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**Sharing our stories: celebrating critically reflective psychological
textual practice**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of
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in
Psychology
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abstract

This study involves my engaging with ideas through three interweaving, storied strands: some personal experiences of my own, the historical development of the academic discipline of psychology, and the pivotal autobiographical vignettes in five psychological articles. Ethical considerations permeate the overlapping theoretical, metaphorical and analytical processes of this work. I consider how writers and readers can engage together through the reflexive sharing of personal narratives, working toward interpretations of experiences in terms of subject positionings within powerful cultural discourses. A metaphorical perspective is integrated into my research process to help me in my attempts to articulate and evoke some fleeting traces of meaning through the elusive symbolic system of language. My analyses of the five focus pieces of writing attend to their skilfully metaphorical, critically reflective use of language within a supportive, nurturing discursive space. This thesis celebrates the transformational possibilities inherent in these pieces of psychological counter-practice. I believe these writers usefully address social sciences' 'crisis' concerns around the relationship of psychology with 'real' people, enabling re-interpretations of experiences in terms of gender and social power relationships and the fashioning of different, more useful meanings for our storied, culturally directed experiences.

appreciation

...for the ongoing help and caring support of supervisor *extraordinaire* Mandy Morgan, whose discerning questions and germane suggestions kept me focussed on my beliefs and aims as i found my way through the intermingling theory and practice of this personally meaningful thesis experience.

...for my partner, Colin, a careful listener and valuable sounding-board, whose astute responses from a non-psychological perspective frequently helped me to clarify my developing ideas as i worked on this project.

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introduction: moments and sites – working locations
...the emerging thesis...

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside stories and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is the getting lost. [For] if you're lost, you really start to look around and to listen.

Deena Metzger, 1986, p. 104

This thesis traces some meanings of interlaced narratives and, in one sense, begins with a personal story. On a spring morning in 2004, a day of clouds moving across bright sunshine, I was in the little town of Pontorson in northern France. I wandered over to look inside the medieval Église Notre Dame but, realising a service was taking place, I decided to explore the rest of the town and return later. As I rounded the corner of the ancient church, the congregation began to sing and, as their voices reached me in a hauntingly muffled way through the ancient stone walls, I experienced something which, though fleeting, was exceedingly intense and moving. I perceived an image of generation after generation of people filing into this church over hundreds of years, and this seemed to me to be a manifestation of humanity's bewildered searching for answers to the vast, mysterious questions of life. I felt pangs of aching compassion for all of us who struggle through life groping for understanding about our places in the world. Never before having experienced this particular form of intensity, and not being a religious person, this occurrence was totally unexpected and deeply emotional, and occupied my thoughts a great deal during the next weeks.

When I returned to New Zealand, I resumed my graduate work in the area of narrative psychology and in my first email to my supervisor, Mandy Morgan, I described this event. Mandy was interested in my experience, recalling that she had felt a similar intense awareness of history at the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. She also recommended an article written by Mark Freeman in 2002 in which he discusses a comparable incident during a visit to Berlin. I read this piece, which resonated more powerfully for me than any other psychology article I had encountered up to that point. Not only does Freeman movingly describe an event with which I could empathise after my experience in Pontorson, but his very inclusion in this article of such a personal narrative seemed to me to represent a decisive step away from the impersonality of most psychological writing. Freeman relates how, while viewing the monuments, gardens and other sights of the city during a bus trip, he was suddenly overcome by a sudden, acute awareness of

the tragic history played out in Berlin, and overwhelmed by a deep feeling of sadness. In the same way that I was surprised at my feelings outside the church in Pontorson because of my irreligious stance, Freeman wondered at his response because, though nominally a Jew, this religion has not been a central part of his life. He even admits that mystical, arcane explanations crossed his mind as he tried to make sense of this experience in which history became a “living, breathing presence” (p 197). In his article, Freeman interweaves this personal story with a theoretical discussion around ways in which the narratives within which our societies are embedded send us off with cultural ‘baggage’ which steers us toward interpreting our experiences in particular ways. As Gordon Mills (1976, cited in Bruner, 1986) asks, “Isn’t it strange how [Kronberg] Castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here?” (p. 45).

As I continued with my work during the year, I came across four other psychological articles in which, like Freeman, the authors have included personal stories which work reflexively alongside theoretical discussions around the paradigm of narrativity – a psychological approach which conceptualises human lives as culturally embedded, storied constructions articulated through language (Bruner, 1986; Crossley, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). Ian Parker (2003) uses personal vignettes to help him examine how our identities are constituted in psychoanalytic narratives. In his 2001 piece, Theodore Sarbin discusses emotion, reflecting on his own experiences of crying as part of cultural narrative plots. Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990) work with an argument they experienced together, to consider the ways in which stances assumed in conversations reflect the social narratives we are living out. And in their 2001 article, Mandy Morgan and Leigh Coombes draw on a personal incident to explore interpretations of silence within conversations inhering in narrative constructions. These five pieces examine ways in which personal stories are constituted in cultural narratives; they consider how such narratives give certain meanings to our experiences and shape our understandings of our identities. I believe that central to the huge effect they had on me is their reflexivity; these authors do not just *discuss* culturally constructed narratives, but *include themselves* in the discussion by exploring meanings of their own experiences through telling their own stories.

These articles affected me profoundly, speaking to me on emotional and intellectual levels. They evoked for me resonances of past personal experiences and fostered

reconsideration of them as I began to recognise how my own stories are caught up in larger social narratives. And they seemed to achieve this through a new approach to psychological writing which reached out emotionally to me. More and more I was realising that I wanted to work with these pieces – to consider how they moved me the way they did, what they could suggest about my own experiences and how they might be valuable for psychology. In a specific way then, this is where my thesis began – with an intense personal experience and the discovery of five personally meaningful psychological articles.

In a more general way, however, this thesis can be located as a moment within some intertwined, ongoing processes – both within my own life and also within the historical development of the discipline of academic psychology. In terms of my personal story, I am interested in and curious about my yearnings, in these later years of my life, to pursue particular interests – my ongoing study of psychology through Massey University, artistic and musical activities, and my passion for French culture and language. I feel that I may be engaging with these areas to try to find new ways of exploring who I am and what is important to me by coming from different perspectives and expressing myself through different ‘languages’ or ‘voices’. In terms of my current location within my own life story, these five pieces are valuable because they have facilitated reinterpretations of past memories through their own use of alternative psychological ‘voices’.

In this achievement of a new way of ‘speaking’ to their readers, these articles also seem to be a part of the continuing flowering of post-‘crisis’ issues in the social sciences which was, in turn, part of the broader cultural postmodern movement which took hold during the last half of the twentieth century (Burr, 1995; Crotty, 1998; Roiser, 1997). Postmodernism questioned and challenged established ways of thinking about and doing things. From M. C. Escher’s illusionary graphic art to composer Philip Glass’s unclassifiable genre of music, the postmodern stance eschewed traditional authority and rigid standards, embraced multiplicity and fluidity, and ushered in a simultaneously frightening and liberating new era. Seeing the universe as an empty, meaningless void, postmodernism can be located within the ontological position that there is no fundamental reality or truth (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1991; Lyon, 1994; Roiser, 1997).

For the social sciences, including psychology, the ‘crisis’ which began during the 1950s and continued through the 1980s, occurred within a postmodern cultural space, questioning the assumptions of the discipline as it had come to be conceptualised and practiced (Burr, 1995; Crotty, 1998; Roiser, 1997). Psychology emerged initially as a philosophical area of study, notably with the introspectionist work of William James (Lefrançois, 1995). However, the discipline was soon captured by the scientific model with its keynote of logical positivism – the conviction that knowledge can only be acquired through empirical observation (usually experimentation) and the application of quantitative methods of aggregate analysis (Gergen, 1985; Gergen, 1991; Tuffin, 2005). Mainstream psychology, ignoring its philosophical roots, is now conventionally considered to have begun with the establishment of Wilhelm Wundt’s scientific laboratory at the University of Leipzig in 1897 (Lefrançois, 1995).

Crisis writers deplored the application of logical positivism to the study of human beings and the resultant virtual disappearance of the ‘real person’ psychology was ostensibly interested in (Pancer, 1997; Tuffin, 2005). I was, along with many other students, certainly surprised and disappointed by my first university psychology course. I had looked forward to studying material that might illuminate something about myself and people I interacted with every day. Instead, I was presented with a discipline neatly divided into discrete constructs which were experimentally investigated and statistically summarised. As an English literature major, I found this dryness and dehumanisation disillusioning and relatively meaningless in terms of reaching any new understandings about myself or others.

Social constructionism is one of the epistemologies which developed in response to crisis concerns around the inappropriateness of using a scientific approach to study human beings (Gergen, 1985; Gergen, 1991; Misra, 1993). This stance rejects the dehumanising *reification* inherent in a scientific conceptualisation of psychology – that is, the assumption that human phenomena are essential entities which can be investigated without recognising their production by human social processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Eacker, 1972; Gergen, 1985). For example, Sarbin (2001) deplores the “essentialist view of regarding emotions as thing-like entities...quasi-objects” (p. 217), finding value instead in conceptualising an emotional behaviour like crying as part of a culturally embedded narrative within which identities are constructed. From a

social constructionist perspective, meanings of reality and truth in a postmodern world are contextual – they are interpretations constructed by people in the course of their sociolinguistic interactions at particular times and in particular places (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Gergen, 1999; Tuffin, 2005). This is in clear contrast to the way in which mainstream, scientific psychology has “...done its best to imagine what it is to be human without being social” (Bradley, 2005, p. 83).

This constructionist idea is not only applicable to human attitudes and behaviours addressed by psychological studies; it can also be used to reflexively look at the principles and methods employed by psychologists themselves in their interactions with experimental subjects – interactions which are themselves social, meaning-making encounters. One way that crisis writers focussed on the dehumanising character of scientific psychology was through their concern with the prevailing researcher-researched relationship. The researcher was assumed to be an objective ‘expert’ whose own attitudes did not in any way impinge on or invalidate the workings or findings of the scientific method. The experimental subject became a mere object of study. No recognition was afforded to what each brought to the experimental situation as human beings who live in social environments informed by particular cultural narratives. (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1985; Riger, 1992). As Mark Freeman’s (2002) experience in Berlin led him to recognise, we bring a world of cultural experience to every situation – including the researcher-researched encounter – each one of which is constituted in and played out in terms of socially constructed meanings.

I am working from a social constructionist perspective in this thesis, shifting attention from the researcher-researched dyad to focus instead on the dynamics of textual relationships, particularly the social power relationships involving academics who write psychological articles and students (like me) who read them. Through their reflexive narrativity, the writers of these five articles bring real people back into psychology; they include themselves – and me – in their discussions in a personally meaningful way. They challenge reifications of psychologists’ and students’ places within the institution of academic psychology in which these are constituted, recognising their social production. My feelings of being invited into a more inclusive type of psychology enabled me to consider my own emotional experiences as valid and potentially fruitful

stories. I hope that my work here will become a step in interwoven journeys across changing personal and psychological landscapes.

...narrative psychology bears within it the promise of fashioning a different kind of psychology, one that...seeks to practice a deep fidelity to lived experience in all of its variousness.

Mark Freeman, 2003, p. 344

aims: spaces of possibilities

...sharing my hopes...

*...these authors invite us to share the same **human** social plane and free us to perhaps more clearly explore our own pasts.*

Susan's diary entry, 2007, p. 3

I hope that through engaging with this thesis project, I can come to some understandings around how these five written pieces were able to speak to me as they did. (From this point, I will refer to these pieces as the 'focus' pieces, and their authors as the 'focus' authors. Mandy Morgan and Leigh Coombes, in contrast to the authors of the other four articles, will be referred to by their first names; this seems appropriate because of their positions as staff members of the school of psychology at Massey University). I am working in a theoretical space, attempting to explore elements of narrative and reflexivity which wind through some intermingling 'stories' – my own personal story and the historical development of the discipline of psychology, as well as the vignettes in these five pieces which I believe hold exciting implications for me and for psychology. My research question can be articulated in this way: *How do these five particular psychological pieces reflexively engage with narrative form to evoke my emotional response?* Through addressing this question while remaining reflexive myself, I hope to support and celebrate a way for researchers and practitioners to relate to psychology and to each other through deepening understandings of a specific type of reflexivity which can open spaces for examining how experiences are embedded in socially constructed meanings.

My readings of these five pieces enabled me to reinterpret past experiences; it seems to me that the authors of these articles take an ethical stance because they facilitate possibilities for changes in relations between people and new potentials for self-understanding. This perspective marks a change of direction; for mainstream psychology, "both historically and procedurally, ethical considerations are add-ons" (Bradley, 2005, p.4). I am trying to work from ethical underpinnings rather than tacking on ethical 'bits' later in order to fulfil institutional thesis requirements. From its inception, this project is imbued with ethics as I attempt to explore how these pieces enabled me to recognise how my stories are subsumed within cultural narratives as I reconsider past experiences. In doing this, I hope to open similar spaces in which others may recognise and reconsider their own socially constructed 'selves'. Supporting my

idea that sharing experiences is an ethical endeavour, Bradley posits that “...the examination of others’ experience is imperative in a fair and democratic psychology” (2005, p. 5).

Experience is closely interwoven with emotion in the five focus articles; I believe I responded to these pieces as I did because the authors talked about *emotional experiences* in an *emotional way* – indeed, Sarbin (2001) even focuses on *emotion* itself as he movingly tells personal stories illustrating his position that an emotional manifestation like crying is part of a socially constructed narrative plot. Content and form work together in these articles to shape ethical spaces. The tie which binds emotion and experience together into an ethical undertaking here is reflexivity. I am working throughout this thesis toward a way of articulating reflexivity in ethical terms – of interpreting it as a way of coming to narratives of experience which involves recognition of their social construction. Central to this conceptualisation of reflexivity is the acknowledgement that our understandings of our experiences affect how we approach the study of psychology and how we see ourselves and others. One of the ways I am aiming to *be reflexive* myself here is by trying to find the courage to show the sort of vulnerability the authors of these articles did as I tell personal stories which may involve painful disclosures around past emotional experiences. Writing of such disclosures in terms of ‘courage’ and ‘vulnerability’ suggests that there are complex ethical issues involved in personal narratives told within psychological literature, and these issues will engage my attention at various places within this thesis.

As I consider the stories with which this project engages, I am trying to be careful not to veer from the postmodern ontological perspective with its stress on multiplicity. In what I hope is a valid and useful demonstration of social constructionist epistemology, I am not seeking to define any fundamental answers – thereby unethically manipulating readers into certain ways of thinking – but merely to interpret; this project can be understood as a moment of personal meaning interpreted through stories which may be useful. I aim to provide a space in which I offer readers opportunities for making up their own minds about things from the perspective of their own feelings and experiences. And I will be consulting with other people involved in the personal stories I tell; my memories and my re-workings are only *my* interpretations and past events may have very different meanings for others. This is another site at which the ethical

complexities of reflexive narratives draw my attention because although these stories are personal, they are not only ‘mine’; I cannot speak about ‘my experiences’ without involving the lives, experiences and stories of others.

As part of this effort to maintain an ethical reflexivity throughout this project, I am also trying to be explicit about the thesis process itself as I journey through it, inviting readers to share my experience of working alongside Mandy Morgan, my supervisor. Partly through diary entries and emails exchanged with Mandy, I am trying to openly trace my thinking processes, and my feelings about them, as I work through the theoretical development of ideas which will lead ultimately to my analysis of the five pieces. Working in such an explicit way means that I must confess here to another perhaps somewhat lofty aim – to do something new which may cause a tiny ripple within academic psychology. At one point, Mandy and I discussed across several emails the possible effects of a piece of academic work. This ‘conversation’ began when, in answer to my enquiry about her presentation of a paper at a conference, Mandy replied that she was pleased, feeling that she had created some little ripples, an outcome she felt to be more satisfying than making waves. I agreed, suggesting that ripples, unlike more extreme, pendulum-like changes, can perhaps better enable us to keep sight of some of the more subtle nuances of ideas. We expressed metaphorically the idea that ripples may diverge from the main stream, intermingling with other currents to gather strength. Mandy went on to voice the idea that sudden changes can even be violent in their effects, and that making ripples might be a more peaceful, ethical way of working and living together..

Thinking about the ways in which ethical issues intertwine with my aims for this thesis work, I was looking over material from my previous narrative studies and was inspired again by one of my favourite pieces of text by Mary Gergen (2001, p. 1): “What if one did psychology in that empty space of possibility beyond the domain of the everyday and the taken-for-granted? How would it look? Did I dare to try?” And I found myself asking questions of my own: In terms of representing real change in post-crisis terms, have the writers of these five pieces indeed found a new way of doing psychology? Do I have the courage to try to create a small, but maybe important, ripple within the ‘space of possibility’ they offered me? And might my own stories around feelings and experiences resonate for others? Perhaps the most effective way I can give voice to my

appreciation to the writers of these five pieces – and try to pass along to others what they gave me – is to cherish the space into which they invited me and try to fashion something worthwhile within it.

...there might...be ways of crafting [arguments] like stories and songs, so they make offerings and gifts to others...

Mandy's email, 2007B, p. 4

theoretical discussion in 3 steps:

1. threads of ideas

...finding my way...

narrative

Working toward my aims means closely examining some key ideas involved in the intertwining personal and psychological journeys which have brought me to this exciting space. Exploring these theoretical issues will hopefully help me develop useful perspectives from which to approach an analysis of the five focus articles. The centrality of stories in this project suggests to me that a discussion of the narrative psychological model is a logical first step in this theoretical section. I have decided to try to bring some clarity to the disparate and potentially confusing variety of perspectives within narrative psychological theory and practice by using Mark Freeman's 2003 article, *Identity and difference in narrative inquiry: a commentary on the articles by Erica Berman, Michele Crossley, Ian Parker, and Shelley Sclater*, as a basis for this discussion. In its gathering together of various threads of narrative psychology into some key dimensions, this piece seemed to me a sort of 'manifesto' for this psychological area when I encountered it during my past narrative work. Freeman takes a significant step here toward establishing narrative psychology as a field which provides alternatives for some of the assumptions of mainstream psychology and remains cognisant of their implications for real people.

Freeman's exploration of dimensions of narrativity coheres around the concepts of *identity* and *difference* in terms of both individual human beings and also narrative psychology, paralleling the dual personal and psychological processes from which this thesis emerges. Freeman theorises different stances within the narrative paradigm as subsumed within commonalities which may enable narrative psychology to achieve an identity and define some purposes. On a personal level, this way of working with the narrative model may help me to find out something about how the five focus authors' stories around specific experiences quite *different* from mine were nevertheless able to speak so effectively to some part of my constructed *identity*.

A number of narrative theorists point out the ubiquity of narrative; they believe that storytelling, whether in the form of autobiographies, conversations or interviews, is a

human necessity, a manifestation of our consciousness of our temporal existence within our environments (Crossley, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). Indeed, Christie and Orton (1988) have reclassified human beings as *Homo narrans narratur* in recognition of this characteristic which seems fundamental to our human state. Freeman (2003) considers this dimension of *narrativity* specifically in terms of its implications for identities. He cites Crossley's piece (2003) in which she suggests that we use narrative to construct out of our fragmented, disordered personal experiences something meaningful and coherent – something with a beginning, a middle and an end through which we can move as unified 'selves'. Freeman questions the dimension of *agency*, positing that our 'selves' are constituted in an *unconscious* dimension bestowed by the cultures within which we are socialised. The significance for identity formation of cultural narratives is central to the focus piece by Freeman, where he describes it as "woven, often unconsciously, into the fabric of memory" (p. 193).

Freeman believes autobiography can be useful for revealing how both easily-recognised and also more deeply hidden – unconscious – narratives are tied up with our own personal stories. Ways in which the personal and the cultural work together to shape identity is central to Freeman's fascinating (1993) book, *Rewriting the self – History, Memory, Narrative*. Here, autobiographies illustrate how selfhood is constructed through a process involving the triad of history, memory and narrative. Freeman believes that one of these, *Confessions*, the life history of St Augustine, represents the "beginning of autobiographical reflection as we have come to know it" (p. 26). Augustine's recollections tell of a dissolute life that finally culminated in a turning to God, who Augustine realises was always there, watching over him and guiding him to his eventual salvation. Paradoxically, Augustine, a product of a culture that downplayed individuality and recognised God as the supreme authority, expresses his faith through the telling of his personal life story. While revealing unconscious cultural messages, Augustine's narrative represents a change in focus to an individual *self*. Like the other figures in this book, Augustine attempts to unravel a trajectory that has led to the present, and reweave memories – 'rewrite' their pasts – into an acceptable self, that is, acceptable according to the values of their particular cultures.

In contrast to more mainstream narrative researchers who address the construct of memory in order to examine how current recollections vary from supposedly verifiable,

‘true’ past events, Freeman is not interested in such discrepancies, but rather in how we work with our past experiences within particular situations to construct ourselves through language. Freeman (2003) is mindful of the difficulties involved in speaking about memories, especially in a “research situation [which] underscores the fragility of personal disclosures, of giving voice to one’s personal experience” (p. 334). In my analysis of my own memories as called up by the five pieces, I will need to consider this *experiential* dimension carefully and find the courage to disclose whether I have been constructing acceptable versions of myself through the specific language I use to talk about my past experiences. This issue underlines for me that my work with the five pieces must stay grounded in language since, as Freeman declares in his manifesto, “...there *is* no self apart from language” (p. 332).

This dual emphasis on the *linguistic* and *situated* dimensions of narrative is central in the focus piece by Davies and Harré (1990). Their story was produced in the course of a particular interactional event, exemplifying the *dialogical* dimension of the narrative psychological model. If another person had been present, or if the time or place had been different, other talk would have emerged, perhaps revealing different aspects of selfhood. This fluid, fragmented picture of identity highlights the illusionary nature of the idea of a unified ‘self’.

Considering where this theoretical discussion has brought me so far, I believe that using Freeman’s manifesto as a guide is working effectively to enable me to weave together a version of narrative psychology which can work well with the ontological and epistemological positions which are guiding this project. Freeman paints a picture of a shifting postmodern world with no foundations – a world where we construct narratives in particular dialogical situations and, in so doing, mould our understandings of our ‘selves’. I have found it tempting, maybe because of my English literature background and my continuing fascination with stories, to be beguiled by the idea that we have an essential storied nature. However, I am aware that, in terms of the social constructionist model, I need to eschew such fundamentalism by trying to resist seeing narrativity as an essential human trait; I share Theodore Sarbin’s (1986) belief that the narrative psychological model can most usefully be considered as a *root metaphor* – an avenue through which we can articulate how we fashion meanings as we function within, and are shaped by, our social environments. In his focus piece, Sarbin (2001) uses this

metaphor to conceptualise emotions, not as reified constructs classified as various behaviours, but as narrative plots within certain cultural stories. He explores ways in which such social processes have implications for our own lives. An emotional embodiment like crying “is connected to contexts in which something vital to one’s identity is taking place” (p. 221). The meanings we develop around emotional narratives are informed by cultural plot-lines like crying.

Like other epistemologies that emerged in response to crisis concerns, social constructionism works with meaning and interpretation. A narrativity metaphor can work as a useful aid to understanding how people bestow meaning on their experiences through their storied accounts, and can be of particular value to people whose sense of self has been altered through illness. For example, Michele Crossley’s (1999) research around long-term HIV-diagnosed individuals, and Mary Horton-Salway’s (2000) exploration of ME sufferers, both suggested that narratives can work to create an embodied identity to cope with the disruption of self accompanying serious illness. HIV and ME are controversial conditions, and these researchers examined how the language used during interviews functioned to explain or justify their illnesses and thereby construct acceptable identities.

Analysing talk as a metaphor for meaning-making can lead to positive outcomes for members of marginalised groups of people. Freeman considers this potential for usefulness in his ‘manifesto’, positing that a narrative has a *performative* dimension – it is a *practice* – something we *do*. The position of women in a patriarchal society is an area of fertile ground for narrative research. In the focus pieces by Davies and Harré (1990), and Mandy and Leigh (2001), close analysis of accounts enables better understanding of gender power imbalances and opened spaces for me to address my own location as a gendered being. In another article encountered during my past work around narrative, *Speaking from the margins – an analysis of spirituality narratives*, Kirsti Cheals, Mandy Morgan and Leigh Coombes (2003), analyse the metaphorical configurations of women’s stories and suggest that valuing certain spiritual aspects of identity might enable the taking up of positions of resistance against constraining cultural narratives. While remaining aware of the limitations of human agency, Freeman’s manifesto includes a *transformative* dimension, declaring that narrative can be “an emancipatory...tool, an instrument of *freedom*” (p. 341).

Freeman discusses the implications of transformation within academic psychology, recognising that different kinds of moral stands might be taken. He points out that the variety of narrative positions from which to critique mainstream psychology are associated with deep personal investments tied up with transformed identities. He suggests an open, reflexive recounting of the processes of psychological inquiry with which we are engaged. Freeman looks with favour on Burman's (2003) recommendation that we "acknowledge and address the emotional character of experience within teaching and learning arenas" (cited in Freeman, 2003, p. 342). Freeman's ideas around a transformed psychology support my aim to write this thesis from an ethical perspective focussed on a useful reflexivity.

...narrative psychology, in its multiple forms, represents a potentially powerful indictment of those forms of untruth that sap people of all their humanness and their voice.

Mark Freeman, 2003, p. 345

Freeman explores each dimension in terms of how it can be turned toward useful, practical aims. He considers these various dimensions 'axes' upon which narrative psychology can work to revalidate real people and give them a voice. These aspects of narrativity will all come into play in this theoretical section as I move toward my analysis of the focus articles, which I believe exemplify this transformative type of narrative practice. Before moving on from the area of narrative, I think it is important that I have one more reflexive look at my past narrative work, this time to review my responses to some of the material in my reading diary entries and other assignments. Looking through this material, I am reminded that I was able to engage closely with many of these writers because, like Freeman, they see hopeful potentials for helping real people in narrative psychology. Such possibilities demonstrate how social constructionist models can show the way to practicing psychology ethically, with compassion for real people, albeit within an apparently valueless postmodern environment. The moral relativism commonly assumed to be inherent in a postmodern ontology is eschewed by Edwards et al (1995), who explain that such an environment "is not a world devoid of meaning and value...but precisely the reverse. It is a foregrounding of meanings and values, to be argued, altered, defended and invented" (p. 36).

One of the central premises of a narrative psychological approach...is of the essential and fundamental link between experiences of self, temporality, relationships with others and morality.

Michele Crossley, 2003, p. 298

Ethical issues become valid areas of psychological exploration for people like Polkinghorne (1988), who focuses on the connections between theory, practice and ethics, and believes that psychologists working with these ideas can better people's lives. Lorraine Code (1995) suggests the use of imagination in new ways which can foster care and compassion for each other through an awareness of our commonalities as human beings. Code uses the concept of *choral support* to express this type of relational environment in which trying to understand real people in real situations may enable their experiences to "resonate with other lives" (p. xi). I felt this sort of resonance not only when I read the five focus pieces, but also when I paused outside the old church in Pontorson.

Resonance and the sharing of experiences is in a way illustrated by the way this very concept of choral support has been passed on between people, changing along the way. Lorraine Code (1995) borrowed this expression from Patricinio Schweickart, who had used it in a conference presentation, understanding it to indicate an empathetic environment in which there is "an expectation of being heard, understood, taken seriously" (p. x). In the article exploring spirituality mentioned before (Cheals et al, 2003), choral support is interpreted as a special kind of relationship that can enable political resistance. One of the authors of this piece, Mandy Morgan (2004), also believes it is a space in which "we learn of the commonalities and differences amongst us" (p. 2), an idea which coheres with Freeman's ideas around identity and difference. The sharing of accounts which highlight differences is important to Taylor et al's (1996) collaborative interview methodology which addresses researcher-researched power relationships and seems to me to work within chorally supportive spaces. Here, narratives are produced together by interview participants in a resonating environment and the interview texts are then analysed by a carefully-chosen 'interpretive community' with shared values who try to empathise with others' points of view. Clearly, in all its permutations, a chorally supportive space is an environment in which individuals are respected as real people, providing a space in which concerns around

personal disclosure may be at least partially ameliorated, and hopes for a revalidating narrative psychology can become possible.

This revisiting of my responses in past narrative work has led me to form what I feel may be a key perspective with which I can approach my analysis of the five focus pieces. Trying to relate my engagement with this narrative material to my response to the five pieces, I realised that almost all of my past reading dealt with narratives shared in *spoken* interview situations, while the five pieces I am working with here are of course *written* narratives. I believe it may be useful to reconceptualise writer-reader relationships so that they can be worked with in the same way as spoken interviews, that is, as ‘conversations’ which can be carried out in a collaborative space and achieve a special kind of choral support, thus marking a further step in the development of this idea. My experience of reading the five focus articles felt *relational* – as if through these texts I was interacting with other human beings who ‘spoke’ to me in a way which disrupted power differentials, shifting the balance between writer and reader.

reader-response

The relationship between writer, text and reader is at the heart of *reader-response* theory, an approach to literary criticism which was a reaction against the prevailing formalist and so-called ‘New Criticism’ which emphasised the idea of an objective text (Davis & Womack, 2002; Tompkins, 1980). This discussion of the literary area of reader-response not only provides me with a new perspective from which to consider my own English literature education, which from its formalist position stressed the various structural elements of literary pieces and downplayed any subjective emotional responses; it also conforms to the postmodern multiplicity which informs this thesis through its validation of a plurality of subjective responses to narratives. New Criticism proponents insisted that there was only one true reading of any text. In two essays, *The Intentional Fallacy* (1954) and *The Affective Fallacy* (1954), Wimsatt and Beardsley denied the importance of either author or reader, placing all the meaning within the text and positing that its essential meaning can only be reached by objective analysis. Here I will analyse five pieces of text *alongside of* and *in terms of* my emotional responses and the personal memories evoked.

Reader-response theory has taken some interesting turns during its development, all of which concern themselves with writer-text-reader dynamics. German *reception* theory, though ostensibly exploring the dynamics between the objectivity of the text and the subjectivity of the reader, in effect places more emphasis on the text's control of the reader (Holub, 1984). For example, Wolfgang Iser believes that only through a reader's interpretation can a text's meaning be elicited – a meaning, however, which is already existent implicitly in the text (Holub, 1984; Tompkins, 1980). Reader-response theorists have moved on from this position to give more importance to the reader. Michael Riffaterre acknowledges that meaning is expressed linguistically in text, but denies that it exists independent of a reader (Tompkins, 1980). Norman Holland's early work emphasised the text, but he later focussed his attention on the reader, taking the stance that readers transact with a piece of literature according to their psychological needs (Wright, 1998). For Holland, a reader's response to a text is embedded in a "process of identity maintenance" (Wright, 1998, p. 56). Holland (1980) believes that

“...all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation. We interact with the work, making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work – as we interpret it” (p. 124).

It is through the work of Stanley Fish, however, that reader-response theory begins to address the reader in a constructionist way relevant to this thesis.

Fish, arguably the most well known figure in the area of reader-response theory, moved the writer-text-reader discussion into an interactive, social realm (Tompkins, 1980). As Freeman's manifesto helped me to focus my thoughts around narrative, Fish's work serves as an apt basis for my particular use of some reader-response ideas for the purposes of this thesis. As Fish's (1980) ideas changed across the years, a strand of clearly constructionist reader-response theory was developed: “In 1970 I was asking the question ‘Is the reader or the text the source of meaning?’ and the entities presupposed by the question *were* the text and the reader whose independence and stability were thus assumed” (p. 1). Now, interpretation has become central in Fish's theory, producing the writer, the text and the reader as well as the meanings they construct together. He conceptualises this interaction as constituted in the workings of *interpretive communities*.

With the idea of interpretive communities, Fish moved the focus from the individual to the culture within which she has been constituted. Like Freeman's reaction in Berlin, a reader's responses to a text – the meanings it has for her – are determined by her culturally-bestowed assumptions. Fish takes a clearly socially constructed stance: "...all objects are made and not found and...they are made by the interpretive strategies we set in motion" (1990, p. 91, cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 47). Interestingly, Fish (1980) supports my first key perspective around the connections between spoken and written communication: "...what utterers do is give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meanings (and texts) by inviting them to put into execution a set of strategies" (p. 173). Readers and writers work together in a meaning-making endeavour.

Texts are written by readers, not read, since...the formal features of the text, the authorial intentions they are normally taken to represent, and the reader's interpretive strategies are mutually interdependent.

Jane Tompkins, 1980, p. xxii

A well-known anecdote vividly illustrates these ideas around interpretation. Fish was teaching two classes which followed one another and used the same classroom. One day, at the conclusion of the first class (in linguistics and literary criticism) he had left on the blackboard a list of names of recommended authors (one followed by a question mark, indicating his uncertainty about the spelling of the name):

Jacobs-Rosenbaum

Levin

Thorne

Hayes

Ohman (?)

Seeing fascinating possibilities, he asked the students in his next class (in English religious poetry) to explain the meaning of this text, which he told them was a poem. From the perspective of the interpretive community these students were part of, they were able to find appropriate meanings. They interpreted the very shape of the 'poem' (an altar? a cross?) as significant. They found a myriad of allegorical and symbolic meanings in the names, which were noted to be Jewish (representing the Old Testament), Gentile (representing the New Testament) and uncertain (shown by the question mark!). Fish asserts that the students saw a poem because they were told it was

a poem – they came to the task already prepared to use certain interpretive strategies (Fish, 1980).

Through the concept of interpretive communities, Fish is able to begin to untangle the threads that hold together writing and reading by looking at the way in which they are connected – he sees meaning as constructed through “the fusion that exists between writers and readers throughout the reading process” (Davis & Womack, 2002, p. 83). Particularising Freeman’s ideas around the performative dimension of narrative, Fish stresses that reading a text is an activity – a significant, interpretive act. “The notion that readers actively participate in the creation of meaning entails, for him, a re-definition of meaning and of literature itself. Meaning...is not something one extracts from a poem, like a nut from its shell, but an experience one has in the course of reading” (Tompkins, 1980, p. xvi).

Fish’s work presents me with the exciting idea that I can transform the way I was taught in literature classes to approach texts. I can begin to accept and recognise my responses as emergent from my own experiences and share my interpretations – my own stories – with others, who may find resonances of their own. Like the idea of choral support, narratives can travel and develop in useful ways through interpretive communities.

...meanings of stories are never fixed but emerge out of a ceaselessly changing stream of interaction between producers and readers in shifting contexts.
Ken Plummer, 1995, p. 22

Fish (1980) emphasises that we are always in a situation in which we are controlled by beliefs and assumptions which limit our interpretations; even “a sentence that seems to need no interpretation is already the product of one” (p. 284). Despite such constraints, however, he insists that we can try to better understand these limitations and how they affect us. Since there is a multiplicity of interpretive communities, each with its own accepted assumptions and meanings, Fish firmly denies that his literary interpretations are the only valid ones; he sees this as an ethically sound stance because by embracing the subjectivity involved in the act of reading, he recognises the validity of others’ ideas and meanings (Tompkins, 1980).

Although there may be no fundamentally true interpretations, we can fashion useful and liberating meanings (Crotty, 1998). Patricinio Schweickart (1986) declares that "...the activities of reading and writing [are] an important arena of political struggle, a crucial component of the project of interpreting the world in order to change it" (p. 39). Crotty (1998) considers how the metaphor of the *bricoleur* can articulate the building of new meanings. A French word which in simple terms denotes a 'handyman', the concept contains subtle shades of meaning which can provide a useful perspective from which to consider the interpretation of texts. Crotty explains that the *bricoleur* re-combines materials which have already been used together in certain ways in order to construct something quite different. "Research in constructivist vein, research in the mode of the *bricoleur*, requires that we not remain straitjacketed by the conventional meanings we have been taught to associate with the object. Instead, such research invites us to approach the object in a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new or richer meaning. It is an invitation to reinterpretation" (p. 51). I believe that I am working here as a sort of *bricoleur*, choosing and combining particular relevant ideas voiced by people like Freeman, Fish and others to fashion my own interpretations and embrace my own meanings – and then offer them to others.

Fish's work on behalf of readers in recent decades may register [a great] impact... upon the ways in which we think about literary texts and their possibilities for illuminating our condition – whatever that condition may be.

Todd Davis and Kenneth Womack, 2002, p. 89

Looking back over my theoretical work so far and considering my developing thoughts around narrative and reader-response areas, I have come to develop a second potentially useful key perspective – one cohering around the same concepts of difference and identity central to Freeman's narrative manifesto – from which to continue with this theoretical working toward a way to analyse the focus texts. Fish's ideas around interpretive communities suggest that writers and readers are subsumed within powerful culturally constructed assumptions and that it is from these constraining places that each approaches texts. Though our experiences and our identities may be fluid and ever-changing as we move among various situated encounters – including responding to written material – what remains constant, following us wherever we go, is the *socially constructed* nature of the way in which we see ourselves and the world.

Applying this new key perspective to reader-response clarifies that while there is a multiplicity of very *different* writers, texts and readers, what is the *same* is their putting into play of certain strategies within social, interpretive communities. Paralleling this, though the five focus pieces deal with very different experiences, what is the same in each is the attention focussed on the socially proscribed locations we inhabit and the way in which they determine our experiences and our identities. These writers brought this commonality to my attention through a very effective kind of reflexive writing. They opened a special, chorally supportive space in which we could relate together as a particular type of reflexive, interpretive community. From within this space, I was able to adopt new strategies and move into new locations. My theoretical travels so far – and the two key perspectives I have developed along the way – have brought me to a place where I need to look more closely at this central idea of reflexivity.

reflexivity

Up to this point, I have been using the term ‘reflexivity’ loosely to refer to a reconsideration of one’s memories which I experienced as so valuable and which I hope to share in a useful way with others. The reflexive exploration of personal experiences by the focus authors marks their move away from mainstream objective research and exemplifies Parker’s position that researchers must recognise their own subjectivity in order to promote an effective narrative psychological practice that features “reflexivity woven into the production of knowledge” (2003, p. 314). This dual reflexive focus on individual practice and its effects on the epistemological direction taken by the discipline of academic psychology suggests a way to address this binary which is central in my work here and also the guiding perspective of Freeman’s (2003) manifesto.

Like both the narrative psychological model and reader-response theory, reflexivity can be conceptualised and approached in a number of ways (Woolgar & Ashmore, 1988). Woolgar and Ashmore (1988) point out that the elusive, seemingly indefinable nature of reflexivity has bestowed on it something of a problematical character, one strewn with theoretical and methodological difficulties. However, I believe this complexity aptly mirrors the fluid postmodern environment in which it has become significant. I believe it will be more valuable for me to turn away from attempts to define reflexivity, focussing instead on a specific valuable reflexive *practice* evidenced in the focus

articles. I hope to move on from my simplistic approach to reflexivity, fashioning in this section a tailored approach which will help me move through my theoretical explorations toward a valid way to examine the reflexivity of the five focus pieces.

Malcolm Ashmore's (1989) *The Reflexive Thesis* vividly illustrates the many ways to come at the idea of reflexivity and may be a useful starting point where I can gather up some strands of meaning and shape them into a useful approach to understanding this elusive concept. Ashmore considers the etymology and usages of the terms *reflect* and *reflex*, noting at the outset that *re* preceding the basic Latin root *flectere* suggests *bending again* or *bending back*. This connotes for me the constructed nature of the world and the way we can purposefully turn back to explore the ways in which our interactional environments have emerged, how we experience these social worlds and the implications for our identities. Appropriate to the postmodern multiplicity of my grounding here, Ashmore (1989) looks at meanings from several different perspectives. For example, looking at the term *reflect* in *visual* terms, mirrors, light and illumination are relevant – and are elements which become important metaphorically at a further point in these theoretical travels. From an *intellectual* perspective, to *reflect* is defined as “to think deeply and deliberately upon a topic” (p. 30). And considering *reflex* in a *grammatical* way, Ashmore defines a reflexive verb as one “indicating the identity of subject and object” (p. 31), addressing a dualism which is to become increasingly significant for this thesis.

Ashmore (1989) looks more closely at the subject/object binary, exploring the interpretive process involved when readers (subjects) give meaning to the statements (objects) we hear and read. Supporting Fish's (1980) ideas around the *already interpreted* nature of every statement, he posits the “essential reflexivity of accounts...to make sense of an account one must, in a sense, already know what it is that the account refers to; and in order to know that, one must have already made sense of the account” (p. 32). This paradox underlines the constraints which characterise our interpretive communities and also provides a useful perspective from which to approach the circularity of intertwining narratives which gives shape to my work here.

Extending the definition of reflection as a serious and purposeful intellectual pursuit, Ashmore (1989) suggests it can become a useful type of self-awareness, as opposed to

mere introspection. I believe that attempting this deeper kind of reflexive exploration of our 'selves' can reveal how we are tied into a web of socially constructed ways of living; maybe it can even help us find a way to break out of tightly drawn circles of interpretation. I hope that examining the specific practice used in the focus articles will acknowledge and address Woolgar and Ashmore's (1988) concern that the examination of reflexivity has been too "theoretical and abstract" (p. 2). These pieces suggest that a useful type of reflexive self-recognition can be enabled by – and enabling of – a particular type of psychological practice which interweaves personal and psychological issues. The reciprocal way in which these two elements work in these articles – the interdependence of personal experience and socially constructed knowledge – suggests to me a parallel blending of epistemology and methodology. Reflexivity is perhaps most usefully considered as simultaneously an integral component of a constructionist theory of knowledge and also the design used to reveal how that knowledge is produced and reproduced.

Social science can be considered an implicitly self-referential discourse in that if it is about humans and their social arrangements then it is (also) about those humans in those social arrangements who are responsible for the production of social science.

Malcolm Ashmore, 1989, p. 32

Ian Parker (1999) refines and extends this idea of an effective form of reflexivity which steps firmly away from a less purposeful introspection, referring to it as *critical reflection*. He describes this as a type of reflexivity which moves into genuinely useful areas, enabling us to explore how a particular socially sanctioned belief or practice, "pins [us] into place" (p. 31) – how it limits who we can be and the choices we can make. Parker's (1999) model of critical reflection seems to fit snugly into my developing theoretical journey, describing what the focus authors did and in turn enabled me to do. Critical reflection can help psychology to move away from the mainstream empirical paradigm while avoiding a humanistic perspective with its belief in an agentic and autonomous individuality – the sort of perspective Freeman claims began with Augustine's confessional autobiography. Parker (1999) explains how, rather than becoming embroiled in relativistic, regressive self-absorption, being critically reflective lets us question accounts in political terms; it "...traces the subjective investments we make in our everyday practice, and traces them to the networks of institutional power that contain us" (p. 31). Parker (1989) is aware that this type of reflexivity can involve the discomfort of placing ourselves in vulnerable and

uncomfortable positions since it has the effect of “troubling hidden secrets about the self” (p. 61); yet he suggests that difficult disclosures which may be a part of critical reflection are well worth the risk, positing that this type of reflexivity can become an important *counter-practice* which challenges institutional dominance. The recognition of powerful social forces which constrain us, and which critical reflection can help us to reveal, has brought me to a point where I can identify the theoretical perspective of this research process as a *critical inquiry*.

Crotty (1998) discusses critical work in terms of looking at social interactions as we experience them in our daily lives and questioning common assumptions that underlay them in order to expose power relationships. The goal is for revealed injustices to be challenged and resisted, but Crotty reminds us that power imbalances are produced in an ever-changing context which is affected by each new act of resistance, necessitating constant, ongoing vigilance. Taking a critical perspective means examining narratives of personal experience in an attempt to reveal their constitution in political issues and ultimately change the practical realities of peoples’ everyday experiences.

Spoken (and written) accounts do not only describe, they also change the world, and they change relations between people.

Ian Parker, 1989, pp. 4-5

A critical theoretical approach has been embraced by feminist work (Crotty, 1998). Parker (1999) asserts that “...feminists ...have been scathing about what humanistic psychology does to devalue connections between women’s experience and political struggle” (p. 27). I will attempt to look critically at some of my own gendered experiences as I consider my evoked memories in the analysis section of this thesis. I hope to learn something about how patriarchy has constrained me to interpret things in certain ways. Perhaps in this way too, I must become a bricoleur, taking up some of the incidents of my life and fashioning them into new understandings. In a patriarchal society, socially constructed assumptions have been produced and are reproduced to serve masculine interests, and these meanings can be examined in written accounts (Crotty, 1998). It is for this reason that Adrienne Rich (1990, cited in Crotty, 1998) advocates “a radical feminist critique of literature that will use literature as a clue to how women have been living and a pointer to how women can begin to see things

differently, name things authentically for themselves, and so bring themselves into a new way of living and being” (p. 182).

Embracing a critical stance requires that I look back at my aims for this thesis and extend them to include the sorts of emancipatory goals implicit in the work of Freeman and Fish. Another avenue toward emancipation, the work of Pierre Bourdieu, was suggested to me by Mandy, providing another example of the exciting journeys taken by ideas and becoming a wonderful discovery during this theoretical journey. Bourdieu’s work with reflexivity is fascinating and has helped me to develop my ideas around how this concept can play a central part in a psychology which is useful in the lives of real people.

social fictions – the work of Pierre Bourdieu

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was France’s leading ‘public’ intellectual until his death in 2002, arguably assuming this position on the death of Michel Foucault in 1984 (Formosa, 2002). One of his central beliefs was that “research must incorporate both a critical and emancipatory edge” (Formosa, 2002, p. 118). This focus found an outlet in a political activism (especially in his later years, when such actions became relevant within a changing political and economic climate in France) which was tied to intellectual pursuits, especially reflexivity which is a central emphasis in his work with the ‘thinking tools’ of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* (Formosa, 2002; Swarz, 2003).

Habitus is the term used by Bourdieu to denote the web of culturally constructed assumptions and practices in which our meanings are constituted (Formosa, 2002). He conceptualised the social world in which the *habitus* functions as divided into a number of contextual *fields* (for example, the academic field) in which we experience our daily lives, interacting with others occupying social positions according to our possession of various forms of a resource he calls *capital*, all of which bestow power (Formosa, 2002). For example, in the academic field, a psychologist may attain a position of eminence and enjoy certain powers because of the capital of his educational attainments and numerous publications. A mere psychology student occupies a quite different position within this field due to her limited capital. Bourdieu believed that contemporary power relations and subjectivity are mainly dependent, not on a direct, overt form of power, but rather on a more subtle symbolic subjectification of human

beings through classification, and that education systems are the most significant sites for such classification (Bourdieu, 1992; Formosa, 2002). Knowledge and values validated as true and right are imposed on all pupils, making them subject to the assumptions of the dominant social class. (Formosa, 2002). Even at higher educational levels, students can become complicit in their own subjectification by accepting the prevailing theories and practices as legitimate ones.

Bourdieu's ideas around the ways in which such symbolic power can divide and classify us, and limit our choices, were shared by Michel Foucault. Foucault's (1982) work demonstrated how institutionalised *dividing practices* classify and label people; paradoxically, human *subjects* are treated like *objects* as they are *subjected* to the workings of institutional power. Through the classic image of the *panopticon* (Bartky, 1988; Rabinow, 1984), Foucault illustrated how we accept our own subjectification. The panopticon was a proposed model prison which featured a central watchtower surrounded by tiers of cells, each with one window facing outwards (backlighting the interior of each cell) and another facing the tower across a courtyard. This design would result in a unique situation of power in which, though prisoners would be unable to see the guard in the watchtower, they would be clearly visible to this guard at all times; they would in effect be coerced into behaving as if they were under constant observation. The panopticon provides an apt metaphor for the way in which the 'truths' of the socially dominant become accepted and internalised, and cause us to become self-regulating (Bartky, 1988; Rabinow, 1984).

While eschewing a positivist objectivism, yet Bourdieu refused to ally himself with subjectivism, instead trying to use the structural components of habitus, field and capital to look at *how* we are made subject through the hidden symbolic manipulation of power, and how this determines how we view the objects around us in relation to ourselves (Bourdieu, 1992; Formosa, 2002). Bourdieu's *epistemic reflexivity* enabled him to articulate how dualisms like subject/object work and the effects they have, breaking the ties between these powerful dualisms (Bourdieu, 1990). His deep suspicion of binaries is succinctly explained: "Each term of these paired opposites reinforces the other; all collude in obfuscating the anthropological truth of human practice" (Bourdieu, 1992, p.10). He posits that it is necessary to work *in the spaces between* such pairs, looking for the mechanisms which fuel the workings of relations between them. Specifically, it

is necessary to look at social positions occupied and meanings of lived experiences within these locations (Bourdieu, 1992). Academics need to ensure that they look reflexively at their own practices in order to attempt to become aware of how their own preconceptions contribute to their construction of objects (Formosa, 2002). Bourdieu also disliked the theory/practice dualism, asserting that focussing on either one limits our understandings of the workings of social history (Bourdieu, 1992). A reflexivity which blends theory and practice – more specifically, in the case of the focus pieces I will analyse here, epistemology and methodology – can enable recognition and exploration of socially-sanctioned ‘truths’ woven into the fabric of our daily lives.

In its picking apart of dualisms like subjectivity/objectivity and theory/practice, epistemic reflexivity is a moral endeavour in which topics chosen for consideration and the way in which they are explored work together to expose curtailments of freedom experienced in particular by marginalised groups of people (Formosa, 2002). The role of intellectuals becomes plain – they become a “moral force in society, whose function is to call to order, to hold accountable the actions of political leadership” (Swarz, 2003, pp. 808-809). For example, in *The Weight of the World* (1999), Bourdieu looks at state housing developments in France at a time when subsidies for such projects were receding. Here, lengthy open interviews enabled people to talk about their subjective experiences of hardship within the social space or field they inhabited. In another practice aimed toward practical inclusiveness, Bourdieu in the early 1990s began to publish cheap, easy-to-read paperbacks to encourage a wider readership including people from different classes (Swarz, 2003).

For Bourdieu, choice of research topics is guided by moral and political considerations: inequality, suffering, and domination.

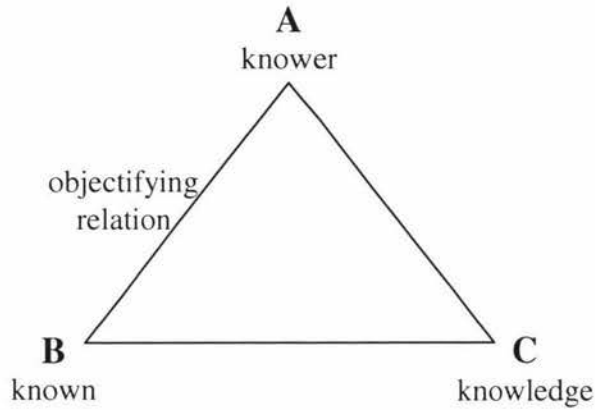
David Swarz, 2003, p. 798

In some very practical ways, Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity enabled him to work with the play of mechanisms fuelling the dynamics between binaries, focussing on social practices as a basis for social critique. Listening to accounts of the experiences of real people – trying to find out about the meanings of inhabiting certain social spaces and being dominated by others – is a start toward revealing political domination and also blending academic, political and personal areas: “The theory of knowledge is a dimension of political theory because the specifically symbolic power to impose the

principles of construction of reality in particular social reality is a major dimension of political power” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 165, cited in Swarz, 2003, p. 819).

Bourdieu (1990) was under no illusions around the intrinsic difficulty of such a task; he recognised that forces of domination implicit in binaric plays are hidden through their ‘taken for granted’ nature. They are both very secret, enmeshed within the myriad strands of cultural assumptions, yet also “‘stare you in the face’ in accordance with the paradigm of the purloined letter dear to Lacan” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 187). In Edgar Allen Poe’s (1971) story, *The Purloined Letter*, the wily Minister D— has in his possession a letter which incriminates the queen. After a number of meticulous but fruitless searches of the minister’s rooms by the Parisian police, the prefect of police approaches C. Auguste Dupin for help. Realising that a man of the minister’s intellect will have understood the usual techniques of the police, Dupin deduces that he has ‘hidden’ the letter in plain sight, and indeed he quickly discovers and recovers it. Bourdieu recognised in Poe’s story an apt metaphor for the way in which powerful binaries become unquestioned parts of the fabric of our daily lives. However, although we are working from within a very constrained place, Bourdieu believed that it is, in certain particular times and places, possible for social research to succeed in “demasking taken-for-granted power relations” (Swarz, 2003, p. 797).

Responding to a critique by Karl Maton (2003) may serve as an effective way to clarify how Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity can work against domination. I hope to show how the management of binaries important to my critical work here and relevant to the five focus pieces, is also central to Bourdieu’s understanding of reflexive practice. Maton explains that Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity aims to counter common ineffective forms of reflexivity which are too subjective, too individualistic and too ‘confessional’ or ‘narcissistic’. Maton uses a triangular graphical representation to portray the basic workings of Bourdieu’s epistemic reflexivity in terms of three elements: the knower or subject (A), the known or object of study (B) and the knowledge (C) which the subject attempts to develop about the object:



Maton states that Bourdieu's emphasis is on the interaction, or objectifying relation, between the knower and the known. He points out that it is important to recognise that, for Bourdieu, 'knower' is, more accurately, a community of 'knowers', who must reflexively explore their relations to the each other as well as to objects of study. This plurality is crucial to an understanding of how epistemic reflexivity articulates the emergence of knowledge.

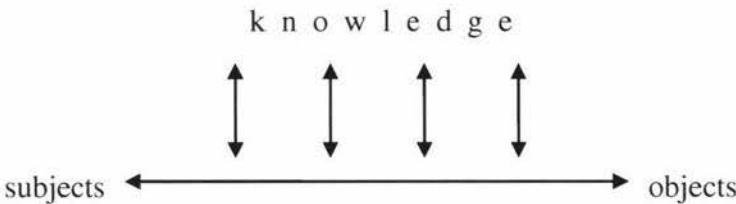
Maton believes that Bourdieu's theory fails in its aim of avoiding a form of individualist, narcissistic reflexivity. He claims that the subject-object relation is emphasised at the expense of achieving knowledge. He describes a pitfall of *reflexive regression* in Bourdieu's ideas: as a knower (A) analyses her relation to the object of study (B), the resultant account becomes a new objectifying relation to be analysed, and this process goes on repeatedly without ever leading to knowledge (C). For Maton, the individual knower becomes the focus of a regressive, self-absorbed process.

I believe a major flaw in Maton's argument stems from the fact that he does not give appropriate weight to his own recognition of the collective nature of Bourdieu's knowers. I believe the focus authors have found a way to practice a kind of epistemic reflexivity by fostering a communal, chorally supportive, reflexive experience between writer and reader. Any regressive potentials were quelled the moment their personal stories called up resonances for me. Far from being merely individualistic accounts, these reflexive vignettes enabled a sharing of experiences. Through examining the similarities and differences in our experiences, the *mechanisms* fuelling the relations between ourselves and the objects we try to make sense of can be explored. It is only

through a focus on this space between subjects and objects that this binary can be disrupted and some understandings around the production of knowledge reached. This intra-binary process will be an important part of the analysis section.

The conception of reflexivity as both a methodology and an epistemology provides a subtly effective solution to Maton’s concern. He asserts that “Bourdieu’s methodological relationism misses the key epistemic relation of knowledge and so provides a sociological account of knowledge rather than an epistemology” (2003, p. 61). However, it is precisely the social interactions involved in the space between knowers and known – subjects and objects – which construct knowledge. Reflexivity is a practice through which subjects/knowers can communally begin to understand the social production of knowledge; it is also a crucial component in a subjective, experiential, constructionist epistemological approach to knowledge.

Maton’s closed-in triangular representation of the three main elements limits an understanding of Bourdieu’s focus on the social construction of knowledge. By assigning knowledge to a point of a triangle, Maton seems almost to bestow on it a positivist, essential existence; this way of looking at knowledge maintains the subject/object binary, separating knowledge from the objectifying relation and suggesting that there are fundamental truths which can be discovered. Looking at knowledge in this way ignores Bourdieu’s understanding of knowledge systems as instituted within the habitus which informs the fields in which we live our lives – in which subjects and objects interweave in a social interplay which constructs that knowledge. Representing the basic elements of epistemic reflexivity in a different way may help to demonstrate how this theory, far from eluding knowledge, leads directly to it:



Knowledge claims are emergent from relations within communities of subjects and objects, and in turn have effects on this objectifying space. The relativism implied in Maton's claim of reflexive regression is clearly countered by Bourdieu's theory. His reflexive work with the elements of habitus, field and capital can help us to use a constructionist epistemology within an apparently anchorless postmodern ontology, taking ethical stands, reconstructing knowledge and moving toward practical ways of helping real people.

When you apply reflexive sociology to yourself, you open up the possibility of identifying true sites of freedom, and thus of building small-scale, modest, practical morals in keeping with the scope of human freedom which, in my opinion, is not that large.

Pierre Bourdieu 1992, p. 199

In his brilliant application of social constructionism to his development of epistemic reflexivity, Bourdieu (1990) declares that supposed

“social functions are in fact social fictions.
And the rites of institutions *create* the person
they institute...they summon him to become
what he is, or rather, what he has to be; they
order him to *fulfil* his function, to take his place
in the game, in the fiction...” (p. 195).

It is through a critically reflective psychology that we can refashion these fictions – tell new stories which reveal the power and subjectivity which have determined their plots and characterisations.

subject positioning

This theoretical process has brought me to a place from which I can look back at the concept of narrative, focussing in particular on our own personal narratives or life stories which can now be understood as sub-plots within broader cultural narratives informed by contextually accepted ‘knowledge’. While this perspective acknowledges the constraints placed on us by our societies, it can also provide us with potentially useful understandings about our places within our social worlds, exposing ways in which cultural beliefs and institutional norms play a central role in the configuration of our own stories.

St Augustine considered his life story primarily in terms of the religious institution of the church which was central to his society, and gave a sense of coherence and a

socially acceptable meaning to his life (Freeman, 1993). From a different context, we may be able to see our lives in terms of a different kind of coherence articulated by my second key perspective – that is, in terms of their social construction through institutions like religion or academia. Moving more deeply into implications for our identities, we can explore the concept of *subject positioning* as a component of the second key perspective. In contrast to Augustine's *unconscious* acceptance of Christianity as the essential, unquestioned standard of his society, we may be able to nurture a *conscious* awareness of our places within such institutions.

The focus piece by Davies and Harré (1990) explores the idea of subject positioning. These authors explain how positioning theory provides an alternative to the common dramaturgical metaphor of *role*. Moving away from the assumption that we play static roles, we can understand ourselves to be constructed of a multiplicity of positions contingent on our social relationships in a variety of settings. The *immanentist* perspective taken by Davies and Harré sees conversations as produced during specific dialogical encounters to meet particular purposes. Any likenesses between conversations are not due to fundamental linguistic rules, as the *transcendental* view posits. Transcendentalists see language in terms of *la langue* – essential qualities of language which reappear repeatedly in different conversations. From the immanentist perspective, meaning resides in *la parole* – each specific, purposeful word uttered during a particular conversational event.

Focus authors Mandy Morgan and Leigh Coombes (2001) usefully unravel the immanentist/transcendentalist binary to more precisely enable understandings around how our personal stories are entangled with cultural narratives. They avoid taking either of these approaches by applying the Derridean concept of *iteration*, which recognises that a particular pattern of speech can be both commonly encountered across social interactions and also used in a particular way within a specific conversational event.

Davies and Harré (1990) seem to use an iterative model to explain how our own personal experiences – our life stories – interweave with larger social narratives to construct our understandings of our 'selves' and our resultant positioning within our social worlds. For example, they suggest that a woman's concept of her position as a mother develops not only from the *typification extension* of accepted cultural norms for

mothers, but also from the *indexical extension* of her specific experiences of mothers which bestow particular meanings on the idea of mothering. The focus article by Morgan and Coombes (2001) explores in depth the subject positioning of a mother. Conversation is conceptualised here as constituted in *speech acts* which have social implications for participants as they interact. In this article, silence is theorised as a speech act which has the same implications for positioning as actual speech. Whether they are produced by words or silence, our 'selves' are understood by positioning theory to be fragmented across fluidly shifting positions. However, also implicit in positioning theory is the belief that we can work toward a certain degree of agency through recognition and examination of our subjectivity within our positions; in this way, it becomes possible to achieve emancipatory moves. Empowering ourselves to refuse certain positions, take up new trajectories and re-locate ourselves becomes a genuine choice.

Subject positions are mutually offered and either accepted or rejected during specific conversational situations (Morgan, 2002). Applying my first key perspective to extend this idea to written pieces and the 'conversational' interactions between writer and reader, I believe the authors of the focus pieces refused to support existing norms within the field of academic psychology by removing themselves from the subject position of 'expert' academic writer. They spoke to me primarily as human beings and in this way offered me the opportunity to move out of a student's usual subject position and respond as a real person. I found myself in a new space from which I could examine the subject position of 'student' as well as a number of others I have inhabited during my life.

Subject positions...both enable and constrain personhood: they confer rights and specify obligations and duties. They locate persons within moral orders.

Mandy Morgan, 2002, p. 472

Recognising that I have been positioned in certain ways within my society means acknowledging that this had significant effects on my identity – on my understanding of who I am. This new way of looking at my 'self', while taking away an illusory freedom, has simultaneously made possible a more realistic awareness of limitations imposed on me by society. This shift in meaning supports Freeman's (2003) hope that finding new ways of using autobiographical memory can foster emancipation. Mandy Morgan (2002), in an article responding to Freeman's focus piece, recommends addressing the

narrative unconscious through a different approach to autobiography which attends to the various subject positions we adopt during conversational interactions and tries to find out how they have been constructed. Mandy also points out here that these positions are *discursively* produced; the part played by *discourse* in our subjectification is a crucial issue within a social constructionist epistemology to which I now turn.

language/discourse

Having come to the central constructionist elements of language and discourse, I considered how various relevant linguistic and discursive aspects could most effectively be integrated into this thesis. I have decided that they can be usefully addressed by circling back to look again at the last four topics of narrative, reader-response theory, reflexivity and subject positioning – this time integrating issues around language and discourse. Travelling along a path formed by linguistic and discursive ideas can help me move from the exploration of theoretical concepts to the practical task of analysis of the five focus pieces in a critical way which adheres to my ethical aims and makes emancipatory movement possible.

narrativity – moving beyond the words

Beginning this process by revisiting the area of narrativity, it is clear that our stories are told through the medium of *language* – a cultural system of spoken and written words which are arranged in a recognisable fashion so that we can communicate with others in our social worlds. The concept of *discourse* enables us to look at language in a new way – as “a system of statements which constructs an object” (Parker, 1990, p. 191). I like Parker’s pithy description because it suggests the sociolinguistic construction of a world which we as subjects experience in particular ways. Approaching discourse from this perspective can help me to probe within the space between subject and object while considering issues around identity and difference. These sets or systems of statements – the specific words or other symbols used, the way they are joined, the connotations they hold – construct the objects in our world in particular ways which become legitimated as knowledge and meaning. Dominant discourses produced and reproduced by institutions use particular symbols and rites to make statements which support certain understandings and reject others. For example, religious discourse is constituted in the church and academic discourse in the university, and each of these institutions is

informed by specific practices which construct ways of understanding the world and ourselves.

Examining discourses which affect our lives can make it possible to explore the narrative unconscious by re-evaluating our own stories in Mandy Morgan's (2002) terms of looking for the social, linguistically formed 'sources' of our constructed identities. Looking closely at relevant linguistic concepts may be a useful first step in this endeavour.

Conceptualising language in terms of Saussurean structural linguistics may help us to understand the differences between language and discourse and usefully work in the space between them. Ferdinand de Saussure's *semiotics* sees language as a symbol system made up of *signs* (Milner, 1994). A word (the *signifier*) symbolises or stands for an object (the *signified*). Arguably, the most significant idea attached to the signifier-signified relationship for this thesis is that "the link between them is entirely arbitrary, for any sound can be linked with any concept" (Wright, 1998, p. 109). It is the way we learn to interpret signifiers within our societies that builds meaning. Saussure emphasised that each sign only has meaning in relation to other signs, which in their joining become socially comprehensible (Milner, 1994).

For Saussure...what is at issue is...the social power of discourse, the power of the system of signs itself.

Andrew Milner, 1994, p. 79

Jacques Derrida's concept of *sous rature* or *under erasure* represents a way to articulate this idea of elusive meanings flitting along a chain of arbitrary signifiers. Here, a word is crossed out to indicate its lack of any intrinsic meaning; yet, the word must remain legible – the sign system of language, though unsatisfactory because we can only catch glimpses or *traces* of meaning, is all we have (Sarup, 1988).

Saussurean and Derridean conceptions of semiotics have shown me a way to find some value in psychoanalytical areas, an aspect of psychology which has never 'spoken' to me before. Lacan's work with the sign system of language addresses psychoanalytical ideas from a social constructionist stance, bringing them within the scope of this thesis process (Wright, 1998). Ian Parker (2003) asserts in his focus piece that "psychoanalysis

is *already* woven into the texture of culture, and as we translate it we need to untangle some of the threads of experience that organize us as subjects psychoanalytically” (p. 313). He uses narrative vignettes around experiences of struggling with foreign languages to point out how language is implicated in the workings of our psyches. This metaphor enables Parker to explore Lacan’s ideas around how the symbol system of language both enables and prevents communication with others (Wright, 1998).

Lacan conceptualises that the conscious and unconscious parts of our psyche, and the ways in which they interact, are constrained by language (Wright, 1998). Lacan is aware of the illusory nature of language and, simultaneously, its power. As human subjects, we are entrapped in a web or chain of signifiers which produces meanings which constrain us. “Signifiers do not refer to objects but to the chain of language. They do refer, but to other signifiers...‘the signifying chain’...is what limits the speaker’s freedom” (Sarup, 1988, p. 47). Like Bourdieu, Lacan (1972) found metaphorical value in Poe’s (1971) *The Purloined Letter*. For Lacan, the elusive letter symbolises the signifier. It holds important meanings which, however, can never be grasped by any of the people involved with it. As it passes from the queen to the minister to Dupin, it leaves only traces of meaning as it moves along the signifying chain. Lacan also tellingly points out that readers of this tale never find out either who sent the letter or what its actual contents are. The psychological importance of the letter resides in its power and its elusiveness. Our acceptance of the linguistically constructed positions we inhabit is chillingly described by Lacan (1972): “subjects...more docile than sheep, model their very being on the moment of the signifying chain which traverses them” (p. 60).

Lacan’s blending of social constructionist linguistics and psychoanalysis supports Sussman’s assertion (1990, cited in Sarup, 1992) that Lacan moved psychoanalysis into its postmodern phase. It also occurs to me that the constraints imposed by language may explain my passions for art and music; perhaps these non-verbal interests provide avenues for explorations of my ‘self’ which sidestep the web of the linguistic signifying system.

For Lacan, we are linguistically constructed human subjects (Sarup, 1992). Sarup (1992) declares that “Truth resides, as it were, in the spaces between one signifier and

another, in the holes of the chain” (p. 91). How can we get into these spaces to detect the powerful discourses which entrap us in nets of related signifiers? Parker (1990) discusses a number of criteria which can help us to identify and explore discourses which may be significant determiners of our identities. These elements preview the discussions around the linguistic and discursive elements in the next three areas of reader-response, reflexivity and subject positioning.

Parker (1990) suggests we look for metaphors, images and other stylistic devices which join cohesively – and relate to cultural discourses with which we are already familiar – to portray certain ‘truths’. Pieces of discourse are present in and can be revealed by textual material – not only linguistic, but visual too – in fact, any “tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretive gloss” (Parker, 1990, p. 193). For example, the text of a mainstream psychological article contains a number of structural features which identify it as a piece of the discourse of academic psychology and which can be examined in terms of the power such a piece of discourse wields. Its division into the systematic organising parts of *abstract*, *keywords*, *hypothesis*, and *procedure*; its use of quantitative, scientific images like *measures*, *MANOVAS*, *alphas* and *F values*; its inclusion of graphs and figures to symbolically support the ‘knowledge’ and ‘truths’ discovered – all of these components work together to present a privileged interpretation of what psychological research is. They also firmly position me as a relatively powerless student reading ‘expert’ material produced from within the institution of the university. An article like this plays an important part in telling me what psychological knowledge is and how it is achieved. It is necessary to critically examine pieces of discourse like this to work toward revealing some of the mechanisms they use to reproduce power relations. It is equally important to analyse counter-practices like the focus articles in order to explore critical alternatives. My appreciation of a particular type of textual material has led to this thesis, and it is to this area of responses by readers to *texts* that we now turn.

reader-response – the textualised ‘i’

I will use the methodology of *textual analysis* to analyse the personal narratives included in the five focus articles. In this exploration of text, I need to remain cognisant that, as Parker (1990) posits, the post-crisis turn to language is a double-edged sword. Discourse can both constrain and free us and I am mindful that the text I am

constructing here is only *my interpretation* of how narrative and reflexivity work together in the five pieces; this project articulates *my* response as a reader. I would be sidelining my ontological and epistemological groundings and the ethical aims they have led me to if I try to constrain others to accept my interpretations. I hope I am fashioning here a text which speaks to my readers in some useful, maybe empowering ways.

Changes in the field of reader-response have involved significant transformations in the concept of text as it developed from the German reception theory toward the constructionist work of Fish; “While reception theorists have displaced their interpretive focus from the text to the reader, post-structuralists have displaced all focus by textualizing the reader” (Holub, 1984, p. 154). This conception of the reader has deep implications for issues of identity. Considering how this stance affects my sense of ‘self’ has inspired me to emulate Mandy Morgan’s practice of using a lower case ‘i’ to refer to her ‘self’ in our shared email narratives. I find the modest little ‘i’ valuable as a constant reminder that i am not a discrete, autonomous individual, but a textually constructed woman constituted within powerful discourses; i will refer to my ‘self’ in this way from this point.

What distinguishes Barthes’s ‘reader’ from that encountered in reception theory is that his is composed of an infinite number of codes and texts. It is not a unified center from which meaning and interpretation originate, but rather a construct characterized by dispersion and plurality.

Robert Holub, 1984, p. 15

Highlighting the confusing web of signifiers which informs text and calling to mind Parker’s ideas around the difficulties involved in trying to convey meaning in a foreign language, a translation issue occurred to me as i worked with this material around language, discourse and reader-response and their implications for notions of identity. The accepted English translation of a well-known statement by Barthes (1974) is: “This ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite or, more precisely, lost (whose origin is lost)” (p. 10). I discovered with interest that in the original French, Barthes (1970) writes, not *je* (‘I’), but *moi* (‘me’), a choice which seems to subtly connote a socially constructed, textually-bound subject. The use of ‘I’, on the other hand, has a hint of humanist agency clinging to it. As in

Parker's focus article, this translation issue seems to serve as an apt metaphor for the nebulous nature of the chain of signifiers.

Textualisation is all-encompassing, subsuming both the reader and the writer. Lacan posited that "...the reader/writer distinction is no longer valid because making sense of the sign system implicates both: each is caught up in a net of signs, is up against language...readers write in the act of reading and writers read in the act of writing" (Wright, 1998, p. 123). This idea has been most famously encapsulated by Derrida in his assertion that *there is nothing outside the text* (Adams, 1990). And, pointing out another interesting translation issue, i agree with Hazard Adams (1990) that a more useful translation of the original French (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*) would be *there is no outside-the-text*.

Delving deeper into the interweavings of language and discourse may lead to ways to access and explore the 'fusion' between reader and writer where meaning is constructed by interpretive communities; however, it is a process which seems fraught with difficulties. Both writers' and readers' textual immersion is constituted in their 'identities' as constructed within cultural discourses. If both writers and readers are held within such a web or chain of signifying discourses, can we even think in terms of writers reaching or touching readers? How could such a practice happen? My experiences reading the five focus articles suggests to me that such contact can be achieved through a special kind of reflexivity – an open, emotional disclosure of personal experiences in which we critically reflect on the workings of discourses in which our understandings around these experiences are constituted.

reflexivity – practicing in elusive spaces

In doing a textual analysis of the focus articles, i hope to address Woolgar's and Ashmore's (1988) concerns around the over-theorisation of reflexivity by focussing on and working with actual specific examples of reflexive practice. The ways in which discourses are explored in these pieces' counter-practices can hopefully be explored through a close examination of the language used in the five pieces. Such a concentration on practice which tries to get between the writer and the reader may be tantamount to catching a glimpse of what happens in that elusive space of meaning in the holes of the signifying chain. Hopefully, i can approach some new understandings

around what happens between the members of the binaries so hated by Bourdieu, notably that between subject and object – that space where the double-edged sword hangs to either keep us in thrall or enable us to cut our way out of powerful, entangling discourses. I believe this latter freeing space was opened together by the focus authors and me, as both the writer/reader dualism and also the subject/object binary were disrupted by a very special kind of reflexive practice.

This newly articulated reflexive endeavour, at once specific in its attention to specific examples of practice and general in its relation to semiotics, suggests some significant implications. It is beginning to feel more and more that i am working in a scarily nebulous yet simultaneously confined space, pressed in on both sides by the forces of binaric halves. But my process here also feels like a job worth doing – an ethical undertaking exploring issues of dominance and freedom in human interactions. My specific interest here in textual practice which emerged from, yet also suggest an alternative path for, academic psychology as practiced within the institution of the university, enables me to remain centred within the intermingling personal and psychological concerns from which this thesis emerged.

subject positioning – struggling in nets of discursive power

Parker (1990) emphasises that speaking and writing need to be recognised as *practices* which work, especially through institutions, to reproduce power structures which establish and maintain subject positionings. Monique Wittig (1992) echoes Foucault's and Bourdieu's related assertions around the symbolic yet simultaneously very real power of language, positing that language and discourse work together as political forces which construct subjectivity, keeping people marginalised in ways which undoubtedly feel very real to them. Jane Tompkins's (1980) assertion around the implications attached to the sheer power of language provide strong support for this work with which i am engaged, usefully extending the aims of this project: "When language is believed to have an overwhelming influence on human behaviour, then mastering its techniques and exercising ethical control over its uses must of necessity become the paramount critical consideration" (p. 204).

Closely examining specific linguistic practices as i will be doing in my analysis is a valuable first step toward such vigilance and is, indeed, a specifically *critical* approach.

Crotty (1998) distinguishes between the mere *interpretation* of our stories around our experiences and a more *critical* attempt to locate examples of social oppression, mirroring the distinction between an individualistic reflexivity and critical reflection, and addressing the pervasive presence of power and its assigning of subject positions. Crotty (1998) points out that “Criticalists...emphasise...that the tradition echoing through personal accounts of experience is a tradition founded on exploitation and resounds with overtones of dominance and unfreedom” (p. 159).

Examining how linguistic and discursive elements work together to keep us in certain subject positions may help us to explore the spaces between ourselves and others. We can perhaps begin to discern the mechanisms implicated in the classification and division of human beings, and how we are positioned within this system. Perhaps we can find ways to reflexively reveal to ourselves our own collusion in accepting subject positions by identifying some of the symbolic forces that make us behave as though we exist in a constantly-observed, panopticalised environment.

An interesting way to consider how we accept certain positions and conform to particular behaviours is provided by Mary Gergen’s (2001) novel construct of the *social ghost*. Social ghosts are discursive entities – imaginary ‘others’ – who may or may not have ever actually existed – or who may represent socially constructed parts of our ‘selves’. We interact with them in a variety of ways – we may ‘hear’ them or ‘speak’ to them in inner dialogue, or we may conduct our daily activities as though they were watching us. When i first read about social ghosts, i tried to identify who mine might be as i performed in certain ways, even when alone. Although i couldn’t specifically identify these ‘others’, i had to admit to sometimes behaving as though i was in some form of panopticon. I also tried to determine whether i was in any sense affected by unseen *male* watchers. Although unable to answer this question, i was made uncomfortable by Gergen’s finding that “men were chosen as social ghosts to a greater extent than women by both sexes” (p. 137).

I hope i may be able to gain some insights around issues like these through my analyses of my memories. Critically reflecting on our personal stories is an important step toward transforming the meanings we give to our experiences. And we have these experiences in the Bourdieuean fields of our everyday lives, the area to which i now turn.

experience

Intermingling ideas developed through these theoretical explorations of narrative, reader-response, reflexivity and subject positioning – combining them in new ways in the manner of a bricoleur – can lead to new constructions around our experiences; it can locate us in different positions from which to ‘watch’ ourselves. How do we listen and move and talk (and when do we remain silent) during specific interactional situations? What meanings do we place on the linguistic resources used during conversational encounters? Do we come away from social occasions feeling that we inhabit a marginalised position? Or do we feel empowered? And what discourses might be implicated in these feelings?

Our experiences – the ‘stuff’ of our stories – are the arenas within which we struggle and from which our ‘selves’ emerge. It seems that the *personal* – our lived, emotional experiences as real people – is indeed *political*. The exposing of certain aspects of my life when I analyse my evoked memories may be a way of ‘talking back’ to my social ghosts, providing an alternative to the complicity of my panopticised experiences in which i accept certain positions in subjectification to unidentified, generalised, invisible ‘others’. I hope it will become a counter-practice which may reveal the part played by particular institutions informed by certain dominant discourses.

Aware of the importance of experience to this project, Mandy suggested two current books on this subject that she heard about at a conference: Benjamin Bradley’s *Psychology and Experience* (2005) and *Analysing Everyday Experience: Social Research and Political Change*, by Niamh Stephenson and Dimitris Papadopoulos (2006). This material provided me with valuable perspectives from which to examine the experiential stuff of our stories. Both books support the position that the personal and political are intertwined, and both also present hopeful ideas for disentangling them. They do this partially by drawing together some of the theoretical threads winding through my work here and tying them to practical paths for change.

Deploring mainstream psychology’s unethical neglect of socio-political effects on real people, Bradley (2005) asserts that the discipline’s “rejection of a proactive stance with regard to social problems means that it easily becomes subordinated to the political aims

of those who fund and apply it” (p. 208). He supports the need for a critical psychology which reflexively examines itself. He draws a distinction between ‘top-down’ and ‘democratic’ approaches to research, the latter involving techniques which include semi-structured interview techniques and interviewee choice of discussion topics. Bradley also addresses my concerns around academic-student relationships: “...students’ personal experiences are irrelevant compared to the expert knowledge of the fully fledged psychologist” (p. 190).

The authors of these two books believe that recognising the importance of our everyday social experiences is the first step toward challenging the dominance of social structures like mainstream academic psychology. Bradley (2005) describes this experiential site as the *intersubjective* space in which our psyches are formed. Bradley and also Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006) assert that change is not possible if we conceptualise our lives in linear, causal terms in which the past-present-future trajectory inevitably carries us along. Bradley states that “psychical alteration is always both *relative to* and *revealing of* a specific intersubjective space” (p. 154). It is only through developing understandings around our positionings within this contextual space that power balances can be shifted and new meanings formed.

The everyday is the site in which experience circulates and transforms.

Niamh Stephenson and Dimitris Papadopoulos, 2006, p. xi

Considering this concept of intersubjective space has brought me back again to the issue of disclosure. I wonder how difficult or even painful it might be for me to admit, as i analyse my own memories of past experiences, that subject positions i have accepted have had effects on my life which were not part of an unavoidable process. Hopefully, stepping into this possibly uncomfortable space of personal disclosure will provide opportunities for working toward changes in how i see myself and what i feel free to do.

Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006) believe that working toward fashioning new meanings around our positions within specific situated experiences is a way to unravel the personal/political dynamic. They assert that *micropolitics*, as they call this approach, “fracture the ongoing processes of capture entailed in state politics [and] privilege the everyday and cultural realms as sites of transformation” (p. xviii). Moving into a place from which we can recognise and challenge state or institutional power involves a

collective reaching out to and working with others with whom we share out everyday experiences. Bradley (2005) recommends this type of communal approach as the most effective way to work toward some understandings of ourselves and others because “we are connected to each other in a field of *intersubjectivity*” (p. 170).

Stephenson and Papadopoulos (2006) recommend a specific methodology, *memory work*, which “*undoes* the subject of linear, causal, biographical narratives” (p. 50) and fosters increased mutual understandings. Memory work involves an interactive process which is in some ways similar to the relationship fashioned through text between the focus authors and me, and also to the critically reflective analysis of my memories which i will undertake. In this technique, individuals write down a detailed, third-person account of a memory, excluding any interpretation. This text is shared with the other members of the group, who discuss it, comparing and contrasting it with their own memories. The memory is then re-written from the new context of shared experiences; the new version of the text potentially marks a move from individual introspection to communal critical reflection – from the personal to the political – as realisations are reached around the constructed and constrained nature of our experiences.

I want to look in a more detailed way at how my experiences within the intersubjective space of writer-text-reader fusion in the focus articles fostered emotional responses which, in turn, led to intellectual reconsiderations of autobiographical memories. I believe that the perspectives developed during this theoretical journey will facilitate a useful exploration of these pieces which is informed by intermingled personal and political strands. The importance of language and discourse to constructionist epistemology, together with the Derridean emphasis on text, support my proposed methodology of examining the linguistic resources used to fashion the texts of the narrative vignettes in these articles. However, before moving from this theoretical exploration to a more specific discussion of my analytical approach, i need to consider this thesis process from one other perspective in order to round out more fully the meanings this work has for me.

2. metaphorical accounts

...images and imaginings...

why metaphor?

In considering why augmenting my theoretical work with a metaphorical approach seems valuable to me, and was present at the back of my mind throughout my theoretical travels, my first thought was that metaphorical imagery would enhance my work by giving it a vivid, imaginative gloss. With my English literature background, i appreciate the richness such figures of speech can bestow on a piece of writing. I was also aware that metaphor could provide another perspective from which to look at this thesis process, an alternative avenue which might lead me on to some further theoretical ideas, shedding new light on this undertaking.

Thinking more deeply about the theoretical journey taken so far, however, i realised that a metaphorical approach might be more significant in its specific relevance to my interpretive process here, usefully developing some of the meanings i have fashioned. I am not only examining the slippery medium of language in this project; i am also struggling to use it myself in my efforts toward reinterpretation. The signifiers i am using here hold no implicit meaning, standing only for other signifiers – a metaphorical relationship. If metaphor is, as Sarup (1988) asserts, the process through which meanings are constantly moving and changing, perhaps gathering together some metaphorical images will enable me to more clearly articulate my ideas and grasp for a moment some fleeting traces of meaning.

In a postmodern environment, truths and meanings are not stable, but fluid and ever-shifting. Social constructionism understands meanings as formed in a cultural space of discursive interactions. Language for social constructionists does not reflect an essential reality, but plays a central part in its construction (Sarup, 1988). The structure of language systems through which discourses are articulated is built around a chain of elusive signifiers. We are constrained as subjects in certain positions because of dominant power structures; we are held in thrall by the structure of language through which such dominance is manifested – and metaphor is an integral part of that structure.

Sarup (1988) points out how certain powerful metaphorical uses colour whole societal attitudes, for example the way we represent the concept of *argument* in terms of a *war* metaphor: "There is a position to be established and defended, you can win or lose, you have an opponent whose position you attack and try to destroy and whose argument you try to shoot down" (p. 48). Such warlike images affect the way that we understand our world and our place in it and they are very different from the reflexive, chorally supportive communication i am 'arguing' for here from my ethical perspective – the metaphorical ripples of ideas i am hoping to gently set in motion.

The power and arbitrariness of the metaphorical system of language is exemplified particularly aptly in the metaphor of the binary (Milner, 1994). The dualisms so abhorred by Bourdieu have no intrinsic meaning, but act as metaphors which structure our thinking in certain ways, focusing our attention on the two categories of binaries and diverting our understanding from what is going on in the spaces between them. Monique Wittig (1992) points to the ethical implications intrinsic to binaries, explaining how they fit together as "terms of judgment and evaluation" (p. 50). Sampson (1983) explains that Derrida saw binaries as part of the hierarchical system so central to Western culture and was concerned with not just replacing existing powerful binaries with others, but with moving away from the concept of hierarchy itself.

I believe that metaphors determine to a large extent what we think in any field. Metaphors are not idle flourishes – they shape what we do [and] can be productive of new insights and fresh illuminations...Through metaphor we can have an increased awareness of alternative possible worlds.

Madan Sarup, 1988, p. 50

Given this importance of metaphor to our interpersonal relations, our sense of our identity and our place in the social world, it seems to me that only by reflexively using metaphor myself can i hope to form some new personal meanings around the five articles in terms of the theoretical journey i am on. Far from being a mere literary figure of speech, i can now understand metaphor as potentially liberating – as a way to re-form some of my understandings around myself and my world.

...metaphor will always be involved in the creation of new meanings...

Andrew Soyland, 1994, p. 119

binary as metaphor – a reflexive re-articulation

To begin my search for an appropriate metaphor to represent what i am doing in this project, i first looked once again at my past work with narrative. As i have suggested in preceding sections, this former theoretical experience can be considered as one of the starting points for this current thesis process. This past work was informed by extensive consideration of metaphors and binaries; Mandy and i discussed the variety of metaphors available to us, their flexibility and their ability to help us find new perspectives from which to approach the ideas we shared. Metaphors helped me to articulate ideas in both practical and theoretical terms. For example, working toward clearer understandings around my own research practice, at one point i used a *water* metaphor to describe my thinking processes. In an email to Mandy, i recounted how my thoughts were flowing along and were then joined by two other streams of ideas (an email from Mandy and a section of a book i was reading). I used the image of turbulent rapids to evoke the joining of all these ideas in my mind, which resulted in a broad, strong river made up of sounder ideas.

Several metaphors were useful for exploring key theoretical concepts involved in this past work. The image of a many-layered *onion* helped me to describe levels of narrative; i used it to consider how a personal story can develop into an interview transcript and then an article. Metaphor helped here to articulate the fact that, while each of these narrative versions is different, yet they are tied together, adhering to the same experiences recounted in the first telling. This image of a many-layered onion could also be used to convey the changing meanings of the concept of choral support addressed previously, the same general idea being developed in specific ways to lead toward varying theoretical objectives.

The most notable metaphor we used during past work was that of a *double helix* to evoke the narrative/discourse relationship which became central to our undertaking. This image of two winding strands seemed to suggest aptly the way in which stories through which we structure our lives are intertwined with, and yet separate from, the cultural discourses which inform them. It was effective in helping us to consider binaries as made up of quite separate polar entities, yet paradoxically also as paired

units which are not easily separated to expose the in-between spaces of power mechanisms.

While the double helix image would no doubt work to help me explore the binaries which have become part of this current project, i decided i wanted to find a new metaphor – something that would have explicit aptness and meaning for this thesis. In order to decide on an appropriate metaphor for this work, it was clear that i first needed to circle back and identify metaphorical images and binaric structures which have already become significant during the preceding theoretical exploration. As i looked at these metaphors and binaries and thought about how they worked here, i kept in mind a number of criteria which this new metaphor would need to meet. It would need to facilitate a critical stance to affirm my theoretical journey to issues of power and positioning. This critical approach would have to take cognisance of my two key perspectives around writer-reader relationships and the social construction of fluid interactions, positionings and ‘selves’. My new metaphor would need to have meaning in terms of both theory and practice – that is, be relevant to the developing ideas and concepts as well as to my own reflexive research process. And all of the above elements would have to hold clear implications for the three stories – mine, psychology’s and those in the five focus pieces – with which this journey began.

The first thing i became aware of during my review of the preceding theoretical section in specific metaphorical terms was that i used others’ metaphors as well as some of my own. I have borrowed metaphorically for the purposes of this project in a number of ways. Affirming Sarbin’s (1986) idea of *narrative* as a *root* metaphor has helped me to shape my constructionist approach through its recognition of the usefulness of seeing our spoken and written social encounters – not excepting this thesis – as *stories*. The Foucauldian metaphorical image of the *panopticon* (Bartky, 1988; Rabinow, 1984) illustrates vividly the self-regulating complicity of our attitudes and behaviour during these interactions. I see Mary Gergen’s (2001) *social ghost* concept as a metaphor for the nebulous ‘others’ by whom we are constrained. And the symbolic *purloined letter* of Poe’s (1971) tale metaphorically represents the simultaneous *hidden* and ‘*in plain sight*’ nature of discourses and also the elusive nature of signifiers, providing a deeper look into the linguistic and discursive nature of our social relationships.

I found, like Parker (2003), that the concept of *translation* is a useful metaphor to articulate our struggles to communicate using the slippery sign system of language. In one of the vignettes in his focus article (2003), Parker uses vivid imagery to describe the process of an address to a conference in Montenegro being translated for the listeners:

The pained look on their faces made it clear to me that the words I sent were different from the ones that eventually arrived, or perhaps I didn't even know now what the words I sent meant. Each sentence on the page was pulled up and out and made its way interminably via the interpreter into the hall. Time slowed into something as sticky as my sweat (p. 305).

It seems paradoxically telling that the two translated sentences which i discuss are themselves trying to clarify something about the elusive nature of semiotics. Becoming mired in the muddiness of linguistics, these translations serve as their own examples of the intrinsic difficulties of communication.

Looking for metaphors of my own, i find i continually used a *travelling* or *journeying* metaphor as i worked through theoretical issues. This image seems to aptly describe my reflexive work here, affirming my epistemological and ontological beliefs. The social constructionist emphasis on contextuality makes it appropriate for me to understand this work as happening in a particular time and place – a certain location. And yet remaining cognisant of postmodern fluidity, i have purposefully considered understandings developed here not as *arrivals* at essential knowledge, but rather as brief *momentary pauses* at particular *points* where i have gained fleeting glimpses of potentially useful insights.

The idea of journeying through a landscape also seems to work well alongside other critical work. For example, “Foucault...was particularly fond of using ‘geographical’ metaphors such as territory, domain, soil, horizon, archipelago, geopolitics, region, landscape. He also makes profuse use of spatial metaphors – position, displacement, site, field” (Sarup, 1988, p. 49). Beryl Curt’s (1994) *Textuality and Tectonics: Troubling Social and Psychological Science*, uses throughout a topological metaphor to address crisis issues from a critical stance. For example, the image of *sedimentation* is used to describe the many layers of competing discourses which offer different ways of understanding the world. And people are conceptualised as inhabiting a *fold* of, and

inextricably connected to, the socio-political life from and within which they tell their stories. My journeying metaphor enables me to conceptualise my process here as moving through such geographical, spatial, topographical features, enhancing my awareness of the significance of the interpersonal sites in which we interact linguistically and socially. It also enables me to feel that my work can be located within a new sort of counter-tradition.

Suggesting the particular way in which i am aiming to move through these interpersonal landscapes, the discussion around ripples, emerging from a *water* metaphor, affirms the idea of fluidity; this metaphor leads to and blends with a moral stance around the kind of gentleness with which i am trying to mould this work. The image of whirling water also suggests the circularity which is a significant feature in this project. I have tried during my journey here to continually turn back to re-examine issues, a practice which seems to parallel the circular nature of both narrative and reflexivity, intertwining my practice with the theory i am grappling with.

I was surprised to see how many *weaving* images i have used, suggesting my developing awareness of the interwoven complexity of threads of theoretical issues and also the confusing intricacy of trying to extricate myself from their sticky web and tie them together into some relevant meanings. This image of re-combining strands of ideas into useful new materials gives me a new way to use the metaphor of the *bricoleur*. Accepting the job of bricoleur in order to work toward critical, perhaps empowering, re-interpretations of our social locations involves a recognition that struggling with complex theoretical *problems* is necessary in order to work toward some practical *solutions*, as i try to both disentangle and re-tie difficult concepts.

As i circled back to look once again at my theoretical work, this time combing through the material looking for binaries, i was surprised and initially somewhat daunted by their sheer number. After lengthy consideration, i decided that the most useful way to work with them toward my thesis aims was to re-conceptualise them in terms of a functional process involving three steps. The first step consists of *guiding* pairs which underlie and give direction to this undertaking. Especially significant here are the dual personal/psychological interests from which this thesis emerged and the binary in which they are subsumed: personal stories and cultural narratives. With reference to the five

focus articles, there are the dual emotional/intellectual levels on which they spoke to me and also the way in which their reflexive practice can be seen as both theory and practice – epistemology and methodology.

The subject-object dualism to which my critical approach has brought me becomes the *central* binary in this functional process. I looked again at how i dealt with this binary in my reconceptualisation of Maton's (2003) diagram of Bourdieu's key ideas, and i thought about the part this dualism has played in my theoretical travels. Given that this journey led me to the seminal realm of *experience*, i began to move more deeply into the *subject* pole of this dualism – into the intersubjective space where subjects interact. My theoretical work has shaped my belief that it is through an exploration of how people behave in specific situations – researchers and researched, academics and students, writers and readers, men and women – that we can move on to understand more about what goes on in the space of power structures between these subjects and the objects they struggle to understand in their everyday lives. I have come to believe that the most important starting-point for effectively using the idea of binaries is an attempt to become more conscious of our positioned encounters with others, trying to articulate how Freeman's (2003) ideas around identity and difference play out in our everyday experience – in terms of my re-drawn version of Maton's diagram, focussing inside the *subjects* part of the subject/object dualism.

Finally the conscious/unconscious binary becomes important in terms of a third, *transitional* function, suggesting the movement or journeying from one point to another which may be possible within the scope of the theoretical landscape which i have developed here. This binary offers transformational possibilities through recognitions around how we are positioned as subjects and constrained in certain ways, and how we can re-locate ourselves.

This re-articulation of my theoretical and practical process has met my hopes that the use of metaphor would foster useful reconsiderations and the fashioning of new meanings. It has also, once again, made me aware of the challenging nature of the task of finding a new metaphor. Now i knew that, in addition to the other criteria, i needed to find an image that gave recognition to the experiential realm of real people – subjects in experiential space. I realised that shaping a new metaphor meant a huge new bricolage

project – gathering together bits of theory and pieces of practice; staying within my ontological and epistemological foundations; retaining the personal-political recognition; focussing on extricating subject/object relationships. It meant doing all this in a location within some specific, contextual time and place – some moment and point which has resonances with the theoretical development here. Like the weaving metaphor, it would also need to contain a critical edge which included transformational possibilities. This is clearly a challenging task – one which necessitated considerations of many metaphorical possibilities for many weeks.

the masked ball – a French palimpsest

The metaphorical image which i finally chose came to me in an almost dream-like way, as if all the strands of meaning it needed to contain had been winding around in my unconscious mind until they became woven together into a tapestry which might represent the theoretical journey i had taken. This metaphor – the *masked ball* – seems to be apt for considering each of the three circling stories with which i began this undertaking (mine, psychology's and those of the focus authors) in terms of these significant strands which hold together the web of my theoretical development.

In my experience of the masked ball as it rose into my conscious mind, there was music behind everything else – music that was beautiful and stirring, but simultaneously structured and disciplined. And the patterns of the music were mirrored by the different shapes of the dances and the changing positions of the dancers. I could imagine being there – i felt the heat and smelled the perfume overlaying the sweating bodies. I heard the sound of voices, the laughter and the tinkling of glasses...the rustling and swishing of brocaded gowns and the flitting of fans. I saw the rich, colourful clothing, the fancifully stylised masks and the powdered, scented wigs. Light shimmering on satin was reflected by the mirrored walls and i felt myself twirled round and round – i was part of a story in a faraway time and place...then i noticed a door opening onto a terrace and – as it happens in dreams and imaginings – i had suddenly moved out of the ballroom and was outside sharing the wonder of a woman who was taking deep breaths of fresh, cool air and gazing at the unmasked face of her dancing partner as she reached up to remove her own mask...

As Mandy noted when i described this new metaphor for her, it is a very European image, and is therefore connected to my own heritage and also to my fascination with France. Indeed, i picture this ball taking place in a French château during the eighteenth century. The masked ball reflects a particular moment in history – a step in a historical process – as does the stance of mainstream psychology. This metaphor contains the constraints of specific musical styles, dance steps and ways of dressing and adorning oneself – and all of these constrictions seem to me to have enormous implications for how the dancers relate to one another. Just as the masked ball played a particular, proscribed part in the lives of the nobility of a particular society, there have been privileged ways of ‘doing’ psychology which are constituted in a specific context – subject areas deemed appropriate for psychological study and conventional methods of investigation. As with the tightly constrained behaviour of the masked dancers following set dance steps, these contextual ‘right’ ways of doing psychology determine how we relate to one another and the sorts of ‘truths’ we accept.

Like a dancer wearing a mask and engaging in mannered chat at a ball in a French chateau, the mainstream researcher has assumed the guise of an objective expert whose face we never see and whose human voice we never hear as he executes the conventional steps of the psychological article. Reflected in the mirrored ballroom, the dancers see only their disguised selves reflected back at them again and again as they whirl around and around. Mainstream psychological writers reflect the social constructions currently deemed to be ‘real’; each writer and reader is called on to wear a mask and accept the rules. My personal story has in this way been affected by psychology’s story, which is itself just one example of the institutionalised power structures which keep us following the ‘right’ steps.

However, ways of doing things are changing within the ‘dance’ of academic psychology; crisis writers introduced different kinds of music and suggested alternative patterns of steps. This transformational potential – the moving from unconsciousness to consciousness – is metaphorically evoked by the two people in the ballroom who move onto the terrace, removing their masks to recognise themselves as people who have been dancing in particular ways – experiencing their lives in the socially-sanctioned manner of a certain time and place.

Such reflexive recognitions seem to me to be at the heart of what the authors of the five focus articles do; through sharing their stories of personal experiences, they offered me the chance to become more conscious of my own choices. Taking up opportunities presented by more critical, questioning ways of participating in psychology can foster mutually reflexive ways of standing aside from the dance and asking questions about what sorts of masks we wear, steps we take and positions we inhabit – and can thereby reveal what investments are being protected by the status quo. Maybe relating to critical stories can disrupt aspects of the subject-object dualism inherent within mainstream psychology and enable us to find ways to “know the dancer from the dance” (Yeats, 1990, p. 130). Yeats’ use of this image in his poem *Among School Children* provides a useful avenue for relating the masked ball metaphor to the central binary of this thesis – the subject/object dualism.

Hazard Adams (1990) discusses Yeats’ *antithetical* stance toward the dancer/dance relationship in a way which usefully addresses the subject/object binary; he posits that “we can properly know the dancer from the dance by also knowing the dancer as the dance” (p. 173). This idea articulates the way in which we are nearly inseparable from the cultural world which informs our very being and enhances Mandy’s (2007A) vision of the dancers at the masked ball as ‘iridescent’ beings: “...the truth effects of particular historical and cultural locations are interwoven with the dancers’ bodies – [they are] persons who are...shimmering and shifting...” (p. 1). This image of dancers as reflective forms who move through a world which colours their meanings, and indeed their very beings, also has bearing on the metaphor of the journey. Adams (1990) sees Yeats as “a poet who inevitably returned to query the particular experience [and who] celebrated life as an individual journey with the purpose being the journey itself” (p. 253). This way of understanding travelling can be developed in a way which embraces a postmodern view of a tentative type of transformation – not as the static reaching of a goal at the end of a linear trajectory, but rather as an exploratory pausing at a point or moment – more like a subtle but important directional change in a fluid journey or story. This shift is metaphorically represented by the dancers at the masked ball moving out of the flow of the dance toward the terrace door.

Not only does this metaphor meet my theoretical requirements; it also seems specifically relevant to the fabric of this work because of the significant ‘French

connections' which have been made during the theoretical journey. The ideas of French thinkers are important to the development of my ideas. For example, the work of Bourdieu and Foucault facilitates the integration into my process of critical ideas around positioning, subjectivity and emancipation. The linguistic ideas of French intellectuals like Derrida and Barthes provide ways of exploring more deeply and usefully the part played by language and discourse in our subjectification. Lacan's work has made psychoanalysis meaningful for me for the first time through its recognition that language shapes our psyches. Certain usages of the French language itself have deepened my understandings around the powerful, elusive symbol system of language. The term *sous rature*, the *langue/parole* distinction and my translation concerns exemplify the centrality of language to the subject/object binary which has become the focus of my interest.

The masked ball metaphor also makes this thesis process more reflexively meaningful for me through its intertwining with some personal experiences in France which i have considered in terms of thesis issues. It occurs to me that visiting particular sites during my times in France might have unconsciously played its part in bringing the masked ball metaphor to my consciousness. It is for this reason that i have included paintings of my imaginative interpretations of these places as almost dream-like watermark backgrounds of my text – like the colours of the world which reflect off the iridescent dancers, these locations give substance to my ideas. This practice also seems appropriate given that a favourite metaphor of French intellectuals was the palimpsest (Sarup, 1988). As Sarup explains, "reading texts resembles the X-raying of pictures which discovers, under the epidermis of the last painting, another hidden picture...Since metaphors are not reducible to truth, their own structures 'as such' are part of the text" (p. 50). The first of these watermarks appears in my introduction – an image of the Pontorson church, the site of the unexpected and moving experience which in a way marks the beginning of this thesis.

Another of these background images is my representation of my favourite statue in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris – Astruc's *The Seller of Masks*. Representing a young boy surrounded by the masks of noted French artists and thinkers, this work has always suggested to me the ways in which we are offered received wisdom in the form of certain roles – masks of conventionality – and of course has taken its place in the

masked ball metaphor. Yeats was interested in the image of the mask, which suggested to him a false kind of individuality – a sort of performance or role which reaches its ultimate development when a person is “all metaphor...he is his mask” (Adams, 1990, p. 247). This quite chilling situation is addressed by Bourdieu, who uses the mask metaphor to assert his goal of “demasking taken-for-granted power relationships” (Swarz, 2003, p. 797).

I was also intrigued by metaphorical meanings implicit in the structure of the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, and i imagine the venue of my masked ball in a mirrored room. The Hall of Mirrors is a magnificent, long room with mirrors along one side, windows looking out onto terraces and gardens on the other, and chandeliers along the centre of the ceiling, creating a multiplicity of light and reflection. For me, this has connotations regarding identity which remind me of the backlit prisoners in the panopticon – in other words, one learns one’s role and becomes self-regulating. When you look at your illuminated reflection, you also see others promenading outside in the gardens and maybe who you think you are becomes intermeshed with the reflections of positionings and attendant roles you see illuminated all around you. It is interesting that the couple in the masked ball metaphor actually move into such a garden to become conscious – to examine who these controlling ‘others’ are and what they represent.

The ‘double helix’ staircase at Château Chambord in the Loire Valley provides a link between the double helix metaphor which was so significant for our past work, and the new masked ball metaphor. It engendered much thought for me as i wound my way up and down its circular form. I realised that, within the confines of this staircase, people can move up and down the steps within the same structure without ever really coming into contact with each other – like masked dancers, who touch and hold each other as they move through the proscribed steps together, yet make no important contact until they move onto the terrace, away from the restrictions of these patterns. In the five focus articles, such useful contact – that is, a relating to someone else from awareness of mutual social construction – is achieved through written communication and resonance which is enabled once the ‘masks’ of academic and student are removed.

Through the development of ideas as i have journeyed through these theoretical and metaphorical landscapes, i have come to realise that shiftings of binaries will play a

central part in my analysis of the five focus pieces. The metaphorical images i have found important – helical, mask, dance and mirror images, for example – may help me to focus on the relationships between the two parts of some of the significant binaries implicit in these articles (pairings like writer/reader, psycho/social and emotional/intellectual – all subsumed with the central subject/object dualism). This kind of approach may enable me to explore some of the ways in which these authors use language, and how their reflexive inclusion of personal stories within psychological articles works to reveal elements of power and positioning which resonated for me. The relationships between emotional tellings of personal stories and intellectual explorations around subject positionings seem to give shape to a promising environment in which new writer-reader connections are possible. The five writers and i were able to relate together within chorally supportive communities, spaces where i began to imagine new ways of considering my‘self’.

3. applications

...theory to practice...

My aim in this chapter is to shape an analytical approach to the focus articles which is woven in with meanings developed in my theoretical and metaphorical processes. As it is through their autobiographical stories that these writers succeeded in inviting me into a conversational, chorally supportive space, *narrative analysis* seems to be an appropriate method for carrying out my textual exploration. The practical specifics of this analysis need to emerge from a conceptualisation of narrative structure which is germane to my work here. After examining some common, established structural theories which have been used to conceptualise and approach human lives in storied terms, i decided that most of these are not appropriate here because they do not relate to meanings relevant to my theoretical and metaphorical developments; nor do they facilitate a focus on the two guiding key perspectives formulated during my theoretical journey. Most of these conventional approaches to narrative structure do not map onto the counter-practice evidenced in the five pieces of writing i am focussing on. Closer consideration of such structural theories in specific terms of the autobiographical vignettes may help me to clarify why most of them will not be useful for working toward deeper understandings around these linguistic constructions; it may also enable me to pick out some useful threads of meaning with which to fashion a tailored analytical approach. To avoid awkward repetition, i will omit the usual date reference for each citation in my discussions of the focus articles here and in the following analysis chapter.

Some structural theories are based on **lists of temporal features** included in narratives. For example, McAdams (1993) proposes that all life stories contain the elements of *setting, characters, initiating events, attempts, consequences, reactions* and *dénouements*, phases which are worked through repetitively in a lifespan, identity forming model. Labov (1977) proceeds through the stages of *abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution* and *coda*. Such temporal steps do not simplistically represent real lives like those examined in the focus vignettes, where these features are subsumed within and lose salience because of the significance of the socially constructed nature of human experiences as posited in my second key perspective. The plotlines of our personal stories are impinged on at all points by the central theme of the subject positionings we inhabit. Lives are not as directly linear as

this type of theory suggests...Instead, our experiences whirl us around in a complex interactional dance in which our steps are directed by pervasive music and our meanings constrained by our positionings as subjects.

Addressing the focus article by Mandy and Leigh in terms of McAdams' model demonstrates why this theoretical approach is not useful for understanding the counter-practice of this piece. McAdams' first few narrative structural elements can be usefully identified in Mandy's personal story; they introduce the reader to the basic situation from which this complex story emerges and develops. The *setting* is a contemporary New Zealand household; the main *characters* are Mandy, her son, her daughter and her daughter's father; the *initiating event* is a phone call from Australia from the father, who during his conversation with his daughter voices the supposition that Mandy's son recently left home because he was "kicked out" (p. 364). Mandy's daughter replies that she does not believe this was what happened, and afterward tells her mother about her father's comment.

It is at this point that McAdams' phases become difficult to pinpoint and ineffective for representing meanings in this story. There are no simple, direct *attempts*, *consequences* or *reactions*. There are instead – as discussed in the theoretical part of the article which is interwoven with this vignette – a number of ways to address the positions in which Mandy is placed, each of which will attract various responses from others and lead to certain consequences. Each structural element of this story hinges on the subject positionings occupied by the people involved, and it is from these positions that each will form their own interpretation of Mandy's son leaving home. Mandy and Leigh's theoretical discussion explicates how gendered power relations constrain these positions and associated interpersonal relations and interactions. Regardless of which version of the position of 'mother' is applied, the concept of a child being 'kicked out' is a negative one. And it is a discursively powerful image. Mandy's silences too – for example, to her daughter (whom she merely thanked for differing with her father) and to her daughter's father – can be interpreted in various ways. Above all, however, Mandy is aware that "...the subject positions resourced through discourses and narratives used to interpret my silence iterate historically and institutionally developed exclusions and marginalizations" (p. 372). Breaking silence through the counter-practice of this article not only affords recognition of the key perspective that subject positions are a constant

factor in all our interactions; it also provides a way to examine it through the recounting of personal experience. Conceptualising a story like Mandy's in terms of McAdams' model masks the constraining effects of subject positionings. In terms of the masked ball metaphor, though the dancers may move along in repetitive patterns which seem to lead smoothly from one to the next, in order to explore deeper meanings of the dance, it is necessary to listen to the overarching music which choreographs each step and position.

A second type of structural theory focuses on narrative **trajectories**. For example, Polkinghorne (1988) points out that Kenneth and Mary Gergen distinguish between narratives of *stability*, *progression* and *regression*. But such categorical choices seem too limited – too 'tidy' – to apply to these pieces of counter-practice, which capture so movingly all the 'messy' directions taken in real lives constituted through discourses of power. It is not relevant or useful to classify human experience in terms of one particular trajectory. The choices between them are relatively insignificant in view of the fact that all are complicit in the subject positionings which are central to autobiography and which are articulated through language.

Parker's vignettes around his experiences of trying to communicate in non-English speaking countries represent metaphorically the way the linguistic symbol system prevents such tidy trajectories through space. It may appear that "...another language is another symbol system. To be in another language is to be in a symbolic space, but space that feels buoyant enough to hold us as we float through it" (p. 304). In Parker's account of his presentation at the conference in Montenegro, however, this assumption is shown to be false, as his words struggle painfully along an ill-defined trajectory through a vague space fraught with difficulties. Parker explains how "Lacan's re-reading and re-writing of psychoanalysis...draws attention to the way language works as a symbolic system which seems to provide a communicational bridge to others but which [in fact] renders us helpless..." (p. 307). It is impossible to move directly or smoothly on a trajectory of stability, progression or regression. Because of our entanglements in the web of discourses in which our subject positionings are constituted, "...another language is system of signifiers on which we often hang helpless" (p. 305). Nor do the dancers at the masked ball move in any clear direction, but circle round and round, back and forth, directed by the 'language' of the music.

They are helpless to communicate meaningfully with their dance partners until they move out onto the terrace – into a different kind of space.

Another structural theory categorises narrative genres according to their **outcomes** or endings – for example, as *success*/'*happily-ever-after*' stories or *failure/tragedy* tales (Gergen, 1991). Such classifications may be useful to particular analyses, perhaps when examining the way in which a 'success' ending serves to justify a particular claim made in the present. For the purpose of this project, however, endings, even if they seem to include some move toward empowerment, always remains located within inescapable subject positionings, power structures and discursive/linguistic constraints that are reflexively included in the tellings. In the practice of the focus vignettes, the authors' reflexive recognition of their own subject positioning within particular narrative plots enable particular kinds of endings. The vignettes are fragments of stories, shreds of discourse within incoherent lives with no 'endings' or final resolutions as such. Each of these little discursive tales, however, represents a movement toward some understanding of the powerful cultural forces which position us in certain ways. In this way, each of these narratives reaches an outcome of increased consciousness.

Sarbin's focus piece exemplifies how this structural theory can be useful if applied in this very specific way. He eschews the mainstream perspective toward emotions – "the essentialist view of regarding emotions as thing-like entities" (p. 217). Sarbin's very different epistemological stance considers emotions to be "strips of social interactions...narrative plots" (p. 217). He explores emotions in terms of their bodily manifestations, here specifically examining crying as "a rhetorical expression of the embodiment of emotional life" (p. 217). Sarbin's personal stories support Bruner's (1986) recognition of the embeddedness of emotional responses within a "symbol system that constitutes culture" (p. 117). Sarbin's stories were particularly moving for me because he uses situations surrounding death – the ultimate 'ending' – to explore the act of crying. For example, he tells of the reaction of his mother at home with other mourners after her husband's funeral. Aghast at the arrival of a certain uncle known to be something of a joker, she admits that she has been hoping he was not coming because "I know he will make me laugh" (p. 219). She was aware that laughter is not culturally accepted behaviour for a grieving widow. In terms of the key perspective here around the pervasiveness of socially constructed subject positions, this little story ends

with a conscious recognition of a way in which a powerful cultural narrative positions us.

In another vignette, Sarbin describes how, when his wife died, he found himself crying and unable to carry on speaking normally when talking with friends about his deceased wife. However, significantly, he was able to carry on normal conversations with strangers. It was the positionings of the conversational partners – and the narratives in which they were involved together – that made the difference. For me, Sarbin's most moving story is about his friend Sandy, near death in hospital at the end of a long illness. At the bedside, as he began to say 'sholom' in a familiar recognition of their shared cultural backgrounds, Sarbin started to cry and have difficulty uttering this word. Sarbin analyses this occurrence as follows:

What narrative was I entering? The story was that of a valued friend who was dying. The experience of loss was overwhelming. The word "sholom" with all its religious and transcendental connotations facilitated my transfiguration from a hospital visitor to a participant in a farewell narrative. It was not the word as such but the narrative plot that called out the crying (p. 223).

It is irrelevant to categorise these deaths or the responses of crying which accompanied them, as either successful culminations or failures at the end of life. It is not endings themselves – here, represented by deaths – which Sarbin is examining, but rather the ways in which they fit into certain well-defined cultural narrative plots. Moreover, whether a person dies bravely or not, and whether their loved ones respond with courage or fall apart, is not the issue from a social constructionist perspective. It is more significant that these behaviours are part of a rhetorical repertoire not unlike that in which the masked dancers dress, move and converse in certain ways. We are very aware of the appropriate, accepted, even required behaviour in terms of the narrative plot in which we are positioned. I believe my own emotional responses to the focus pieces were partly a result of my awareness that their moving vignettes were *not* part of the usual narrative plot in which a student reads a psychology article. The incongruity of my deep personal engagement with these accounts signalled to me that i was a participant in an unexpected and different kind of narrative plot.

Emotion is not usefully isolated from the knowledge of the situation that arouses it.
Jerome Bruner, 1986, p. 117

To focus on the classification of life stories according to the success or failure represented by their endings is to miss deeper meanings around our positionings within personal narrative events. Taking either of the last two ‘categorising’ approaches to my narrative analyses – based on trajectory or outcome – would be tantamount to falling back into a dualistic-type trap which would limit me to making a simplistic choice and marginalising the more significant discursive relational events which enable and constrain our positions, our experiences and their meanings. It is possible to usefully classify these situated storied experiences as successes if they end in a movement toward consciousness of their embeddedness in powerful social structures.

Another approach to narrative focuses on an **epic hero** figure whose life traverses the temporal/spatial features which define the preceding structural theories (Gergen, 1991). While certainly both a traditional literary figure and also one embraced by the individualism of a humanistic paradigm, the epic hero is incongruous in a postmodern environment and does not fit within the social constructionist form i have fashioned here. Considering human lives in terms of subject positioning means eschewing the idea of such a heroic figure; we are not individuals in a humanistic sense, but rather culturally-inscribed beings best indicated by a small ‘i’. However, although we exist within the chains of an already-existing sign system and the systems and codes embedded in dominant discourses are inescapable, there is a space for some awareness – for movement from unconsciousness to consciousness. The masked ball metaphor encompasses this potential: although the social world of the dance – the music, the steps of the dances, the other dancers, the masks, the reflections, the style of clothing and the mannered chat – merges with the bodies of iridescent dancers, there is a space for unmasking in the fresh air of the terrace. Here, some awareness may become possible through a different kind of communication.

In their focus article, Davies and Harré recognise the effects of constraining subject positions through challenging the notion of a heroic figure. These authors use an argument they had while at a conference as an exemplary vignette. Interestingly, the ‘characters’ in this story are given the pseudonyms of *Sano* and *Enfermada*, a stylistic

device which initially puzzled me. After deeper consideration of the ideas examined here, however, i believe that this renaming was a quite deliberate emphasis of the positions of *health* and *sickness* so simplistically assigned by Sano, the would-be hero of this tale. The use of pseudonyms here functions to facilitate a reflexive stepping back to examine oneself in terms of subject positioning, offering possibilities for questioning and challenging these positions.

The event which sets off the dispute is simple enough. The two have been unsuccessfully searching, in a wintry foreign city, for a chemist shop in order to purchase medicine for Enfermada, who is ill. They finally decide to turn back, Sano apologising to Enfermada that he had ‘dragged’ her out in her state. Enfermada objects strongly to this, responding, “You didn’t drag me, I chose to come” (p. 55). A heated discussion ensues which involves mutual offence; Enfermada reacting from within a feminist narrative and Sano from one of social responsibility for someone who is sick. Each inhabits a different position with different moral rights and responsibilities. Enfermada points out that, from her feminist perspective, Sano’s statement positions her as a helpless female. Sano insists that his attitude was merely that of a healthy person toward one who is ill. As the argument continues, Sano comments that Enfermada, like other feminists, has responded in an extreme way to a minor issue, thus potentially discouraging feminist sympathies in others. Enfermada is even more upset at this account, seeing it as one that identifies her as “trivialised and silly” (p. 56).

This story is not only an apt example of the ways in which subject positionings are played out during a specific interactive event; it also demonstrates how the positioning concept can be used to effectively enable spaces for questioning. Sano’s comment that initiates the conversation provides an opportunity for working through issues around positioning. Enfermada’s resistance of the position offered by Sano opens a space of possibilities for change. The authors’ reflexive dialogue emerges from their locations within certain positions; their argument points out implications of subject positionings for understanding and communicating with one another. It seems significant that, though the authors are psychologists working together and presumably holding similar professional interests and investments, such commonalities take second place when stereotypical gender identity positioning arises. This underlines the power of gender discourses in shaping our ideas of our’selves’. The significance of gender for my own

identity was revealed during my re-evaluation of past experiences which were called up for me by the story of Sano and Enfermada.

Davies and Harré use another example in which children's responses to a feminist fairy tale point to the major repositioning work necessary to dislodge dominant discourses. *The Paper Bag Princess* often fails to convincingly establish the heroic identity of the princess for children already caught up in cultural narratives around helpless, dependent women. Like the story of Sano and Enfermada, *The Paper Bag Princess* takes apart the notion of a 'hero' who assumes responsibility for a 'helpless' sick person or saves princesses from dragons, showing how these are positions generated by certain cultural narratives. Davies and Harré support my perspective that a consistent feature within a life narrative is subject positioning. These authors reflexively demonstrate through two apt examples the major effort needed to disrupt the discourses that inform subject positions which we inhabit. Their personal story also embodies the very ways in which spaces for questioning can be linguistically created and utilised, making possible empowering movements from unconsciousness toward consciousness.

An approach to narrative structure which may be usefully applied to the five focus pieces, and which may help me to work in a transformational space, is Kermode's (1980) **sjuzet/fabula** distinction. Bruner (1986) succinctly explicates these elements, stating that *sjuzet* refers to the temporal events of the story's plot, while *fabula* refers to a broader, "timeless, underlying theme" (p. 7). Bruner asserts that "the power of great stories is in the dialectical interaction they establish between the two" (p. 7). The *sjuzet/fabula* relationship may be usefully applied to my analyses, paralleling and providing a way to address the personal/cultural and emotional/intellectual binaries present in each of the five pieces. Each of the narrative vignettes takes the form of an autobiographical story (the *sjuzet*) which emotionally touched me and inspired resonances with and re-examinations of my own experiences, then also facilitated my engagement with the intellectual content in each article which addressed more general social discourses of power (the *fabula*). Smith (1980) suggests other ways to consider the *sjuzet/fabula* dualism – for example, as *surface manifestation/deep structure* or *signifier/signified*. I believe it is also valid to re-conceptualise them as *narrative/discourse* since the stories of personal experience included in the focus pieces

are used as a way to access and talk about the meanings constituting powerful discourses of subject positioning.

The relevance of the sjuzet/fabula structural approach for my analyses of these narratives is supported by Freeman's focus piece. Freeman's account of his personal experience in Berlin is the sjuzet; the fabula illuminated by this story is the way in which the narrative unconscious colours our experiences. Our lives as human beings are indelibly stamped by the meanings given by our cultures. We are iridescent dancers who move through our lives reflecting the colours and meanings constructed by our social worlds.

...my own "auto-biography" is much less about myself, about the vagaries and idiosyncrasies of my personal experiences, than it is about my world, my existence as a social and cultural subject.

Mark Freeman, 2002, p. 200

Like Davies and Harré, Freeman suggests that it is possible to bring the narrative unconscious into consciousness by addressing memory in a different way. He believes we must look at the wider cultural history in which we are constituted as a way of "discerning...the multiple sources...that give rise to the self" (p. 209). As I have already stated, Mandy Morgan (2002) recommends achieving this specifically through identifications of subject positionings we have inhabited when we re-consider memories of past experiences. I hope that my attempts to achieve such recognitions in my analyses of my own memories will help me to unpick the intricate threads of sjuzet and fabula; as Freeman (2002) says, "...narrative, rather than being imposed on life from without, is woven into the very fabric of experience" (p. 209).

Approaching the narratives in the focus articles in terms of the sjuzet/fabula relationship seems to offer a useful way to move beyond more simplistic, linear structural models. Considering my own memories in terms of subject positioning increased my awareness of the intertwining of my life with my social world; this in turn led to deeper appreciation of the discussions in these articles around the power of cultural narratives in our lives. But it was my emotional engagement with the personal vignettes which made me receptive to resonances with my past experiences, and it is these responses I need to investigate first. How were these writers able to speak to me in such a moving way? Certainly their use of stories was appealing to me. And the courage involved in

their disclosures inspired admiration for these authors. But in order to explore their important effects on my understanding of my 'self' i will need to look at the linguistic strands used to weave these tales, putting into analytical practice my recognition of the significance of language and discourse. Moving more deeply into the vignettes to explore their effects on me means examining how these accounts were constructed through language.

Focusing on the linguistic components involved in these pieces of writing brings my endeavour in step with the ideas of Russian Formalism. While concerned with the same close textual examination as New Criticism, Russian Formalism developed in different directions from Anglo-American Formalism (Davis & Womack, 2002; Wittig, 1992). Russian Formalists were interested in *literaturnost* – the 'literariness' of writing, and in exploring the signs and signifiers which make some writing particularly engaging for the reader. Because of their artistic use of language, certain pieces of writing "provide avenues of fresh perception that allow us to recognize new dimensions of reality" (Davis & Womack, 2002, p. 41). This description aptly articulates my experiences of interacting with the five focus pieces.

Russian Formalists were interested in the 'taken-for-granted' nature of language. Wittig (1992) explains Shklovsky's formalist belief that "the task of a writer is to re-create the first powerful vision of things – as opposed to their daily recognition" (p. 72). In just this way, the stories in the five articles enabled me to see my past in a new, fresh way – peeling back the years of cultural assumptions and constraining positionings which have influenced my understandings of particular events. My engagement with these pieces and the re-visions it fostered underline the interdependent nature of writer-reader relationships. Barthes (1974) states that "...only what is authentically writerly can *become* readerly" (p. xi). This idea augments my theoretical development around the complex interactions of writer, text and reader, suggesting that certain 'writerly' strategies enable 'readerly' responses and the nurturing of chorally supportive interpretive communities which feel relational in the way i described in my first key perspective.

Davis and Womack (2002) explore Russian Formalist Mikhail Bakhtin's approach to textual communication, describing a perspective which maps onto my theoretical and

metaphorical work regarding the five pieces and may provide an avenue for understanding this effective writing. Working from the basic assumptions of Saussurean linguistics, Bakhtin shaped four key theoretical concepts which are relevant to my undertaking here. The concept of *chronotope* ('time space') parallels the importance of social constructionist contextuality to my understandings around my own personal narrative, psychology's ongoing development and the focus stories. It reiterates the significance of Bourdieu's key concept of *field* and supports the location of my masked ball metaphor in a very specific time, place and social stratum.

Bakhtin's *dialogism* is distinguished from *monologism*; while a monologic text reflects only the dominant discourse, a piece of dialogic writing invites the reader to listen to other voices and consider other viewpoints. This description of dialogism can be applied to the counter-practice of the five pieces, in which power and subject positioning are examined and spaces for alternative choices are opened. The Bakhtinian notion of *carnival* recognises the joyfulness of the empowerment made possible by dialogic texts which listen to the voices of ordinary people. Carnival valorises lived experiences and new forms of communication and "celebrates temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order...suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Davis & Womack, 2002, p. 48).

Bakhtin is aware that such celebratory pieces of writing are created through metaphorical choices made within the situation of *heteroglossia* – the vast array of words (signs) available to us, with their multitudes of meanings and interpretations. This choice is always pre-eminently social – it is necessarily made from our own cultural location (Davis & Womack, 2002). In this recognition of the sociolinguistic nature of meaning and reality, Bakhtin blends discursive form and content; that is, it is the sociolinguistic choices which a writer makes which are at the heart of the form, but which also tie it to the content.

Trying to pin down how the writing in the focus narratives worked effectively for me from a Bakhtinian perspective will involve identifying specific linguistic choices which moved me. Bruner (1986) describes language use which transforms narrative "into powerful and haunting stories...In the *telling* there must be "triggers" that release responses in the reader's mind" (p. 19). Clearly, it was such 'triggers' in these stories

which resonated for me and led to my explorations of memories and my re-articulation of them in terms of fabula. Genette (1980) describes Proust's belief that an effective piece of writing functions as "an optical instrument the author offers the reader to help him read within himself...In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self" (p. 261). Iser (1978) suggests how the process of writerly narrative becoming readerly may facilitate understandings around what happens in the space of fusion between writer and reader; his explanation also suggests a way to begin to disrupt the subject/object binary central to this thesis:

...for a brief period at least, the real world becomes observable...image-building eliminates the subject-object division essential for all perception, so that when we 'awaken' to the real world, this division seems all the more accentuated. Suddenly we find ourselves detached from our world, to which we are inextricably tied, and able to perceive it as an object. And even if this detachment is only momentary, it may enable us to apply the knowledge we have gained by figuring out the multiple references of the linguistic signs, so that we can view our own world as a thing "freshly understood" (p. 140).

Iser's account enables me to usefully extend my ideas around Maton's (2003) work in practical directions. In my commentary on Maton's theory, i posited that a kind of Bourdieuean epistemic reflexivity was practiced by the focus authors. I explained that it was through the chorally supportive environments shaped by their practice that memories were called up for me. And it was through my re-examinations of past experiences that the subject/object binary was disrupted as i came to knowledge around the power relationships between myself as subject and the objects in the world. Iser's ideas enable me to go a step further, specifying the linguistic practice – *image-building* – through which such writerly, chorally supportive spaces were formed; they also support an analytical approach which identifies and explores linguistic usages which engaged me – both with this writing and also in a process of forming some different images of myself.

Through these linguistic choices, metaphor is involved in the development of new meanings stemming from engagement with writerly stories. A writer's decision to use a particular signifier to substitute for or 'stand for' something is a metaphoric choice.

According to Bruner (1986), a narrative can function through such choices as a “text whose intention is to initiate and guide a search for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings” (p. 25). Indeed, Sarup (1992) declares that “for Lacan, all uses of the word are metaphoric” (p. 52). Through writerly metaphoric language use, the focus stories became readerly. Spaces to develop new meanings were given to me through carnivalian counter-practices, so that in an intricate blending of writer, text and reader, i became the producer of new textual meanings.

...the goal of literary work...is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.

Roland Barthes, 1974, p. 4

Some of the effective metaphorical language i observe in my analysis may be identifiable as particular structural linguistic usage. Bruner (1986) describes how readers can become producers of narrative when writers use certain speech acts through which they “recruit the reader’s imagination” (p. 25). For example, by assuming the understanding of the reader – *presupposition* – meanings become implicit rather than explicit, giving the reader more “interpretive freedom” (p. 25). Writers can also challenge the taken-for-granted nature of language by using the element of *surprise* to oblige the reader to question presuppositions. Eschewing the assumption of universal truths, a writer can use *subjectification* to describe events through the eyes of one character or *multiple perspective* to articulate a number of viewpoints. Like Bakhtin’s dialogic narrative, which recognises and celebrates a heteroglossial potential, multiple perspective fosters the reader’s formulation of her own view as it presents the world “through a set of prisms each of which catches some part of it” (p. 26).

The social constructionist contextuality central to narrative – its location in a Bakhtinian chronotope of time and place – can be shaped by an author to engage a writer’s interest and imagination. Genette (1980) points out the significance of the temporal difference between the *story* being told and the *narrative* through which it is related. The gap between these – *anachrony* – is of great interest to formalists; it can be addressed by using *analepsis* (recounting past events) or *prolepsis* (relating something which will happen later). Another possibility is *ellipsis*, in which there is a sudden leap forward in time. Particular events can be repeated several times (an *iterative* usage) or occur just once (a *singulative* occurrence). In either case, it may be valuable for my

analysis to consider these narrative events in terms of the iterative concept mentioned in my theoretical discussion around subject positioning. It could be useful to ask what cultural discourses are articulated through each experience which is recounted, and what subject positionings are inhabited as personal stories intertwine with cultural narratives. Genette (1980) points out that, in terms of the spatial context of narrative, an author can choose to provide very little detail or a wealth of detail; this choice will help to determine whether the reader is kept at a distance or brought close to the events of the story. The feeling of place thus created – the mood fashioned – can evoke certain feelings and memories for the reader. All of these temporal and spatial structural techniques invite the reader to become engaged with a story that is interesting, vivid and full of life.

Through a twisting together of threads of the *sjuzet/fabula* binary, a Lacanian conception of metaphor and Russian Formalism, i have developed an analytical approach to the focus articles which fits with my theoretical developments. Working in terms of a *sjuzet/fabula* narrative structure is appropriate to social constructionist conceptualisations around the embeddedness of human lives within cultural narratives. Lacan's idea that all language use is powerfully metaphorical provides a way to understand how the focus stories are told so that particular meanings are set within larger narratives by which they are informed. Russian Formalism provides some specific ways to examine the metaphors and images which not only engaged me emotionally but also called up memories of personal experiences which i was then able to reshape in terms of subject positioning. Moulding my analyses around my emotional responses to the focus narratives affirms my belief in the importance of *experience* to which my theoretical journey brought me. I will explore how particular segments of writing worked to speak to me and move me. As i work through my analyses, i will try to adhere to my ethical principles by remaining aware that my findings emerge from my own subjective experiences, and may be different from those of other readers. Resisting the temptation to offer definitive answers or identify universal truths will also help me maintain my ontological perspective. I am intent on reflexively moving through the analytical process. While i have formulated research questions which seem to use my theoretical and metaphorical developments to explore narrative structure, i will consider and address any further questions which may emerge during this analytical work.

An important aim of my thesis practice has been to nurture a feeling of a multiplicity within ongoing processes. I imagine this work as a circular weaving together of emotional responses and theoretical ideas that work with relationships between the stories around which this work coheres – my own life story, the developmental narrative of the discipline of psychology and the autobiographical vignettes in the focus articles. In my analyses I have been concerned to merge theory and practice by mingling my subjective engagement explicitly and implicitly with my reading of theoretical and metaphorical developments. I have also tried, through discussions around the five articles at various points throughout the text, to affect a gradual gathering of interpretation around the focus vignettes; hopefully, this process has enabled enough familiarity with these stories to ensure that the analyses are intelligible.

I have designed research questions which i hope will help me reflexively articulate the connections between writerly use of linguistic/discursive resources and readerly emotional and intellectual responses. At this point, i have developed two groups of research questions. The first questions focus on specific metaphorical choices through which the writers fashioned chorally supportive spaces. How were metaphors, images and other linguistic techniques used as structural elements in the vignettes to evoke my emotional responses? How might different linguistic choices have affected the impact of the stories, my engagement with them and the kind of writer-reader relationship nurtured? The second group of questions is directed toward transformations in personal meanings. Which memories resonated for me as a result of this effective writing? How was i able to re-examine and re-shape events in my past?

My analysis of the vignettes in the five focus pieces will proceed in an order which moves from broader, more general issues to issues which are more particular, emotional, personal and central to my own socially-constructed identity. This rationale also means i can begin with the article by Freeman which was the first one i encountered, thus paralleling my thesis experience. Freeman's piece addresses the idea of cultural history, positing that its texts and experiential 'textures' are an unconscious part of autobiographical memory. Next i will analyse the piece by Parker, which moves into a more specific area of cultural discourses in its exploration of language and communication barriers. Parker examines how psychoanalytic discourse constitutes our "reflection, understanding and experience of culture and identity" (p. 30) through the

example of the signifying system of language. Moving on to next analyse Sarbin's work marks a move into a more emotional area. Sarbin provides an alternative to essentialist theories of emotion, using crying as an example of a form of social interaction embedded within narrative plots. The work by Davies and Harré explores the area of subject positioning and identity through its analysis of a heated argument involving gender. Finally, the piece by Mandy and Leigh extends these ideas around subject positioning and conversation to intimately and movingly explore the idea of silence as a kind of speech act within power relationships.

analyses: circling back to stories

...recounting my interpretations...

Mark Freeman

My approach to Freeman's article was different from the way i came to the other four focus pieces because i had *already experienced* the event in Pontorson and was prepared to read about a similar incident. The other four articles resonated for me in a different way, *calling up* memories of past personal experiences. However, though Mandy had told me that Freeman discusses here an autobiographical incident similar to mine, i was not prepared for the intensity of my response to the moving reflexivity of his writing. It was this deep engagement with Freeman's article, followed by my encounters with the other four pieces, that led to my choice of thesis topic. As a part of maintaining the reflexive stance so central to this work by letting my emotional responses to Freeman's and the other authors' writing guide the process, i will begin each analysis by considering the passages which most immediately and deeply spoke to and affected me the first time i read each piece of writing. I have italicised words that functioned as 'triggers', sparking my engagement with the writing and facilitating my shaping of particular meanings.

Freeman uses language skilfully to describe his momentous experience in Berlin and his response to it. He introduces the event by explaining that, following some fairly ordinary touring around Berlin, albeit accompanied by awareness of the city's horror-filled past, "something strange, and *utterly* unexpected, happened" (p. 197). The monuments and other sights of the city became "a kind of living, breathing *presence*" (p. 197). He felt an "emotional *outpouring*" (p. 200) during which he "was either *weeping* or on the verge of it for a good amount of time afterward" (p. 197).

The signifiers chosen by Freeman from the available heteroglossia exemplify the power of metaphor as conceptualised by Lacan (Sarup, 1992). They colour his narrative in particular ways, suggesting subtle connotations and nuances of meaning; they provide ways for me to articulate my own story. I do not believe that other words with similar meanings would have worked as effectively for Freeman or for me. For example, words like *completely*, *wholly* or *totally* lack the intensity of *utterly*, which vividly conveys the sense of something absolutely unforeseen. Freeman's experience, like mine, marked a

starkly astonishing change from the situation immediately before the event occurred. For me, there is also a subtle association with the verb *utter*, evoking the difficulties involved in speaking of this ineffable event.

The description of the sights of the city as a *presence* is very evocative. The opposite of *absence*, it strikingly describes Freeman's changed perception of Berlin, as history and memories came alive for him. The image of a *presence* also suggests a *spirit*, *ghost* or *manifestation* and presages the esoteric possibility considered by Freeman – the idea that certain sites may be imbued with perceptible “traces” (p. 197) of past traumatic events. The term *presence* also highlights for me the significance of the sudden change experienced by Freeman – from the *past* of just moments ago to a very different *present* in which he is immersed in this intense experience.

The use of *outpouring* aptly demonstrates the value of the water metaphor. This signifier seems to work better than, for example, *gushing* or *flowing* because of its suggestion of the emptying of a vessel; it invokes for me the pouring away of preconceptions as new awarenesses take their place. *Weeping* works well here to depict Freeman's emotional upheaval. It is more appropriate than the more general *crying* that can describe either emotional or physical suffering. *Weeping* may also avoid the arguably more vocal or even somewhat gushy connotations attached to *sobbing*, a behaviour that evokes a more convulsive action. I imagine Freeman weeping silently, overwhelmed by the unexpected power and depth of his emotional response. There are also associations with weeping willows, symbolic of sorrow and lament.

Freeman's metaphorical use of language in a Lacanian sense engaged and moved me. He chose words that aptly articulate his attempt to evoke and make sense of an extraordinary experience. Freeman's writerly telling of his story about his experience in Berlin reinforced the intensity of my own experience at Pontorson and reminded me of the strength of its ongoing effect on me. It made me want to read on through this article, searching for ways to consider Freeman's experience as well as my own. And it validated the importance of my experience, helping me find the courage to disclose my feelings and interpretations around its meanings as i moved toward deeper consciousness of the part played by cultural narratives in my own autobiographical stories.

The subtle shades of meaning in Freeman's imagery rippled between him as a writer and me as a reader in a gentle, chorally supportive way that confirmed my key theoretical perspective around the potentials for close, relational writer-reader communications. Form and content merged as Freeman's reflexivity and his writerly metaphorical choices worked together to engage my imagination and enable me to apply particular connotations, fashioning interpretations which guided me toward deeper considerations of my own experience at Pontorson. A valuable writer-reader relationship was formed which enabled me, in Genette's (1980) terms, to become a co-producer rather than merely a consumer of this text.

The effectiveness of this text for me is also fostered by the use of metaphor in another way. The *presence* metaphor not only informs Freeman's suddenly transformed perception of Berlin – it is also central to my theoretical interpretation of issues raised here. Freeman's experience is imbued with the metaphorical image of an ineffable *presence* – an 'other' which he struggles to identify and understand and for which he even contemplates a mystical explanation. Freeman says that "everything that I suddenly found menacing or sorrowful was wholly Other, wholly outside of me" (p. 197). His experience brings this other into sharper focus for him: "...it was as if everything that had been at a distance had suddenly come near" (p. 197). Freeman's metaphorical use of the *presence* image enables him – and also me, as his reader – to feel fleetingly "detached from our world, to which we are inextricably tied, and able to perceive it as an object" (Iser, 1978, p. 140), a space of opportunity also opened for the pair of dancers who stand aside from the metaphorical masked ball, perceiving it in a new way as they stand together in the fresh air of the terrace. Freeman disrupts the subject/object binary, finding a way to move inside this dualism, where he can consider new meanings of the relationship between himself as a socially constructed, positioned subject and all the historical, cultural objects associated with the city of Berlin. Through the "sudden transformation...from *monument* to *memory*" (p. 197) that is at the heart of his *sjuzet*, Freeman illuminates something important about the fabula in which it is embedded - the power of unconscious cultural narratives and the control they have over our interpretations of our experiences and the meanings of our memories. The *presence* image becomes a metaphor not only for the monuments of Berlin, but more deeply for the power structures which constrain us in certain subject positions. Freeman is not so

much *bending* over weeping as being *pushed* by these powerful cultural stories in which we have our being.

Through this involvement with the subject/object binary, the *presence* metaphor intermingled with my theoretical work around reflexivity to usher me into a location where i was able to fashion some useful interpretations around my own socially constructed identity. In terms of my reconceptualisation of Maton's (2003) representation of Bourdieu's epistemic reflexivity, writer/reader fusion developed as Freeman and i worked together as knowers to reflexively consider our experiences. As subjects, we were able to form new objectifying relations with particular objects; we moved into different positions from which we were able to form knowledge claims around our embeddedness in certain social discourses. As a result of my interaction with Freeman's text, my experience in Pontorson and the story (the *sjuzet*) i have fashioned around it hold new meanings for me. I can now articulate that the moving sound of the singing reaching me from inside the church brought these human voices into sharper focus for me in the same way that Berlin's monuments became a *presence* for Freeman, letting them stand aside from the institution of religion. I am now able to understand the apparent contradiction of my emotional response in view of my non-religious stance. For a long time, i have smugly believed that i had recognised and refused subject positions offered by organised religion. I now realise that religion had nevertheless been insidiously exerting power over me – subjectifying me - through the paradox of my inclusion of churchgoers in religious discourse. My total rejection of religion had extended to the very human beings who i feel have been victimised by and suffered at the hands of this powerful discourse – the overarching fabula of this particular cultural narrative - down through history.

My irreligious stance has meant that i have located myself in a position of superiority over people who, as i perceived it, followed religious rites and rituals in a sheep-like way. Now i accept that i am not so different from them. I have had to relocate myself alongside the rest of humanity, admitting that i am just as bewildered about my place in the world as they are, only finding other ways of living with my uncertainties. Recognising how mechanisms of religious discourse have been controlling me means that i can maintain my knowledge claims around religion while refusing to let this attitude seep into my feelings for people who subscribe to it. I realise now that the

aching compassion i felt as i stood outside the old stone church was for myself as much as for the people inside; it marked my acceptance of our common humanity and represents not only a transformation in my consciousness, but also an ethical move toward greater humility.

Looking back at the introductory chapter of this thesis as i wrote the last two paragraphs, i found it interesting that areas i identified as meaningful parts of my own life process – art, music and France – are all involved in my little vignette. Freeman’s use of metaphor to emotionally and reflexively recount his experience in Berlin has facilitated the integration of my own experience in Pontorson into my life story, incorporating these areas which are valuable to me into the fashioning of new interpretations. I feel i have stepped onto a new path leading toward deeper awareness of my location as a positioned subject. I am also feeling, as i read over these last two paragraphs, some of the uneasiness associated with disclosure recognised by Freeman. I am uncomfortable confessing to such arrogance – both in my attitude toward other people and in my claims around my new humility. I recognise that it is important for me to remember that my life remains constrained within deeply embedded cultural narratives which may make it difficult to re-tell my stories in more ethical ways. It will no doubt be an ongoing struggle to keep in mind meanings contained in the modest little ‘i’ as i try to re-form myself into a more humble person.

My deep involvement with this writerly metaphorical text and the transformation of meanings it led to were also facilitated by the workings of some formal linguistic elements. *Presupposition* played an important part in making this writing readerly for me. To introduce his standout event in Berlin, Freeman need say nothing more than that he was on a bus trip around the city, viewing some of the important monuments and gardens. I am part of an interpretive community which is very aware of the horrors of World War II, Nazism and the holocaust. My understandings are informed by particular socially constructed interpretations – a narrative unconscious which determines meanings. Freeman only needs to briefly sketch in an account of the bus trip through Berlin and provide a general idea of the sights he saw. He can downplay aspects of linear plot and concentrate on imagery which works in a Lacanian metaphorical sense to construct an effective narrative. His account of Berlin enables him to both “fill it with gaps [and also] render that world newly strange” (Bruner, 1986, p. 24); it enabled me to

use my imagination to “re-create the first powerful vision” (Wittig, 1992, p. 72) of Hitler’s Berlin. Freeman’s linguistic choices facilitated a writer/reader co-production; as my imagination was fired, i became the “writer of a virtual text in response to the actual” (Bruner, 1986, p. 24).

In terms of the structural element of *temporality*, Freeman (and the other focus authors) approached *anachrony* – the distinction between the *story* and the *narrative* which relates it – through *analepsis*. The analeptic recounting of past events is of necessity the strategy that enables these authors to work with their emotional, autobiographical *sjuzet* that form the basis of their more academic discussions of *fabula* cohering around socially constructed power structures and subject positioning. Freeman’s personal experience functions as a *singulative* event – it is a one-off experience, signalling its significance for both Freeman and me. The short, stark sentence which introduces the event achieved the element of *surprise* for me, interrupting the normal flow of writing and preparing me for something out of the ordinary: “But then something strange, and utterly unexpected, happened” (p. 197). This sentence functioned as a stylistic marker that engaged my curiosity as it clearly gave notice that what was about to happen was in direct contrast to Freeman’s normal sightseeing as a tourist up to that point. Though clearly the sights of Berlin embodied reminders of the horrors of the city’s past, despite his own – albeit somewhat nominal – Jewish identity, Freeman’s reactions up to this point had been “somewhat distanced...blunted and rather generic” (p. 197). In the same way, my sudden experience in Pontorson, sparked off by the sound of voices singing inside the church, was in stark contrast to all the events leading up to it, as i wandered around the town, fascinated by the historic sights, but certainly not moved by them as i was by the haunting voices inside the Église Notre Dame.

Freeman uses another very short sentence to conclude his moving description of the experience: “It was extremely disturbing” (p. 197). This simple statement seems to convey Freeman’s difficulty in explaining the depth and intensity of his emotional response, which was “something like a deep grief, a mixture of sorrow and horror, all rolled into one” (p. 197). The juxtaposition of the struggle to articulate his feelings and the simple, short statement resonated very strongly for me. Though the emotions i felt were different from Freeman’s, they were, like his, a mixture – for me, feelings like compassion, empathy and humility; it was an indefinable response which has indeed

been hard for me to pin down using the elusive and slippery sign system of language. In the email i sent to Mandy when i returned from France, i groped for words to convey what my experience had been like for me, using words like ‘strange’, ‘wonderful’ and ‘moving’ in my attempt to describe it.

Contrast is also an important feature in Freeman’s use of binary as metaphor. The contrast between a sudden *presence* filling a space of *absence*, the fresh understandings facilitated around the relationships between *subject* and *object*, the move from *unconsciousness* of the significance of cultural narratives toward *consciousness* of their power and control over us and finally, the fact that all of this is felt by both *writer* and *reader* – all of these binaric contrasts help Freeman to reflexively shape an image of a communally transforming experience.

Freeman’s writing practice is characterised by a frank, conversational *style* which nurtures the writer-reader relational space of the piece. This tone achieves the rhetorical purpose of painting him as a credible person trying to make sense of a unique event. Freeman shared with me his search for some explanation or interpretation for his experience, openly admitting that nothing like this had happened to him before and that it was difficult to know what to make of it. This stance distinguishes Freeman from objective, ‘expert’ writers working within a mainstream, empiricist psychological paradigm; it brings the real person back to psychology. Before describing his encounter with the *presence* of the ‘other’, Freeman foreshadows this startling incident, admitting that, “to be honest, I still don’t know quite how to make sense of it” (p. 197). Regarding his intensely emotional response, he hastens to tell us that “generally speaking, I am not given to this sort of thing” (p. 197). While eschewing a positivist perspective by addressing a personal experience, Freeman at the same time openly and reflexively shares his concern that his readers may interpret his unusual and powerful perception of Berlin as somewhat fanciful and incredible. Freeman’s autobiographical story becomes all the more believable as a result of his own candid recognition that it may not be. I remember feeling slightly uneasy while relating my own Pontorson story to others; like Freeman, i tried to validate this personal experience by emphasising my awareness of its puzzling and singular features.

Freeman speaks as openly about his considerations around an arcane explanation, using a confiding, almost confessional tone: “I have to admit that my first impulse led me down an almost mystical path” (p.197). Although acknowledging the ‘oddness’ of the idea, he discloses that he “couldn’t help but wonder whether it was possible for the events of the past – terrible ones, in particular – to somehow leave traces” (p. 197). Presupposition is again involved in his likening of his Berlin vignette to the stories of houses haunted by spirits from the past, a simile that works because his readers are part of the same interpretive community – most of us have read books or seen films presenting this scenario.

Freeman reflexively acknowledges the vulnerable position in which he places himself through such open self-disclosure: “...engaging in this sort of proto-analytic autobiographical venture is very risky” (p. 197). Not only is his sharing of deeply personal feelings and ideas courageous – “More than this...the venture is risky because it is filled with speculations – that is, with interpretive hypotheses” (pp.199-200). Freeman’s own interpretations of his experience form the basis of this article, so the point of view here can be identified as *subjectification*. In a paradoxical way, though, since Freeman shares with us a number of possible explanations that he considered, his self-questioning becomes a form of *multiple perspective*. In Bakhtinian terms, Freeman’s open consideration of a number of explanations means he moves away from the *monologism* of taking a single explanatory path to embrace a type of *dialogism* as he openly considers and discusses with his reader various ideas, even unconventional, mystical ones. Unlike a mainstream psychological researcher who takes an empirical, scientific stance, Freeman’s social constructionist perspective encourages him to consider a number of possibilities emerging from the cultural interactions of people and the meanings their experiences have for them. This ethical approach freed me from constraints of accepting a particular, proscribed perspective as the only valid path toward the ‘truth’ of what happened to him – or to me.

Freeman refuses to make claims that he has reached any final ‘truth’ through his deliberations; he has merely considered and discussed ideas and suggested interesting and useful interpretations around the narrative unconscious. Any ‘concluding’ statements he makes are couched in the uncertain terms of postmodernity: “What makes this particular autobiographical endeavour so risky is the suddenness of the experience

under examination and the opaqueness that surrounds it, even now” (p. 200). With regard to an arcane interpretation, he admits, “I still wonder whether this is possible” (p. 198). This is wonderfully refreshing writing which refuses to be pulled into a safe, positivist space; it invites me to respond not merely as a student, but as a human being. I have felt safe enough in this supportive space to widen the perspective of my own thinking, value my subjective interpretations and find the courage to disclose some changes in my meanings. Working toward the same ethical approach taken by Freeman, i am trying to emphasise throughout this work that my analyses of the focus pieces and of my own memories have developed from subjective ideas emerging from my personal experiences. Other readers of Freeman’s text may fashion quite different meanings as they interpret their own memories and re-tell their own stories alongside Freeman’s vignette.

This piece of writing is an endeavour imbued with humanity. Freeman tells an emotional story about an event in his life in a very ‘human’ way, speaking to his reader as a real person. He then uses his vignette as the starting point for an intellectual exercise which tries to come to some understandings about humanity in general. Freeman’s story helped me to realise that the trigger of the music and singing drifting out also spoke to me as a human being. Just as the two dancers at the metaphorical masked ball moved away from the dance floor in order to unmask, i was able to remove my own mask of superiority and recognise the unethical stance i had been taking, finding a new way to consider religious discourse without casting out real people. Freeman did not believe that his reaction to the incident in Berlin was primarily that of a Jew toward the suffering of fellow Jews. Like me, he suspected that his emotional response was fundamentally about “the plight of humanity, forever at odds with itself...My own gut feeling at the time, in fact, was that humanity *was* the primary category” (p. 200). As my second key perspective posits, the control exerted on us by our social construction – the cultural narratives in which our own stories are told – is a significant part of our human situation. The counter-practice of pieces of writing like Freeman’s can help us critically reflect on our memories, construct alternative meanings for our experiences and perhaps move in fresh directions toward different positions alongside others.

Ian Parker

Ian Parker extends Freeman's discussion around cultural narratives, examining how the language through which they are articulated informs discourses which construct us, forming our sense of self and controlling us as subjects. The conceptualisation of language at the heart of this ubiquitous fabula can be likened to the music at the masked ball. In my dream in which this metaphor came to me, i perceived that music was 'behind everything else' – directing the steps the dancers took, the patterns they followed and their interactions with others. In his vignette on language, Parker recounts personal experiences of trying to communicate in foreign languages which illustrate five important aspects of the workings of language in Lacanian psychoanalytical terms. He explains that Lacan's conceptualisation of metaphor surfaces from his position that language is central to the emergence and workings of our consciousness and unconsciousness. Our psyches have less to do with intrinsic inner states than with social discourses which construct us through language in the Lacanian *Symbolic* order.

The metaphorical linguistic uses which most engaged me and resonated emotionally for me are closely intertwined with memories of incidents during my various trips to France, where the need to communicate in French largely determined the flavour of my experiences and my feelings about myself. While certainly not fluent in the French language, i have a sound vocabulary and speak French with a good accent, though my understanding of spoken French is far inferior to my comprehension of written French. My experiences with the French language, like Parker's memories described in this piece, range between "nice...bad" (p. 305) and "typical" (p. 306). They all, however, illustrate the power of language; the metaphor of translation becomes central to my consciousness during these periods of my life.

Parker's first ideas about the role of language in structuring our subjectivity cohere around the point that language is a symbolic system. Trying to communicate in another language means being plunged into a different system and our experiences dealing with this new structure metaphorically highlight our struggles with our own language. We can experience both successes and failures as we try to communicate within this new order. The passage here that resonated most strongly for me describes how a successful conversational interchange in another language lets us experience "moments of *ecstatic*, *omnipotent* illusory freedom" (p. 304) in which we feel we have "a *jubilant* sense of

mastery” (p. 305). This situation can be likened to the sense of joyful freedom the dancers at the masked ball might feel as they whirl around in tune with beautiful, stirring music which blinds them to the constraints it holds over them. The words *ecstatic*, *omnipotent* and *jubilant* suggest extremes of feeling that might seem out of proportion to experiencing competence in another language. However, i have felt exalted and euphoric when i am able to smoothly and successfully carry on a conversation in French or when i am complimented on my language skills by French people. My feelings go well beyond mere *pride* in my accomplishments or *satisfaction* with my progress in the language. My achievements seem to have something to do with my very being – who i believe (or would like to believe) i am. Yet i am aware, as Parker points out, that this illusion of empowerment is fleeting, inevitably giving way to awareness of its transitoriness in the midst of my trudging through linguistic mires. I have had to acknowledge my self-deception during these brief, heady moments of triumph. I must also maintain an awareness that the foreign language metaphor can lead to understandings around my disempowerment within the system of my own language that i use every day.

Parker next moves on to illustrate how using a symbol system to communicate is necessarily a “mediated” (p. 305) experience; the signifiers we use travel along a trajectory that is far from smooth or direct. The metaphorical imagery used by Parker to describe the translation of his words at the conference in Montenegro vividly evokes the tortuous path of the language we struggle with:

The pained look on their faces made it clear to me that the words I sent were *different* from the ones that eventually arrived, or perhaps I didn’t even know now what the words I sent meant. Each sentence on the page was pulled up and out and made its way interminably via the interpreter into the hall. Time slowed into something as sticky as my sweat (p. 305).

This passage brings to mind instances when my limited skill with the French language affects my communication with French people. *Different* is an effective word to articulate the French words i have used during such experiences, which are not simply *wrong* or *inaccurate*. There is a *difference* – a gap – between the words i chose and the contextual meaning i wanted to convey. While talking with some native French speakers about the different policies of New Zealand and France on nuclear power, i

used the French words 'station de pouvoir' in quite a literal way to refer to the nearby nuclear power station. One of my conversants, with some amusement, eventually found a subtle and polite way to let me know that the term signifying a nuclear power station in France is simply 'un nucléaire'. Vocabulary skills – when trying to communicate in another language or in one's own language – encompass far more than simply mastery of definitions. Common usage among real people, connotations and shades of meaning all limit the efficacy of signifying symbol systems, affecting interpretations and colouring meanings of the language we use.

The third feature of language addressed by Parker is its constitution in elusive signifiers that keep us subject through the inexactness of language. Parker remembers his arrival in Mexico City, where he was unable to find anyone at the airport to meet him. Eventually he discovered that someone had been there waiting for him, holding up his name, but written so small that he hadn't noticed it. This signifier did not function effectively enough to be recognisable. I remember a similar incident when a signifier did not work for me. I repeated several times to an employee in a French McDonald's restaurant that i wanted my food 'pour emporter' – to take away – only to be met with a blank stare. I finally managed to make myself understood, but i still do not know why i had such difficulty on this occasion using a phrase with which i had never before had any problem. It was a rainy afternoon, i was tired and then my French, in which i had confidence, didn't allow me to communicate. It all added up to a frustrating experience in which signifiers didn't work for me.

Parker says that while searching unsuccessfully for his name at the airport, "I was *alone*" (p. 306). I too have felt this sort of aloneness – a scary isolation in which i find myself when i cannot find a way to communicate with others through speech. In contrast to this situation are instances when i encounter English speaking people in France. Everything suddenly becomes so easy! Parker describes his response when he was promptly met on his arrival at another airport: "We embraced as if I had been *drowning* and now was *saved*" (p. 305). *Drowning* works effectively within a water metaphor to articulate the frightening struggle to keep one's identity alive. Suddenly being able to affirm one's sense of self *saves* one from feelings of foundering in a sea of flitting, evasive signifiers. It seems that my fragile sense of identity is intricately tied up with the unfathomable signifiers which i must grasp hold of to form every utterance.

With his consideration of a fourth linguistic aspect, Parker moves into the area of psychopathology. He asserts that our mastery – or pretence of mastery – of another language can function as an obsessional neurosis in its ‘masculine’ assumption that we understand a linguistic symbol system. “We are reluctant to let ourselves be at the mercy of a symbolic system, for it threatens to make us or *break* us as men, whether we are men or women” (p. 306). Competence with language – the ability to speak – is associated with men, silence with women. The word *break* works effectively – more aptly, for example, than *tear apart*. It connotes the sudden destruction of a brittle and readily shattered aspect of gendered identity at moments when we suddenly realise that the signifiers we have used didn’t work and, in effect, have silenced us.

For me, Parker’s ideas around psychopathological meanings of silence evoked memories of visiting France with my partner, who speaks very little French. As a result, i assume the job of doing all the necessary communicating in French. I am now wondering if even deeper psychological issues are at stake for me as i try to perform this important task well – issues pertaining specifically to my socially constructed, gendered identity as a woman. Does my pride at success with the language represent my grasping of some power not normally accessible to a woman? Do these encounters with French people offer me opportunities to ‘speak’ – for my voice to be heard? Within my relationship with my partner, it seems that my voice is listened to with respect, suggesting that any psychical needs in this regard have more to do with my position as a woman within society.

Parker’s final perspective on language also resonated strongly for me; he asserts that “language is something that makes sense only retrospectively, after we know what it means” (p. 306). He goes on to describe how “A word we *catch*...throws meaningless noise into relief, but at the very moment that we *grasp* it...we are *pulled* away from that *anchorage* as we try and fail to make it work for the words we hear afterwards” (pp. 306-307). The words *catch* and *grasp* immediately suggested to me the image of a game of ‘catch’. The ball is constantly in motion; it is a matter of hard work and constant attention to keep it going, just as the words we use are always moving just out of our reach. The word *pulled* calls up the image of a puppeteer subtly manipulating strings to direct us through language. The idea of an *anchorage* builds on a water metaphor to describe a location where we are sheltered from the powerful onslaught of language, the

anchor holding us securely in this space of safety, giving us time to consider the enigmatic words with which we must deal.

Extending this metaphorical image of an *anchorage* intertwines with Fish's (1980) theoretical ideas around the *already interpreted* feature of linguistic signs. Paradoxically, even when, from the security of our *anchorage*, we finally do seem to have momentarily grasped hold of a signifier and reached some glimmers of understanding, the meanings we interpret are always determined by other signs we already 'know'. This idea reminded me of my experiences watching French films or television, and of the way in which i can't quite keep up with the continuous linguistic flow. The timing seems skewed as i struggle to catch the signifiers quickly enough, while at the same time not lingering so long on an understood word that i miss what comes next. This idea around the delay in understanding articulated more clearly for me something i had been aware of but had not closely considered. It also put into perspective for me my pretence of understanding my own language as i write this thesis, trying to pinpoint meanings even while i am aware that i am grappling with an endless succession of slippery signifiers, each of which only refers to another.

Parker's discussion of these five aspects of language effectively uses the *translation* metaphor to articulate a fabula around linguistic features that constitute us as subjects. His stories around trying to deal with everyday interactions within another language worked as *sjuzet* that were very relevant for me, raising my consciousness around my powerlessness in the face of a controlling other – that is, a language system made up of arbitrary signs. As a result of Parker's use of rich imagery, i engaged with these vignettes, which called up memories for me and offered ways for me to understand how my experiences speaking French may say a lot about who i am as a discursive subject. My feelings of success and failure illustrate how i am held in thrall to the symbolic system of language. It has not been easy to consciously and 'publicly' admit here that these aspects of my psychosocial construction explain at least in part my passion for the French language. These disclosures enter the intimate realm of who i think i am and what makes that identity acceptable.

While Freeman's piece was constructed linguistically around the single general image of a *presence* – an 'other' which exerts control over us, Parker uses a number of

metaphorical images which employ elements of structural linguistics to show how language entraps and holds us – manipulating us while giving us the illusion of freedom. For example, Parker uses *personification* to fashion a metaphor of control in which language manipulates us like a puppeteer; the word *pulled* works well to evoke this image of people turning this way and that, dancing to the tune of the controlling system of language; in just this way, the dancers are pulled around the dance floor by the pervasive music at the masked ball.

Parker mingles a *water* metaphor with the *foreign language* metaphor to effectively convey a feeling for the kind of relationships we have with language. He describes how language positions us in “a symbolic space, but space which feels buoyant enough to hold us as we float through it” (p. 304). He posits that “Immersion in another language is immersion in another world, and entry into it can be like diving into something strange” (p. 305). Considering our own familiar language as ‘strange’ may bring it into fresh perspective for us; though it is in plain sight and ubiquitous in our lives, we may be able to approach it in a new way so that, like the purloined letter, it suddenly becomes something we can talk about. Like Freeman’s *presence* image, the idea of strangeness can distance us from our own language; paradoxically, plunging into a foreign language can enable us to stand apart from our own language, enabling us to form new understandings around the powerful part it plays in the directions of our lives.

Parker’s watery images strikingly represent his experiences while in the world of another language, experiences that leave him feeling that he has “swum through it for a while, choking” (p. 304). The seriousness of our constant struggles with language is recognised: “Noise washed in” (p. 305) with the passengers as Parker waited to be met at an airport; he finally located his contact, whom he “embraced as if I had been drowning” (p. 305). These passages emphasise the emotional trauma associated with our floundering around in linguistic whirlpools and suggest how we grasp gratefully onto a signifier – onto hope of a means of contact – as though it were a life raft.

The character of Parker’s watery spatial images alters somewhat when he describes it as “a murky medium” (p. 305), emphasising the turbidity through which we try to send words. Parker works within the Bakhtinian paradigm of *chronotope*, adding the element of time to this thickened space in a vivid simile that succinctly represents his experience

of the translation of his words at the conference at Montenegro: “Time slowed into something as sticky as my sweat” (p. 305). Parker’s use of both temporal and spatial representations of our constraint by language metaphorically reaffirms the contextuality of the social constructionist perspective from which language is addressed in this piece.

Parker also paints a metaphorical picture of a fragile, yet surprisingly strong *web* or *plexus*, in which signifiers support us tenuously. Our efforts within this net of language are feeble and tentative; it is only with great difficulty that we are able to negotiate its thin strands in our attempts to reach other people. Parker describes how we “hang helpless [in the] structured meshwork” (p. 305) of the powerful signifying system of language. While the water images represent language as more *actively* threatening as we thrash about in its wake, there is a more *static* feeling attached to the almost sinister web image. Like a motionless spider waiting to spring on her entrapped victims, the ensnaring sign system of language is ever ready to trip us up as we try to delicately step along illusory strands of meaning. Parker weaves together the the water and web images in a writerly fashion that articulates his recognition that he is controlled by these “networks of words [that are] flowing around me and doing things to me and they are connected, linked in chains of meaning” (p. 306).

Parker uses these metaphorical images to recount personal experiences, each of which, like my own, can be recalled as “A nice memory...A bad memory” (p. 305) or “A typical memory” (p. 306). Like Freeman’s use of short passages that contrast starkly with sentences that evoke authoritative factuality for me. Parker’s inclusion of these three short phrases is important in their encompassing of all sorts of incidents. I have come to recognise that, while my experiences – with French and with English – may sometimes be ‘nice’ or ‘bad’, they are more often ‘typical’. They are the stuff of everyday life as i struggle to clutch at some kind of control over the language i use.

I have come to believe that, for both Freeman and Parker, these succinct sentences and phrases enable a moving away from a more authoritatively factual effect to one coloured by subjective emotional responses. Through this linguistic practice, these authors circumvent the ‘expert’ stance of mainstream psychological researchers. These concise, emotionally charged passages surprisingly and strikingly articulate the writers’

emotions; they validate working together toward useful meanings through considering the contextual experiences of real people in their everyday lives.

As i have suggested, the contextual, chronotopal elements of space and time are involved in Parker's metaphorical imagery. The element of temporality can also be considered in a more formal, structural way. Parker's vignettes emerge from several personal experiences – each one a *singulative* event, unique in its own way as was Freeman's intense experience in Berlin. However, in another sense they (and also my own personal vignettes in the form of my called-up memories) work together as *sjuzet* in an *iterative* way – that is, each one repeatedly weaves a fabula around the power wielded on us by the signifying symbol system of language. As articulated in my second key perspective, our separate experiences and how they make us feel about ourselves vary across time and place, but they emerge from the culturally constructed, linguistically constituted environments in which we are embedded. In terms of chronotope, the masked ball metaphor occurs in a very specific time and place, but the dancers there are no more saturated with the colours of their society than i am in my own everyday experiences here in twenty-first century New Zealand.

Parker must use language to form an image of that very language; he represents it as a mirage-like “bridge” (p. 307) that can ostensibly help us to communicate with others during our everyday encounters. However, the language we use itself curtails our power to form and communicate meanings and skews the trajectories of the words we direct toward others. Language permeates our lives; like the symbolic purloined letter, it is always in plain sight and we even have no choice but to use language to talk about language. Through the skilful use of Lacanian metaphorical imagery and in terms of some of the elements of structural linguistics, though, we can momentarily bring this ‘other’ – this ‘object’ of language – into our conversations about ourselves and imagine how we are subjectified through its manipulations. As in Freeman's article, form and content merge in this piece. Through the inclusion of elements like personification, simile, temporality and contrast, language is necessarily used to talk about language, but in a metaphorically skilful way which lets us sneak in between signifiers to gain a sense of how language works and consider how it may be affecting us. Along with the other four articles i analyse in this thesis, Parker's is transformational. Unlike mainstream psychological writing, this piece is a counter-practice in which a critically reflective

stance bridges the gap between subject and object through its achievement of close writer-reader relations.

Parker's metaphorical writing informs and is informed by a stylistic tone of fragility and helplessness. There is a feeling here for me not unlike the kind of bewilderment I felt as I stood outside the small church in Pontorson. Parker believes that some native English speakers approach other languages with "*trepidation*" (p. 304). Reflexively illustrating the fear and powerlessness associated with other languages through accounts of personal experiences, Parker, like Freeman, discloses his own vulnerability. His stance is one of humility as he recognises that the words which flow around him and control him "represent me to other signifiers, and only *incidentally* to myself" (p. 306). Parker reflexively applies to himself a postmodern conception of the 'self' as an illusionary construction pulled about by language through a confusing trajectory not of his own choosing.

This tone of postmodern vulnerability and fragility lets Parker speak to me as a real person, just as Freeman did. Through his interpretations of his experiences, he articulates the invalidity of seeing ourselves as autonomous individuals following purposeful trajectories with clear beginnings, middles and ends. Instead, we struggle to understand our relationships with others in our world as we are tugged this way and that by the powerful linguistic signifiers that surround us. My own vulnerability became increasingly evident to me as I considered Parker's piece from within the supportive writer-reader space he shaped. I hope similar relationships are being nurtured here between my readers and me, and that my changing awareness of my own floundering around in the web of signifiers which directs the erratic trajectory of my life involves ripples which may clear tiny spaces for glimpses of useful insights for others.

Theodore Sarbin

Like Freeman and Parker, Theodore Sarbin writes moving personal narratives around emotional experiences. However, he also moves more deeply into the idea of emotion itself, focussing on the behaviour of crying. Sarbin takes the stance that emotional embodiments like crying are rhetorical articulations of socially constructed narrative plots. He illustrates this fabula with three *sjuzet* involving the deaths of loved ones. As described previously, the first vignette discusses Sarbin's mother's response to the

presence of a particular relative while she was mourning her deceased husband. This story points out our strong awareness of acceptable behaviour during the unfolding of particular cultural narratives. Sarbin's second personal story recounts his varying difficulties with maintaining normal speech patterns during his grieving for his wife, depending on who he was conversing with. Again, this situation indicates how readily we take our places within particular narrative plots and behave accordingly. Sarbin's final story movingly tells about time spent with a close friend who was in hospital close to death. It is the language used to relate this last story that I will be discussing most extensively as I found it the most affecting emotionally.

Sarbin uses language that metaphorically colours his story of the dying Sandy in particular ways that engaged and profoundly moved me. For example, the image of *feebleness* is aptly used more than once. Leading up to his account of his hospital visit, Sarbin says that "In our phone conversations, I could sense a growing *enfeeblement*" (p. 222). Entering the hospital room, he noticed that Sandy "participated in a *feeble* way" (p. 222) in a conversation with family members. And responding to Sarbin's greeting of 'sholom' – a recognition of their shared Jewish origins – Sandy gave "a *feeble* smile" (p. 223). For me, *feeble* works better than *weak*, *frail* or *fragile* in these contexts, subtly implying the tragedy of a person close to death, yet still attempting to relate to loved ones. There are emotional shades of meaning attached to this particular form of 'weak' that evoke a feeling of wretchedness – more so, for example, than *fragile*, which can signify a breakable object like a porcelain ornament.

The most moving passage for me is the one that describes Sarbin approaching his friend's hospital bed: "...I reached for Sandy's hand. I held *two fingers* that were *cold* and *smooth*" (p. 222). That only two fingers were held is strangely moving. This detail represents a sharp contrast to a firm grasp of someone's hand. There is a sense of a life slipping away. The coldness and smoothness of Sandy's fingers suggest a marble tomb effigy, an image vastly different from the textured warmth of a healthy, living person's hand. Sarbin's use of these vivid and touching linguistic images add another dimension to Parker's ideas around the impossibility of real human contact. In the same way that we struggle every day to use elusive linguistic symbols to communicate within various conversational contexts, Sarbin and his friend try to find a way to articulate their emotions within a deathbed narrative.

Interestingly, Sarbin effectively uses two of the trigger words i discussed in my analysis of Freeman's piece. Describing Sandy's condition, he describes the "great deal of effort...required for him to *utter* a few syllables" (p. 222). He also tells us that he "*uttered*" the word 'sholom'. In a way, this verb worked for me as did Freeman's use of the adverb *utterly*. Both words subtly foreshadowed something quite singular and significant. It is difficult for Sarbin and Sandy to communicate in the context of the particular narrative in which they are located; *utter* evokes both the struggle and the achievement as each word emerges than simply *speak* or *say*. Sarbin also tells us that his utterance of 'sholom' was accompanied by "a brief interval of suppressed *weeping*" (p. 223). As with Freeman's use of this word, it enhances the sense of an extremely emotional experience.

Sarbin uses evocative words to paint a moving and memorable picture of his emotional experience with Sandy. His writing practice illuminates Genette's (1980) assertion that vivid details like these 'bring us close' to the story. For me, these instances of Lacanian metaphor helped to fashion a kind of text that Bruner (1986) describes as "discourse that converts an unworded narrative into powerful and haunting stories" (p. 19). They function as triggers that encouraged me to critically reflect, along with Sarbin, on meanings of this little story. Through apt and striking metaphorical language, this vignette works as a *sjuzet* embodying the fabula of our embeddedness in cultural narratives. It belies the mainstream "ontological premise that emotions are quasi-objects sometimes cranial, sometimes visceral" (p. 217). The classic mind/body dualism this stance adheres to is dissolved in the affecting vignette around Sarbin and Sandy taking leave of each other. The emotionally overcome Sarbin and the physically feeble Sandy struggle together to relate through speech and touch. Their minds and bodies are inextricably tangled and subsumed in their embeddedness in a culturally proscribed narrative.

Like Freeman and Parker, Sarbin also addresses metaphor explicitly, reflexively considering the parts it may play in his interpretations of his experiences. He questions his association of Sandy's extreme weight loss with "a bag of bones" (p. 223), wondering if this "unvoiced metaphor [might be] a disguised way of my recognizing that Sandy was dying" (p. 223). The Jewishness of both men – an aspect of cultural narrative unconsciousness which they share – becomes a metaphor for contact and

communication between them, representing their closeness and in a way symbolising their situation in the hospital room. Sarbin realises that his use of the word ‘sholom’ “with all its religious and transcendental connotations facilitated my transfiguration from a hospital visitor to a participant in a farewell narrative” (p. 223). In these ways, Sarbin demonstrates his awareness of the potentials inherent within metaphor to help us interpret our experiences and voice our emotions.

Another linguistic element used here by Sarbin is *syllabification*. This augments the significance of his *utterance* of ‘sholom’, highlighting his extreme difficulty speaking to Sandy. Sarbin says “As I uttered the first syllable of the word “sholom”, I experienced a tightness in my throat and chest, and my breathing was disrupted. The second syllable was muffled by a sob and a brief interval of suppressed weeping” (p. 223). This description in terms of syllables worked well to vividly exemplify Sarbin’s struggle to maintain normal speech patterns while under the sway of such strong emotions.

The relation between crying and speaking, and its part in a narrative of grief, is examined more closely by Sarbin in his vignette around the death of his wife. He “could carry on a normal flow of conversation except when friends would refer to one or more of my wife’s talents and graces...Stuttered sounds, crying and tears took the place of normal syntactical talk” (p. 221). Sarbin also noticed that he could have normal conversations with strangers, even if the conversation involved the death of his wife. In each instance, it was a matter of manifesting his grief in the way proscribed by the particular cultural narrative constituting each specific conversational event.

The vignette around the death of Sarbin’s wife reminded me of what it was like for me when my father died some years ago. I felt deep sorrow, and my sadness was tinged with a substantial weight of guilt around living far from my father during most of my adult life. I was aware, in the midst of my grief, of interesting aspects of an incident that occurred just a few days after his death. I had an appointment for a job interview and my first impulse was to ring up to explain my situation and hopefully reschedule the interview. However, i decided instead to go ahead with it, in order to just get it over with and to avoid complications. Though, like Sarbin, i easily lapsed into tears when being comforted by friends and family, i managed to successfully complete the interview process, a lengthy procedure including an initial chat with a representative of

the company, the filling in of forms, computer tests and an extensive formal interview with several people. I was able to speak and behave normally for the duration of my time at the company, though i remember i burst into floods of tears the minute i returned home, where i re-entered the narrative of grieving daughter and released my restrained emotions. I can understand now that i was able to interact ‘normally’ with these people who i didn’t know and who were not aware of my father’s death because tears and sorrowful behaviour were not a culturally accepted part of the narrative of applying for a job. At this time, around people i was close to, my identity was ‘grieving daughter’; during the job interview procedure, however, i was a ‘job applicant’, a role i was clearly able to fulfil successfully.

Temporal elements are important to this little story around one of my experiences during my grieving for my father. It is germane to the depth of my emotion that it was *my father* – a family member who was very dear to me and who i had known for all of my life – who had died. For Sarbin too, telling us that he had been married for fifty years signals the extent of the trauma involved for him. In both cases, the ability to refrain from crying and to display normal speech and behaviour becomes even more striking because of this temporal feature. In my little story, the length of time i had lived at a distance from my father intensified my grief through the addition of an element of guilt, making it even more noteworthy that i was able to suspend my crying in such a way.

Sarbin’s inclusion of three personal stories that take place across a span of years also involves temporality, making a convincing case for the validity of his ideas over time. As with Parker’s several vignettes, though each story recounts a significant, emotional *singulative* event, considered together, they *iteratively* illustrate how crying is always part of a cultural narrative plot. Interestingly, Sarbin’s experience with Sandy’s death occurred “During the time frame that I was preparing this paper” (p. 222), providing him with an opportunity to work reflexively with his own experience as it intertwined with his writing process. Using this temporal feature is one way in which he draws together the fabula of narrative plots involving episodes of crying and the *sjuzet* of his own story of his involvement with Sandy’s death. The emotional/intellectual binary central to all five focus pieces is thus particularly highlighted in Sarbin’s article as he considers how emotion itself is dependent on cultural factors.

Like vignettes by both Freeman and Parker, Sarbin's third story involves both of the *chronotopal* elements of time and space. For Freeman (and for me) a relatively brief event resulted in an emotional response which stayed with him for a long time in a place which had been utterly transformed in his new perception. During the conference in Montenegro, Parker's words took an inordinately long time to struggle through a space which had become viscous and opaque. Sarbin too depicts a sort of chronotopal *skewing* which emphasises the significance of his experience. The detailed and moving account of his syllable-by-syllable utterance of the word 'sholom' as he held Sandy's two fingers stretches out agonisingly as he seeks contact with his friend. The space within which this occurs is also transformed: "It was as if the others were not in the room" (p. 223). The very special time and space fashioned during this moving encounter is, however, cut off abruptly: "The moment ended with the entrance of the nurse to take Sandy's vital signs" (p. 223). Though very little has changed, yet in a way, everything is profoundly different as Sarbin and Sandy are brusquely pulled back into the institutional discourse of the hospital.

In this way, the element of *contrast* works effectively alongside the idea of chronotopal skewing, underlining different attitudes toward a dying human being. The time and place to which i as a reader was taken as Sarbin tells of his attempts to reach Sandy vanish abruptly with the nurse's entrance, returning me to the ordinary context of a hospital room. This structural strategy of contrast also paralleled the distinction between the subjectivity of personal experience with the objectivity paramount in conventional scientific contexts.

Contrast between long and short sentences is also used effectively here by Sarbin, as it was by Freeman and Parker. At the end of his considerations of meanings of his use of the word 'sholom', he states baldly, "I visited Sandy the next day. He was comatose. He died that night" (p. 223). The stark reality of death, stated in short, clipped sentences, is juxtaposed effectively with the lengthy discussions around meanings. Of course Sandy's death has significance as a meaningful ending to a life and to a personal story – a *sjuzet*. But in terms of a broader *fabula*, it is not this end or outcome of a narrative *as such* that is crucial, but its place in terms of cultural narratives we live out during our lives. In the same way, the end of the little metaphorical masked ball tale is less important in terms of a burgeoning new relationship as the couple remove their masks and begin to relate

in new ways, than it is as a consciousness-changing moment in which this new sense of choral support facilitates recognition of the control wielded by cultural narratives.

Contrast between long and short sentences is also used skilfully in Sarbin's vignette about his wife's death. Introducing his ideas around the relation between crying and speaking, he initially says simply "I cried a lot" (p. 221). The *presupposition* here is that we all, as human beings who have suffered loss, know what it is like to go through times when we find ourselves spending a lot of time crying. This unadorned statement was the only one Sarbin needed to make to prepare me – a reader who is part of the same 'human' interpretive community – for considerations around the meaning of crying as part of a narrative plot.

Like Freeman and Parker, Sarbin places himself in a vulnerable, humble position as he carefully observes and thoughtfully considers his own subjective emotional responses. In focussing on the topic of death, one of the unfathomable mysteries with which human beings grapple, Sarbin locates himself and works squarely within an area of concern to real people. His question whether his use of a metaphor like 'a bag of bones' is a way of preparing himself for Sandy's death, and his considerations of meanings around his use of the emotive signifier 'sholom', both portray Sarbin as a person bravely trying to critically reflect on his own responses to death and their meanings within his own personal story. He is aware, as he begins to say 'sholom' that "a double consciousness was operating – I was both participant and observer" (p. 223). Sarbin's reflexive and engaging vulnerability enables him to move into elusive spaces between *sjuzet* and *fabula*, emotion and intellect.

Through the counter-practice of his writing, he also nurtured fusion between writer and reader. I felt that, in a sense, we shared emotional experiences. The relationship Sarbin invited me into is mirrored by the fleeting contact he achieves with Sandy through his utterance of 'sholom': "I was looking at his face and he was looking at me...Sandy responded with a whispered "sholom", a feeble smile, and a gentle squeeze of my hand. His eyes were moist. It was as if the others were not in the room" (p. 223). The attempts at human contact described in Sarbin's piece echo the relational nature of this thesis and support my belief in the usefulness of spaces of choral support in which subjects can work communally to recognise power and the way it positions them within narratives.

The most fitting words with which to conclude this analysis are Sarbin's: "It seems self-evident that the act of crying is connected to contexts in which something vital to one's identity is taking place" (p. 221).

Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré

Like the preceding three authors, Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré discuss an aspect of cultural narrative, addressing the area of gender relations in terms of subject positioning. Their article considers how the language we use functions narratively in a *performative* way as 'speech acts' through which we offer, accept and maintain – or resist – gendered locations and identities during dialogical events. The linguistic practice of the authors in a specific conversational situation illustrates the power struggles inherent in these positionings. Its approach to feminist issues makes this piece important to me as a socially constructed woman within a patriarchal society that has affected my interpretations of my experiences and my perceptions of 'selves'.

As mentioned before, Davies and Harré work with their own identities in an interesting way, adopting the pseudonyms *Enfermada* and *Sano*. The personal incident that they relate occurs during an overseas conference, when the two decide to give up their futile search for a chemist to buy medicine for Enfermada. At this point, Sano says, "I'm sorry to have *dragged* you all this way when you're not well" (p. 55). The surprised Enfermada answers, "You didn't drag me, I *chose* to come" (p. 55). Sano's response is also surprised, and a heated argument ensues, progressing "through a number of further cycles of reciprocal offence" (p. 56). Enfermada feels that Sano's utterances have positioned her as a "*marginal...accessory*" (p. 56). She becomes even more upset when Sano accuses her of typical feminist over-sensitivity to minor issues, an allegation that makes her feel "*trivialised and silly*" (p. 56).

These trigger signifiers set off powerful resonances for me, leading me to interpretations illuminating my own gendered positioning. The key words *dragged* and *chose* worked in opposition (something like a binary pair), sparking the conflict between Sano and Enfermada through their representation of two opposing stances. *Dragged* invokes for me a behaviour perpetrated on an *object* – something with no volition; it also connotes *force*, bringing to my mind the classic caricature of a caveman dragging his mate along by her long hair. *Chose* conjures up for me a sense of consciously working toward an

informed choice, albeit within an extremely limited space within socially constructed restrictions. It is a term encompassing empowerment to reach a decision. Sano insists that he was only assuming the role of a healthy person accepting responsibility for helping a sick person. But Enfermada refuses to accept this motive or the position in which it places her, as a helpless ‘object’. She is “determined to refuse” (p. 56) Sano’s implication that women are something “other than central actors in their own life stories” (p. 56). Enfermada clearly feels that her very identity is at stake here.

The words *dragged* and *chose* are at the heart of the issues Sano and Enfermada are disputing. These two signifiers exemplify how the words we use function as speech acts that carry deep implications for positioning and power relationships. These two words are used in this specific conversational context from an *immanentist* perspective as *paroles*. They also, however, function in a particular sort of *transcendentalist* way – not as abstract, essentialist, grammatical entities, but rather as elements of *la langue* that point to broader cultural gender constructions. The application of Derrida’s conception of *iteration* by Mandy and Leigh in their focus article resolves this dualism, enabling us to perceive more clearly how our own linguistic experiences are fragments of stories tightly woven into cultural narratives. In terms of structural linguistics, this translates to a blending of the *singulative* incident experienced by Davies and Harré with an *iterative* multiplicity of similar events experienced by others, all informed by powerful cultural narratives.

This engaging vignette called up for me both general and specific memories. On many occasions, men have spoken to me from the same general perspective taken by Sano. Enfermada’s reaction to Sano’s statement is very understandable to me; though similar utterances have always been tinged with ostensible concern for my welfare, they identify me as a non-person, objectifying and disempowering me. Unlike Enfermada, however, i have usually not responded, assuming that such incidents were too minor and petty to comment on; i was probably afraid of seeming *trivial* or *silly*, thereby accepting the cultural norms that enable men to authorise the value of women’s experiences. Through their illumination of meanings of such conversational encounters, Davies and Harré have helped me recognise that, by maintaining silence, i have accepted the gendered location offered to me and also contributed to the maintenance of unjust positionings of women in our society. My emotional response to this piece was one of

anger – toward men who have spoken to me in demeaning ways, toward myself for maintaining silence on these occasions and toward the cultural narratives that inform and perpetuate gendered power relationships.

A more specific memory also came to me along with my emotional response to the writerly articulation of Sano's and Enfermada's argument. I remembered a particular behaviour that functioned in the same way as Sano's words to Enfermada, and it involves the classic masculine symbol of the car. In my past 'dating' days, in order to pre-empt the ostensible courtesy of a man opening the passenger door for a woman, i always used to jump out quickly, then lock the car door. However, in those pre-central locking times, men would frequently (and intriguingly) come round to my side of the car, trying the door handle to ensure that i had locked the car door properly. While feeling annoyed and insulted and demeaned by this behaviour, it also seemed to be relatively unimportant – again, too minor an issue to argue with. So, once again, i usually said nothing about it. Other metaphorical trigger' words used by Davies and Harré, *accessory* and *marginal*, invoked new realisations around my feelings in these situations. Now i am able to articulate that through this action, i was made to feel like a doll or a child, a pretty and pleasant companion sitting placidly in the passenger seat, not adult or responsible enough to be trusted to remember to lock the car door, or to do it properly. I can now interpret my feeling that i was somehow belittled every time this apparently unimportant event occurred. Each time a man enacted this behaviour, he disempowered and objectified me, placing me in a marginal position as just another car accessory.

Davies's and Harré's metaphorical use of language worked well to engage my emotions and my interpretations to suggest ways in which Enfermada and i are culturally located in subordinate spaces. Along with their skilful use of emotive key words, the authors provided just enough physical detail to enable me to use *presupposition* to imagine Enfermada's situation, becoming in this way a co-producer of the text. I perceived Enfermada to already be in a relatively demanding situation simply because she is attending a conference in a foreign country; added to this, it is a bitterly cold day and she is ill and unable to find medicine. The setting thus evoked for me contributed to the credibility of this story – it is one in which it is even more likely that Enfermada would respond as she does when Sano utters his belittling statement. Along with my mingled

empathy and admiration for Enfermada, i also felt shame and disappointment with myself because i did not respond in similar situations

My silence is, however, in part explained by a more subtle aspect of the interaction between Sano and Enfermada. While taking serious exception to Sano's positioning of her and the attitudes she believes it represents, at the same time Enfermada believes that Sano "does not wish or intend to marginalise women" (p. 56). She therefore tries to generalise her perspective, approaching issues in terms of the subject positions to which we are *all* in thrall. This was thought-provoking for me because many of the men i have interacted with were apparently not chauvinists and seemed to be sensitive to women's points of view...*and yet* at times they said or did little things which felt sexist, disrespectful and disempowering. I am wondering now if any of these men would sympathise with Sano's position as much as i did with Enfermada's, simply because he would be working from his own culturally directed, gendered position. These subtler aspects of discursive practice point to the sheer strength of cultural narratives. "The complexity, if not impossibility, of 'refusing the discourse'" (p. 56) pervades the unfolding argument and what it reveals about the two participants and their socially constructed identities. Part of the discourse of male identity coheres around a storied figure – the epic hero. Sano's belief that he was merely acting with responsibility for a sick person may be embedded in his desire to be an agentic hero and rescue a 'maiden in distress'. It also occurs to me that perhaps he made his statement about being 'sorry' partly because he was disappointed in himself and embarrassed that he had failed to accomplish his heroic quest for a chemist – he was not able to achieve the expected behaviour associated with his individualistic perception of himself.

Further considerations around the linguistic use of the pseudonyms *Sano* and *Enfermada* can illuminate more deeply embedded elements of gender discourse. In terms of simple metaphorical meaning, these labels use Spanish words to designate one who is *healthy* and one who has become *ill*; they represent the states of health and sickness of each according to Sano's point of view. However, these pseudonyms also suggest all sorts of other possibilities, perhaps most significantly here a dualism firmly entrenched in our social structures – a gendered classification that, in terms of a Foucauldian dividing practice, locates men and women in a series of binaries that maintains our patriarchal system, associating them with health and sickness, activity and

passivity, mind and body (Nicolson, 1992). Refraining from using their own names helps Davies and Harré to relate the story of their own experience – a *sjuzet* – into a broader cultural narrative around gendered positionings – a *fabula* – in an attempt to bring it to consciousness. The metaphorical use of the names *Sano* and *Enfermada* is a linguistic practice that suggested to me that my position as a woman is in many ways much more significant than my own name. While the narratives in the other four focus articles are written in the first person, this story is told in the third person, enabling a distancing from an illusionary, autonomous self as the authors try to separate themselves from the story in order to analyse in wider terms what happened to them during their argument. It may have helped them to consider issues from a location like that of Sarbin at the bedside of his dying friend, in which he felt himself to be “both participant and observer” (p. 223). Maybe this kind of space is close to the one in which the modest little ‘i’ places me. I hope that meanings around subject positioning i have been fashioning while considering the focus articles help me to maintain an awareness that my own stories – *sjuzet* – are strands of a broader *fabula* – a thickly woven tapestry of cultural narratives.

The positions of *Sano* and *Enfermada* and all the meanings attached to them enable this piece to take a particular form of *multiple perspective* – a gendered, *dual* perspective that invites us into a revelatory place between these two locations, where we can begin to recognise some of the powerful social forces working on these two people. It is important not to let the metaphorical pseudonyms or the third person voice allow us to forget the autobiographical character of this vignette. This piece is an example of psychological counter-practice that meets the crisis aim of returning the discipline to the concerns of real people. Through their reflexive writing practice, Davies and Harré work with a specific experience to examine their own cultural locations. “The importance of positioning as a real conversational phenomenon and not just an analyst’s tool is evident in this example...Each was driven by the power of the story lines and their associated positions...” (p. 57).

This article is fashioned around the actual situated, linguistic interaction between two real people. The serious disagreement that is the central element in the autobiographical vignette demonstrates how the *personal* can be recognised as *political* when psychologists work in the ‘intersubjective’ space of everyday experience. Temporally,

the Bakhtinian *chronotopal* elements of time and place are involved in this focus on a specific dialogical event. The experiential, situational and linguistic dimensions of Freeman's narrative manifesto work together in this piece to demonstrate potentials for moving into a transformative dimension. In terms of Bourdieu's epistemic reflexivity, subjects can work together to examine their experiences and question the power relationships that are manifested in their talk together during specific situations. This can be a step toward challenging and refusing disempowering subject positionings. The critically reflective counter-practice of this writing embodies one way for a narrative psychological paradigm to function in emancipatory ways. Enfermada refuses to "step into" (p.56) the position offered to her by Sano's words. This text, like those of the other focus authors, nurtures a chorally supportive writer-reader space in which issues of power and subject positioning can be reflexively considered in terms of everyday events. It is a Bourdieuean 'site of freedom' just as the terrace is for the metaphorical dancers who step away from and begin to consider the choreography of their own lives.

The ways in which real people are directed by gender discourses is represented vividly by Davies and Harré. Their postmodern telling also illustrates ways of questioning and resisting positions in which patriarchy locates us. Sano's pretensions to heroic stature are eschewed in this story which suggests alternative locations for women and men. Sano's and Enfermada's experience is paralleled with an account of a study around children's understandings of *The Paper Bag Princess*, an alternative feminist tale. Elizabeth is a plucky princess who dons a paper bag when a dragon destroys her clothes along with her castle, and takes as captive her betrothed, Prince Ronald. She angrily sets off to rescue Ronald, cleverly outsmarting the dragon, only to be spurned by the prince because she no longer looks like a real, beautiful princess. This exposes Ronald's chauvinistic attitude and Elizabeth spurns him and happily goes off alone. Most children understand stories within a cultural web of gender stereotypes in which they are already caught up. They are unable to perceive Elizabeth either as a genuine princess or as a hero. That young children are already so firmly entrenched in gendered cultural narratives supports the need to open discussions around the effects of socially constructed stereotyped images of women and men and affirms the value of counter-narratives like the story of Sano and Enfermada. Like Ronald, Sano is rebuffed when he utters his demeaning words. Enfermada refuses to be a foil for Sano's heroic pose. She overturns the scripted roles of health and sickness and, like Princess Elizabeth, steps

into a kind of counter-heroic position, inviting me to move with her along a path toward feminist consciousness.

In its consideration of interactions between binaries like man/woman and speech/silence, Davies and Harré enable movement into the nebulous intersubjective space between individuals and the positions they inhabit – between how we conceive of ourselves and the ways in which these selves are made subject. In terms of my re-drawn representation of Bourdieuean epistemic reflexivity, this article placed me metaphorically in the experiential community of subjects. Davies and Harré, in the guises of Enfermada and Sano, demonstrated to me that by working together, we can question the dances we perform together as subjects and the music that directs the movements of our bodies; we can remove our culturally moulded, gendered '*masks*' and costumes and fashion useful knowledge claims around discursive mechanisms that position us in certain ways. Paradoxically, considerations around the workings of the *object* of patriarchal gender discourse involves not only awareness of how it locates us in certain *subject* positions, but also how men's positions seem to sanction the *objectification* of women. Through this complex involvement with the subject/object binary, this piece focuses attention on the gender relations within the Bourdieuean community of knowers. It also raises questions around the implications of accepting or rejecting subject positions.

My reconsiderations of my memories in terms of subject positioning suggest that, during interactions with men, i accepted the *role* of a subservient woman. This piece has helped me re-interpret memories and re-articulate that i was placed in certain *positions* during such experiences and that i can reclaim the right of resistance as a step in a transformative direction. I cannot now justify my compliance in a patriarchally ordained woman's role by explaining my attitudes as *indexical* or *typification* extensions. That is, i cannot point to either "indexical meanings developed through past experiences" (p. 51) or the typification of another woman who models "a culturally well-established cluster of attributes" (p. 51) of womanhood as explanations for my own silence. I am now in a more conscious location from which i can disclose suspicions that i have at some points in my life been going about my everyday activities wrapped up in a sort of private little, self-regulating *panopticon*, obediently maintaining my own subject positionings. I can voice my ideas about my everyday 'performances' for *social ghosts*. I believe i am

attempting at these times to seem competent, capable, empowered and worthy of respect – all those things denied me by men i have known who are likely my social ghosts.

I am also again reminded of how ‘risky’ these admissions are, and of the discomfort and embarrassment i am feeling as i make them here. I greatly admire this work by Davies and Harré, professionals and colleagues who have placed themselves in vulnerable positions in discussing their serious argument. Their writing practice in this piece is an ethical endeavour in which they advance the cause of a psychology that is more useful for real people. This piece of counter-practice exemplifies a way of using language, not to maintain existing unfair power relations, but to challenge them. Like the authors of the three articles i have already discussed, Davies and Harré celebrate human potential – of both women and men – and transformational possibilities that can lead to fairer and more respectful societies.

Mandy Morgan and Leigh Coombes

Mandy and Leigh work more intimately with ideas around the issue of *silence* involved in the focus articles by Parker and Davies and Harré. Parker’s explanation of the psychopathology which can be involved in speaking a foreign language is based on the Lacanian theory that a person who cannot understand language is “put in their place as a hysteric, positioned as a woman who may then resort to finding other ways to speak, ways of speaking with their body perhaps. Mastery of language for some – usually men – and feminisation of the silent for many” (2003, p. 306). The piece by Davies and Harré functions as a counter-practice by way of Enfermada resisting this position through her refusal to remain silent. Mandy and Leigh use a personal incident from Mandy’s life as a basis for more thorough considerations of issues around silence. Mandy’s autobiographical story illustrates how subjective interpretations and meanings of experiences are told through the problematic symbolic system of language. Mandy and Leigh theorise silence as a part of our linguistic system – a particular kind of speech act that can have complex and contradictory social effects.

The three parts of Mandy’s personal vignette are interwoven with theoretical discussion of the issues involved. A number of the words used in her story worked as metaphorical triggers to engage my involvement in an emotional way. Mandy begins her story by recounting the telephone conversation her daughter had with her father, during which he

suggests that Mandy's son was "kicked out" of home (p. 364). Mandy explains that, on the contrary, her son's leaving was a choice made by the two of them together after "careful negotiation [and] had allowed both of us some satisfaction with the decision" (p. 364). Mandy then goes on to say, "Perhaps *you* think the father should have been involved" (p. 364). Using this personal pronoun enabled Mandy to reach out to speak directly to *me* in a conversational way, fostering closer writer-reader contact. Through this practice, Mandy identified herself not only as a psychologist, but as a woman and a mother. I felt that she was making an appeal to me and that she wanted me to understand the position she was in as she struggled through a difficult and painful situation. She explains that she had taken sole responsibility for the raising of her son, and that she feels this justified the two of them deciding together that her son should leave home. This open and direct speaking to me as the reader positioned me as far more than merely a student reading a psychological article; Mandy invited me into a space where i could also respond as a woman and as a mother, working alongside her in a chorally supportive way.

In the second segment of her story, Mandy says, "Throughout this writing my *heart aches* to undo the damage that has been done to my relationship with my son..." (p. 372). She tells us of her wish for her son to be able to "reclaim a '*big adventure*' at the end of his childhood, as he became a man...to leave home, *celebrating*..." (p. 372). The use of the phrase 'my *heart aches*' worked immediately and very emotionally for me. I wondered at my powerful response to such a familiar phrase that in some contexts can sound trite. I remember feeling an actual physical aching when i first read these words – and it was, indeed, located in the area of my heart, presumably demonstrating the reason for the traditional identification of the heart as the seat of our emotions. Feelings for Mandy's emotion were engendered by her writerly metaphorical practice and some particularly painful personal memories were also called up for me. I entered a situation which felt like one of writer-reader fusion in an environment of choral support. The strong physical response i felt as i thought of Mandy's pain and re-examined my own traumatic experiences was not unlike some of the manifestations of grief described so vividly by Sarbin, in which emotional and physical symptoms blended as the behaviour of crying occurred within particular narrative plots. Even now as i write these words, heartachingly painful memories return – memories of a time when my greatest wish was that i could change the situation for my children.

After my separation from my husband, my children were obliged to spend a certain amount of time each week with their father as part of the agreement that had been reached. My daughter, who was then almost 9, openly declared that she didn't want to go each time a visit approached. At the time i responded by explaining to her that i understood her feelings and that i was sorry, but that she must go. For my son, this situation was possibly in some ways even more difficult. He was nearly 11, a pre-adolescent who i felt was confused and upset by the marriage break-up perhaps more than his sister. Though he didn't object to going off to spend time with his father, still i sensed that the situation was uncomfortable and difficult for him. Maybe there wasn't much i could have done to change things at this stage, but i felt then and still feel now the *mother-blame* that is discussed in this article.

Mandy and Leigh explain how a mother in our society is "positioned as caregiver and nurturer who is personally responsible for the child's wellbeing" (pp. 368-369). In terms of this subject position, there are three ways of talking about a mother who – like Mandy and me – separates herself from her child. An account which considers motherhood a social responsibility labels as *incompetent* a mother who 'kicks out' her child. The biological conceptualisation of motherhood sees such a mother as behaving contrary to instinct; she is *unnatural*. A psychoanalytical approach to the position of mother posits that she harms her child's sense of identity through this act of *castration*. Each of these attitudes makes a negative judgment and perpetuates the mother-blame prevalent in our gendered cultural stories around motherhood.

Both Mandy's story and mine are embedded in a cultural narrative which positions us as mothers and expects us to fulfil certain responsibilities. The other people who feature in our autobiographical accounts, the settings in which they occur and their plotlines are the components with which we construct these sjuzet. The meanings of our personal stories in terms of power relationships can be usefully discussed by considering how all of these specific narrative elements are subsumed in and deeply affected by the powerful fabula of a broader cultural narrative around motherhood involving mother-blame. Mandy asserts that, "...in this story the historical trajectory of the narrative endpoint is mother-blame, and the affirmation of the mother's personal responsibility for the child's well-being...I am positioned as a subject within social power relations that historically exclude, marginalize and subordinate the specificity of women's

narratives and voices” (p. 370). Telling her story here enables Mandy to “articulate something of my experience of maternal grief and desire” (p. 372). She recognises and regrets that something of her son’s *big adventure* as he set off from home was spoiled by harmful cultural stories. *Adventure* aptly refers to the *big*, major milestone of leaving home; unlike other possible choices like *undertaking* or *enterprise*, it avoids suggestions of definite directions or plans. *Adventure* is an appropriate representation within a postmodern paradigm, evoking in a positive way the blending of risk and excitement involved in the watershed time when children move out into a wider world.

The guilt i still feel for placing my children in a situation where they were obliged to visit their father at certain times is informed by my acceptance of the socially constructed position of mother and the mother-blame attached to it. I do not know if there were better choices i could have made at the time around visitation issues, but at least i can now begin to articulate how the meanings this situation has had for me are sourced in deeply entrenched cultural beliefs; they cohere around the mother-blame inherent in my socially constructed position as a mother. The support offered through the words of this article has enabled me to address my memories in different ways. This new awareness does not take away my feelings of sadness around some of the things that happened in the past, but as recognised by Mandy, “it does enable me to respond” (p. 373). Perhaps there is even room for a kind of *celebration* around my changing interpretations around positioned experiences that are leading to new and potentially useful meanings. *Celebrating* works vividly in its evocation of positive feelings around the decision for Mandy’s son to leave home and their negotiation of this *adventure* together. Its positive tone contrasts starkly with the negative interpretations placed on this event by Mandy’s daughter’s father. The metaphorical image of *celebration* valorises the occasion of a young person leaving home, marking it as a special and joyous event. This image also represents in a hopeful way the new perspectives i can take through the ideas discussed here around subject positionings and mother-blame. Both of these applications of the metaphorical image of *celebration* seem to me to parallel Bakhtin’s notion of *carnival*, with its recognition of the joyfulness of liberation through voices in respectful dialogue.

In the concluding part of Mandy’s vignette, she talks about her discussion with her son, including her voicing that she feels she “had *lost* something of the big adventure that we

had negotiated together” (p. 373). While establishing that this is her critically reflective account of sorrow and loss, representing a response she needed to make – a silence she needed to break – Mandy makes it clear to her son that she would like him to share with her his own feelings around the situation. The notion of *losing* as it is used here implies an emotional aspect; it acknowledges the sadness and regret felt when certain things are damaged, ruined or simply no longer there. It also, however, suggests an opposite, holding within it possibilities that something redeeming may be *found*. Mandy refuses to position her son, demonstrating an ethical approach that respects and validates his own subjective interpretations of his experiences and opens avenues for *finding* ways of fashioning new and positive meanings around his leaving home.

Meanings i have fashioned around my memories of the situation just after my separation are mine only, and like Mandy’s, are no doubt directed to a great extent by motherhood discourses. Sifting out how much of my guilt flows from these cultural narratives around mother blame and how much from a failure to do things differently within the small space of freedom available to me within societal constraints is complex. I do not remember the details of our separation agreement, but i have been asking myself as i have worked on this analysis whether it was necessary to oblige my children to visit their father at particular stated times or whether my insistence was at least partly to placate my husband – who was not in favour of our marriage ending – by at least agreeing to let him have the access he wanted. This question fills me with disquietude and more guilt as i wonder if my behaviour may have been a kind of silence – a reluctance to confront my husband with anything else disagreeable simply to make things easier for myself. But the way i handled things may have made things easier for my daughter and son too in the long run. As part of my ethical aims in this work, i need to ask my now adult children what it was like for them at this time. Maybe they will feel they can share with me some of their memories around their feelings during this difficult time. Some part of the loving relationship i believe i had with my children was indeed *lost* for me; i am afraid i may have lost their trust and confidence. In a way, things that were lost cannot be recovered. However, some sharing of experiences may be possible when i speak to my son and daughter about my memories and the way i have talked about them here; we may be able to move toward some new and useful understandings about how we felt during this past situation and why we experienced events as we did.

It is evident that potential meanings implicit in the speech/silence binary are complex and that sifting out these meanings necessitates examining their workings within contextual sociolinguistic interactions in our everyday lives. Sometimes silence means accepting the position one has been given. This is how i interpret my silences with men who, through their speech or actions, treated me with belittling disrespect, as Sano treated Enfermada. It may also explain my insistence that my children visit their father when they would have preferred not to – using them as pawns in my delicate negotiations with my husband through a difficult situation. Breaking silence as Enfermada did can mean challenging or refusing to inhabit the places others put us in – speech here is an empowering act through which we can resist positions constituted in cultural narratives.

Mandy's and Leigh's piece looks more minutely at silence and examines the way its meanings fluidly change across dialogical situations. Speech and silence both function as speech acts that intermingle in complex ways and have immense social effects. The words of Mandy's daughter's father initiated the situation examined here through the harm they did to Mandy and her son and the interpretations they may have caused to circulate among other family members. The disclosures Mandy makes in her vignette present opportunities for sharing with readers experiences of speech or silence and finding new ways to consider them in terms of particular cultural narratives. Talking with our children may open ethical avenues toward mutual respect around our subjective meanings. At the end of this piece, Mandy points out that sometimes, silence can work in an empowering way toward maintaining our own safety. She states that she will not be discussing any of these issues around her son leaving home with her daughter's father, with whom she suffered an abusive relationship. Like the other focus authors, Mandy uses a short, succinct sentence with striking effect, concluding "That silence is for my safety" (p. 373).

Mandy and Leigh tease apart the speech/silence dualism, interpreting it as a subtle and intricate relationship that is contingent on the specifics of each dialogical event. The particular situation of Mandy's son leaving home is a temporally *singulative* incident that exemplifies *iterative* events directed by the mother-blame intrinsic to socially constructed subject positionings of motherhood. Like the other focus authors, Mandy tells her story from the temporal stance of *analepsis*, looking back to recount a past

event. However, she also shares with us her feelings in the present as she worked on this piece: “Throughout this writing my heart aches to undo the damage that has been done to my relationship with my son through the story my daughter’s father has told about us...” (p. 372). Mandy’s reflexivity around her writing process underlines the point that neither the disclosure of her story nor her academic theorisation around its meanings can dissolve the social effects of culturally informed speech acts. Her lasting emotional hurt demonstrates this, just as Sarbin’s experience with Sandy during his writing of his article supports his idea that the emotions we feel are intertwined with particular cultural narrative plots.

Bringing their writing practices into the present – reflexively applying their ideas to episodes in their current lives – enables Sarbin and Mandy to demonstrate that their lived experiences are inextricably woven into their work. The critically reflective practice of these counter-pieces eschews the objective stance taken by mainstream researchers and embodies a way to further the crisis aim of returning psychology to the concerns of real people. The inclusive nature of Mandy’s and Leigh’s piece means they identify and consider themselves as well as their readers in this way. I was encouraged to consider my current feelings toward past memories and acknowledge that the pain associated with my past experiences has stayed with me across the years. As i wrote this section of my thesis, i worked along with images of my daughter reluctantly walking out to her father’s car, eyes downcast, schoolbag strapped on her back. I remembered my son, seemingly accepting the visitation regime, but setting off with a hint of touching bravado which broke my heart. And i wonder how these past events have affected the kind of adults they are now. Past and present merge in the continuity of powerful ongoing social discourses in which our lives are constituted. Mandy’s courageously voiced emotion around her story freed me to embrace my own, as i have many times – but this time in a more critically reflective way that suggested how my experiences were directed by cultural narratives. This piece has suggested important things to me about how my own singulative story is informed and directed by the iteratively occurring mother-blame that features so centrally in culturally gendered narratives around motherhood. Considering my story as a *sjuzet* helps me to remain aware that it is just one example among many incidents of women subjugated by the broad, overarching cultural fabula of mother-blame.

In addition to considering her story in terms of the past and the present, Mandy also reaches out to the future when she discusses her conversation with her son. My approach to my son and daughter will demonstrate the ethical stance that i have tried to integrate into this thesis process, communicating my respectful recognition of the validity of their subjective interpretations around past events. It will also represent a way of merging this work with the ongoing process of my everyday experiences, reiterating that the personal is indeed political. Temporally these consultations take Mandy and me into an unknown future. We don't know if our children will disclose their past feelings, or if so, what kind of meanings they will attach to them. Our stories are told within the uncertainty of a postmodern world where nothing is wrapped up nicely or finished off cleanly. I do not expect any neat conclusions; i am aware that i am moving through fluidly floating, circulating meanings as i attempt to negotiate the precarious web of social discourses in which my personal relationships are embedded. Mandy blends the temporal orders of past, present and future, suggesting a myriad of linguistically intermingled narratives represented through both speech and silence. These stories are not usefully considered by focussing on separate elements like setting, plot or characterisation. It is more fruitful to talk together about how all of these aspects of our personal narratives work together in terms of our socially constructed experiences in the past, present and future.

The central issue of the power exerted on us through the sociolinguistically constructed nature of our reality as stated in my second key perspective is addressed here in terms of the complexities and contradictions inherent in the speech/silence binary. Bruner suggests that, "In most instances of dialogue, silence is interpretable, has a meaning..." (1986, p. 84). Mandy and Leigh move on from Parker's and Davies' and Harré's ideas around silence to consider some of the multiple interpretations of silence as a speech act. Parker psychopathologically equates speech and silence with men and women, empowerment and disempowerment. Davies and Harré work within this dualistic paradigm, discussing how Enfermada breaks silence in a move toward empowerment. Mandy uses her own experience to move past this binary, pointing out that there are other, more subtle sociolinguistic complexities and contradictions involved in meanings of speech and silence. She tells us that she had not had contact with her daughter's father because "I have maintained silence as a way of *refusing* to be involved in a relationship which had become abusive" (p. 364). As in the other focus pieces, the issue

of *power* is central – and the idea that it is *personal*, pervasively and insidiously embedded in all aspects of our lives and our experiences. This piece has impressed on me the complicated ways in which mothers are set up for guilt and pain and the way this works through networks of gendered relationships. In my approaches to my daughter and my son, i will assure them that they need not share their feelings with me now or ever if maintaining silence feels safer for them. What i see as the ethical endeavour of this work depends on my respect for others and my recognition that they, like me, make decisions to speak or to remain silent not in isolation, but within a web of interpersonal relations. “As an example of analysing a discursive act, analysis of silence no longer relies only on the intentions or commitments of the silent participant or a response to silence by another, but on social power relations among participants” (p. 367).

In this article the disruption of binaries like speech/silence, singulative/iterative and *sjuzet*/fabula suggests that we may also usefully address the relationship between narrative and discourse by pulling them apart as if they were a dualism. Teasing its intricately woven strands away from each other can help us recognise that our narratives – our storied experiences – are informed by and constituted in cultural discourses that direct our interpretations in particular, socially sanctioned ways. In terms of the narrative structure of this particular article, the focus on Mandy’s autobiographical vignette gives it a perspective of *subjectification*. However, though it is Mandy’s voice we hear, she espouses an ethical respect for others’ equally valid subjective meanings, mingling form and content to bestow on this piece a kind of implicit *multiple perspective*. Through a critically reflective approach, opposing principles are again merged in a disruptive counter-practice that holds possibilities for more subtle and precise tellings around our sociolinguistic experiences. This in turn can lead to different ways of considering the crucial subject/object binary. As subjects, we are caught up in and directed by discursive objects. As with the iridescent dancers at the metaphorical masked ball, the colours and values of our society shine through us as we go about our everyday lives. Conceptualising ourselves as separate from the discourses that choreograph our interactions – retaining the subject/object binary – is not useful for addressing the subtle intricacies of social power relationships; it is more valuable to speak of ourselves as almost inextricably intertwined with cultural discourses. As subjects, Mandy and i are deeply affected by the discursive object of mother-blame even

as we consider and discuss it. Rather than trying to distinguish the dancer from the dance, we can benefit from accepting that the dancer *is* the dance.

These considerations around the subject/object binary have significant implications in terms of the Bourdieuean space in which we as communal subjects work toward knowledge claims around the discursive objects in our everyday lives. Before we can effectively analyse the power exerted by cultural discourses, we must acknowledge that it is sociolinguistically practiced by all of us as subjects. We function as discursive objects ourselves in our maintenance of certain cultural discourses through our positioning of each other during situated interactive events. Our world can be usefully imagined as a postmodern space inhabited by swirling subjects and objects intertwined in intricate webs of relationships – a paradigm that can help us come to terms with its complexity and locate ourselves in positions where we can recognise mechanisms of social power. This interpretation can help us to embrace Bakhtinian *dialogism* through respectfully listening to each other's accounts of subjective meanings.

In keeping with the postmodern ontology within which this work is conceptualised and the multiplicity of voices it validates, and like the other focus authors, Mandy and Leigh do not constrain us by espousing certain truths, but invite us to enter into a dialogue with them, to engage together in a “search for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings” (p. 25). Their words hold no pretence that there is some formula that we can apply to enable us to identify clearly when to speak and when to be silent. Mandy places herself in the vulnerable position of a real person when she recognises this uncertainty, saying, “I thanked my daughter for not supporting an interpretation in which I kicked out my son. I did not know how else to respond, so I didn't say anything more to her” (p. 364). The humility of these words embodies the open and subjective, yet careful and critical reflection with which this piece was written. The approach taken by this article represents a stark contrast to the objective empiricism of mainstream scientific work, which proceeds from an assumption that there is an essential ‘truth’ that can be identified, and that the researcher is a psychological ‘expert’ who can empirically pin it down.

Like the other focus articles, this piece of writing by Mandy and Leigh has enabled me to work usefully with my memories and fashion different interpretations of my

experiences. The focus authors have invited me into linguistic spaces where i was able to embody Genette's belief that "...every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self" (1980, p. 261). All five pieces resonated powerfully for me, and i became deeply and emotionally involved with the feelings and ideas they considered. I have engaged in a particularly intimate way with aspects of Mandy's and Leigh's piece, which spoke to some deeply hidden parts of my socially constructed being. This analysis feels like a culmination of what has been a difficult but rewarding exercise in critical reflection around my own stories and my 'self'. Mandy has told me that writing about her personal experience here was very difficult. I am aware of feelings of vulnerability clinging to my own disclosures as i have talked about subject positions i now believe i have occupied during past experiences. Along with other emotions, i feel embarrassment and shame around some of my behaviours; yet my interactions with all five pieces of writing presented challenges to my assumptions and important ideas about how i may have been discursively constrained to act in certain ways. This new consciousness certainly does not 'excuse' me for saying or doing things i regret, but nor does it condemn my discursive acts of speech or silence; it avoids a right/wrong moral binary altogether, letting me consider in more subtle ways the confusing web of social discourses within which i struggle to interact with others in my everyday life. Mandy's and Leigh's text perhaps touched me more closely than the other four through its calling up of memories involving my gendered identity as a woman and a mother – and associated positionings that are moulded from huge and complex expectations leading to both wonder and joy as well as guilt and pain.

dénouement

My analyses have suggested some responses to my research questions around ways in which the focus authors engaged with the narrative form to involve me and enable me to become conscious of different meanings for my experiences. These pieces of writing worked for me in two ways. First, they nurtured a chorally supportive space in which language was used to invite me in to participate in reflexive writer-reader conversations respectfully. The authors' subjective approaches to their personal experiences, the vulnerability they evoked, and the emotional responses they articulated, worked together to enable them to relate to me, not as objective, 'expert' psychologists, but as people whose everyday experiences are interwoven with their psychological curiosity and directions. In this way, these researchers have worked here toward crisis aims of

transforming psychology into an ethical discipline that concerns itself with the interests and needs of real people. This approach is exemplified by Mandy's apt use of a common expression to eloquently disclose, "my heart aches" (p. 372) over the harm done to her relationship with her son. This moving metaphorical imagery called up for me emotional and physical responses as i remembered a difficult time in my own relationship with my children. Sarbin evinces this kind of emotional subjectivity in his representation of his slow and painful, syllable-by-syllable utterance of the word *sholom* as he attempts to relate to his dying friend, reminding me of the sorrow i have felt in similar situations.

Second, these writers worked skilfully with language within their carefully formed supportive spaces; they chose metaphorical images with associations for me that helped to articulate ideas around the immersion of personal stories in cultural narratives. This careful crafting of language to represent particular shades of meaning demonstrates Lacan's position that metaphor is involved every time we use language (Sarup, 1992). For example, in Davies' and Harré's article, Sano apologises for *dragging* Enfermada out on a fruitless endeavour. This word immediately called up for me the caricature of a caveman dragging his mate off by her long hair, an image rich in suggestions around gendered power relationships; it invited both emotional and intellectual responses as i recalled with shame my acts during past interactions with men and considered how i accepted my subjectification and my placement in certain gendered positions.

Several elements of interest to the Russian formalists became evident as i analysed these pieces, and contributed to their writerly effect. For instance, Parker used the Bakhtinian notion of chronotope (Davis & Womack, 2002) to vividly articulate the struggle of his translated words through a metaphorically 'skewed' time and place; his vivid imagery provided me with new ways to interpret some of my own experiences with the French language.

Specific structural linguistic elements were also used effectively in these pieces. Two such features worked together in Freeman's introduction to the significant incident in Berlin, when he states, "But then something strange, and utterly unexpected, happened" (p. 197). The strategic use of a subjective, emotionally charged short sentence, combined with the element of surprise, focussed my attention on the singularity of

Freeman's experience and called up for me details of the memorable event in Pontorson. Freeman's and my experiences can be identified in structural linguistic terms as temporally singulative events, intense incidents that foster considerations of alternative interpretations.

The chorally supportive, relational spaces developed by these writers freed me to respond, not merely as a student, but also as a real person. Their respectful treatment validated my own personal experiences, supporting me in the calling up and re-consideration of my own memories of events similar to, yet different from, those featured in the vignettes. These supportive, relational spaces fostered the development of a kind of writer-reader textual fusion; in a sense, i felt that i was working alongside these writers on a co-production. My contribution to this cooperative effort was shaped by my decision to use the *sjuzet/fabula* relationship as my analytical structural narrative model. Taking this perspective helped me to speak of each singulative occurrence as simultaneously iterative, as i considered the authors' and my own personal stories in terms of powerful cultural narratives in which they are subsumed.

Analysing these written pieces in terms of the *sjuzet/fabula* model brought power structures into a central location in this project; it helped me to avoid mere introspective reflexivity and keep my efforts turned toward more useful critical reflection. For example, my engagement with and analysis of Freeman's piece facilitated a re-evaluation of my position toward and within religious discourse. Freeman's *presence* metaphor provided a way for me to conceptualise my experience at Pontorson in a useful way. As the presence of Berlin became a kind of detached 'other' for Freeman, i was momentarily distanced from the idea of religion by the ancient stone walls through which the moving sounds of singing drifted. I was able to recognise the paradoxical position i had been inhabiting in relation to religious discourse and to feel a sense of compassion and humility that i hope i can continue to maintain and cherish. Parker's stories representing the elusive slipperiness of our linguistic symbolic system through the foreign language metaphor fostered for me a heightened awareness of the power and complexity of language, and suggested ways for me to re-consider some of the cultural narratives implicated in my experiences with the French language. Sarbin's stories around the emotional embodiment of crying provided me with a way of interpreting a particular event around the time of my father's death through considering my actions as

part of a cultural narrative construction. I responded to Davies' and Harré's vignette with emotions of anger toward gendered power discourses, and shame that i have remained silently accepting of proscribed positions; their story also brought to my attention the salient idea that examples of disempowering mechanisms of cultural narratives can be recognised in the brief situational encounters of our everyday lived experiences. The piece by Mandy and Leigh brought back for me feelings of guilt and sadness as i shared Mandy's heartache, but the meanings of these responses were changed through my new awareness of the disempowering cultural narrative of mother-blame.

Through fashioning chorally supportive linguistic spaces and using them to practice a critically reflective narrative psychology, the focus writers invited me to share my stories. Through my focus on the *sjuzet/fabula* model to which my theoretical and metaphorical process led me, i was able to make some useful sense of their stories and mine. The writer-reader co-production in which i became involved has enabled me to recognise how power structures 'write' cultural narratives in which our own stories are told; my work here has opened spaces for changing personal/political meanings.

conclusions: the end of the journey

...and also new beginnings...

I had no idea, as i stood in wonderment outside an ancient church in northern France nearly five years ago, that my singular experience there would led to a life-changing process of reading, thinking and writing. Though my introduction opened with this personal story, this event cannot be singled out as the ‘beginning’ of this project. My work here has affirmed Deena Metzger’s (1986) words around the complex circularity of stories with which i prefaced the introduction. There is a multiplicity of possible beginnings to my story, to psychology’s developmental narrative and to the focus vignettes. Identifying a single starting point for any of these stories is not relevant to this work; what has been important is locating fragments of each that could be woven into a fabric of critical reflection around our socially constructed subject positionings. I hope i have picked out strands of these stories and re-told them here in a way that says some useful things for me and for others. The changing meanings of some of my memories in terms of the cultural stories in which they have their being have strikingly affirmed the everyday personal significance of socially sanctioned ideas and ‘truths’.

I have tried to work toward my ethical aims throughout this project. A celebration of multiplicity and difference informs my hope that others will be able to call up their own experiences as a result of what i have written here. Through reflexively validating my own emotions and subjective everyday experiences, i have tried to nurture an environment in which readers may begin to value and work with their own experiences and memories, re-examining their interpretations and meanings in terms of subject positionings. I have tried to say some useful things about power structures and how they work to constrain and limit us; i hope any ripples i have set in motion are gentle ones that merely invite others to reconsider the cultural moulding of their own stories. The personal disclosures that have been a necessary part of my reflexive approach have been difficult to make because they involved uncomfortable and painful recognitions of certain aspects of myself. The decision to tell personal stories was complex, particularly the one involving my two children. Speaking to my son and my daughter about my memories is part of an ethical attempt to respect their subjective memories, which may be different from mine. This speaking out to them was also hard to do; i am aware that my children’s memories of past events may include interpretations of my behaviour that lead me toward more guilt and mother-blame.

I have also tried to explicitly and reflexively talk about the process of this work itself as i have moved through this project. I have been concerned to avoid mainstream psychological objectivity; i want my readers to be aware of the emotions and uncertainties that came into this work, and to find out how my ideas developed. Paradoxically, not only do i need to remain aware that this work represents only my own subjective understandings; i also need to recognise that my interpretations emerge from a swirling mix of ideas offered by others in this relational dance of dialogical social life. The enormously helpful guidance offered to me by Mandy through her suggestions and thought-provoking questions as she travelled this path with me, the extensive material that formed the basis of my theoretical research, the succinct and striking quotes i sprinkled throughout my text and the ideas of the focus authors – all have found a place here, and i celebrate this interweaving of many voices.

Keeping this work reflexive has given it a satisfying closeness and relevance to my everyday life; the ideas i have developed here matter to me. Reflexivity was also crucial to my meandering and open-ended trajectory through a postmodern space in which i turned away from essentialist assumptions of a definite goal or endpoint. Taking this kind of unrestricted stance helped me to eschew a mainstream logical positivism that is not useful for addressing the fluid, positioned, sociolinguistic experiences of real people. My trust in letting the process guide me has also made this a satisfying exercise. Critically reflecting on each issue as it arose enabled me to gather together useful threads that suggested what the next idea should be, fostering a logical development of ideas and sidestepping potential entrapment by preconceived ideas.

The centring of this endeavour in three kinds of interweaving stories – mine, psychology's and the focus authors' – is represented in my research question: *How do these five particular psychological pieces reflexively engage with the narrative form to evoke my emotional response?* The formulation of this guiding question suggested that my theoretical development should start with considerations around narrative. Beginning this examination by looking back to my previous academic work with narrative affirmed both my reflexive stance and the intricate circularity of overlapping stories.

My re-visiting of Freeman's (2003) narrative manifesto led to my idea that his nine dimensions – axes upon which a narrative psychological paradigm might turn – could fit usefully into this work; indeed, they turned out to be extremely relevant to my interpretations of the five focus articles. The cohering of these nine central aspects of narrativity around the ideas of identity and difference helped to articulate how the focus pieces told personal stories which, while different from mine, spoke to our common location within cultural narratives. These ideas worked together toward the articulation of my first key perspective, which voices the idea that these written pieces can work like spoken conversations, inviting me into collaborative spaces of choral support.

When i told Mandy about this important step, she suggested i look into the area of reader-response, one of the many interesting, useful and personally meaningful theoretical areas i encountered for the first time during this project. Fish's (1980) social constructionist approach to the writer-reader-text relationship offered me a perspective from which i could critically reflect on my past English literature education and its downplaying of my subjective responses as a reader. Fish's ideas around interpretive communities and strategies re-affirmed my use of a social constructionist epistemological model for this thesis and resulted in the formulation of my second key perspective, which recognises that our very different experiences take place within the commonality of a socially constructed environment. This recognition helped me to circle back and work in more useful ways with the identity/difference duality. The stories of the different experiences of the focus authors were useful for me through their common origins in socially constructed situations. They resonated and became accessible to me through their engaging, reflexive attitude that invited me into a chorally supportive space where i could critically examine my own storied memories.

Reflexivity was clearly the next relevant point in this flowing process, and after considering the multiple ways of theorising reflexivity, i made a decision that at once supported my ethical aims around helping real people and also suggested a way to work with the theory/practice binary. I decided to turn away from attempts to define reflexivity theoretically, focussing instead on the particular kind of reflexive practice used by the focus authors that seemed to hold potentials for helping people. Applying Parker's (1999) term 'critical reflection', with its inclusion of political awareness, enabled me to identify this developing work as a critical inquiry. I was able to continue

to move along usefully in this vein when Mandy told me about Bourdieu and his model of epistemic reflexivity, an area being examined by another of her students. Finding out about Bourdieu in this way was an example of the sharing of ideas in a chorally supportive environment and fitted appropriately into the ethical merging of a multiplicity of voices here. Bourdieu's work focussed on the struggles of real people and his strong interest in the emancipatory potentials of social science worked along with his deep suspicion of binaries to nurture and guide my developing feelings around the importance of dualisms for this work. The workings of his epistemic reflexivity focussed my attention on the subject/object binary, as i began to examine more closely the way we live our lives as socially constructed subjects inhabiting certain positions.

The involvement of iteration within the notion of subject positioning fostered my continuing considerations of the identity/difference duality. It suggested the value of examining the language we use during particular situations in terms of the meanings of broader cultural narratives. Considerations around subject positioning and iteration moved my developing theoretical discussion closer to issues around power and its linguistic manifestations. A more detailed investigation of language and the discourses that inform it was clearly my next step.

My research around language and discourse involved a circling back to consider in new ways the theoretical areas of narrative, reader-response, reflexivity and subject positioning – this time in terms of the added linguistic/discursive factor in which they are constituted, and which has significant implications for human subjects. My reading in the areas of semiotics and Lacanian psychoanalysis suggested a new way for me to consider my own stories – as formed from traces of elusive meanings. It also led to my adoption of the textualised little 'i', which i hope will help me to become more aware of the subject positions i inhabit and the social discourses which place me in these locations. My work in this area supported my idea of analysing the five focus articles through the methodology of close textual analysis. The conundrum of how these pieces of writing were able to speak to me so effectively despite their necessary use of the elusive chain of signifiers seemed to be resolved through their reflexive practice – through autobiographical accounts that point to cultural narratives in which our stories are subsumed and by which they are informed. I decided that the focus authors had found a way to slip into the spaces between language and discourse, subject and object,

while bringing together writer and reader. They seemed to do this by focussing on their own subjective experiences, telling personal stories informed by cultural narratives.

Two newly published books around experience that Mandy recommended were very relevant, fitting into my developing ideas around the personal/political dualism. Stephenson's and Papadopoulos's (2006) memory work recognises everyday experiences as a site of micropolitics and takes place in Bradley's (2005) intersubjective space. The ideas of these writers led me to further thinking about the subject/object binary and enabled a more detailed conceptualisation of the Bourdieuean space of communal subjects/knowers. My efforts to imagine the interactions of subjects within everyday experiential situations brought me to a place where i felt i needed a metaphorical image to help me represent the point to which my theoretical process had brought me.

My thoughts around metaphor again involved a circling back to examine metaphors used and examined in past narrative work; i also identified images that i had – often without conscious awareness – used in my theoretical process here. The crucial significance of metaphor for the forming – and changing – of meanings was confirmed through this exercise, which suggested how extensively i have used metaphor in my attempts to give voice to my developing theoretical ideas. I was also now able to address metaphor in terms of linguistic signs which merely refer to other signs, and in terms of Lacan's assertion that all language use is metaphorical. I felt increasingly sure that metaphor should play a central part in my analytic approach to the reflexive linguistic practice of the five focus authors. My 'unconscious' use of metaphor in my developing work here was paralleled by the dream-like way in which the masked ball metaphor came to me – and both suggested the usefulness of bringing to consciousness these images and their associated meanings. I felt pleased with the masked ball metaphor; it seemed to aptly represent my work here, both in its evocation of theoretical ideas and through its French associations and its function as a kind of glimmering palimpsest.

I tried to tailor my analytical approach in a way which followed on from my theoretical and metaphorical process and also retained the focus on stories. The use of the *sjuzet/fabula* relationship as a narrative structural model enabled me to keep my focus

on the subsuming of personal stories in cultural narratives. The emphasising of Lacan's conceptualisation of all language as metaphorical focussed my attention on the associations attached to particular words and the way in which their use engaged me. And the involvement of Russian Formalist interests and structural linguistic elements provided me with specific practices to look for as i examined the way language was used by these authors.

As i thought about where my theoretical and metaphorical processes had brought me, i became aware of interesting and unexpected directions this work had taken. When i began this work many months ago, i made a list of 'key' words which denoted the concepts and topics i felt would be important to this work. Looking back at this list, i realised that some of these concepts have become much more central than others; in addition, elements not appearing on my list at all have become integral parts of this project. It pleases me that this has happened; it seems to confirm that this endeavour has not been constrained by an essentialist plan or end-point. Letting one idea or theoretical element lead to the next informed a guiding process which has worked effectively within the ontological and epistemological space of this project.

For example, the image of the bricoleur that i encountered for the first time during this thesis work, has become extremely relevant to and useful for this project, vividly representing my research practice. I have studied a great deal of material, picking out from this body of work particular strands that guided my direction and stitching them together into a new fabric that could be overlaid onto my postmodern assumptions and my social constructionist perspective while also covering my central concerns of three overlapping stories and two key perspectives. Considering a number of narrative structural models and selecting the *sjuzet*/fabula dualism as a central paradigm was also a piece of bricolage; one which played an important part in the eventual formulation of a carefully designed analytical approach. Looking back at my research process as a bricoleur, i can recognise now that i was moving toward a kind of merging of my two key perspectives – toward a conceptualisation of the writer-reader relationship between each of the five pieces and me as both a chorally supportive textual dialogue and also as a counter-practice nurturing an alternative kind of socially constructed, positioned experience.

The lovely idea of choral support has also become central to my work here. I believe that it can even be applied to my research work as a bricoleur – responding to particular writers like Freeman, Fish and Bourdieu and gathering potentially emancipatory strands of their work to use in my own. This process represents a chorally supportive working together in which these other voices – like those heard in the quotations sprinkled through some of the chapters of this thesis – joined mine in a chorally supportive fashioning of some new understandings. It is a travelling of ideas between writers who, through recognition of the differences, and also the sameness of our experiences, seek to work respectfully and cooperatively as subjects to bring our subjectification to consciousness.

While i was perhaps aware that metaphor would be involved in this project, i did not imagine the extent to which its potentially liberating function in the shaping of new meanings would affect this work. We must communicate through language – it is the ‘key’ to our social interactions; in Lacan’s terms, however, metaphor is always there too, at work every time we use language and providing a way to ‘turn’ this key – to grasp for fleeting moments, traces of slippery signs, opening spaces for moving away from constraining interpretations toward more empowering ones. The metaphor of binary has become crucially important to the developing meanings of this work; a number of dualisms are integral to the interweaving of my ideas, perhaps most notably the subject/object pair, which holds within it the workings of power relationships.

The issue of power is closely intertwined with the developing identity of this thesis as a critical inquiry; my ideas inevitably became more and more overtly political throughout my research process. Interweaving theoretical, metaphorical and personal strands wound themselves together into the issue of social power and its effect on us. The hard-to-define *reflexivity* was augmented by Parker’s *critical reflection* and Bourdieu’s *epistemic reflexivity*, with their explicit recognition of social power structures and possibilities for ‘pulling out’ the cultural pins which constrain us in certain positions. The notion of subject positioning became pivotal here to a recognition that the personal is indeed political; it also functions as a pivot between accepting socially constructed limitations and restrictions or working toward transformation in this Bourdieuean ‘site of freedom’.

Unexpected elements also became important in my analyses, among them a process of bricolage in which i was able to turn some of the issues stressed in my own English literature courses to more subjective uses. Combined with the strands of the Lacanian conceptualisation of metaphor and structural linguistic elements, these elements provided avenues to examine the literaturnost of the engaging writing in the five focus pieces. Personification and simile, for example, were used in ways that enabled the vignettes to speak movingly to me. Sarbin used syllabification to tell in a more vivid and touching way the story of his experience at the bedside of his dying friend, as he slowly and emotionally struggled to utter the word 'sholom'.

A feature i called 'skewing' worked to let these writers take us out of an everyday context and invite us into another realm where social relationships could be addressed in terms of their locations in stories embedded in cultural narratives. Skewing is involved in Parker's piece as a part of the foreign language metaphor that recognises the temporal gap between our hearing and our understanding of slippery signifiers. In Sarbin's story, the emotional closeness he feels with Sandy skews time and place, transporting him briefly to an alternative world which contrasts starkly to that of the institution of the hospital. The notion of contrast worked evocatively to underline the constitution of our subjective, storied experiences in cultural narratives. Two examples are the contrast between an everyday and a metaphorically transformed time and space, and the contrast between longer, more authoritative sentences and starkly emotional shorter ones. Both of these instances of contrast articulate the intrinsic power relationships between objective, powerful cultural discourses and our subjective, emotional, storied experiences.

I hope this concluding discussion works to summarise the important things i have tried to say here, and also to explain how i made the decisions to say them – that is, how the process moved along as it did. I am delighted that unexpected things happened as part of my research practice. It suggests to me that i succeeded in working within a postmodern space in which there were no solid guideposts or a predictable ending. Working in this kind of space was sometimes scary. Not only was i not sure what i would find out about the five pieces and how they had emotionally engaged me; i also did not know what i would find out about myself. Though the vignettes immediately resonated for me on a first reading, calling up past memories, it was not until after a good deal of

consideration that i was able to form interpretations that felt valid and seemed to represent subject positions i had inhabited. Some of these new interpretations made me feel uncomfortable and ashamed of my‘self’, but it also felt good to talk about them here in the hopes that this re-consideration of past experiences may help me and others. Another somewhat surprising recognition was that these past events were not major ones in the usual sense; they were simply little snapshots of everyday life which, however, pointed to deeply embedded cultural stories. I have tried to find my way among intricately circling stories, saying some useful things in the space of possibility offered to me by the five focus writers; i hope that my work here may add some gentle ripples to the flow of a changing psychology and to readers’ personal meanings.

It is important to remain aware that my text here is *sous rature* – it is articulated through the troublesome medium of language through which i can only offer tiny, but hopeful, traces of meanings. It is also important for me to remain aware that i am a textualised person, a modest ‘i’ whose ideas are directed by the social environment in which i live. Though some of the disempowering ideas i am trying to turn away from have no doubt sneaked in here, i hope that i have at least some of the time been able to gently use words that will be, in Mandy’s (2007) words, “like stories or songs...gifts to others” (p. 4).

I think of my thesis as a celebration of the counter-practices of the five focus pieces and of their embodiment of a new kind of psychological writing that reached out to affect me in significant ways. Though in some ways it feels sad to be concluding what has been a life-changing process, it ultimately feels like a joyful new beginning – a kind of Bakhtinian *carnival* celebrating chorally supportive uses of words to touch one another in emancipatory ways. Just as there are no real beginnings in the circularity of stories, there are no endings either. I have reached a point where i must come to a kind of ending, however, and i would like it to be a hopeful one. My hope is for more ethically respectful and critically reflective interpretations and meanings for the academic area of psychology, for my readers, for my children and for myself. I ‘end’ with an anonymous academic’s metaphorical articulation around the idea of reflexivity – a statement that evokes the postmodern circularity of the personal, social and political journey this work has felt like for me: “[Reflexivity is] walking backwards in the sand and viewing your footprints as you go” (cited in Frewin, 1997, p. 89).

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(‘focus’ articles are indicated by bold font)

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