Six and Seven. I cultivate a sense of agape in my mind as I reflect on relationship. I use my action account of practice, which includes reference to my daily spiritual practice, as the grounding from which my reflective writing emerges.
As in previous chapters, I refer back to the theory contained in Chapter Two.

There are four reflective iterations in this Chapter, which generated a lot of data. These iterations are followed by a summary of the main themes on page 257. The reader may wish to look at the summary first.

ACTION ACCOUNT: LEADERSHIP PRACTICE IN NHH

Critical Incident and the Dynamic of Contradiction

This account describes relationships on the Board of NHH, a housing association set up to take the transfer of housing stock from the local housing authority, and shows how I dealt with an issue that involved the relationships between Board members and the Housing Corporation.

As I journalled these events, I defined five separate issues.
These five strands are comprised of

(1) The Housing Corporation's regulatory role: the pull towards secrecy and the push towards democratic, open decision making.

(2) Issues of social justice and the dynamic of difference, which the 'Tenant Participation and Involvement Policy' and the 'Equality and Diversity' policies of NHH attempt to address in practice.

(3) The move towards improving tenant services at the front end and at the highest level of organisation through tenant empowerment and effective governance structures.

(4) Reviewing and determining the implementation of NHH's corporate values through policies and procedures.

(5) And containing, supporting and holding the activities of the Board, and its decision making processes by improving relationships between Board members.

As a part of my journalling, I draw 'Mapping a Critical Incident'[1] showing how I depict the interaction of these policies and the values that are embedded within them.

The issues: I experience a concern:

The Board has 15 members, five local Councillors, five Tenant Members and five Independent Members. No one except myself has any experience of Housing Associations or their Regulator, the Housing Corporation. The Chief Executive and Chair rely heavily on consultants in the months before the transfer of housing took place. The position of the tenant representatives is particularly difficult because they often have little experience of Committee work, which for Housing Associations also involves complicated financial arrangements and legal frameworks. The role of the Housing Corporation can be either friendly or antagonistic, depending on the issue and whether they are in 'inspection' mode or 'consulting' mode. Neither role is very easy to discern except through experience.

NHH's lead regulator from the Housing Corporation said at a Board Away Day 'You can always phone me for advice if you are not sure of anything' and so a tenant board member contacted her privately about the Chairman's sub-group decision making. This was a problem first raised several months ago, when I journalled:

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[1] See Chapter One, page 18

'I … think that the decisions that have been made are fine, it's just the way that they are made that's the problem…

The plot thickens with M (tenant member) handing out a typed sheet with conspiracy theories everywhere fed by B (tenant member) who is also Chair of the Personnel Group and his neighbour!'

I fail to imagine an appropriate solution, and wait for events that would indicate what my next action should be:

I had been biding my time over the issue of ratification of decisions made outside the Board meetings. I had raised this in relation to the behaviour of our Consultants at the time of transfer, and again in relation to the conduct of Board meetings, and yet again when referring to the relationship between the Board and its Sub-Committees.

I decide that there is a problem about lack of openness that could well not withstand very close scrutiny, but that the decisions that had been made were in line with usual housing association practice. I assume the communication problems are arising partly from ignorance of how housing association Boards are expected to conduct themselves, ignorance of the meaning of Housing Corporation requirements, and an experience of 'cabinet government' and party politics.

I wait for the right time and for an opportunity to raise these issues. I try to let go of my frustration and anger in my practices of silence. I am not very successful!

Predictably, following the conversation with the tenant Board member our Regulator ceased to be an advisor and became the Regulator, we had received a couple of very serious letters from the Housing Corporation that were read out at the next meeting.

Now I knew that I must act to support the Chair and officers of the association:

I write to the Chairman and to the Chief Executive. This is the full text of my email:

Having 'slept on' and digested further the correspondence from the Housing Corporation and our reply, these are my further thoughts.

First of all I want to reiterate my ongoing support for you as Chairman and for the Chief Executive of NHH. I think it is important that the remaining Board members, having now been privy to this correspondence and after due consideration, also pledge their full support and that the Housing Corporation are cognisant of this.

As you know, I welcome the Chairman's Group terms of reference, which we agreed last night. Taken together with the reporting and minuting of Chairs Actions at the commencement of the Board meeting following the decision, this should now have clarified and opened up the decision making processes to the satisfaction of ourselves and our regulator.

We must also satisfy our regulator and ourselves that an effective Board heads NHH, and we must be sure that all current members support the revised governance and executive arrangements in relation to pay and remuneration of staff. I have two further suggestions in this regard:

The Board agrees at its next meeting the way in which sensitive information agreed through Chairman's Action or the Chairman's Group be reported and ratified by the Board. This is always a difficult area, and RSL's deal with it in various ways. The important issue is that we agree in advance of an issue arising, the process by which sensitive material is reported and ratified. This is a safeguard not only for the Board but also for staff.

That we agree a 12 month review, in closed session, of the new governance arrangements, the reporting arrangements for sensitive issues and any unresolved tenancy (or other) issues that any Board member may have raised during the previous 12 months under the protocol agreed at the meeting last night. This would be an opportunity for all Board members to raise 'running sores' that might otherwise fester and erupt – which it seems may have led us into the present situation.

If we are to have a Special Meeting of the Board we will need not only to affirm our support for the Chairman and Chief Executive, but also ratify the decisions on pay and remuneration that were made at the Chairman's Group held on the 8 April as I do not recall these being reported last night.

We need to continue to demonstrate that we have upheld, and intend to continue to uphold, the highest standards of probity in all our dealings.

The AoB experience last night came as a great shock and was incredibly upsetting to me. I had assumed that all Board members realised the importance of resolving differences within the Board itself, and it may take some time before this trust is re-established.

As letters from the Housing Corporation go, I would rank the content as very serious but rate the language as mild. And I would guess that the regulator is unlikely to take any other action if the Board is seen to deal effectively with the issues she has raised. And as Chairman, I think that you have already responded well and taken appropriate action.

I was wondering if it might also be worthwhile thinking about a mini-training session prior to a Board meeting on relationships with, and the role of, the Housing Corporation. Although KJ did cover this at an Away Day and at a Board meeting, it might be an idea to get someone, say a Board member from another RSL, to talk about it from the practitioner's perspective. And of course as from the 1 April inspections are being carried out by the Audit Office so there are more regulatory changes on the way, the implications of which the Board will need to be aware of at some point.

These are my thoughts, I hope they may be some assistance in your deliberations. It has obviously been a very busy and stressful time for you C… lets hope we can settle down soon to the business of running this new, super organisation really well.
Regards,
Eleanor

I feel very strongly about the need to support the position of the Chairman and Chief Executive. I acted immediately and do reflect on this.

The tenant Board member who had spoken to the regulator had resigned at the Board meeting in April, then later rescinded his resignation. This is his email:

I have had some time to reflect upon my offer of resignation at the last board meeting. Realising it was an ill-considered and rash decision, brought on in no small way by T's intimidating and masterful performance, I now withdraw the offer and intend to stay on the board, certainly until September 2004.

I believe my actions were justified and stand by my claims. I will provide the board with additional information if asked to do so.

Your reply to … at the Housing Corporation contains a number of 'inaccuracies' and if my contacting them does result in their "breathing down our necks", as T suggested, perhaps it can only be seen as a good thing.

For your information, I should like to sit on the Audit Sub-Committee.

I review and evaluate my actions:

I meditate, supported by the rhythm of my daily spiritual practice. I am uncertain about how to act and felt very ambivalent about how NHH is supporting tenant Board members. It looks OK on the surface, but actually there are all kinds of difficult ethics at play for tenants, and in addition, they do not have experience of high-level decision making forums like this. One tenant Board member clearly found it very confusing and felt unable to get sufficient clarification to set her mind at ease. This is serious for a Board one third of whose members are tenants.

I decide to seek the views of other Board members, reflect further on my position, and then imagine a solution:

I have conversations with two other Independent Board members before the Special Board meeting. I reflect on whether or not I can trust this tenant on a personal level. My question is, 'Can I trust him, knowing that he thought that he had taken the only possible logical, rational step open to him? I apply the Torbert's Leadership Development Framework and ask myself where would I place him, which stage of cognitive development he had reached. The answer is the 'Impulsive Stage' and so I conclude that I cannot trust him.

This decision is confirmed by the subsequent discussion in the special Board meeting. This tenant kept saying that his action had been proved to be 'right' because the Housing Corporation's interest had led to a significant improvement

in openness and a restructuring of the sub-groups. I agree with that conclusion, but it was clear that he had no conception of the damage to relationship and to future Board deliberations that had resulted from his action. For the organisation to be excellently managed, 2.2 of the regulatory code states that:

> 'Housing Associations should be headed by an effective Board with a sufficient range of expertise – supported by the appropriate governance and executive arrangements – that will give capable leadership and control' (Housing Corporation 2002).

I think that means working together to honour, respect and support relationship within the parameters of the housing association movement as it attempts, however clumsily, to uphold the concept of social justice through the redistribution of wealth through the provision of good housing and the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods.

I evaluate the outcome:

This incident has come to a close now, but I continue to look for an opportunity to raise the issue of tenant board member support when the openings occur. Knowing also that those who took part in these events will weave their different stories.

It is also likely that this will go down in the Board's history as a defining moment, and those resignations may cause further ripples, further iterations through the tenant voice and community consultations. Will the stories become a canker or a learning point, or will they be lost over time?

THE FIRST ITERATION: REFLECTION

Embodied resonances

If eros is the inhalation, the breath that seeks the divine, focusing attention on the object of desire with the energy rising upwards from the base of the spine near the sexual organs, all subtle sensibility lost in the drive to fulfil its objective. Then agape is the exhalation, the breath that releases the divine into everyday life. It broadens awareness and acts through the heart, opening, widening and responding, carrying its innate capacity to encompass paradox and dissonance.

I see agape everywhere like the intoxicating perfume of the lotus flower. It enables my embodied awareness and embodied knowing to happen. If my body lives in tune with agape, then it becomes the dance of life.

This aspect of love does not look for goals, purposes or achievement of any kind.

> 'Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things' (Corinthians Chapter 1 verses 4-7, King James Bible).

Agape does not distinguish between the good and the bad, or between friends or enemies, is 'unconditional positive regard' (Rogers, 1961) for others regardless of their socially approved worth or their level of self esteem.

> ' (T)he therapist experiences a warm caring for the client – a caring which is not possessive, which demands no personal gratification. … It involves as much feeling of acceptance for the clients expression of negative, "bad", painful, fearful and abnormal feelings as for his expression of "good", positive, mature, confident and social feelings…with permission for him to have his own feelings and experiences -and to find his own meanings in them' (Rogers, 1961 p. 284).

How is agape expressed in the body if it is not an erotic passion? The felt embodied impression of agape leads me to feel giving and joyful, the kind of love that Damasio refers to,

'love is nothing but a pleasurable state, joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause' (Spinoza quoted in Damasio, 2003 p.11).

Andre Comte-Sponville also turns to Spinoza to define love as joy;

'What is love? A joy accompanied by the idea of its cause. What is a joy? The passage to a greater perfection or reality (the two words are synonymous in Spinoza). To rejoice is to exist more fully, to feel one's capacity increased, to preserve triumphantly in one's being. To be sad is, by contrast, to exist less, to feel one's power diminished, to draw closer in some way to death or nothingness' (Comte-Sponville, 2003 p.271).

For Spinoza 'God is the origin of all there is before our senses…and is most clearly manifest in living creatures' (Damasio, 2003 p.273) and there is no distinction between thought and feeling rather a determination to bring positive feeling into relationship. So finally with Spinoza there is a deliberate 'colouring' of perception brought about through the reasoning / feeling capacity of the body / mind acting in the moment.

As I write this I am recalling Jack Whitehead writing about educational influence. I think that he is also expressing that joy that Spinoza refers to, but here he calls it 'life affirming energy':

'I have decided not to focus on a language of love or loving spirit because of the complexity of the responses. The complexity included conversations about the role of the erotic when I talked of love and a loving spirit. This complexity made it difficult to develop a shared understanding of my meanings of love and loving spirit in my educational relationships. However, what did appear to be shared was an understanding of the educational influence of a life-affirming energy others acknowledge that I bring into my educational relationships' (Whitehead, 2003 p.6).

So I experience agape as life-affirming energy arising from the out-breath. This is a relational, accepting energy that brings us together.

And this joy is what I hold as part of myself as I feel and write about my relationships in organisations. And through the joyful lens of agape, I begin to consider how relationship might give rise to organisational form and structure.

THE SECOND ITERATION: REFLECTION

Emotional landscapes of interaction

Now I am reflecting on the transformational nature of love by 'thinking through' agape and considering the way that conversation develops relationships and transmits emotion in organisation. Fletcher (Fletcher 2001) maintains that following relational logic, staying within the perspective of that logic, creates a discursive space in which the relational aspect of organisational life is 'allowed to retain its full power as a subversive story' (ibid. p. 84). I think that what Fletcher means is that taking an uncritical subjective position on relationships at work creates the potential for a different perspective that challenges the cultural hegemony.

Although it is not intended as such, my immersion in love, allowing joy to influence thought, inevitably challenges existing conventions because it brings a phenomenological and holistic dimension into a direct relation with the prevailing organisational logic.

> 'Relational theory suggests that although the prevailing models of adult growth and achievement are based on public sphere characteristics such as separation, individuation, and independence, there exists an alternative model called "growth-in-connection" that is rooted in the private sphere characteristics of connection, interdependence and collectivity' (Fletcher, 2001 p.31).

My account of leadership practice in Chapter Seven shows that I was not only determined that projects should succeed, but that I applied the learning from one project and used this iteratively in the implementation of the next. I would do whatever it takes to ensure that we had an outcome that would contribute to the overall strategic objective. This could be interpreted as 'achiever' behaviour in the Leadership Development Framework but it is relational practice, it is preserving, responsible behaviour.

As I reflect on and appreciate the complexities of projects with which I was involved, I realise that I spent time and effort maintaining relationships. Being 'diplomatic' here does not indicate a leadership stage in the linear model of

leadership so much as developing relational networks that are necessary to support a project.

Joyce Fletcher refers to this as 'preserving behaviour' following Ruddick,

> 'Although it might seem strange to think of the relationship between an engineer and a project as similar to the relationship between mother and child, there are a number of similarities that make it an interesting analogy. In terms of dependency, the project, like the child, cannot take care of itself. By the same token, the worker, like the mother, depends on the survival of the project in order to continue to define herself as a worker… Thus a mother's job is to oversee the whole, to be aware not just of those things within her control and directly related to specific actions defined as her responsibility but also aware of the systemic factors influencing the child's well being and to do whatever needs to be done to influence those factors' (Fletcher, 2001 pp.53-54).

Seeing project tasks and relationships within a broader context than the immediate, and imagining the consequences of alternative courses of action is an extension of Ruddick's (1989) 'preserving' behaviour. This capability was a key factor in WHHA's success in defining its strategic objectives within the government's changing policy and regulation environment.

The account of practice given above shows that as an NHH Board member I deliberately look for ways of using relational skills to achieve more effective organisational working. I hold questions about the effectiveness of the Board in the way that it includes tenant Board members. My aim is to get the organisation to acknowledge the contradictory position that tenant Board members have to deal with by the very nature of their being both tenants and Directors of the organisation. I want to assist the emergence of a truly collaborative space. Fletcher calls this behaviour creating a context:

> 'Creating background conditions in which group life can flourish and the feeling of the team can be experienced…' (Fletcher, 2001 p.85).

I aim to create collaborative influence contextualised within the cultural norms of the organisation, that is, not in a way which creates conflict but nevertheless in a manner that might be recognised and acted upon.

I see the creation of this context arising not just from strategic analysis but also from the emotional landscape of interaction. That awareness of the emotional landscape can be compared to the 'systems thinking' as described in Marshall, (Marshall, 2004), where I am considering the emotional frames and their effect not only on organisational relations but also on organisational structures. I hope that this reflection will show me how my actions might encourage more ways of working collaboratively and inquiringly within organisation, such that these might eventually lead to new structures and new systems. In doing this I become a thinking active contributor, able to influence the transformation of systems and organisational structures.

Emotional authenticity in conversation

For mutuality to be achieved between people, the-truth-of-the-relationship needs to be given an opportunity to speak. Does this mean that acting (doing and speaking) with emotional authenticity means not play-acting emotions that are not aligned with internal feeling? Fletcher maintains that for relational logic to be effective,

> 'Authenticity (acknowledging vulnerability and need as well as strength, skill and expertise) is a necessary condition for mutual growth-in-connection' (Fletcher 2001, p. 87).

Learning first through socialisation what convention demands, and practising politeness gives way later to more self-determining virtues like love and compassion:

> 'Morality is like a politeness of the soul, an etiquette of the inner life…So morality starts at the bottom – with politeness. …There is more to life than good manners; and politeness is not morality… Politeness is a small thing that paves the way for great things. It is ritual without God; ceremonial without religion; protocol without monarchy' (Comte-Sponville, 2003 p.10 -14).

Having learned what social convention demands I think that adult development involves a whole range of aspects of emotional intelligence that include respect for the other, and taking responsibility for my emotion and noticing the effect emotion has on my thinking and action. Spinoza's suggestion that,

> a *feeling is the perception of a certain state in the body along with a perception of a certain mode of thinking and of thoughts with certain themes.* Feelings emerge when the sheer accumulation of mapped details reaches a certain stage… Feeling is a consequence of the ongoing homeostatic process, the next step in the chain' (Damasio, 2003 pp.85-86 [*Author's italics*]).

Ashforth and Tomiuk in their study of what they refer to as the 'emotional labour' of receptionists (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000) make an interesting distinction between surface acting and deep acting; and surface authenticity and deep authenticity, as experienced by front line service staff. And in their definition of deep authenticity, play-acting is valued even when the internal feeling behaviours are dissonant with the display of emotion.

> 'Surface acting involves simulating emotions that are not actually felt… Deep acting involves actively inducing, suppressing or shaping one's actual emotions so that one's expression of emotions is consistent with one's experience of emotions.'

> '(S)urface authenticity occurs when one's emotional expression or display reflects one's current emotional experience. … Deep authenticity occurs when one's emotional expression or display is consistent with the display of rules of a specific identity that one has internalised (or wants to internalise) as a reflection of self – *regardless of whether the expression genuinely reflects one's current feelings.* …you do it, you act – because you believe in it' (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000 p.195 [*author's italics*]).

In analysing his many accounts of emotional experiences at work, Waldron writes:

> '(E)motion is a resource that, through language choices and social tactics, is used to define work relationships. … They (these emotional experiences) signal the delicate balance between public and private, organisational and personal realms. …Emotional abuse is an extremely memorable and strikingly common experience reported by (the) workers' (Waldron, 2000 p.79).

And in considering group behaviour, Sandelands and Boudens make a similar point about the way that people feel and respond to each other:

'Contest and conflict are the engines of feeling at work. Status is the principle dynamic within and between groups….A great deal of feeling goes into the relationship between workers and management, a relationship often passionately antagonistic and full of intrigue. Workers' feeling run hot in stories of abuse by managers or stories of union organising and retribution. Managers' feeling runs hot in stories of worker laziness, ingratitude and subterfuge, or stories of being unjustly cast as ogres. One senses that people feel most alive and most energised when there is a battle of war going on' (Sandelands and Boudens, 2000 p. 50).

In so many accounts (Toynbee, 2003) people often say, 'I hate the job, but I would miss the people if I left', and I take that to mean, 'I would miss the life of the group, but I dislike my work or the way I am treated.' It is as if through gossip we deal with some of the frustration that emanates from work groups, perhaps it will also help to shift power balances.

'(W)hen people talk about their work and its feelings they rarely speak of what they do on the job or the meaning of the job. They talk almost exclusively about their involvement in the life of the group, including the need to limit or regulate this involvement. Feelings are not identified with evaluations of the job, even less with personal growth and development. … Work feeling is *of* work, not *about* work….It is an aspect of doing on the job' (Sandelands and Boudens, 2000 pp. 52-53).

So, I am beginning to write about the emotional charge that is carried in conversations and the nature of group life in organisations, taking our capacity for gossip and chatting as my mental frame and which I know from experience can be a powerful force for good or ill. And I am considering it from the perspective of knowing in the heart as well as the head, and considering conversation as a means by which staff gain satisfaction with work, that what we do, and how we do it, is formed out of this emotional landscape.

How do we decide whether these emotionally charged conversations are right or wrong?

Shotter writes about a particular kind of ethical sensibility that is encapsulated in speech and that enables adult conversation to take place.

'Making sense … within a conversational reality, constructing a grasp of what is being "talked about" from what is "said" is not … a simple one-pass matter of an individual saying a sentence and a listener "understanding" it. … Specifying or determining them (events) sufficiently for the relevant practical purposes involves a complex back and forth process of negotiation both between speaker and hearer, and between what has already been said, and what is currently being said, the making use of tests and assumptions, the use of both the present context and the waiting for something to be said later to make clear what was said earlier, and the use of many other "seen but unnoticed" background features of everyday senses' (Shotter, 1993 p.27).

'This sense, these *feelings* (which are not properly called emotions), work as standards against which our more explicit formulations are judged for their adequacy and appropriateness' (Shotter, 1993 p.29).

This is an incomplete process of 'giving form to feeling' that happens in conversations, through which people 'act back upon that background to give it further form' (Shotter, 1993 p.79). In this way the imaginary becomes imaginary entities and 'exert a real influence upon the structure of people's lives' (Shotter, 1993 p.80).

Conversation thus becomes an active form of living-in-the moment that gives form to feeling through an emotional landscape that contains an ethical dimension and which enacts itself through the dynamic of mutual interdependence. If I develop my inner capacity to give voice to agape, then love is enabled to enter more fully into the conversation by widening the landscape of interaction.

In organisations conversation has several functions.

'(W)hen people talk about work, they talk primarily about other people. They talk about relationships, about the intrigues, conflicts, gossips and innuendoes of group life. They talk about their friendships and the importance of camaraderie at work. There is endless fascination in this – and endless feeling. Feeling has mostly to do with the life of the group – with its divisions and play' (Sandelands and Boudens, 2000 p.50).

I think that all of these levels of emotional authenticity apply in different combinations in different circumstances and with varying levels of awareness, to everyone most days, whatever we are doing. This 'emotional landscape of interaction' (Fletcher, 2001 p.70) interacts with external experience and results in the collection of 'emotional data'. This echoes my experience of relationship in organisation, fuelled by the organisation's emotional landscape of interaction both created by staff members and also influences relationships between staff.

From my yoga teaching experience I would say that emotional competence and authenticity is not a universal capacity.

There is a way of speaking that seeks to honour the data of sensuous knowing as it is lived in the moment. An example of that conversational and intimate connection is given below.

For over 10 years a group of us went to breakfast after the yoga class on a Saturday morning. Over time these conversations became as much concerned with the shared connections that we made with each other through the act of speaking, recognising and being recognised, as with the content of what we said. We created a living space in which we could place our whole selves, in which we were wholly affirming and being affirmed. In the notes that I made afterwards of what we said, the patterning of the interchange of the words could not capture the ebb and flow of attention, the degree of excitement and involvement, the eruption of hilarity or the degree of synchronicity.

CASE EXAMPLE FOUR

The Breakfasts

For example, in a recent conversation the whole breakfast became animated after C had been talking about a changing relationship with her sister when the conversation suddenly turned onto forgiveness-in-general, and from there to the efficacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. And then we moved into the delight of using C's lens cleaning fluid and wash our reading glasses!

Our embodied sense of ourselves moves seamlessly from the politically big to the little questions of everyday living. Our conversations are not directly concerned with how to do parenting as they were when my children were little, or with organising joint action, but with making sense of our respective histories, and discovering deeper meanings. And this brings its own learning. Sometimes it takes the form of recent stories or some event that is long past that has reoccurred in some way. Sometimes out of the intensity of a discussion comes an unanticipated co-ordination of thinking that brings new clarity, a narrative revelation, which develops an ethic for future action. This happens because this is an intimate place and these are intimate bonds, and we take care of each other. We knowingly and deliberately create space and acceptance for each other through our conversing.

As friends we use speaking and listening as a form of caress to enable a mutual dynamic that takes our emotional and embodied landscapes of interaction as a given. Conversation arises not only as a consequence of connection, but also as a way of responding and affirming relationship, not just a way of making relationship.

Sometimes I get irritated and exasperated, with people who do not understand what I mean, and it shows, it interrupts relationships. I conclude that in the same way that eros requires duty to curb its excesses, so agape needs an appreciation of the dialectical relationship and needs to be challenged.

THE THIRD ITERATION: REFLECTION

The emergence of organisational form

My experience is that it is possible to create new forms of organisation out of relationship.

I am thinking back now to the stories in the left-hand column in Chapter Five. Here I briefly described the Brent Campaign for the Under Fives which campaigned for and achieved the setting up of a Centre for registered and unregistered childminders. That organisation was set up organically, as a consequence of a meeting of women who wanted to increase opportunities for children in a London Borough. No one was 'in charge' of the campaign although there were those among us who were more experienced in dealing with local politicians, and when we appointed staff there was no one who had had experience of recruitment.

This worthy and sustainable local community resource was set up thirty years ago in one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in London as a consequence of relationships between young women with a shared passion for a more equitable distribution of educational resources. My experience is that having leaders with vision is not the only way to build organisations and that organisation can also emerge out of a jointly held leadership arising out of relationship.

I am suggesting that it is possible to give organisational form to the landscape of interaction created by relationship, that it is possible and desirable to organise from connection because it is the emergent nature of relationship that creates new possibility.

The University of Hertfordshire's Complexity Management Centre has used Complexity Theory as a basis for considering how organisational change can be influenced by changing the way key actors relate.

Griffin (Griffin, 2002) rejects Kantian notions of a pre-given Nature and of an-already-existing-Universe and develops his thinking in direct contrast with Kant, and also without reference to feeling, emotion or embodied knowing. However I

am considering relationship as an organising principle using Griffin's theory of self-organisation. The difference between Griffin's self-organisation and relational logic is that in the latter, relational logic includes feeling and emotion.

In the philosophy of Kant there is a split between the individual and the group, and between the individual and the system, between the thinking body and the feeling body, which creates conflict and paradox, and where knowledge is *'a priori '* that which existed beforehand. Griffin rejects this split and develops ideas around participative ways of relating in organisational contexts that can enable the co-creation of new knowledge through interaction. He suggests that this then becomes a self-organising process through which leaders naturally emerge. Knowledge is thus created jointly with others in the present moment; it is not determined beforehand.

In a similar way to Griffin, I suggest that agape is unconditional and has no '*a priori'* knowledge, and unlike eros, needs no rules to contain it, there is no 'Law'. Agape is more akin to life affirming energy (Whitehead, 2003), it is the stuff of relationship for which there are no public rules and which just develops as we participate, interact and challenge each other.

Patricia Shaw (Shaw, 2002), also from The University of Hertfordshire's Complexity Management Centre, suggests that bringing frustration into attention has the capacity to interrupt the organisational habitual patterns of instrumentalism, and the erotic charge towards idealism. She makes it clear that this is risky because it challenges our established purposes:

> 'I am interested in learning with others how we may live at times with a somewhat less 'safe' sense of self, as we experience changing and being changed by our sense making interactions, as the enabling constraints we are mutually sustaining undergo spontaneous shifts' (Shaw, 2002 p.146).

Working as management consultant with the idea of organisation, not as a living system, but as a series of complex interactions and reactions, Patricia Shaw tells stories of 'interventions' that sound more like serendipitous happenstance in the form of conversation, and which shift cultural norms in a significant way. Her narratives persuade me that working informally through conversation triggers the 'tipping points' towards significant change. She makes the point however, that

this can only be understood with hindsight. In the moment, there is no goal or outcome that focuses these informal interactions. It happens over time, and seems to rely on chance meetings and invitations, as well as deliberate contacts. This is conversation that interrupts the hegemonic logic of established managerial monologues, shifts actions by disrupting relations.

Shaw creates 'speech cracks' in the organisational landscape and describes a route through which agape might be brought into work relationships, letting joy live through relational practice, not in necessarily in a formal way but through chance connections. And certainly as a Board member I hold an image of a rough uncrafted lived landscape in my mind that is supported by agape and which I hope becomes a part of my practice.

How do I know that this is a good thing to do?

I measure the worth of what I do through responses in relationship, so that while I hold to an internal standard of what I feel is authentic, my ethics have developed, and do develop, always in relation. I measure and reflect on how people feel towards me as well as what they say.

> 'The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in interviews with women is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate "real and recognisable trouble" of this world. …For women, the integration of rights and responsibilities takes place through an understanding of the psychological logic of relationships' (Gilligan, 1987 p.100).

> 'The essence of a moral decision is the exercise of choice and the willingness to accept responsibility for that choice' (Gilligan, 1987 p.30).

The standard of judgement that Shaw applies is whether or not people talked differently and whether or not it 'worked'. That doesn't seem to be much of an ethical choice, more like pragmatic decision-making.

Shaw challenges the systemic view of organisations (as does Griffin) as being coercive and not dealing with conflict either because of its emphasis on unity or because of the role of leaders in these systems. Both Griffin and Shaw consider

that management gurus like Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley are imposing a tacit view on others because they see organisations as entities or have a transcendent view which is essentially Kantian. They maintain that where there is *a priori* knowledge then emergence and creativity cannot be genuinely new. And in their critique of whole system working they abhor the emphasis on 'good intention' and 'releasing love as the generating force in the workplace' (Shaw, 2002 p.142).

But I think that to ignore our imagined relation with 'things' 'out there' means ignoring ethical standards. I agree with Will Hutton writing about the Iraq war and fundamentalism, we do not need to impose religious beliefs on each other, but we do need universal values:

> 'What is needed is a rediscovery of politics and a belief that purpose is best attempted in a secular guise underpinned by universal values, and that religion is a moral code to live by, rather than a purpose in its own right that gives its believers the right to deny rationality and humanity' (Hutton, 2004).

Like Shaw, I too dislike the idea of love being used as the 'glue' that binds a workforce together and which implies a certain fundamentalism and an avoidance of the shadow side. However, my proviso is that personal value and belief systems are still enabled and can still influence others within the fluidity of the complexity frame, because otherwise there is no ethical standard that operates except that which arises in conversation. And we increasingly do not have a public model of what virtues are commendable, and that is important even if it's only purpose is for us to contradict it.

A complex organisation is comparable to a pulsating web of life; a mandala of possibility, and how we relate to each other will affect the emotional landscape of interaction and what we do together. Because power is not shared equally and not everyone has the same expertise, and we do not share the same beliefs or values, it is inevitable that we do not always act either in our own or others best interest.

Systems and structure in organisation

Just as Shotter (Shotter, 1993) suggests that conversations create 'Imaginal entities', so I think that structures and systems in organisation create the mental frames that reflect real structures of power within organisations that bind us into patterns of thinking and of action. This is the basis of systems thinking which Shaw and Shotter both resist because it encourages hegemony and hides the use of power.

Shaw's reasoning (Shaw, 2002) argues for self-organisation in complexity because interventions based on systemic thinking have not been successful in transforming organisations. Nevertheless it seems that at times people <u>like</u> to be able to differentiate between the top, bottom and middle structures of organisation (see also Sandelands and Boudens, 2000). My experience of creating new organisations (see previous section) resonates with much of what Shaw says. However I think that self-organising within an existing system is very different from initiating or gestating the birth of new organisations. In existing organisations there is less freedom of thought because there are tons more history and baggage that will be carried through existing relationships.

Oshrey (Oshrey, 1995) describes the usual relations between the top, middle and bottoms as most often engaged in the 'Dance of the Blind Reflex' (DBR) with the people in these positions engaged in an episodic or chronic dance that traps fixed behaviours (and conversations) within the system. Understanding the patterning of the interactions, seeing the old dance, liberates interactions between people and groups, systems thinking enables people to choose the dance they wish to dance:

> '*Partners in creation…*
>
> The challenge in stepping out of the Dance
> is for Tops and Bottoms –
> each side bringing its unique
> experiences,
> knowledge,
> and skills –
> to become co-creators of the system –

the classroom,

the team,

the department,

the organisation,

the meeting,

the family,

the nation,

the world;

sharing responsibility for its success

and its failures

in each moment

and in the long term' (Oshrey, 1995 p.68).

Facilitation tools develop awareness, connection and conversation between different parts of the system, and working with systems, these tools are variously called Market Place, Café Society, Open Space, Future Search. I have used 'mapping your system' as a management tool. It helps everyone involved to learn more about where they are in their landscape and gives us an opportunity to be more reflexive about our own meaning making. As I draw the mandalas of the lotus flower, of the mandala of possibility, that is what I am doing, mapping my mental frame as I imagine my 'system' inside my head.   I guess it might depend on how individual learning takes place, whether spatial models make sense – or not.

Oshrey's work does a lot to enable people to test their assumptions, become more aware of how certain decisions are made, and as a result make better choices about the way organisational life happens. This work is not just about changing what people say to each other, but about opening out and giving more information about organisational processes, and as such would seem to be of value in appropriate circumstances.

'And then there is this other path – more difficult to discern; we are unclear as to where it leads, hesitant to take the first step. And rightly so. That first step requires great humility. Maybe, in our system blindness, we have been wrong about these others; maybe in sliding from one dance or the other, we have misjudged them. Maybe it was great folly for us to hate others, fear them, separate ourselves from them, escape from them, avoid them, dominate them,

hurt them, oppress them, destroy them. May be it was all a terrible mistake. And may be we are still doing it.

So that is the test. To see systems or be blind to them. The costs of blindness are clear. Who knows what the possibilities "seeing" holds for us' (Oshrey, 1995 p.204).

I think that this leads to the same place that Shaw starts from, working with the unknown from the place where you already are in the organisation. When freed from 'system blindness' it then becomes possible to let the values created in the act of relating to shine through the practice, and following this there is the more subtle work of capturing the nature of those relationships by sharing the stories that are told after the event. Then the cycle returns, of recounting the stories in practice, and so on in cycles of action (practice) and reflection (story telling).

This means that the worth of what we do together may only emerge, become tangible, in the longer rather than the shorter term. Like realising the worth of the 'good' teacher from school days, or the effect of my initial meditation teaching, it may take time to understand the nature of what was given or the value of the work that we did / do together. Over time, the influence of conversations and relationships are reflected in the extent to which those values continue to live on, either in organisational terms or in the continuance of those cultural values that were given form through its inception. My words are formed through an initial sensing which creates patterns; the effects of language come through the timbre of my voice, through the attunement of my words/ voice with my body/mind. These form the resonances, in the space, the air that lies between us, which will echo authenticity or inauthenticity and will show my real meanings and values to you as I speak.

THE FOURTH ITERATION: REFLECTION

Connecting the emotional landscape of interaction with spiritual practice

In writing about relationship and agape I am coming home to myself. After years of learning the 'right' way to behave in organisations – and thus of putting my 'self' to one side – I am coming back into my embodied understanding, my heartfelt understanding, of connection and relationship through relational practice at work. In this inquiry I have given myself an opportunity to liberate my thinking.

Whereas the erotic impulse to life creates the potential of the mandala of possibility through the dynamic of contradiction just as the sap rises in the stem of the lotus flower from the muddy waters of the lake, now I imagine the dynamic of interdependence enabling the thousand petals of the lotus flower to open in relation to each other. This happens, apparently at random, each petal opening in relation to some other mysterious opening. It is neither linear nor predictable. Only when the petals open can I see the connection between them and begin to make sense of what has been happening. This centripetal movement, this petal-opening life affirming energy is what I know as agape.

The relational aspect of love involves an emotional and spiritual elasticity where the 'self' is identified and defined by its interaction with other selves unbounded by any particular cognitive framework or mental map.

Feeling is fluid that's obvious if I am laughing and end up weeping, or if I start angry and finish peaceful. This is not a creative exchange process like reading and thinking because I cannot be angry and peaceful at the same time, and I am dominated by whichever feeling state is the stronger. Feelings do not have permeable boundaries like thoughts, and feeling states are able to exclude all thoughts and desires that do not align with the current emotion. I know that because when they are strong they take over my body and my thoughts. So to become like joy when not feeling joyful, I need to understand how my mind works, to notice the action of the mind. I must develop an embodied sense of stretching where my feeling mind moves into a different mode of being, unwilling but willingly, using my will and my sense memory of love, to move the mind and take up a different more joyful form.

Watching the action of the mind and body in meditation, I begin to witness the relatively mindless repetition of action and reaction, which is called the ego or the *Ahamkara* in Sanskrit and that socially constructed 'I' loses much of its meaning making capacity. As I ask the question, 'Who am I?' and look at events and emotions with dispassion, this witnessing reveals a deeper feeling level within which shows me the underbelly of my action and the deeper purposes of my relationship making.

Pretending to be joyful, acting joyfulness, gives the mind permission to shift its expectations, and seeing the way the mind works, creates an opening, a shift to the possibility that there might be a layer underneath (or above) the everyday mind where this Mind is always peaceful and serene. In opening to the possibility that the mind is just like any other organ of the body, and its action can be witnessed like any other organ, like the hands or the breath, creates a release in the brain.

I practise looking at the action of the mind as it contemplates an object. This is *Dharana* 'concentration', becoming engrossed in an object, a flower or candle flame to the exclusion of everything else. This is the 6th Limb of yoga, practising reaching a state of equilibrium in thought and feeling, enabling the mind to absorb the object of contemplation:

> 'Through the cultivation of friendliness, compassion, joy and indifference to pleasure and pain, virtue and vice respectively, the consciousness becomes favourably disposed, serene and benevolent. …
>
> This sutra asks us to rejoice with the happy, to be compassionate to the sorrowful, friendly with the virtuous, and indifferent to those who continue to live in vice despite attempts to change them…' (Sutra 1.33, Iyengar 1993 p.80) .

This is cultivating a change of character. Ideas about changing individual personality tend to be deeply resisted by most non-religious Westerners, but it is contained in Christianity as well as the eastern traditions. In Christianity it is described thus:

'When I look on the world as something focussing on me, when I look on God as something functioning usefully in my philosophy, then I am imprisoned in myself, and I cannot give or receive true and compassionate love. When God in this terrible darkness breaks through, he begins to displace and destroy that dominating manipulating self; then he sets me free to be loved and to give myself to him and to my brothers and sisters' (Williams, 1994 p.99).

In seeking communion with God we must let ourselves be made by God, 'because we can't complete ourselves' (ibid. p.153).

Changing the self is analogous to the body becoming like a mountain or the synaesthesia of making music or dissolving into the sense of the sublime. From that space I am in love with the whole world and the world loves me. I am the world.

In Hinduism, submission to the will of the guru is a practise for this collapse of the self into the Self. I could not even contemplate this without, at the same time, holding agape, the sensation of fostering growth, secure within my embodied knowing. This nurturing is my vehicle for giving up the self.

To give an example of what I mean by submission, I have drawn my interpretation[2] of a talk given by my meditation teacher. Here there is complete surrender to God at the heart of love, which is surrounded by equanimity, reverence, quietude and faith.

- Equanimity (noted incorrectly in the drawing as equality) leads to endurance of pain and suffering – surely there are times when one should protect oneself? This difference of opinion is based on the meaning that I take from the language, and what I do with this is to hold the paradoxical nature of the understanding, which over a period of time, might give me an understanding of what this particular teaching about equality might mean.
- Having endurance means that failure should not be taken as an indication of Divine Will. This has been very helpful to me. By showing me what I need to learn, failure is also an opportunity for learning, and

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[2] In Chapter One, on page 19

a test of determination. Failure is to be overcome and not to be dwelt upon unduly.

- Reverence brings respect and an ability to receive what is given and is connected in my mind with humility, which prepares me to be an instrument of peace and faith. And trying to remember that 'What is for the best will happen' and to remain faithful to that rather than worrying about reaching my idealised outcomes is a practice for my every day living.

- Quietude is so much silence that nothing disturbs the tranquil mind, is not that a wonderfully peaceful performance target, and an interesting contradiction to Eros? Do I want peace or do I want excitement, and which did I choose today?

- Surrender is plasticity to the Divine Will, so that eventually the result is certain.

So what became of integrity, of that inner sounding board that I have relied upon to gauge the truth, surely I am shifting the sands of meaning too far, to understand the world not through my eyes, but through someone else's?

But if I listen, integrity begins to speak back to me. Jim Dodge describes this process in relation to writing novels:

'Another artistic peak is the mysterious point where you amass enough momentum that you stop telling the story and the story begins telling you. …what the Muses seem to favour for getting out of your mind is a concentration so ferocious and total that you seem to disappear. And yet while the writer has surrendered his or her imagination to the story, some part must still make, by my careful count, 257 exquisitely difficult aesthetic decisions per second about diction, usage, sonics, punctuation, and a few hundred other craft choices required for coherence, compatibility and clarity. If you have to stop and wonder whether a semi-colon is called for, or if a Mountie would use the expression "Your brain is like a baked dude" in 1934, your pure concentration on the story flowing through you is shattered. To sustain imaginative engagement, especially for the months or years required for a novel, craft must be a reflex, and that only comes with years of dedicated practice, practice, practice; and dedication is meaningless without discipline, and discipline without honest desire becomes an empty drill' (Dodge, 2004 p.31).

Practising with this level of skill and concentration and being able to see that I am being 'done' by the story (or the yoga posture) calls for humility. By focussing on agape with reverence, respect and humility I am able to be more watchful, to notice the flow, able to 'go with the flow', to allow quietude to pervade my speech and my work so that the mind is less disturbed.

I find that if I act 'as if' I am joyful but without awareness then I may not notice that I am pumping myself up with self-aggrandisement, and there can be unpleasant consequences. My continued and obstinate resistance to acting with joyfulness is ultimately met with my 'will'. Here my will becomes my desire to accept and move beyond failure, to act differently, step out of the patterns that hold me, so that my personality becomes crafted by joy.

What I am aiming to do is to become joyfulness itself, to surrender to joy so that it acts through me but does not belong to me, is not mine, does not serve my purposes but rather that I serve Joy. It is like the yoga postures, practise the asanas, and one day they 'do' you. If manufacturing the great virtues brings a semblance of joy into my heart, then this 'deep acting' is preparing the heart and the soul for awareness of the Higher Self. As this quality of attention to myself and to my relationship with others goes deeper, so it is likely that my capacity to act well in the world increases.

My small experience of this joy is of a heartfelt feeling clarity like the pure water of a mountain stream; it is cold but feels comfortable, not cold to the senses but light and translucent.

So this embodied knowing takes me from a physical and emotional experience into an inner feeling level and into the heart. It informs cognition, which lies at the outer edge of the socially constructed surface of my self, and then going deeper inwards I find the no-Self (the witness) and make preparation for awareness of the Real Self as it lies hidden in the heart.

> 'The Self is hidden in the Lotus of the heart...' (Easwaran, 1987 p.183).

And I know that it has taken me many years to learn about, believe and trust in the power that emerges through relationship, that I have often refused to let go and trust that co-creating with others brings its own results.

Summary

In the first reflective iteration, I develop a sensed connection with agape through the interpretative embodied frame of joyfulness.   I justify this with reference to Spinoza (Damasio 2003), and link it to unconditional positive regard in relationship as defined by Carl Rogers (1961).

In the following iteration, I take Fletcher's (2001) theory of relational practice and consider my leadership practice from this perspective.   I do this by referring to the action accounts of practice in Chapter Seven and in this Chapter, and as I review my actions through the lens of relational practice, I continue my critique of Torbert's Leadership Development Framework.   I go on to suggest that awareness of the emotional landscape of interaction is an integral aspect of living systemic thinking (Marshall, 2004).

I then consider how emotion in conversations contributes to job satisfaction and the development of organisational life. I refer to the complexity of communicating on affective, embodied and cognitive levels, and refer to the potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation that this carries.   I provide a case example of a satisfying conversation, which compares with my failure to communicate well in Case Example given in Chapter Ten.   There is also a comparison to be made with Case Example One 'Working with Contradiction in an Inquiry Group', where communication broke down completely. It was these examples that I reflected upon as my inquiry was developing.

In the third reflection, I develop my ideas about how relationships can influence organisational structures, suggesting in the first instance that relationship can have a direct impact on structure. In the second instance I refer to how clarifying relationships can allow the 'organisational dance' to be creative rather than be bound by the 'blind reflex' of existing roles and systems (Oshrey, 1995).   In comparison with eros, which is contained by rules, agape flexes the boundaries of fixed organisational conventions.

The potential elasticity of agape is covered in the final iteration, where I link love to submission to the 'other'. When I was writing and discussing this in peer supervision this concept was considered deeply repellent. But I am bound by the logic of love, in which I have immersed myself. The idea of surrender to the will of another is the rational logic of sacrifice and surrender, referred to earlier in

Chapter Five. In the same way that the erotic superabundance of love must be curtailed by convention, so agape's superabundance must be curtailed by the conventional boundaries of relationship that require each of us to see ourselves as separate agents. The relevant point here is that agape allows us to 'lose' our identity in the action, as shown in the above quote from Jim Dodge (2004) and as demonstrated in the experience of headstand in Chapter Six.

The action account at the beginning of this Chapter shows:

- That the methodology I employ combines first person action research practice with daily spiritual practice.
- That I choose to wait for the 'right' moment to act. It means that I tend to place emphasis on and value relationship and context, rather than on doing the 'right' thing as a matter of principle regardless of circumstance.

These reflective writings arise from my immersion in joyfulness as the embodied expression of agape. They relied on my journalled accounts of my leadership practice in WHHA and in NHH. Again, the ordering principles of language show the dynamical flow of thoughts, as they arise from my agape influenced reasoning. As I summarise this Chapter I begin to appreciate the complexity of this loving practice. Through my reflexive writing I learn about the capacity that agape has for challenging established 'habitus', the generative and degenerative power of relationship in organisational culture and structure, the variety of ways with which individuals construe and construct meaning from conversation, and the value of reducing the boundaries of self to become absorbed in action.