

A narrative exploration of meaning in the public sector

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ABSTRACT

My thesis is a narrative exploration of making meaning in the public sector, drawing on my own lived experience of a radical 'reformation' of the British welfare state over the past two decades. This has been characterised by contested theoretical and political views about the commercialisation of public services, by the experience of turbulent social movements and public sector management, and by a profound sense of loss. The thesis is structured around an alternating weave of story and theory, which contributes to an iterative movement of different forms of reflection. As a researcher, I take up the role of a first-person narrator. This narrative approach is shaped by two discourses, which both emphasise awareness of the social and group dimension. Firstly, complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al, 2000; Stacey and Griffin, 2005) introduces a new and different dimension into use of narrative: one in which meaning making and ethical insight (Griffin, 2002, 2005) are seen as emerging through social interaction. Secondly, the narrative work draws on psychosocial insights into the emotional life and politics of public services, particularly by Hoggett (1992, 2000), Cooper (2003) and Cooper and Lousada (2005). Thirdly, it draws on a body of critical social theory about the new public management particularly by Newman (2000, 2005), Du Gay (2000), Hall (2003) and Finlayson (2003).

The thesis captures the lived experience of a social history and social movements around local government and addresses the question whether it matters if we now send public services 'off to the market'? I conclude that the idea of a 'public sector' is still critically important to our social well-being and that a public service ethos is to be rethought in terms of a capacity for human relating and intimacy, in contrast to the present orientation towards the utilitarian and pragmatic emphasis on efficiency and performance management. I identify the absence of 'a place to think' as an increasingly important phenomenon and advocate a new kind of conversation: one which draws on story and oral history to reflect on the emotional and moral capacities of a public service ethic confronted by intensive commercialisation and the rapid growth of a private public service sector and new monopolies.

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INTRODUCTION

“Where we mean competition we should say so, instead of pretending contestability is something different ... why should choice, innovation, competition, financial discipline be confined to private markets?”

(Patricia Hewitt, Minister for Health, November 2005)

Introduction

During a public conversation in 2003, two social theorists agreed that whether or not we find ‘post-modernism’ a relevant explanatory philosophy, the world we live in now since 1989, *is* decidedly a post-modern one. Žižek and Eagleton¹ emphasised that something ‘new’ is coming into being. We are witnessing, they said, something emergent: the beginning of both the end of an era and the advent of a new global struggle with new rules of engagement. I will firstly explain how I understand the impact of this post-modern world and then turn to the questions that this raises for thinking about public services. I will then go on to highlight my key research questions, the place of storytelling as a methodology and the overall outline structure of my thesis.

A post-modern world

In just over a decade, the collapse of the bipolar world power structure of the late 1980s and the deregulation of world finance systems has meant that the old collectivities and certainties can no longer be taken for granted. This deregulation has brought gains in the way of personal and cultural freedoms with an increased recognition of ‘difference’, which must be constantly renegotiated in the inevitable absence of absolute guidelines. It also means we are called upon to be more ‘psychologically present’ in the workplace (Hirschorn, 1997:14) and to be more aware of the emotional labour involved. But the constant restructuring of the world of work means we now also travel more lightly and have become more cautious and calculating in our sense of loyalty, commitment and attachments both personally and institutionally. So the other side of these more positive experiences of a process of social and economic deregulation is a deep experience of loss, vulnerability, risk, failure and ‘shifting anxieties’ (Elliott, 2000:17).

The impact of these kinds of changes has been very far-reaching on the compromise between capital and labour which was the Keynesian British welfare state. This post-war settlement shaped thinking about the common interest and the public good in both the

¹ Terry Eagleton and Slavoj Žižek in conversation at the ICA October 2003.

policy making and delivery of public services through a public sector. Public services arose out of bottom-up pressures as well as top-down control. This 'settlement' has now been replaced at a policy level by the reification of the 'market' along with the rhetoric of consumer choice and diversity. Boll (2005) has characterised this as the last grand narrative. The commodification of public services has progressed incrementally and steadily from the early 1980s and has intensified over the last five years moving to the very heart of welfare services. The old certainties of the welfare state are being reformed as public institutions are steadily being dismantled, privatised or commercialised. In parallel with this, there has been a marginalisation of politics in the broad sense. There is a growing privatisation of citizenship and moral responsibility. Life lived as 'project' under modernity (Eliott, 2000:15) has changed to one of 'fragmentation', albeit with a celebration of difference. The sense of any single, coherent, authoritative identity has been replaced by multiple local identities.

I will return to explore these themes in more detail in Part Five, in relation to understanding a 'new modernity' (Wheeler, 1999), but it suffices here to emphasise that we are living through a radical reordering of the established connections and psychological contract between communities, public service institutions and government. Public institutions have begun to fragment into multiple agency structures under the policy of public-private partnerships and the private finance initiative. They are increasingly being exposed to a hollowing out.

The delivery of public services has become an important income stream and source of profit for the private sector. The not-for-profit 'third sector' is also being groomed by new streams of government funding and legislation to introduce community interest companies so as to become alternative providers to public sector services. In this they may follow the path taken by Housing Associations 15 years ago. The expansion of the sector is being vigorously promoted by government, elements within the sector itself, and by growing support and involvement of the corporate sector.

The restructuring of public services from the early 1990s has been dominated by the managerial thinking of the 'New Public Management'. The sense that change was a politically determined process was replaced by a new managerial rhetoric and business model. A cultural revolution of performance measurement and the three 'E's (economy,

efficiency, effectiveness) came to increasingly dominate the formal narrative of public sector purpose and change. This also reflected the weakness, disorientation and silencing of the voice of the 'Left' under the 18 years of continuous Conservative administrations from 1979–1997. The return of a New Labour government in 1997 saw all these same ideological tendencies consolidated and become increasingly embodied in EU legislation.

But a renewed contestation of purpose about what public services are for, and how they should be delivered, re-awakened with unexpected force some four years later during 2001, the year in which I began my research. Public services gradually once again became a more contested narrative, a political question rather than just a managerial one. This significant shift in these political dynamics started with a bed crisis in the NHS in the winter of 2000 and was then reinforced by the catastrophic breakdown of rail privatisation, which led to the re-formation of the privatised Railtrack as Network Rail in 2003.

Similarly, British Energy was bailed out and effectively re-nationalised, posing underlying questions of probity about how these privatisations originally took place. In a climate of growing crisis, the government was at last prepared to articulate that the infrastructure of public services in the UK was approaching breakdown on multiple fronts. Together these events permitted the announcement of a massive injection of extra government capital funding, and doubling of expenditure with a six per cent annual growth rate projected over the next five years. However, it is important to emphasise this dramatic shift was grounded as much in a business case in managing the economy, as well as in any concern for social justice and maintenance of the welfare state. The promotion of a public-private partnership model has underpinned the 'soft landing' of British industry in a period of international recession, and explains the absence of complaint by industry about this increase in public investment.

The severe financial constraints on public spending were only relaxed in New Labour's second term in government following its re-election. It meant that over the four years, 2001 to 2005, the mood for many people involved in public services has been reversed for the first time in two decades away from 'managing decline' to the demands of meeting increased spending and related performance targets. However, it is important to emphasise that the significant underlying dynamic remains the commitment to increased

marketisation. This has intensified alongside the increased budgetary commitment to public services. I will explore this dynamic more fully in a later chapter, but it is important to note that it is a central issue which underpins conflict and confusion as to what we now mean by public services and what form they should take. A key expression of this was the decision in November 2003 to legislate in favour of 'Foundation Hospitals'. This represented a symbolic marker in support of a broader strategy of marketisation for the NHS, as does the introduction of a competitive fee structure into higher education. New Labour's achievement of a third term in mid 2005 resulted in renewed proposals to speed up this 'reform' momentum.

National and global events post-2001

Several powerfully, shaping international events since 2001, have also radically changed the context in which I initially embarked on my research. Some of the sudden shifts in world and national events since 2001 are like ruptures, which reveal the hidden processes of change that, directly or indirectly, are shaping factors in this turbulence around public services at a more local level. It was suggested that with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, we had experienced 'The end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992). The triumphalist victory of American capitalism over the Soviet Union and east European socialist states meant exposure to economic shock therapy for these states involving wide scale privatisation. These events shaped the 1990s, plunging the majority of people in the former soviet republics into a level of poverty from which many have yet to recover (Stiglitz:2002:152).

It laid the basis for assertion of new strategies to maintain the American imperium, which emerged towards the end of the 1990s. Initiatives such as the 'Project for the American Century'² established in 1997 expressed a new US neo-conservative agenda and marginalised former 'cold war' alliances, which had previously defined a common unity with Western Europe. These key shifts became more transparent with the 'war on terror' post-'September 11th' and through invasions of Afghanistan and in Iraq. The privatisation of water supply in Africa or state sectors in Kosovo and Iraq underscore how distant global events also resonate with local 'reform' of public services in the UK.

² For details see www.newamericancentury.org.

But there has also been the development of new social movements (Mayo, 2005), which first found a media profile in the anti-globalisation demonstrations in Seattle in 1999. In the autumn of 2003, this developed into a significant refusal by states in the 'south', particularly China, India and Brazil, to accept the terms of trade offered at the WTO conference at Cancun. This new 'G21' has given notice of a growing assertiveness towards the G8. Fractious trade conflicts between America and the EU also highlight the growing potential of future trade wars.

The rejection of the draft EU Constitution in France in 2005 expressed the wide perception that the new constitution provided a 'Trojan horse' for the kind of welfare state market driven reforms already experienced in the UK. The term 'market' was used 99 times in this proposed Services Directive and it highlighted the underlying conflict between the 'Anglo-social' liberal market economic model (Clark, 2005) and the more collective values still popularly embraced in the social market model of France, Germany and the Scandinavian states.

Following the geopolitical shifts of the late 1980s, the global financial system was deregulated. A decade later the massive corporate corruption scandals of Enron and WorldCom in 2001/2 rocked the already falling stock market, taking four years to recover. Enron brought down with it the demise of the major accountancy company, Arthur Anderson, who were its auditors. In the UK it was considered, until recently, that the safeguards against such corruption were sufficient. But the successive privatisations of national utilities, the national and local state, parts of the NHS and extensive private-public partnerships also mean that the once rigid public-private boundary established in the 19th century has become much more porous as the contract culture takes root and with it the potential for new forms of corruption.

After a 20-year absence, several major strikes have occurred in the public sector. In a national strike over pay by local government manual workers in the summer of 2002, the million-strong women workers in Unison played the lead role for the first time. Fire and postal workers have also taken significant industrial action. A 'wildcat' strike wreaked havoc for BA at Heathrow in 2003 as women staff felt pressurised into changing to more flexible working when new hours threatened to disrupt their patterns of care for

dependants. It illustrated how pay increases, like 'reform' more generally, are now particularly tied to incorporating enhanced labour flexibility across all sectors.

New Labour

Following New Labour's election in 1997, its utilitarian pragmatism of 'what works is what matters' was central to its translation of the new 'Third Way' politics (Giddens, 1998:64-66). This diluted a previously understood conflict of values as to what public services represent for society, which had been embedded in very different programmes of political parties prior to 1997. Since then, political questions have been reconstituted as managerial problems about market efficiency or technical questions, such as the way procurement can best produce financial savings. It can be argued that the mantra of 'what works is what matters' has in reality been overtaken by a privileging of market language in which 'reform' thinking ignores and denigrates another tradition grounded in the inherent worth of providing services outside the market system. It promotes an approach to innovation within narrow policy parameters that is fuelled by the illusion of certainty and control through a target-dominated, systems way of thinking. There is an overriding emphasis on efficiency savings, of 'more for less'. Modernisation has sought to accentuate competition and has promoted ceaseless emotional turbulence about survival, at the expense of reflective thought about development.

It is important to register that alongside this embrace of market thinking, the UK and US now have the worst levels of poverty of all western democracies with far higher proportions of the elderly in poverty (Therborn, 2003:141). In the UK, one in three children are still born into poverty (41 per cent in London), and the wealth gap has widened since 1997 (United Nations, 2005).

Local government

The early 1980s were characterised by new forms of funding by innovative local authorities for local action-research work, which had enlivened and renewed civil society. This rich history of social movements and community-based organisations is one in which I had participated for 15 years and is something to which I will return in detail. By the end of the 1980s its radical presence was fast disappearing as the contract culture

began to replace it. As the national economy experienced a deep recession, local authorities in inner cities began to take on the protective role of a 'dented shield' as they faced the increasing impoverishment of their localities. Some councils embarked on a long-running confrontation with the then Conservative government. By 1987 it had secured its third term of office and was intent on vigorously rolling back the frontiers of the local state.

Like many others active in social movements of that period, I had myself by then become a manager in one such 'frontline' local authority where I remained for the next ten years. I will return to this history later in detail but my early experience of this transition was captured for me in a phantasy. Just before I took up my post, I had read a novel about the siege of Stalingrad (Grossman, 1980) in which Russian soldiers fought on from the cellars of the derelict city for a long period and without officers. At that moment it felt that we too were now engaged in a state of war with the entrenched Thatcher administration. At times, I came to feel a parallel sense of an organisation left without its 'officers'. We too were reliant on our own resilience and ingenuity as we engaged with an onslaught of new legislation introducing market thinking into the public sector.

A collapse of meaning

The demand for efficiency and accuracy of work as well as predictable products or services, which meet standard criteria, lies at the heart of capitalist modernity. Calculation and rational thinking rule along with the notion that every good or service must be quantifiable and the production undertaken in the most efficient way (Wheeler, 2000:103). Drawing on MacIntyre (1981:77), she goes on to quote that one of the three prototypical 'characters' of modernity in charge of all this is the 'manager'. The manager's focus is means rather than ends and there is a neglect of anything identifiable as ultimate value or ultimate truth. While sharing this viewpoint in terms of a wider understanding of management theory, my own lived experience *is* certainly much more complex. I know that as a senior manager in public services, responsible for the tendering of services in compliance with and under the duress of legislation, the question of moral and ethical choices, doing what was 'right' in the circumstances and seeking to live with integrity *were* in constant discussion. This pervaded our day-to-day decisions as we struggled to contest the weight of the new orthodoxies of the three 'E's': economy,

efficiency and effectiveness and the business model driven New Public Management (NPM).

I was deeply concerned about whether my integrity was being compromised. After nine years in a senior management role, I was brought face-to-face with how far I could continue to reconcile the pressures of the conflicting and contradictory demands in local government. I was holidaying in Greece in 1995 in a 'summer camp' environment. Someone organised a '*passion evening*' in which anyone could take a seat as speaker on some issue on which they felt passionate. I had spent years passionately involved in different ventures to radicalise and reform the welfare state. Working in collectives, my research had supported the launching of numerous innovative campaigns and the setting up of new services to meet unmet needs. This had been followed by nearly a decade in senior management from the late 1980s in local government in which I was actively engaged in preventing privatisation of public services. Although my role was quite technical in focus it was imbued with political meaning and a collective energy. As I sat under the stars that night my immediate thought was I would speak on this. Speakers came and went and I heard about the intricacies of organic sewage farms, or why not voting was a crime by an Argentinian now living in London. But gradually I became I aware that I could not speak.

Intellectually, I still remained very committed to the idea of public services but under the weight of managing all the contradictions implicit in my role, I realised that I had lost my passion. The entrenchment of the new public management was the reality increasingly shaping my day-to-day life. Later, I had a dream about searching through the tangled chaos of a jumble sale, in which the clothes were impossible to separate out. I was searching for a '*lunch box with a pink lid*'. The meaning of this dream lay in a search for a more nourishing work environment. My workplace was draining away my feminist and 'feminine' energies. I had ceased to be able to 'think' and felt increasingly cut off from a capacity to reflect in any of the former collective ways. Underlying my 'truth-in-the-moment' this warm summer evening I sensed, but could not yet understand, that the emotion of loss was trying to make itself present. My inner compass was at work. So the question of the *meaning* of public services emerged for me in a very personal way at this point.

It could be said in one sense, that it was at this moment that my thesis began. A few years later I left local government, moving first into teaching around gender and management and then to engage intellectually and experientially with the emotional basis of thinking and learning. Four years later I embarked on a PhD to make sense of this experience and the ‘unfinished business’ that followed in its wake, at a time when the question of public services was no longer a central contested political debate and had become a shadow narrative.

Public services: an untold story

I began my research at the University of Hertfordshire early in 2001 in the chaotic aftermath of the Hatfield rail crash, when debate about public services more broadly still barely registered as an issue on the wider political agenda. At that time, I never anticipated that my chosen theme would once again move from being the marginalised issue it had become over the previous 15 years to becoming the contested terrain on which the general election would come to be fought in 2005. However, this election still only focused around funding and levels of growth and savings in public funding and on the themes of consumer choice and diversity. It simply avoided the more fundamental and substantive questions of the values, which should underpin our collective decisions about public service provision and whether privatisation is an appropriate strategy.

The global and national events described earlier, which have been changing all our lives prior to and since 2001, are also impacting deeply on the nature of the welfare state in the UK. I wanted to explore this terrain of *meaning* about public services and the kind of values and ethical purpose that have come to underpin our new and changing understanding in the 21st century, through my own experience and the way it intertwines the global story of neo-liberal economic decline.

Something stolen

It is March 2002, and I am on my way to a conference. I am certain that I am returning to an Adult Education Centre run by a county council. In my own mind, I had been there previously for a weekend as part of course I had been studying many years earlier. My pleasurable memory was of a beautiful Tudor mansion house, sitting above a green valley, with views opening across the rolling Chiltern Hills. As the taxi turns into the

long drive up to the house I suddenly see the sign Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC). Until that moment, I was returning to this rather idyllic Adult Education Centre. Instead, I feel quite shocked for a moment and flooded by angry feelings. I then find myself seeking consolation in the fact that at least the bit of the 'City', which has 'stolen' it, is not Anderson Consulting (then facing accusations with regard to the Enron corruption scandal). Later I swap tales about how such management consultants made a 'killing' in the early 1990s consulting to local authorities in financial crisis and how they acted as the conduit for inducting public sector organisations into the new American business management practices. To remember these 'masters of the universe' in action brings up memories of humiliation and of outrage.

I am staying in a conference centre that extends up the hill beyond the main house rather like a hill top settlement. From my window I look out directly on to the blue and white PWC flag fluttering in the breeze. I begin to imagine what must it be like to be a coloniser. The idea of coloniser, colonised and decolonisation begins to grow in my mind as a possible metaphor for what is happening to public services.³

But does it matter?

I had last seen Delta while I was managing a multi-disciplinary service with responsibility for the corporate tendering of local government services. She was a financial administrator and I valued her measured, calm response to any query. Five years later in 2003 we just meet by chance in the street. We swap histories and she tells me that she was moved on to a regeneration team and how this was eventually outsourced to become, an 'arm's length company'. She falters twice at the memory and eventually sums it up as "the process of being TUPE'd over was badly handled with little consultation". She was left feeling vulnerable and insecure and had eventually changed jobs and moved to a post in central London involving a long journey to work across London.

She is only on a three-year contract, but feels her manager is pushing hard to renew her contract. Her pleasure, sense of recognition and confidence in her new role is palpable. She goes on to say how, although under contract, she is in the 'core'. And then she describes how the customer service roles for most local services have been externalised a

³ The house was identical to the adult education centre I had attended but I discovered this particular house had been owned by the Ministry of Defence prior to sale.

year ago to a company called Vertex, in a £1/4 billion pound, ten-year contract, with an option for another five years. She describes in a slightly bemused way how “just across the corridor from me in the Civic Centre are Vertex, Accord and other companies now running what were once council services”.

At that time I had never heard of Vertex and was somewhat stunned at the scale and length of this new kind of contract. This Conservative local authority has been committed to contracting out for the past two decades. But, the scale of the ‘enabling state’ now being made real in this key local authority left me startled. I go on to ask Delta what does she think about this? She points out that it had all happened before she started and she herself was still part of a direct in-house service. She ponders for a while but eventually says, *“But does it matter if they provide good services?”*

Checking later, I discover that Vertex is an IT/facilities management company and a subsidiary of United Utilities, a top 100 FTE company that specialises in water and electricity supply privatised in the 1980/90s. They are intending to outsource all their call centre work to India and in the longer term there is no reason for this to preclude their local council run services. In a first step, they moved 400 back office parking-related jobs to Dingwall in Scotland in 2006.

Key research questions

These stories convey my own subjective awareness of situations in which I have found myself. They reflect interactions arising from my involvement in different spheres or ‘pools’ of experience in a way which has a multiple organisational, societal and political focus. They variously reflect working in public services, responses to their changing nature or the expectation of shaping their direction in some way through social or political activism. Together, they are indicative of how the public realm is something we all participate in either as citizens and taxpayers, public service workers, or as users and potential users.

Taken together, these stories encapsulate some of the key questions that I want to explore in this thesis. For two decades ‘modernisation’ has been dominated by a narrative of commercialisation, efficiency and ‘service delivery’, and ignored the wider role and

meaning of public institutions. I am interested in this silenced narrative about the *meaning* of public services, and the unacknowledged loss, mourning, confusion and adjustment which have accompanied these changes and reshaped individual and collective identities, including my own. For people who work in those services it has meant open and sometimes bitter conflict and a long and painful process of loss and adjustment. For others, it has been more of an accommodation.

Delta's question as to whether public services could be run equally well by either public or private organisations also highlighted for me the importance of being able to distinguish my own emotional response to her question and to be able to stand to one side from it, so as to listen to how the question had formed in *her* mind. When I told her story to a trade union colleague, it immediately triggered a defensive reaction. Her 'question' was quickly smothered with a received response. I wanted to retain a capacity to reflect on why the question had emerged in her mind in the way it had.

So rather than a defence of public services being my starting point, I wanted to explore what it is like at this moment in time, to live through these turbulent processes of on-going change which have reordered public services in such fundamental ways since the early 1980s: ways which have been mainly experienced away from the public eye and which fall outside the dominant narrative. By implication, they are often unspoken, silenced stories.

In summary, the questions that have emerged so far are what underlay my sense of a theft, of a loss and 'occupation' and was it warranted and permanent? Has something been stolen and if so what is it? Does it matter if we send everything 'off to the market'? Does the public sector remain a different moral community, which readily translates into a distinct public service ethos, or has the decade and a half long impact of the 'New Public Management' so blurred the boundary with the private sector as to increasingly make traditional assumptions about a different public sector ethos simply meaningless? What will sustain and mobilise the meaning we invest in public services as the traditional, taken for granted, structures of the public sector continue to erode?

Thesis outline

The thesis is a weave of four different strands. The first is about my own lived experience of the radical and rapid change in the nature of the welfare state that has taken place over the past two decades. The second is a methodological exploration of the use of storytelling as a narrative approach to researching this experience of change. The third strand of the weave is the voice of theory, drawing particularly on the contested discourses about public services around marketisation and the evolving forms of the New Public Management. But I also engage with two new theoretical discourses that emphasise human interaction: complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking. Both discourses shape my approach to narrative but also bring a fresh dimension to gaining insight into what we now mean by ‘public’ services or a ‘public sector’. The final strand of the thesis is my own reflexive awareness of the process of change arising in and from the social interactions that the research process engendered. Together these four different strands give rise to an iterative process of storytelling and critical reflection.

The thesis is in six parts.

Part One ‘Narrative reasoning’, reviews the ‘narrative turn’ in social sciences and debates that surround this. This provides a context for elaborating my own approach to the use of storytelling as a research method and the central place in this of learning from experience and working with oneself and others. Storytelling offers a way to research a ‘not known’ or an absence, something which is not yet understood, unlike addressing a defined problem from which a linear approach to research might flow. Complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking have a role in shaping my approach to story

Part Two ‘The past in the present’, is a social history of the post-war welfare state drawing on critical social policy, which is intertwined with stories drawn from my own experiences. This includes reflection on why and how the social movements of the 1970/80s engaged in an effort to renew local democratic forms only to be followed by a politically turbulent decade in local government as it engaged with marketisation and modernisation of public services. This story is very much a ‘shadow narrative’, which as

Stacey (2000:382) points out always exists alongside a different, 'legitimate story' as written and understood by those in power.

Part Three 'In search of a literature' engages with the contested literatures about the marketisation of public services and the evolution of the New Public Management in an attempt to make sense of this experience. This juxtaposition of the voice of theory with that of the earlier lived experience demonstrates how they resonate but also highlights key gaps. It points towards the contribution which stories bring to an understanding public services change and the need for a literature, which takes account of ethics and emotional life.

Part Four 'From silence to voice', is a return to storytelling. Fourteen short stories describe my own lived experience of public services from 2001 to 2005 and the encounters that I experienced. This is followed by a critical reflection on what these stories tell us.

Part Five 'Modernity and the public sphere', returns in more depth to the two emerging discourses of complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking already briefly encountered in my approach to narrative. This provides a different lens through which to reflect on the previous storytelling. Both discourses bring a fresh critique to the 'reform' of public services in ways which locate the place of ethics and emotions in a more central way. But this involved engaging with how these different discourses 'rubbed up' against each other, which comes to form an overall part of my narrative. In the concluding chapter I reflect on post modernism and the public sphere.

Part Six 'Conclusions', returns to the key questions posed in this 'Introduction' and draws together the original contributions to knowledge of the thesis which have arisen from the iterative reflections on storytelling and theory.

Chapter 1: On narrative

In this chapter I will look at debates around narrative theory and practice including the relevance of narrative to researching close to the political domain. I will also consider how the ‘narrative turn’ has been taken up in organisational research and other spheres including the politics of welfare. This is as a precursor to discussing my own narrative approach in the following chapter. ‘Narrative’ is a term that is used in multiple ways across different discourses. Within a complex responsive processes approach (see below) it specifically implies the introduction of some kind of linking reflection and evaluation, in contrast to ‘story’, which is the carrier of the feeling states.

Researching close to the political domain

The political domain is intolerant of uncertainties. The role society seeks from politicians is a capacity to project order and control. The growing reliance on measurable systems and adoption of a business model since the mid-1980s, has accentuated the dominant need for ‘hard facts’, which can be rapidly translated into the implications of losing or gaining power. Therefore, a highly rational analysis with all its positivist associations still remains key for politicians. Public services research is saturated with warring theory and ideologies. This sets the scene for justifying or critiquing new policy or procedure and the flow of positivist, empirical, quantitative research to support the case for or against. Hence, for example, the continuous flow of contradictory research and conflicting analyses of the success or failure of the Public Finance Initiative (PFI) or why different publications on the NHS can demonstrate that it is both improving and failing. Does the statement that ‘there are more NHS managers than beds’ imply there is over-management or does it start with a misrepresentation of what constitutes health care? (Dean, 2003).

Theory is key to developing an explanatory framework and I will turn to this public services discourse in Part Three. But it is not my principal methodology. I have not, for example, chosen a theoretical route such as an all-embracing Foucauldian framework

with its insights into power and powerlessness. Its resulting focus on deconstruction leaves me with little sense of the capacity of individual agency or creative collective potential. So although I will draw on critical social policy and theory to elaborate the history and context of public services, I have chosen a narrative lens as the central thrust of my methodology. My interest lies with *experience* as a valid and rich source of data or insight into exploring questions of the meaning we have come to invest in public services in the context of rapid change. This is not to ultimately privilege qualitative methodologies, but rather because it best suits my purpose. Through revealing the complicated weave that is a lived experience, we access more elusive feelings and sensitivities, which may lead to a better understanding of what underlies a present sense of confusion as to what public services mean.

Narrative analysis

In what way does a 'narrative' represent 'reality' around us? Does the blurring of fact or fiction matter? Can stories represent 'truth'? These and other questions are relevant to how a narrative approach is understood in providing a different kind of insight into the meaning of public services.

Reissman (1993:1) opens her study of *Narrative Analysis* with the statement that 'as realist assumptions from natural science methods prove limiting for understanding social life ... scholars from various disciplines (including Bruner, 1986; Schafer, 1990) are turning to narrative as the organizing principle for human action' and although speaking here of researchers across disciplines in the USA, she emphasises that it was developments in European theory that set the stage for this narrative turn, such as 'the work of Bakhtin, 1981; Barthes, 1974; Ricouer, 1981, 1984'. She goes on to argue that 'storytelling is what we do with our research materials and what informants do with us' (ibid:1) and that through the story metaphor we create order in particular contexts. This is contrasted with mechanical metaphors from natural sciences, which require an objective description of forces in the world and in which we position ourselves outside to do so.

To revisit a narrative many years later is to highlight how selective and arbitrary the eventual 'findings' of a research process can be, in a way which cannot be reduced to just good or bad research. If it is not the 'events' but the stories around them that are the

focus of attention, then every text is open to several readings and to several constructions. It also underscores how 'reality' and representations of that 'reality' can never be one and the same. As Riessman (1993:15) states: meaning is fluid and contextual not fixed and universal. We have texts that represent reality, partially, selectively, and imperfectly. The agency of the teller is central to the language of representation along with the action of the reader and other interpretive elements. Yet the use of story in ways that leave the researcher outside the frame is still a dominant practice in the growing field of narrative studies as it extends its reach through social science, health and management and oral history. For example, in 2002, a key figure like Riessman herself⁴ reflecting on her extensive work around narrative analysis as a research method, explored how her own writing had largely stayed in an 'objective' position, writing in the third person as an observer of others. Only in her most recent research project is she now trying to integrate the personal meaning of doing this research as part of an overall story.

During the 1990s, the literature of qualitative research methods was rich with accounts of disputes on how the subjective and autobiographical were seen as tainted with personal bias. Mykhalovsky (1997:229) in Hertz's ethnographically influenced *Reflexivity and Voice* (1997), reflects on being charged by other sociologists with self-indulgence, narcissism and self-absorption and being rejected for a research degree for placing himself at the centre of an ethnographic autobiography, which engaged in multiple voices. He had posed the question of how we represent the self and our own voice in a discipline in which this had typically only been done covertly.

Bochner (2001:134-136) also wrote an impassioned defence of the place for personal narratives arguing against similar ridicule directed towards him by Atkinson and Silverman (1997). They had argued that personal narrative constitutes a blind alley and in reply Bochner suggests that his detractors represent an idealised and discredited theory of inquiry, a received view of sociology as a scientific discipline with a distinctly masculine characterisation, in which suppressed emotionality is dominant. To conform to the rules of social science, he suggests, is to divide oneself and place rigour over imagination, intellect over feeling, theories over stories, lectures over conversations, abstract ideas over concrete events. He reports posing a question during a social science conference

⁴ Talk given at a Narrative Research Centre Seminar 2002, University of East London.

talk: “Have you ever felt that you were writing about yourself when you were reporting ‘data’ about other persons?” (ibid:138). He points out that after the talk people made a point of sharing with him how their research connected to their lived experiences, but that they could not say so in print and felt they had to hide their own stories, interests and experiences.

Bochner concludes that Atkinson and Silverman ‘privilege the analyst over the story’ (ibid:135) and do not recognise the ways in which the analyst becomes part of the story. He challenges the notion that stories are merely products of cultural conventions with absolute authority over our thoughts. In his view, the meaning of a story is not immanent in a text: the process of theorising, analysing and categorising is shot through with the imagination and ways of seeing of the interpreter. He sees the narrative turn as a move away from the master narrative and towards local stories; away from idealising abstract theory and towards embracing the values of irony, emotionality and activism or a feeling, embodied and vulnerable observer; away from writing essays to telling stories. But to counter the accusations of narcissism or narrative as a ‘blind alley’, I would want to add to Bochner’s list: stories also need to reveal something about institutional and societal power.

Defending narrative

Bruner (2003:63-67) suggests we are all constantly engaged in a ‘self making narrative’ and ‘in the end we become the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about ourselves’. In his view we live in narrative and the self is not something one finds; it is something one creates, which we do by ‘writing’ and ‘storying’. He adds: ‘Surely if ourselves were just there, we’d have no need to tell ourselves about them?’ (ibid:63). In other words, the self is a narrative construct and an act of self-creation. But in a challenging response to this, Strawson (2004), a philosopher, has argued that Bruner’s ideas have now come to dominate the humanities and human sciences and asks whether this narrativity view is a profound and universal insight into the human condition, a partial truth at best or a pernicious new orthodoxy. In his view, our being ‘just there’ might give us all the need in the world to tell about ourselves and in order to understand better the way we are. He urges self-discovery without any narrative self-creation (ibid:15). Strawson points out that Bruner never raises the question of whether there is

any sense in which one's self-narrative should be accurate or realistic, claiming that its extreme post-modern position does not care about truth and because fiction is not open to criticism. In Strawson's view, honesty matters: many do revise their past but others do not, or not in any significant or self-flattering way. He implies that the more you recall, retell, narrate yourself, the further you risk moving away from accurate self-understanding and from the truth of your being. Strawson (2005) has also subsequently argued that all that matters to him is the morality of the present moment. In his view, nothing depends on himself in the past.

We do not live narratives, but construct them after the fact when we tell what happened or during as we choose our gestures and responses in the moment. So Strawson's criticism of Bruner's emphasis on how the self continuously 'invents' and 'creates' narratives, implies something of a given or completed self to be revealed, not an emerging self, continuing and constantly changing and being re-interpreted. But I would still want to emphasise rather the process by which we still need 'to come to know' this social self that we are creating, without recourse to avoidance and denial (Kidd, 2004), and to introduce the notion of 'self-understanding' and 'interpretation' (Newman, 2005a), rather than Bruner's emphasis on self-creation. It raises the question of emotional truth and why blurring of fact or fiction matters in narrative. We remember better and more honestly as we gain a better understanding of ourselves.

Strawson is wrong to attack narrative reasoning in the way he does. In an effective challenge to his viewpoint, Worth (2005) points out that there are two kinds of reasoning which we regularly use to make sense of our world and our experience. Discursive reasoning relies on logic, reasoned argument and inductive and deductive reasoning and conceptualisation in an ordered string of events. Narrative reasoning on the other hand is abductive reasoning, which depends on a narrative to order a certain experience. It is a 'form of reasoning that can find morals, reasons, explanations, description, inference, causation (on occasions but not necessarily) and all kinds of other information through the understanding of narrative, particularly well-constructed narrative' (ibid:11-12). She adds that since we do not tend to think of reliable inferences to come from anything other than discursive reasoning, we end up having an extremely limited notion of where belief, and true justified belief can come from. We may not be expert storytellers but in most, if not all adults, it is one of the primary ways we impose coherence and give meaning to

our experience. Narrative then is an under-represented form of reasoning grounded in everyday storytelling as a form of communication.

Perhaps our interest in story is also a sign of the political disillusionment of our times, and that we seek and hope to find some kernel of a different kind of 'truth' amongst this return to story than that which rationality offers. Perhaps this renewed need to tell a story in our time is a way of holding the 'self' together in some way. Raymond Williams (1979:170 quoted by Byrne, 2000: 54) describes how the new industrial society in the early 19th century was unknowable from experience alone. It was only the development of a statistical mode of analysis and information gathering that enabled this to happen, and this form of understanding itself emerged out of changes in that society. Perhaps it is possible in some way to liken the role of narrative work to the role performed by statistics in this previous era. Perhaps our experience of modernity and post-modernity is also unknowable in any other way. So although my story making may well emerge more like 'crabs etching pathways in the sand' (Gleik and Porter, 1990:32), it is their irregularity of patterning rather than their orderliness that matters.

Fact or fiction

Denzin considered that because all writing is fictional 'or made up of things that could have happened or did happen' that 'it is necessary to do away with the distinction between fact and fiction' (1989:25). Similarly, Freeman (2002) is relaxed about drawing any distinction. But I agree rather with Whitelaw (2000) who, in her story of doing therapy research, accepts that boundaries between fiction and science are blurred, but that 'it is politically, morally and academically dangerous to abandon the distinction altogether' (2000:123) and takes the view 'that we need to write credible research, rather than as a result of an active imagination, so that the intended political and ethical content of the work has some chance of entering the social consciousness'. She emphasises the potential generalisability of a story in a way that is diffuse and less tangible than a 'blanket application' of a more traditional research. Certain parts of a story may strike a chord with the experience or ideas of the reader. In arguing this, she distinguishes between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how', emphasising knowing how is very often tacit knowledge, which includes 'unverbalised perceptions, memories, and understandings of situations' (Stiles, 1995:125-126). Telling and reading a story both

depend on and contribute to tacit knowledge of doing research with people. Whitelaw (2000:123) quotes the view of Stiles, that ‘stories can contribute positively to tacit knowledge ... When you’ve heard a story, you know more than you can say’.

The literature of fact and literature of fiction is an ‘open, unmarked frontier’ according to Garton Ash (2002:4-7). Both equally can make claims on truth. For example, historians have created a fictional eyewitness account of a battle and Orbach fictionalised psychotherapy (1999). But in the context of ‘witness literature’ (Engdahl, 2002:57-67), Garton Ash argues that any meaningful notion of witness depends on knowing which side of this frontier one is on. At the same time he reflects on how does one determine when this frontier has been crossed, given the unreliability of witnesses and the involuntary creativity of memory. In his view, a simplistic 19th century positivist answer about scientific truth will not do. For the truth achieved by the literature of fact is also shaped by a writer’s art and imagination. He suggests two truth tests: ‘facticity’, which does not make a text true but to fail it does make it untrue; and on veracity that ‘is there a definite attempt to get at real facts’. He uses Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* as a model in which Orwell warns of mistakes of fact, ‘but we do not doubt that he is trying to tell it exactly as it was’ (ibid:7), as veracity is revealed in tone, style, voice. The problem of memory is at the heart of the matter; we do not simply forget; we re-remember and re-write in a way that makes sense of the story to us and makes it more comfortable. We have, he suggests, a novelist called Memory, ceaselessly redrafting the short story we call ‘My Life’ (ibid:6). To create the literature of fact, he considers that we have to work like novelists in many ways: we select, cast light on this object, shadow on that. He considers that imagination is the sun that illuminates both countries but invention is to cross the line and has to be resisted for moral and artistic reasons.

Subjective experience

In a novelistic memoir the neuroscientist, Broks (2003), grapples with consciousness and brain injury and eventually concludes that science cannot get to understand consciousness because it cannot adopt a first person point of view. Macmillan (2002:345 quoting Barthes 1986), suggests that science in effect is trying to catch up with literature, discovering ‘what ... literature has always known’, which emphasises how there are different ways of ‘knowing’. The challenge to the positivist, objective, and rational route

of scientific method as the *only* way to know the world is also brought together in a provocative way by David Lodge in his novel *Thinks* (2001) and his subsequent study of consciousness and the novel (2002). In these, he argues that it is the first person discourse of literature of the ordinary detail of daily life that is important and has provided the most accurate record of human consciousness compared to the third person discourse of science.

The novel revolves around the problem of 'qualia' (meaning the specific nature of our subjective experience of the world), which as a phenomenal experience is a first person matter, which at first glance seems to prevent the formulation of a completely objective account or causal account. Lodge plays out this conflict through the character of the professor of artificial intelligence, who is researching his own stream of consciousness. He says "That's the problem of consciousness ... How to give an objective, third person account of a subjective, first person phenomenon" (2001:42). In conversation with the 'novelist in residence', she responds, "Oh but novelists have been doing that for the last two hundred years" (ibid:42). She then quotes a passage from a novel by Henry James, just as later at an academic conference she quotes a passage from the lyric poem *The Luscious Clusters of the Vine* by the 17th century poet, Andrew Marvell. In this way she captures the qualia of fruit and fruitfulness, the 'thrill of recognition' and makes you *sense* 'felt life' (Lodge 2002:4).

Lodge also draws attention to the wider cultural shift towards first person narration and to the 'increasing reluctance of novelists to assume the narrative stance of god-like omniscience that is implied by any third person representation of consciousness, however covert and impersonal' (ibid: 6) suggesting that with this has come the blurring of boundaries noted above between fiction and autobiography so that when all is relativity and uncertainty 'the single human voice, telling its own story can seem the only authentic way of rendering consciousness' (ibid:6). In the same essay he also highlights a conflict of viewpoints about consciousness, between Dennett (1993), a cognitive scientist, for whom we tell stories but these stories are illusions and that of neuroscientist, Damasio (2000:17), who in his view draws a distinction between the 'core self' that is constantly modified and the 'autobiographical self' with continuous memory and who concludes, 'something like the sense of self does exist in the human mind as we go about knowing

things ... the human mind is constantly being split ... between the part that stands for the known and the part that stands for the knower' (ibid:5).

The 'narrative turn'

The historic avoidance of subjective experience in large areas of the social sciences and organisational studies has given way over the past decade to a 'narrative turn' and the diverse growth of different forms of narrative work in management, medicine, therapy, oral history and social sciences generally.

Narrative and organisational studies

In organisational studies, Boyce (1996) provides a comprehensive overview of this growing use of story up to the mid 1990s. She uses an interdisciplinary lens of social constructionism, organisational symbolism in its various forms, critical theory and communication theory, to survey the wide array of approaches developing up to that point. She views story as a primary way in which meaning, values and reasons, both individual and collective, are expressed. From an ethical perspective she considers 'storytelling is an example of a process that can nurture and create meaning or reinforce control and manipulate meaning' (ibid:21). Who tells the story, how and by whom are they interpreted and what meaning is attributed are critical. She thus emphasises that the researcher cannot be separated from the research.

Story has become widely used in interactive training and development work (Tierney, 2000; Allen, Faitlough and Heinzen, 2002; Parkin, 2001). In organisational research, Gabriel (2000), emphasises that storytelling in organisations exists in competition, competing against information and data (ibid:240). He explores organisational myths as collective fantasies and creates a typology of stories. In this approach, the stories people tell guide the researcher to observe how the organisation unconsciously sees itself as 'anorexic' or trapped in an 'iron' or 'glass' cage. Snowden (2002) draws on complex adaptive systems thinking in his research using story, using rapid digital transcribing to construct enormous narrative databases arising from mass self-taping programmes by staff. Working as a consultant for IBM, he uses his story making approach to intervene and confront organisations with stories about themselves, for example, the work-life balance of an organisation as seen through the stories of children of employees. He also

claims (Snowden, 2003), that using uninterpreted story is key to how IBM has overtaken other management consultants in work with the US government.

Complex responsive processes of relating

Such an openly functional approach to story is in marked contrast to the place of narrative developed in the complex responsive processes theory of organisational change by Stacey et al (2000, 2001). 'Human experience is story like' (Stacey 2003:78) and human relationships are storylines and propositions, which at the same time construct the relationship. The theory understands narrative and conversation as complex responsive processes of relating, that is as human analogies for complexity thinking more generally and which convey the relational power relating in all social interaction. The narrative development of the discourse has drawn on Bruner (1990) but also initially Shotter, who describes a manager as a 'practical-ethical author' or 'conversational author'; that is someone actually involved in the practical making of history-in-the-moment and day-to-day ethical decision making, which involves the process of 'feeling' one's way forward (1993:156). Although this can lend itself to an interpretation that stresses the self-creating individual, I associate its notion of 'authoring' rather with that of taking up one's own authority in relation to others. I will return in depth to the thinking underlying complex responsive processes of relating in Part Five.

Narrative and social science

In seeking to be accepted as part of the scientific community and because of its often-implicit alignment with processes of social control, social policy has traditionally focused on objective and quantitative social survey work. The literature on public services drawn from a critical social policy or a critical management orientation also still lacks a substantial narrative approach. Barnes (2004) has described the suspicious response of the policy domain to her own narrative work as one of 'but how many anecdotes make a fact'? Prior to the narrative turn in the 1990s, it is only in the area of psychoanalysis and other depth psychologies that the use of story in one form or another remained a constant presence (Rustin, 1999:66). The work of Holloway and Jefferson (2000) has also been influential in broadening this shift, bringing a more psychologically aware approach to organisational and social survey work. They highlight, for example, how stories around the fear of crime are reflective of more personal anxieties (ibid:12-14).

In the *Biographical Narrative Investigative Method* (Brecker, 1996), the researcher analyses relatively few texts in great detail. The method defines five elements (Wengraf 2001:244). These categories are *description*, which has timeless non-historical quality; *argumentation*, which is theorising or reflective; *report*, which is a sequence of events or overview recounted from some distance; *narrative*, which is the telling of a story in rich detail, perhaps in the present tense, a sense of virtually reliving from close up a sequence of events; *evaluation*, which is the moral of the story. In reality it is often difficult to distinguish these categories but the point of interest here is rather that the main carrier of emotion is that of story, which in the typology above is referred to as *narrative*. The clue to the emotions of, for example, surviving some conflict may lie in one line buried within the mass of detail or silences. A labour-intensive, close, textual analysis is combined with a dialectical approach to analysis of chunks of texts. A small number of such stories have been the focus of research revealing societal and institutional processes of social exclusion in a European-wide research programme (Chamberlayne et al, 2002; SOSTRIS, 1998-99).

This shift to narrative work in social sciences is now well established. The Centre for Biographical and Narrative Research at the University of East London actively promotes debate of the different approaches to narrative methodology in the social sciences. As noted above, it was at one such seminar that Reissman described her own coming into an awareness of the need to ‘put herself in the frame’ as a researcher. But in general the researcher remains an objective observer, analyst and interpreter of the stories of others, rather than introducing their own subjectivity. This can be quite specifically rejected in some cases (Miller, 2004). Exceptions include several psychosocial policy theorists who have sought to bring back the reality of emotionally complex subjects into social welfare themes.

In an early break with the tradition of anonymity in social sciences, Hoggett (1992) tells a story of becoming politically active in the early 1970s, describing the often-rampant irrationality of leftist groups. He captures how the sense that the ‘I’ matters can be quite lost in a sub-culture in which the social and collective can be given prime place. He writes that ‘what I found most striking about this experience was the way in which socialists displayed so little interest in the individual. The mysteries of life and death, of feeling and passion, of dreaming and imagination, of love and terror – it was as if these

things did not exist' (1992:3). He goes on to talk about how, while remaining politically active, he had clung on to a quite different tradition of psychoanalysis. He has continued to write about integrating the personal and political (2004:83).

In a story about anxieties generated around a major audit process, Cooper (2001:349-362) uses his own dreams to illuminate and critique the obsessive character of the audit process in public services, and in a conversational exchange with Pecotic (2005:86-90) illuminates the differing moral and social milieus of growing up as a west and eastern European. Similarly, Treacher and Foster (2004:311-324) use quite personal experiences to explore anxiety-provoking emotions that arise in encounters with difference.

Sennett, working in the sociology tradition of Elias (1939) and de Swann (1988), has previously been critical of what he terms the 'tyranny of intimacy' (1977:144) and had argued against the erosion of the public arena and the equation of the authentic with that of feelings. But in *The Corrosion of Character*, he (1998) uses a storied form of social analysis to great effect (2003). In *Respect* (2003), however, he seems to accept that in investigating the social we are also profoundly and inevitably engaged in knowing ourselves and reveals the shaping influences of his own life growing up on a tough new working class housing scheme in Chicago. He catalogues the social history of such estates through using his own experience of humiliation, through well meaning social workers, and explores how we can live in a way which respects people, amidst growing extremes of inequality and exhortations to be successful, which merely imply failure for those who are not able or are dependent.

Oral history and narrative

Oral history is currently a meeting place of differing narrative methodologies, a strand of which shares a certain resonance with the theory of complex responsive processes of relating. Portelli (1998:12) suggests that oral history refers to 'what the source and the historian do together at the moment of their encounter in the interview'. In his view, there is no oral history before the encounter of two different subjects, one with a story to tell and the other with a history to reconstruct. In the telling of tales an interview implicitly enhances the authority and self-awareness of the narrator leading them to raise questions about their experience that they may have never spoken or seriously thought about before. And conversely by opening the conversation, the interviewer defines the

roles and establishes the basis of narrative authority. Ironically, public authority will reside in the written word while the local narrative lives on and evolves. He also challenges the idea of a personally distant interviewer minimising bias and considers 'the less the historians reveal about their identity and thoughts, the more likely informants are to couch their testimony in the broadest and safest terms, and to stick to the more superficial layers of their conscience and the more public and official aspects of their culture' (quoted in Feld, 2003:29-37).

Portelli (1998:23) also makes clear that personal reflection is not the task of the 'subject' alone; it is a shared process of self-analysis and consciousness raising with the interviewer. Similarly, Gabriel & Harding (2000:30) in relation to their work with communities regard a text as the outcome of a conversation, one 'co-produced by interviewee and interviewer – the result of a unique interaction, at a particular time and in a particular place'. Dubois (2000:76) also strongly affirms that social relations shape how and where and to whom stories are told and retold, emphasising that people 'fall silent' (ibid:81) when words are too dangerous for political or psychological reasons. All of this testifies to the slipperiness of memory. Gittens also points out the shift from earlier concerns of oral history with the 'truth' of what people say, to a greater understanding of the vital importance of *how* people remember and what they leave unsaid. She sees this as an important caveat to those who acclaim all narratives are equally valid without questioning who is listening, who is listened to, what is heard and what is silenced – in other words 'narratives with the politics left out' (2000:109).

Gittens describes how there are many silences and has drawn attention to the importance of how people remember and what they leave unsaid (1998:46; 2000:109). Who silences whom and why are the crucial questions in understanding power relations as in the memories of fascist Italy (Passerini 1983:196 quoted in Gittens, 1998:47) or the still silenced, painful memories of the Greek national and civil wars 1940-50 (Vidali, 2005:3) or the 'individual and collective amnesia' in Germany over the destruction of their cities (Sebald, 1999:9) which lasted over 50 years. Plummer (2001:240) identifies six ways to tell a 'true' story and in a commentary on three of these, Bornat (2004:7-13), an oral historian, makes several pertinent and helpful observations to unpicking these very different approaches to narrative. The '*interpretive paradigm*' includes the work of Wengraf (2001) already discussed above, in which close textual analysis is used to reveal

the difference between the 'lived life' and the 'told story' (ibid: 233). They are dissociated in search of a deeper understanding through thematic hypothesising of the subjective and unconscious motives of the teller to reveal many layers of meanings. But there is the risk here, Bornat argues, of over-interpretation from a text adrift from wider social knowledge. The voice of the teller and notion of any storytelling also disappears.

In the '*narrative approach*', plot and character may change as the story continuously unfolds as the situation dictates (Gergen and Gergen 1987:124). The construction of and telling of the story and its significance psychologically and socially is the main focus of interest. The storied norms of a professional group may be revealed or how people construct meaning in their lives allowing for the interplay of social and historical contexts. But Bornat questions whether this helps us to uncover the social function of the telling and what it can reveal about their contribution to a change-making process.

Plummer's '*pragmatic approach*' (2001:250-252), which most closely matches Bornat's understanding of an oral history approach, emphasises that the telling of stories goes to the heart of the moral life of a culture. In her terms, oral history is about moral tales, which reveal the complex interplay of public and professional moralities in which people position themselves personally and socially, enabling an appreciation of what is said as well as the motives of the speaker.

Therapy and narrative

Ronald Fraser (1984) in *In Search of the Past* found he could not live with his own biography. His life in a manor house with its 'two houses within the same walls' (ibid 4) did not make sense to him and limited rather than liberated him. Shotter (1993) suggests it did not allow him to project himself into the future but trapped him in a narrative. Through his storytelling he moves himself forward and Shotter sees in this process that Fraser goes through as becoming the 'author of himself' (1993:129-130).

Is therapy intrinsically a narrative process? Kraemar (1997:41-57) articulates a positive argument for developing narrative competence as the basis of making sense of patterns of relating to self and others. But, in a critique of post-modern family therapy, Frosh (1997:90-97) criticises the use of a narrative paradigm where narrative is seen as a good thing merely because of its 'democratising' tendency. In his view, rather than knowing

the 'truth' of the other person, such therapy can slide into just helping others to tell a more creative story about their life.

He criticises Parry's (1991:42-43) view that 'the post-modern treatment of a story as simply a story, hence something endlessly inventive, offering the narrative therapist a tool for enabling clients to shake off constraining beliefs so that they can live their stories henceforth as they choose'. Frosh is particularly concerned that it is sometimes impossible to put into words the things that matter and that story making can be a defence against forming too close a relationship and less tiring than taking risks with the 'real', which carry with it the possibility of criticism and hurt. He argues that, while the therapeutic task can be cast in narrative terms, what this fails to convey is the experience of working with, for example, a grief stricken family in a way that is not reducible to the linguistic. He cautions against a success which depends on generating new stories which avoid the capacity to stay with the family's experience of their reality. In his view, it is in the way narrative work highlights the importance of the deeper emotional relationship that it only has value. The narrative work is a carrier of something else, not an end in itself.

Critical autobiography

Some of the strands from all of this, which have interested me, come together in a narrative genre, which Griffiths identifies as 'critical autobiography' (1995:70). This she distinguishes from the cultural norm of personal, confessional, individualistic, a-theoretical and non-political autobiography. I first read Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape of a Good Woman* soon after its publication in 1986. It is the story of two lives; that of her mother and herself and 'how they got to be the women they become' (1986:5-7). She writes of how 'stories people tell themselves in order to explain how they got to the place they inhabit – are often in deep and ambiguous conflict' with the 'interpretative devices' of the culture (ibid:6). She is using her reflections to challenge the psychological simplicities of Richard Hoggett's (1958) analysis of working class life, which was a widely accepted narrative at the time in which women like Steedman's mother and her story of wanting just did not figure.

Griffiths (1995:70-71) sees Steedman's work as self-consciously political in terms of class and gender. Early on in my research, a reference was made in passing to Steedman's book during a group discussion at which I was present. I noticed its powerful, shared resonance for those who had read it. Steedman locates her stories in politics, psychoanalysis and her own feminism. It is a weave of individual experience, theory, reflection, and rethinking in which interpretations of the past allow the past 'to be reused through the agency of social transformation' (ibid:5). Psychic structures, in her view, are shaped by huge historical labels like charity, philanthropy and state intervention and in particular of growing up in the 1950s she notes, 'I would be a very different person now if orange juice and milk and dinners hadn't told me in a covert way, that I had a right to exist, was worth something' (ibid:122). Through Steedman's eyes and our own response to these words, we see both what an achievement it was 'for society to pour so much milk, so much orange juice, so many vitamins down the throats of its children, and for the height and weight of those children to outstrip the measurements of only a decade before' (ibid:122). It matters to her in reshaping and reusing past time whether one is 'looking down from the curtainless window of a terraced house ... or the long view stretching away from the big house' (ibid:5).

Autobiographical writing is the basis of *A Life of Ones Own* by Marion Milner (1934, 1986) in which she uses excerpts from, and self-reflections on her journal. She writes that 'It was only when I had begun to try and observe my own experience that I had discovered that what I had casually assumed to be myself, what I had tried to be and felt I ought to be, was something quite different from what I was' (Milner 1987:153). She tries to capture her thoughts in a stream of consciousness, as they never endingly flit from one thought to another. When I read it a decade ago, Milner expressed for me something fundamental about the inseparability of body and mind, of 'letting go', of 'not doing' and learning to think in this way (ibid:75). A recurring theme is living with uncertainty and trusting what seems not to be there. As Griffiths (1995:71) points out, this was both a process of theorising and an invitation to others to learn from it. Its reliance on a reflexive approach was radical and pioneering, which led Milner to anticipate much of the more well known psychoanalytic thinking of Winnicott.

A more recent publication provides a variation in this broad category. *The Gatekeeper* is a memoir by Terry Eagleton (2001). He tracks his journey from a poverty-ridden

childhood, via the 11-plus examination and the emancipation of a catholic grammar school in Manchester, on to Cambridge and a career in Oxbridge academia. He is the perfect embodiment of both the ideals of the 1944 Education Act and the emergent striving to develop a catholic middle class during the 1950s. But Eagleton spurns the idea of any desire for self-revelation and resolutely sees his purpose as to 'reveal the institution'. In spite of this, however, a sadness sometimes slips out from around the sides of the stark humour of his stories.

Finally, Passerini has argued that there is always a tension between individual reality and general process and of the need for history to include personal lives and individual subjectivity (1987: 3-11). In an *Autobiography of a Generation*, (1996) she seeks to integrate individual and collective biography. In researching the life stories of the generation of 1968 and their shared engagement with an era of political activism, she writes of how 'these stories nourished mine, giving it strength to get to its feet and to speak' (ibid; 124). Leydesdorff et al (1996:2) also comment on how oral historians 'have noted the gendered nature of memory from very early on', with women tending to speak more through use of the plural rather than the first person.

Public services and narrative

Hoggett points out that there is no future for public welfare unless people are moved to combine in solidarity around some shared vision in the way that Passerini captures. He argues that 'It is not facts that move people but illusions' and a 'mobilising fiction' (2000:139-141 drawing on Vaihanger, (1924). It is this that is the agent of change and the crucial tool in all liberatory struggles. In politics, he suggests, it is not whether the idea of community is true or not; the question is whether it has the power to effect a transition from what is to what might be. In his view, it is the fictional or playful quality of any vision that matters otherwise an unreflexively held dogma takes over. In this he emphasises the avoidance of a symbol becoming concrete or a thing-in-itself (Segal 1957; Caper 1997:37-55). It is important that the symbolic retains an 'as if' quality.

Narrative representation of the changing welfare state and public services over the past two decades understood in these terms is quite rare. Appendix 1 discusses some further

examples from film, the theatre and art. These works convey the tragic quality of the last two decades.

Reflection

This overview of narrative forms has led me to think about the possibilities and constraints of how to write about my own day-to-day experiences and interactions. I am more aware from this overview of how putting myself directly ‘in the frame’ in a relatively unbounded way as a researcher, is still quite rare. I have been alerted to the strengths and limitations of the subjective voice, the distinctions of fact and fiction and the difficulties of bringing narrative and politics together and I have also become more aware of how the word ‘public’ has literal and symbolic meanings. In the next chapter, I will set out my own approach to narrative methodology and an encounter with storytelling.

Chapter 2: Storytelling: a methodology

Methodology is defined as ‘the ways of finding out knowledge’ or ‘how can we go about finding out about things’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1998:83). It can also be understood as a theory and analysis of how research should proceed as opposed to a method that refers to a technique for gathering evidence. Using this principle, Seibold argues that developing a methodology for certain types of qualitative research is an ongoing process. She suggests ‘The nature of the problem to be investigated is fluid, incompletely determined at the beginning of the study, and subject to change as the study progresses. The design cannot therefore be fully specified in advance, but rather emerges over time’ (2000:147). Unlike the apparent sequential, ordered model of a scientifically shaped research process, method making and ‘data’ exploration occur together.

Seibold (2000:148) also quotes Higg’s (1998) distinction between the need for a research *frame* and a research *strategy*. The research strategy involves the purpose, approach to data collection and methods of analysis. The research frame covers questions of truth and the philosophical and ethical stance, research topic and relevant theoretical framework or paradigm. It also includes the researcher’s personal frame of reference. Seibold is drawing attention to how the researcher’s self is part of the research process and as a feminist researcher she emphasises both the social construction of the research encounter and research process as a lived experience, although in the event then fails herself to build on this.

Bricolage

Denzin and Lincoln (1998:26) consider that the qualitative researcher must work within a complex historical field of methodological development and deploy a range of interconnected methods. They see the researcher using multiple methodologies as a ‘bricoleur’), and the emergent construction as a ‘bricolage’ (ibid:3). As a researcher, I will be both a ‘participant’ in different contexts, which will develop research ‘data’ in multiple ways, and I am myself also a focus of research in which core themes can explain themselves in some way through whatever I might be doing. Writing in the first person,

Marshall (1999:155-157) conveys this experience of 'living life' as a research process, capturing the bodily impact on herself when encountering experiences or ideas that resonate. However, more generally action-research methodology, as developed by Reason and Bradbury (2002:274), has been critiqued by Stacey and Griffin (2005:32-36) from a complex responsive processes of relating viewpoint as articulating an individualistic perspective on reflexivity rather than their own more socially grounded understanding.

Complex responsive processes and psychosocial theory

My narrative approach has been shaped by two new discourses: complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial theory. The theory of complex responsive processes of relating developed by Stacey, Griffin and Shaw (2000); Stacey and Griffin (2005) introduces a new and different dimension into using narrative: one in which the researcher becomes the narrator involved in the ethical insight emerging through one's own social interaction. I have also drawn on psychosocial theory, which brings an understanding of the emotional life and politics of public service, particularly the work of Hoggett (2000, 2002), Cooper and Lousada (2005).

While the body of theory in both discourses has grown significantly over the past five years, neither had comprehensively addressed approaches to research methodology until published work in late 2005. Stacey and Griffin (2005) now describe their approach to researching organisations as 'taking one's experience seriously' (ibid:22) which is represented through a reflexive narrative form in which the researcher tells the story of what *they* do in an organisation through the experience of their own local interactions. Thus the everyday nature of ethical action is, as a consequence, directly addressed. It is this focus on the role of researcher as narrator that I found to be most different and challenging for a researcher in using a complex responsive processes of relating way of thinking.

In relation to psychosocial thinking, Cooper and Lousada (2005:211) note that while areas of social theory have now begun to acknowledge a place for emotional life, the development of an empirical methodology and study of social life as a dimension of human relating and experience still remains sparse. In setting out a research

methodology, they too emphasise the place of direct emotional contact with the object of study and registering patterns of experience utilising sensibilities open to emotional and unconscious processes that lie 'beyond surfaces' (ibid:214). Their emotionally based understanding of social life implies that the evidence for what is happening in society is coursing through each of us all the time, if only we can come to know what is happening to ourselves (ibid:222-223).

Both approaches have influences drawn from ethnography, are grounded in direct emotional and bodily experience and rooted in the experience of knowing and relating in the world rather than being *about* the world. However, these helpful elaborations of research methodology were both only published as my own research process came to an end. However, my own narrative approach has emerged in a broadly consistent way, emphasising direct interaction as a researcher working with myself and others. I have, however, experimented with storytelling. In Part Five, I will discuss both discourses in depth and their role in shaping of my narrative approach, and the way the two discourses have 'rubbed up' against each other, contributing to my own narrative.

Learning from experience

My methodology is, therefore, grounded in learning as experience. The feelings we experience are not theories; they must be lived to be experienced. Britton (2004:6) argues strongly for the 'authority of experience' and challenges the dominance and limitations of an approach now dominant in public services thinking which is reliant on the 'evidence based' approach: a phrase which he considers seems to brook no argument and dismisses all activities for which there is not sufficient evidence in their terms. Cooper & Lousada (2005:212) suggest knowledge of social life must be grounded in direct emotional experience as well as cognitive experience of social processes. In relation to social welfare, recognising experience enables a particular quality of deeper social awareness about social and personal suffering; one that is painful for society to bear and is thus more often avoided.

Experiential practices and events, which value experience as a source of insight, include the use of storytelling, 'social dreaming matrices' (Lawrence, 1998:10) and 'listening

posts' such as organised by OPUS⁵. In events such as these, the emphasis is upon the sharing of meaningful stories and experiences where interpretation then emerges out of the flow of material from the wider group or 'matrix' (Foulkes, 1964:258) rather than from interpreting a single individual contribution in itself. Individual and group phenomena emerge together in the same processes co-creating one another (Stacey, 2003a: 350).

Researching the known and the 'not known'

Stories allow access to a different kind of 'data'. The telling of stories enables one to research or discover the 'not known' as well as the known. By the latter, I mean the sense of something absent and not understood, in the way described previously in the story of 'a collapse of meaning'. Armstrong (1998: 96) suggests when a 'not known' begins to become more formulated, this is through a process of relatedness to others and is never a private matter. Story and conversation are analogies for complexity and Stacey notes (2003:80) it is through conversation that we express richly complex processes of human relating in which our perceptions are mutually conveyed in continuous, inter-subjective forms of symbolic interaction (drawing on Mead, 1934). It is in the dialectical processes of forming and being formed that our identities are shaped and reshaped and through which we construct and find meaning. Thus a personal or seemingly localised experience will also resonate with global or wider organisational processes because one is never outside the shaping of societal or organisational patterning.

Reflexivity

The notion of reflexivity is central to working with oneself and others. It can be understood in a number of different ways: from awareness of one's own socio-historical location (Bourdieu, 1990), to examining how we are part of our own data (Steir, 1991:163), to doubting what we know (French, 2003: 11). Reflexivity also includes scanning one's own social interactions in a consistent way as in infant observation studies. Houzel (1995:42-44) usefully describes how this involves three different kinds of 'receptivity' that we can also make use of in observing the context in which we find ourselves. Firstly, it means being open and free of preconceptions to gestures or silences. Secondly, an emotional and empathetic receptivity means being open to the experience within oneself of whatever those around you may be experiencing And thirdly, an

⁵ Organisation for the Psychoanalytic Understanding of Society: London.

unconscious receptivity can manifest itself in a transference and counter transference, through feelings, representations, ideas, and even physical symptoms, which may appear devoid of meaning at the time, but which later prove full of significance, such as the dream mentioned earlier. An emphasis on reflexivity also calls for awareness of its strengths but also the pitfalls of hyper reflexivity and narcissism or unreflective ethnographic accounts as critiqued by Hertz (1997:ix).

Storytelling

The rhythm in a storytelling 'event' is important. In one workshop that I experienced, once the flow of stories began, a pattern quickly developed in which each person who spoke was listened to intently. There was no immediate follow-up and no attempt to interpret. The next person finding their voice simply took up the baton when they were ready. The intervening silences allowed transition from one story to the next, either continuing a pattern of association or moving the theme in another direction. It was all undertaken in a self-organising way, which generated rich and unexpected insight. Structured reflection followed in a separate session. But, in a subsequent attempt to replicate this experience, I found myself in a group that would not refrain from immediate interpretation. This introduced a judgemental tone and crushed the sense of a creative experience which arises through a free flowing momentum, analogous in complex responsive processes terms to a good conversation with its sense of both being heard and being open to new and emergent insight (Stacey, 2003a:348-350).

In *The Storyteller* (1936), Benjamin lamented the fall in value of experience, attributing this to society's increased dependence on information. He argued that information has to be 'understandable in itself' whereas 'narrative achieves an amplitude which information lacks' (ibid:88-89). In his view, the best storytelling left interpretation up to the reader rather than being shot through with explanation (ibid:89). The tacit knowledge and emotions which a story holds provoke its own kinds of resonance for the reader, or not as the case may be. This line of thought underpins my own inclination to experiment with allowing a story space to amplify before enrolling it into interpretative analysis.

A contemporary artist, Paula Rego, comments, "My paintings tell stories: they do not illustrate stories ... they aren't narratives ... everything happens in the present" (1985).

She is drawing a useful distinction between story and a narrative, which grows out of a multiplicity of stories and their interpretation. As noted at the beginning of this chapter by story, I mean accounts of actions, events, and feelings. By narrative, I mean a story line linked by reflections, comments and categorisations of elements of the story line (Stacey, 2003a:350-351).

Becoming a narrator

According to Bruner (2003:33), we all develop a story telling capacity or ‘narrative grammar’ and we naturally portray ourselves through story (ibid:70). But, poised with a pen in my hand, I immediately find myself having to fend off a way of thinking which wants to sift and analyse and is concerned to produce information, a proof or an incisive argument, to clarify a position or satisfactorily demolish an opposing viewpoint. So, writing stories is a challenge to the discursive forms of reasoning which are deeply embedded as an academic norm and are difficult to step out of. To write one’s own story is also to encounter the power relationships which surround any telling of a story and to sense how powerful constraints shape what can and cannot be said. It is fundamentally about engaging with the ethical and moral dilemmas of day-to-day living in our own lives. As a contributor to a workshop on ‘narrative truth’ warned: “I came to the conclusion that writing a novel was the only way I could really tell my story”.

The process of writing a narrative is also being generated with a perception of the readers who are held in mind. To whom am I speaking and which audiences matter? I am clearly writing for a scholarly purpose, but my own internal conversation is as much with my former peer groups, and present colleagues. My own research history, prior to becoming manager in local government, lay primarily in practical, empirically based action-research, particularly around gender and employment. This was generally with the intention of seeking to identify social problems and resolve them through mobilising local campaigns. But when in 1998 I began studying for an MSc in group relations, organisations and society, I was introduced for the first time to a very different way of experiencing and understanding research to that of the predominantly positivist tradition I had come from. I also joined a reflexive research group for women in a different university where I was teaching, and I became intrigued by the Biographical Narrative Methodology (Wengraf, 2001) discussed earlier. I opted to use this approach for my

MSc dissertation and engaged with narrative for the first time. The interviews were a profound, intense experience. But one of the problems with the methodology that then emerged for me was how I felt very uncomfortable with my own 'absence' from the story and my adoption of an analytic stance towards others with whom I had so recently shared such experiences. So the research was written up at that time in a general way.

My current complexity influenced approach, with its emphasis on conversation and a co-created process, thus seemed, at first sight, far more compatible. But then I found that I was initially uncertain and resistant to becoming the storyteller of my own lived experience of change for reasons highlighted above. Yet at the same time, I sometimes became increasingly irritated with the role of the objective researcher collating and interpreting the stories of others and found myself rather testily asking of a presenter of one such narrative on the theme of 'tomboys'... "but where are you in this narrative?"⁶ It indicated I had an emerging, if still covert desire to write stories.

This I should emphasise is not to privilege a storytelling method or to argue that an approach that seeks to 'give voice' is not also valid, important and powerful, recognising it can sometimes slide into a 'cultural tourism' (Griffiths, 1995:44), but it is to emphasise that one's own experience is an important object of research.

An unbounded approach

Engaging for the first time with a complexity literature, which as noted above emphasises the role of conversation and power relating (Stacey, 2003a: 348-351), I was still concerned about how the interactions of any single individual could be of interest to interpreting wider societal change. Or more specifically, how could *my* experience of change be of interest or reveal some kind of institutional 'truth'? In engaging with such an open ended methodology, I had to just trust in the end that 'putting myself in the frame' and noting the interactions that meaning making would follow and reveal a different kind of contribution to knowledge. But confusion is clearly an unavoidable part of such a research process in which one lacks the certainties of investigating a bounded or static picture. Events and newly published literature would also continually come along to overtake or make sense of what had once seemed unintelligible. A transforming experience can also render what has gone before seemingly irrelevant.

⁶ Paper presented to a UEL Research Centre seminar 2003.

My research process was essentially driven by what was ‘in front of myself’ and my own part in it. It was not about predicting a research process to be followed in advance. It had a quality of indeterminacy and of being swept along by the events themselves. This means, in research terms, allowing things to happen and living through the experience and often tolerating a real sense of not knowing whether anything of significance was occurring. I see myself as having had a dual task; as a participant in events with formal responsibilities and accountability where I have taken up a role, but also as a reflexive researcher in whatever I am engaged in. Occasionally, I have had the opportunity or felt particularly impelled to follow up conversations with a more measured and focused discussion or requested an interview in which my research intent was made explicit. But this did not constitute a research plan; it arose out of the dynamic present as a consequence of some previous conversation with myself or with others.

This is a relatively unbounded approach to research influenced by an ethnographic approach and is not without risk to the researcher. It required supportive supervision, both individual and in my research group to constantly process the anxiety it generated. The experience of this relatively unbounded research process has inevitably been characterised by a continuous feeling of chaos. Not surprisingly, it is an uncomfortable position. The nearest experience, with which I can draw a parallel, is that of joining a group relations conference. Ways of relating, structures and systems all remain to be generated by the membership, amidst confusion, uncertainty, and acute anxiety during which a ‘tyranny of structurelessness’ (Freeman, 1970) can quickly be induced. To write about such an event is a complicated and a highly subjective process. It is one of making sense of unexpected dilemmas and encountering a new and sometimes disturbing awareness of one’s own projections, skills and capacities, and not least the concern whether one will ever find one’s voice. Thinking about how to write up the story of my research experience over a four-year period has much the same quality about it.

Researching public services

At the outset of my research in 2001, political discussion about public services had been marginalised for over a decade. I did not anticipate that a renewed contestation of ideas would re-emerge. But, to my surprise, from occupying a place at the political margins at the start of 2001, the issue of public services was to move centre stage and rise rapidly up

the political agenda. I was engaging with an emerging debate about the process of change. So the context has been directly formed by both marginalisation of, and more latterly a renewal of, debates about the meaning of public services.

The milieus of political and policy domains that I typically experience are largely dominated by empirical or critical theory approaches. My tentative attempts to speak from my developing appreciation of a more complexity or psychosocial way of thinking in such groupings still leave an uncomfortable sense of having crossed an unmarked boundary. But I know in myself that merely critiquing market economics alone is no longer sufficient. I find myself arguing for a shift in the territory on which the present discussion is taking place in order to generate a different narrative. Travelling to a meeting in 2004, I scribbled a comment on the papers for discussion: “I feel the need to write a paper which will fill the hole in the middle of this, which is not to say it’s not all pertinent and relevant – but there is something missing which I could bring to it ... complexity, emotional truth, awareness of anxiety and its containment – the politics of emotions ...”.

Exploring meaning

Exploring a theme like ‘the meaning of public services’ lends itself to a narrative approach for three reasons. Firstly, the questions around their meaning permeate all aspects of life and are not related to a specific organisation; they are inherently political and personal as well as organisational and societal. Secondly, I am interested in questions waiting to be formulated through an act of exploration rather than addressing any particular identified organisational problems or issues. Thirdly, I am not employed within a single organisation but am attached to the margins of two universities and involved in different campaigns and movements with shifting roles and allegiances. Over the years I have worked in different public sector environments and come into contact with significant numbers of different local government staff and professions, civil servants, trade unionists, voluntary sector workers, adult educationalists, users, politicians, academics, researchers, think-tanks, journalists, political activists and group or organisational relations consultants – with many of whom I remain connected.

So although I am not inside an organisational structure, I found myself very much inside the dynamics of a ‘shadow conversation’ about public services thinking around ideas

which are excluded or silenced within the mainstream discourses. I felt increasingly like a 'spider' in a series of separate networks. Some overlaps or are beginning to interconnect, but some are very separate spheres with considerable tension between them. Yet I have felt a powerful attraction to cross these social, political and psychological 'boundaries' in the impetus to answer the question of meaning.

Pools of experience

These 'pools of experience' in the flow of my own life are the primary 'contexts', which I define as having potential as sources of 'data'. By 'data' I mean those conversations that resonate for me and which, therefore, throw light on a theme that is already actively present in my life. This gives rise to moments where there is an intensification of feeling around themes that are present in me. In other words, I sense this critical moment through the responses in my own body. This may mean being very moved to being very irritated. However, it is also the case that I may be present in such a context and no obvious 'data' will be generated. Nor does defining these contexts as 'primary' preclude others arising. This may equally include random conversations in the street when I meet people who ask about my research.

To summarise: meaningful interaction has not involved my setting up special processes or events at the outset. But my choice of engagement has created varied settings for meaningful participation and interaction. This in turn has involved my contributing to discussions, writing articles, and shaping collectively organised events. The research question clearly matters to me personally. It is integral to my everyday conversations and is not a thing apart. Such conversations hold out the possibility of both making sense of the past and shaping the future through an emotional engagement in the present moment. The perspective taken is very much shaped by my own subjective awareness of interactions as an active participant in a variety of roles including working in public services, or experiencing dependence on them, and seeking to shape their direction in some way through social movements.

Storytelling in the thesis

The stories in the thesis are distilled out of this interplay of different ‘pools of experience’ or conversations taking place in multiple and conflictual social contexts, and paralleled by equally turbulent internal silent conversations with myself. The stories which have emerged are my chosen way of representing and reflecting on this experience. They capture moments that have been disorientating, uncomfortable, or exciting. As such they are about the affective or emotional impact of specific moments of emotional contact or events that sometimes prompted powerful feelings. They are laden with micro moments of awareness about change, of the themes organising the experience of interaction shifting my awareness of the power relations present (Stacey, 2003a:349-350). Sometimes the stories bring the previously ‘unthought known’ (Bollas, 1987:280) into awareness. Stories allow the unexpected to surface and convey the complicated nature of lived life which objective theorising tends to remove.

Many stories are simply woven into the text to illustrate a point or to raise a question, as was the case in the ‘Introduction’. But in Part Two ‘The past in the present’, the storytelling is more autobiographical in order to locate myself in the social history of the welfare state and my participation in social movements and in public service. These underline how the past is still very much in the present with a legacy of unfinished business. In Part Four, ‘From silence to voice’ I turn once again to storytelling. This is a more concentrated focus on the contemporary experience of 2001-2005. I wanted to experiment with writing a collection of stories, which would in some way encapsulate my lived experience of public services over the past five years of researching. Each story is prompted by a moment of some significance in my own sense making or by the experience of encounters with others who have in some way acted as a mirror for my own story. It is not just a chronicle of events but conveys an underlying sense of movement between the early and later stories: from silence to voice, from reflection to action and an unanticipated, cumulative shift in perspective.

Critical evaluation

Hoggett (2001:7-10) draws a helpful distinction between ‘being understood’ and ‘acquiring insight’. My own storytelling is certainly about seeking to have something

understood and to reveal a shadow narrative. But can stories and their subjective voice be left to speak for themselves as a source of insight in the way Styles (1995:125) suggests that ‘when you have heard a story, you can know more than you can say? In literature perhaps, but social science requires that they be incorporated within a narrative which evaluates them and brings a critical consciousness to what one has written.

The alternative path is that of a radical post-structuralist position, which claims that there is nothing other than the ‘primacy of the text’ (Derrida, 1994:109), in which the stories just are. There is no proper context to provide proof of a final meaning, analysis merely implicates one further. It is always endlessly provisional, relative and is never exhaustive as it can always be traced further and further back. To pursue the alternative to this is to implicitly retreat to an objective position in which subjective storytelling becomes an object of further critique and narrative shaping. From a complexity point of view, a researcher is not outside the events chronicled. So to ‘observe’ them in this way is to interact with them more in a spirit of ‘disinterestedness’ as Eagleton advocates (2004:133), or as Stacey and Griffin, (2005:9) suggest, as ‘a paradox of detached involvement’. This emphasises the potential capacity for engagement alongside a detachment and thus the ability to remain ‘a little bit to one side but not outside’ as Walzer (1987:61) suggests (quoted in Hoggett, 2001:18).

In setting out the role of story as my central methodology, I am not rejecting the value of other narrative forms, or the voice of theory, which will find a significant place in Parts Three and Five. There is an iterative movement between story and theory as a way of reflecting on the key questions. This juxtaposition of story and theory gives rise to reflection and evaluation, which shapes the overall narrative flow. At intervals I will consider what the stories tell us, whether the stories and theorising resonate or point towards gaps and the insights and new contributions to theory. In the final Chapter 18: Conclusion, I will consider how far storytelling could be both the route and roots of renewed imagination about public service change.

**PART TWO: THE PAST IN THE PRESENT: A SOCIAL AND PERSONAL
HISTORY OF PUBLIC SERVICES**

'... much less and somewhat more than a social history' (Passerini, 1996:23)

Chapter 3: Putting myself in the frame

My methodology calls for the researcher to be actively ‘in the frame’. I was struck by how well this was done in a talk at an academic conference by Helen Bamber (2004), the former director of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. She spoke with great insight on ‘What price a compassionate society?’ but concluded her talk apologetically with the disclaimer that this had been not an academic talk and that she was speaking from the heart. She said that as a practitioner it was difficult to find the time to reflect and giving the talk had been a difficult but eventually valued task for her. Her story had underlined insights into how we all take up roles of ‘victim, perpetrator and bystander’ and this had arisen precisely through the interplay of her reflection and practice on her story about the experiences of working with survivors of the Nazi concentration camps and subsequently with victims of torture seeking asylum in the UK. Next morning, in an informal conversation she reiterated the point with me that “it wasn’t very academic”. I said that I felt that this called into question what do we mean by ‘academic’. Another person joined in the conversation with a metaphor. It was, she said, like being at the beach; some groups are off playing in the waves and others are just sitting and analysing the height and depth of the waves but never experience being in the sea itself. The importance of bringing together action *and* reflection was the issue. Too often we are in one place or the other and cannot bring them together. Yet this seems to be the essence of the role of an intellectual.

That we write about our own concerns in a more covert way was also highlighted for me after listening to a subsequent presentation about gender dynamics, which provided fresh insight into the group dynamics of gender. But I sensed intensity in the presentation of the paper, which was not quite accounted for. Again, later informal conversation revealed a quite personal concern about a perceived feminisation of secondary schooling in another EU state. In other words, when we write objectively, we can also be writing about ourselves, trying to make sense of our own ‘interior’ world of feelings or ‘silent conversations’ we have with our different selves. But to make this explicit within an academic discourse is still considered difficult when a measured objectivity remains more privileged.

Living on the edge

Encountering these examples provided the necessary impetus for me to consider just what I might be working out in my thesis, and what I might unconsciously be trying to make sense of alongside the more conscious concerns about change to public services provision. The following stories are autobiographical fragments, which emerged in response to thinking about the ways in which the welfare state had impacted on my own life in some fundamental ways.

I grew up in rural south-west Lancashire on a small tenant farm, which had been my family's livelihood for very many generations. This once larger farm had been split apart in the 1920s when land was compulsorily taken by the 'Ministry' for the building of an asylum for the victims of shell shock during the First World War. In later decades it had been extended as an institution for the criminally insane and Moss Side became known as the 'Broadmoor of the north'. It is now called Ashworth. However, what was left of the farm buildings still remained inexplicably stranded and close beside the (then) red brick perimeter 'Wall'. This wall was bounded on each side by a deep ditch, so that from a distance it sank away into the rather bleak, flat and windswept countryside.

The flow of the terrain meant that the 'inmates', orchards and grounds, once part of the farmyard itself and which now lay inside the wall, were all quite visible at certain points. My daily path down the fields to school and buses lay along this 'Wall'. During the long walk home from school along this path across open fields, I would often climb down into the sunken ditch which ran alongside its perimeter 'Wall', in order to avoid the risk of becoming exposed to view. While, of course, the patients were the ones *inside* this prison hospital, its psychical impact extended well beyond this physical boundary to pervade family and community, arousing fear, shame and curiosity. I do not recollect any understanding of 'care' in our thinking. It was also very rare for local people to take jobs there. I was quite surprised in more recent years to recognise a picture in a newspaper of a familiar oak tree bent sideways by the westerly wind, but taken from *inside* the wall.

So, my early experience of the state was one of a punitive iron fist without much of a velvet glove. Likewise, my two-roomed village primary schooling in the early 1950s seemed to have been barely affected by the 1944 Education Act. Until the year before I

left this primary school, children who failed the 11+ remained in this tiny village school until the age of 14, unless they could pay for a private education. Violent, unpredictable teachers in a manner reminiscent of Dennis Potter's play *Blue Remembered Hills* (1983) were a feature of this and several small church schools in the locality. The capacity of the community, with its conservative and submissive ethos, to acknowledge what was happening and take action was absent in a way that now seems incomprehensible. We were effectively abandoned for the first four years of school life and this contributed to acute mental distress for some in later life. But more positively, my attraction to working in and organising groups started here before I was 11, bringing together a 'Famous Five' group in search of 'adventure' and a desire to roam the woods and fields.

Although I was a post-war child with the experience of free orange juice in the blue-capped bottle, my sense of the welfare state was thus quite ambivalent. On the one hand it was constraining, punitive and neglectful but on the other hand also increasingly enabling. Passing the '11+' secured a place at a grammar school 15 miles away in Liverpool. It was the first early step in moving away. But it also involved engaging with the dynamic of means testing and the attendant social stigmas. While free bus passes were the right of all and acceptable to my mother, the free uniform and free school meals were the source of deep stigma, a humiliation too far and to be avoided at any cost.

Probably my most important experience of largely working-class convent school education in Liverpool was to join a student movement in the sixth form. I had been consumed for many months with curiosity about this mysterious group, which I glimpsed sitting in a meeting each week through the window of a classroom door as I left for home. Moreover, it met *without* teaching staff, sat in a circle, and appeared to be engaged in discussion! I made a decision to join and negotiated the multiple obstacles to doing this, one of which was my long journey home from the city to the country. The pedagogy of this international student movement was shaped by a practice of action-reflection-action influenced by Paulo Freire (1962) and an incipient liberation theology. It paid great attention to the capacity for leadership in everyone and in the role of being a student. A visiting adviser used a metaphor that was to linger on in my mind. He spoke of 'a polar bear sneezes at the North Pole and a storm blows up over Peking' to underline the importance of every action and decision one made, that somehow our

meeting and talking late on a wet afternoon in the biology lab could hold unknown consequences.

I noted earlier how Steedman speaks powerfully of how a benevolent welfare state bestowed on her the worth of her existence (1986:122). When I first read her book '*A Landscape of Good Woman*' in the mid-eighties, these lines brought a shock of recognition. Living 15 miles from school, I maintained a rigid split socially between these two worlds. As a consequence, growing up was an extremely isolating experience. I would travel on Saturday afternoons to a new library in the local market town. Libraries today still arouse the same sense of anticipation and excitement which I felt as I wandered around encountering both a sensuous experience of books and a melee of ideas taking me beyond the narrow and closed environment in which I was growing up. The library service perhaps encapsulates for me the strongest sense of 'mattering' in Steedman's terms.

This was then reinforced by gaining the right to a university place in London on a full grant, in an era when even travel costs could be reclaimed. University disorients, dislocates, cuts one off and opens one up in new ways. Raymond Williams (1960) captures this experience in his novel *Border Country* in which his characters negotiate class and the impact of higher education as it cuts the continuity and bonds with place. I discovered for the first time that I had a northern accent. In the middle of my degree, my family's tenant farm finally 'went to the wall' and into bankruptcy. The years of relentless financial insecurities were replaced by an experience of total parental dependence on the welfare state and their need to seek both new employment and a new home. How and why small farms were disappearing became the subject of my geography dissertation. But I was quite aware that I was engaged in a personal search to make sense of the catastrophe impacting on my own life.

Community action

My last years at university coincided with the student ferment of 1967. At a student conference on international underdevelopment in Montreal, I met students from Brazil now living in exile along with many others who were risking their lives for social justice against dictatorships or occupation. On the way home, our delegation stood for a moment

and watched the 'summer of love' and emergence of 'flower power' in a park in Toronto. It was followed by the student/worker uprising in Paris, the ominous grainy black and white images of the crushing of the 'Prague spring', and the pervasive question of the Vietnam War.

The following year I qualified professionally as a town planner, enthused by the writings of Jane Jacobs and her seminal *Death and Life of American Cities* (1964). I went to work for the City of Coventry. But the exciting period of planning its rebuilding after the war was long since over. The authority tried to introduce Drucker's 'management by objectives' and my task was to draw out diagrammatically the activities undertaken. But the project was abandoned as unworkable in the face of the sheer complexity of tasks and the absent simplifications of the future 'business model'. The role of a planning officer in local government is at the intersection of conflicting values and interests. It is a complex, regulatory and intensely political role. Like architecture, the built environment articulates the 'handwriting of society'. I wanted a more accessible, straightforward and partisan position. I found the reality of a paternalistic and technocratic ethos disappointing and my interest was increasingly drawn to the community initiatives beginning to emerge in the inner area of the city where I lived.

After four years as a planner, I moved to London in the early 1970s and joined one of the new community-based action-research projects of the Home Office's National Community Development Project in Canning Town in east London. My work was focused on researching the rapid decline of its local economy, still then disguised within London's overall growth. By the mid seventies the focus on class was connecting up with emerging demands around gender and then race and sexuality. The socialist feminist women's movement began to grapple with all three. To sit in a room with hundreds of women engaged in small groups generated a tremendous energy. The struggle was as much within ourselves to speak, think and feel differently. For a while, it built an amazing new awareness of the links between the personal and the political, and then the local and the global.

It then gave rise to an era where women's centres and projects of all kinds sprang into being to express new needs and campaign for new facilities. My participation in action-research connected directly to local community campaigns around gender, race, and

sexuality. It involved working with trade unions and the municipal 'left', which by then had taken root in my local council and the GLC. This social ferment then began to interconnect very directly with the reshaping of local public services.

Chapter 4: From the 'gift relationship' to marketisation

The first welfare state was established in Germany, before the First World War, by the authoritarian administration of Bismarck in order to head off social unrest (Wilson, 1977:33). The establishment of the British welfare state in 1945 was a similar historical compromise between capital and labour. It was classically represented in the image of the 'gift relationship' and through the metaphor of the blood transfusion service, in which people freely donate blood to the 'unknown stranger' (Titmuss, 1971:11). In reflecting on how donors understood this, Titmuss speaks of how people presumed 'an unspoken shared belief in the universality of need' (ibid:238), and of giving in expectation of being able to draw on a common pool when in need. It is an image of compassion and solidarity across classes, which reflects a post-war moment in time. He saw the NHS as the 'most unsordid act of British social policy in the twentieth century' (ibid:225).

As Hoggett (2000:195) has argued, this story masked relationships of power across gender and class, which the structures of the welfare state at its worst also helped to reinforce through its focus on an institutionalised expression. Feminist social policy has argued that Titmuss was simply blind to class and gender relations (Williams, 1989). Indeed, Titmuss's ideology of universalism, shaped by imperialism and paternalism, obscures the way the welfare state is required to reproduce existing relations of domination and subordination and engage in explicit disciplinary forms of social control. Wilson (1977) argued the welfare state could be understood as state organisation of domestic life, and Offe (1984) that the welfare state was an essentially contradictory formation: an achievement of the labour movement but also having a key role in sustaining the economy and disciplining and educating the population.

Hoggett (2000:193-196) considers that it maintained its legitimacy by being committed to a degree of redistribution and by offering a degree of accountability through the development of forms of local government. He describes this as the 'corrupted gift' of institutional welfare but also argues that, despite developing as an impaired example of the underlying ideals, it did retain the goodwill of the vast majority of employees and

users (ibid:199) and it was only because of this continued goodwill and commitment that the institutionalised technocratic model was able to continue to function effectively. The enduring power of these beliefs is still present in the periodic outrage around attempts to commercialise services over the past two decades. Facing a national shortage of blood in 2004, the Director of the Blood Transfusion Service also continued to refer to this freely donated resource as a ‘gift’ and it remains in common usage.

Professionals

The key influence in the rise of the welfare state was the rise of the professional: the doctor, teacher, architect, engineer, social worker and town planner (like myself). It was they who had the authority in the 1950s and 1960s to define the public interest and preside over the expansion of the welfare state. The ethos was of social obligation and contributing something worthwhile. It brought about a self-confident public domain but also ‘patronising arrogance’ (Bunting, 2004). It meant having the colour of your council house door decided for you or if in a slum clearance zone being ‘decanted’ into tower blocks and out of town estates. It was an era when mothers needed to fight (successfully) to be allowed to accompany small children into hospital. It is also worth emphasising that this era of the development of the welfare state was largely presided over by 35 years of Conservative administrations compared to a total of only 16 years under Labour, including the immediate post-war government, which had set up the welfare state.⁷

By the late 1970s it had created a disaffected public alienated by small things and eventually by a fear, fuelled by the 1979 ‘Winter of Discontent’, that public sector unions were unaccountable. Underpinning such discontent was high inflation (25 per cent in 1976), and a crisis of declining profitability. With this came the desire to curtail wages and the social contract (Glynn & Sutcliffe, 1972). The right of ‘managers to manage’ was a frequently heard mantra⁸. Thatcher began her radical challenge by tapping into the desire of council tenants to buy their own home. The reason why the Keynesian post-war edifice collapsed was because Thatcher was able to fashion a new consensus from the fears of the middle classes and aspirations of the new consumerist ‘blue-collar’ working

⁷ Conservative administrations from 1950 to 1964, from 1970 to 1974 and from 1979 to 1997. Labour administrations 1945–51; from 1964–1970 and then again from 1974 to 1979.

⁸ Mantra of Michael Edwards, managing director of British Leyland Motors.

class. By the late 1980s the argument that selling off public services was equivalent to selling off the “family silver” in the former conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s memorable phrase, was met with popular indifference.

As the post-war consensus about the welfare state began to crumble, Hoggett argues it was then that ‘the tragic absence of a durable and mobilising ethical vision’ (2000:198) became apparent. The idea of a community of vulnerable and interdependent strangers was being challenged by a different story: that of the strong and autonomous individual captured in Thatcher’s memorable words ‘there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families’ (1987). By the late 1980s the steady embrace of the enterprise state and market ethos had spread to every part of public services delivery. The legacy of ‘goodwill’ and the networks of trust, interdependence and solidarity, arising from a belief in a distinct public service ethos grounded in a public sector, did not disappear but they were being steadily undermined.

Social movements and local government

At the beginning of the 1980s, local government in UK cities with left-leaning politics briefly became a focus for a political flowering of creative social policies and cultural initiatives arising out of this absence of vision and rising cynicism. Radical social movements around gender, anti-racism, gay and lesbian sexuality and more latterly disability sought out a space within it. A reinvigorated voluntary sector and civil society encouraged new and vibrant forums to flourish (McIntosh and Wainwright 1987:119-120). It was an attempt to rebuild the ‘absent ethical vision’ and inevitably brought with it some explosive confrontations with the local institutions of the welfare state and local government.

From the vantage point of 2004, the passion and vitality of the 15 years prior to 1987 is difficult to comprehend. Some of the energy with which these social movements tried to breathe life into a revitalised belief and commitment to public services is captured in the three movements with which I became involved. These are the National Community Development Project (C'DP), the New Architecture Movement (NAM) and Haringey Women’s Employment Project (HWEP). A detailed case study of each of these three examples of social movements is included in Appendix 2. Following them in sequence it

is possible to see how each project influenced and shaped the thinking of the next one. They illustrate two things at work. Firstly, how radical policies and practice mobilised and politicised people in very large numbers. Secondly, it draws out the context in which my own understanding of public services was being reshaped.

A golden age?

In relation to public services the action-research of the School Meals Project⁹ demonstrated a typical innovatory capacity. It set out the need to revalue low-paid 'women's work' as an integral part of introducing radical and healthy food policies. In doing so it also anticipated the rethinking required of society around race, and class. It also brought together users, workers, unions and local authority managers into a working relationship with radical food policy making of the London Food Commission, demonstrating that such new kinds of alliances could be built, despite intrinsic suspicions and conflicting interest. It provided a model for trade union activity, which was more community-based, and working in alliance with user interests, however turbulent the group dynamics proved to be.

The role of the labour movement was woven into or alongside social movements providing powerful support. But it could be two edged and more negatively it influenced a dismissive attitude to therapeutic ideas and marginalised thinking about the place of 'care' and emotional life in public services in comparison to that of social justice.

Reading the case studies of the three social movements (Appendix 2), I am struck by how group conflict was simply not anticipated. Our passion was undisturbed by such concerns and perhaps this explains the sheer audacity of all these projects. They also share a tenacity, self-discipline and impressive commitment to the 'service of the other'. What is absent in the texts produced from that era is any explicit recognition of the role of emotional well-being or of the subjective experience of what living through these processes of economic decline and social change meant. Nor was there any reflection on our own motivations or of the risk to careers involved in participating in what was often provocative action research that 'bit the hand that fed it'.

⁹ Described in the case study of the Haringey Women's Employment Project (Appendix 2).

Emotions simply did not register in a conscious way as an issue in the reports of the Community Development Project. It pursued a route of empirical reasoning and loosely Marxist influenced analysis. Nor is it present within the New Architecture Movement, although it is implicitly there in a commitment to beauty and the importance of the unmeasurable. The experience of a collective like the Women's Employment Project was a roller coaster of emotions as we explored the contentious issues of race and sexuality alongside gender and class. This was changing our lives and relationships as well our ongoing approach to research. Our own experience and changed consciousness was integral to how we worked. Sensitivity, solidarity and mutual care were abundantly present in how we related over a decade of working together. But our subjective way of 'knowing' and relating are quite absent in the published texts. The public/private world split between reason and emotion remained firmly in place in the way we wrote.

Reflexive qualitative research has now broken down this divide in many quarters, but this sense of constraint is still quick to re-surface on the 'left' where open introduction of feelings can still prompt the implication of self-centeredness. Yet such rationality belies the passion that suffuses such political activity.

In and against the state

A central concern that emerges in each of these three social movements was the question of 'authority'. But in the effort to challenge the authority of the state and its moribund hierarchies, the question of authority was merged with authoritarianism. Authority was often perceived to be in conflict with the emphasis on collective decision-making. When group processes of envy and rivalry were effectively contained, extremely creative work would arise. Some groups, like the Women's Employment Project, managed to develop their own very effective 'authority' systems and patterns of trust consistent with collective management. In others, like the Community Development Project, an external threat was sometimes the essential factor in internal coherence. When this was absent the group processes were often unbounded, chaotic and dysfunctional (Freeman, 1970).

A contentious and very central debate in all three projects was a discussion about the role of the state. Was a women's training project best understood as a separatist enterprise won from the clutches of a disfigured, sexist, welfare state? Or was it an opportunity to

experiment and shatter traditional paradigms with the intention of eventual reinsertion as a renewed leavening of the mainstream? Should innovative architects regenerate public architecture from the inside or should they remain on the outside setting up co-operatives? These issues were debated by Cockburn (1977), Wilson (1977) Rowbotham et al (1977) and in the influential London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group's *In and Against the State* (1979).

There was a tendency by some to see the institutions of welfare as solely the problem rather than as part of the solution. This fuelled intensely emotional debate with those in social movements who worked for a public service. A strand of the New Architecture Movement concluded that it was necessary to renew the ethical vision *inside* the structures of the state: revitalising public design services within local authorities rather than as independent co-operatives. Those working inside those structures already had a growing anticipatory awareness of what the Conservative government's commitment to 'roll back the frontiers of the state' would eventually unleash.

By the early 1980s, there was a new recognition of the need to also defend the structures of the public services whatever their present limitation and a rediscovery of the idea of a public service ethos. The idea of a public service ethos had come to mean an embedded post-war altruistic sentiment based on the still widespread sense of interdependence in public services, rather than a live sense of remaking this. The social movements tried to challenge and reinvent it afresh confronting the paternalistic and technocratic institutions, which had given rise to growing disillusionment of staff and resentment by users. It led to a significant shift in the trade union ethos of the late seventies 'winter of discontent' to the Nalgo campaign of the early 1980s to 'Put People First'. This was launched with a successful family-orientated 'fete' at Alexandra Palace in North London. Along with some similar festivals run by the GLC and local councils, it was an attempt to emulate the much-admired cultural verve of the French and Italian political and trade union movements.

But the parallel rise of the neo-liberal political agenda was to culminate in the defeat of the year long miners' strike in 1984. Documentaries in 2004, to mark the 20th anniversary of this strike, were a stark reminder of the rawness and powerful emotion of what happened next and which now seems like a historical fault line. The strike split the

country, defined an 'enemy within' and vividly revealed the coercive use of force by the British state. It left society, social and gender relationships changed. For a generation born since into a new consumerist and more individualistic society, scenes from this time prompt the question "did that happen here ...?"

A dented shield

This digression into a wider social history serves to explain the position that local authorities in particular came to occupy in the subsequent two decades in the UK. After 1984, the full force of the neo-liberal agenda of privatisation swept through public utilities and then on to central and local government, health, further, higher and local education authorities. It worked to break up the large reservoirs of skilled and unionised labour in public services typical of post-industrial cities in the UK. The most intense impact and active resistance was to be in local government.

The still thriving milieu of new social movements working in co-operation with local authorities quickly became the frontline of conflict with the Thatcher government. To resolve this confrontation, the Thatcher government simply abolished the GLC and the big urban Metropolitan Authorities in 1988. In finally rejecting a strategy of illegality in setting the rates, the residual dozen local councils, which had been radicalised in the era of 'municipal socialism' in the early 1980s, came to see themselves as a 'dented shield' for their communities caught up in spiralling poverty. Rising poverty gave rise to the racial and social unrest expressed in the riots of 1981 and again in 1985 in London (Tottenham and Brixton), Bristol, Birmingham and Liverpool.

But by the end of the decade, the government had successfully imposed a pattern of annual, punitive, financial cuts on local government through rate capping, as it pursued its agenda of a smaller state. This was to combine with the coming to fruition of ill-judged loan schemes, which these local councils had embarked on as a strategy to avoid cutting services. Spiralling inflation compounded the problem, producing financial disarray and mounting debt repayments. This opened the door to the era of the management consultant, brought in to mediate the structural adjustment programmes and deep service cuts required. These were imposed on some of the poorest communities in the UK in a manner analogous to that experienced by debt-ridden third world countries.

The very real threat of personal surcharge on councillors and officers, which occurred in Lambeth, crushed open opposition.

Chapter 5: In public service

After working for 15 years in grant-aided voluntary sector projects and participating in different social movements (further elaborated in Appendix:2), I rejoined local government and the north London borough of Haringey. This was one of the ‘frontline’ councils, referred to earlier, in constant conflict with the then Conservative government since 1979. I joined as a team leader and would leave as a Head of Service ten years later.

I was appointed just prior to the 1987 General Election and started just after the Labour Party suffered its third electoral defeat. Ratecapping and ever-deeper budget cuts from the early 1980s meant a political and financial crisis had been looming for some years. With the demise of the GLC, it was clear that the voluntary sector as an innovative campaigning space funded by local authorities would not survive. I had started to want a ‘proper’ job, one in which I could wield real power in shaping events. There was a sense that defending local government from privatisation would become vitally important in the coming period. My decision was also partly motivated by age. After working for nearly two decades without employment conditions that included any pension, I wanted more financial security.

My new role as a team leader in an economic development service was to promote community-based ‘Job Plans’ in the public and voluntary sectors. But just before I took up the post, the Labour Party lost the general election of 1987. A Conservative government, re-elected for a third term with its mantra of the three ‘E’s (economy, efficiency and effectiveness), had made it plain that it was going to ‘roll back the frontiers of the public sector’. It was to be a fundamental ideological clash. Which side of this now clear cut divide one was on would shape every decision: user versus citizen; satisfaction versus need; autonomy versus dependency; independence versus interdependency. Within weeks of starting my new job, I was asked instead to re-focus on co-ordinating the council’s corporate response to the now imminent compulsory tendering legislation.

Similar legislation already required the tendering of construction services in competition with private companies. This was now to be extended in 1988 to include every manual service (school meals, ground maintenance, leisure, refuse collection, street cleaning, building cleaning, other catering, etc) across all local authorities and hospitals. Four years later this was subsequently extended to white-collar support services such as personnel, training, finance and many technical services like architecture. Only client roles and 'democratic support' remained outside its reach.

In the autumn of 1987, the initial tranche for tendering was only a year away. It was the start of a rolling programme of tendering that would impact very directly on the conditions of employment of thousands of people. Up until the election the focus had been on rhetoric and little practical preparation had been done. My task would be to move the organisation speedily from rhetoric to active preparation. Staff and services had to be split into client and contractor roles and multiple service-specific contract documentation prepared. In summary, it triggered administrative and emotional turmoil. The consequences of an in-house contractor (or direct service organisation/DSO) failing to win its tender carried with it the very real anxiety of severe cuts in conditions of employment. This threat was particularly harsh on women workers in cleaning and catering when transferred to private contractors, with staff losing their pension rights, holiday retainers and facing reduced pay in the years prior to legal resolution of the application of TUPE legislation on the transfer of staff. Low paid women workers were hit very hard by compulsory tendering (Escott & Whitfield, 1995).

The flow of new legislation was complicated and at that time still unfamiliar to most councillors and senior management. Because it only affected manual workers in the first instance, the immediate sense of collective urgency about what was at stake was slow to develop corporately. The focus of attention was elsewhere on an impending internal financial crisis and the impact of an ousted chief executive following a shift in the political leadership away from the 'left'. Yet I was faced with a task that required a council-wide revolution in thinking, rapid development of robust tendering skills, restructuring on a massive scale and the development of guile in countering the legislation if retaining services 'in-house' was to have any chance. The senior politician with lead responsibility, who had asked me to take on the task, chaired an internal working party which brought together officers from the relevant services and trade unions

to thrash out strategy and practice. With its support and the clock ticking, we could speed up the process of change. With seminars and discussion, we plunged into the process of re-skilling and restructuring. My previous immersion in the politics of anti-privatisation around school meals assured me respect where it mattered and confidence to do what was necessary. Minimal additional resources were made available to buy in skills for this huge task. So we set about drawing together people with the capacity to develop the necessary skills – spotting an administrator with untapped skills here, a redeployee from the soon to be defunct GLC there. In this way we built up a team that could collectively develop the new skills on the job and lead the complex pattern of change required. Despite the pressures and onus of responsibility, it was in many ways an intensely creative moment of change.

Falling into management

I had moved in 1987 from the intimacy of a small collective of five women into changing this bureaucracy of many thousands. At that time, I shared some of the widespread ambivalence to the idea of management and hierarchy that existed in the community and trade union circles with which I had been involved. My own position on this was somewhat modified by my long-standing equation of authority with authorship, a legacy of my student movement involvement. However, taking a job as a manager was widely perceived as ‘crossing the line’, and invited the judgemental question of ‘whose side were you on?’ This meant uncomfortable and unresolved tensions for those like myself with previous links with the community and labour movement. Barbed comments could fester. One’s integrity could be questioned by an implication of compromise or complicity. It meant that my role, as for others, was the focus of constant scrutiny.

I would never have had the confidence to apply for such a job had I known the path it was to take. But while I felt extremely pressured and permanently worried, I did somehow find an authority from within myself as well as from those that mattered above and below me which enabled me to act. A process of collective discussion, underpinned by an explicit politics, drew together a solid web of people, which enabled decisive movement. We radically changed the local authority from below, at a moment when its leadership was in disarray and it was threatening to implode financially. The potential

for a complete failure to adequately prepare for competitive tendering of services was very real and would have led to immediate outsourcing of many council services.

Compulsory tendering legislation required a huge process of change with its introduction of an internal market and a contract culture of 'client-contractor' and 'purchaser-provider' splits. Carrying it forward was a turbulent emotional process. People who had worked together for many years would quickly come to perceive each other as 'the other side' once the split took place, even when the service remained 'in-house'. The legislation was punitive and provoked fear and paranoia and this fuelled very competitive, rivalrous dynamics between services. There was a need to constantly reinterpret legislation from a 'one' organisation viewpoint and to minimise this slide into believing in the procedures we were implementing. We tried to simultaneously hold in mind a quite different meaning and a different purpose.

A focus for projections

My responsibilities evolved over time into a client agent division with responsibilities extending across corporate tendering roles and the contract agent roles that we carried for other budget holding directorates, such as Education, Social Services, Environment and Corporate services. This involved managing multiple contracts on behalf of all these services, together with directly managing some related services that fell outside the legislation but which had been transferred alongside them. This extremely complex mix involved multiple layers of accountability negotiated through developing new service agreements and contract management systems of control.

The level of anxiety was very high for everyone concerned. This meant the service was always the focus of powerful unconscious projections. We were constantly caught in the crossfire of fear, dependence and rivalry. Direct service providers (DSOs) oscillated between expressing dependence, blame and resentment. It all depended on which stage of the contract cycle we were jointly engaged with. The macho contract management styles taking root amongst in-house contractors also conflicted with the more 'feminised' style of the women-dominated management developing in my own service. Client directorates using the service as their agent for tendering also began to launch envious attacks as the internal market gained momentum. They wanted to simply go it alone and put work out to whomever they wished, rather than be tied into this interdependent process, which

continued to impose consideration of the purpose of a local authority in its entirety in their thinking.

At times of annual budget making, such an agent service is a political football and each year its survival was in constant question. The long budget making process meant that I had to prepare 5%, 10%, 15%, and 25%, levels of indicative cuts and the implied potential redundancy of staff. This allowed councillors to make corporate decisions about where to make cuts in order to fund debt repayments and release resources to implement new legislation. The service always did ultimately survive, often being rescued from impending oblivion by the political leadership at the eleventh hour of the budget setting process. But the anxiety of whether the service would survive came to dominate life each year in the six months leading up to the highly politicised budget-making process. Despite its repetition and the intention to deal with it calmly, it was in the end always an emotional 'roller coaster'. There was fear of having to deal with one's own redundancy but also that of staff. Survival too left its own trail of murderous feelings. Restructuring often brought the unenviable prospect of having to reapply for one's own job and of competing with friends and allies. For some it was preferable to just leave.

Survival also brought additional and unexpected management responsibilities. Services hacked off from some other failing structure would be unceremoniously transferred to those that survived. Each brought its own problems of separation and loss, resentment and integration to be done at speed. It meant dealing with past losses, future cuts and the language of quality initiatives like 'Investors in People' in the same meeting. Simultaneously with all of this, we were engaged with devising strategies and implementing new responsibilities on which the jobs of thousands of other staff depended. As I struggled to manage this impossible task I sought some counselling. The counsellor told me to "stop thinking you are God or you will go mad". It was sound advice.

Financial implosion

The impact of this compulsory tendering regime was deeply entangled not just with rate capping and the general reduction in welfare state funding but also with the impact of the high-risk financial tactic pursued by this group of leftward leaning local authorities, including Haringey, in the five years prior to the 1987 election. They had borrowed

directly from the finance markets through leaseback schemes. In this way they were able to continue building schools and community facilities and to maintain services in their diverse and impoverished communities (Elliot, 2005a). It was a strategy to 'buy time' which had anticipated a Labour government being returned to power in 1987. This high-risk and seemingly calamitous strategy resulted in near financial implosion as the demand for repayments came to be faced following the return of another Conservative administration in 1987 for the third time. A catastrophic financial crisis broke simultaneously as services were starting to prepare for the rolling programme of tendering just described.

Within months the council, which I had just joined in 1987, was to reduce its 11,000 employees by 2000 within a few months, indicating the scale of this crisis. The search for savings led to whole services being closed down including one which had pioneered progressive community development initiatives. But they were not statutory and thus not 'frontline services' to be prioritised. This financial crisis and the cuts that it prompted would set the pattern for a decade, with a year-on-year cuts process until the late 1990s. The authority retreated further and further into its statutory base and employment fell to 6,000. The potential benefits of new technology to offset this ran up against inadequate capital resources for investment. The cost of the debt repayment increased relentlessly as interest rates continued to spiral during the early 1990s. It was a time when people bought houses for which they could not then sustain their mortgage payments. In my own service, two young female administrators with young children lost their homes and were living in homeless families accommodation.

Development or survival

Hoggett (1997:41) suggests that 'the success of market reforms in the welfare sector lies in the way organisations have increasingly abandoned the goal of development for that of survival'. This precisely captures the tension that is aroused in dealing with the exposure of public services to marketisation. CCT brought about a centralising command and control response to the government's agenda in total contradiction to a more localised, quality-sensitive approach, which had developed in exciting ways in the earlier 1980s. So 'development' now meant resisting the intense pressures to drift towards accepting the

cheapest tender in order to meet the endless financial crises. It meant continuing to find imaginative ways to define and raise quality standards, despite these financial constraints.

The story of the school meals campaign of the mid 1980s, described earlier and in Appendix 2, precisely illustrates this. As a consequence of this campaign the council was able to build a radical local food policy, already in place, into its catering specifications. So it was able to define a high quality standard without incurring the accusation of ‘anti-competitive behaviour’ and the implication of discriminatory practice against the private sector. It was this strategy to maintain and develop standards, which played a key role in successfully inhibiting the bidding by private catering contractors who were primarily concerned with cutting costs by using the latest cook-chill and cook-freeze food technologies. Today, the decline in food quality following privatisation is undisputable and national nutritional standards have been reinstated.

But in an environment of ever-deepening internal financial crises and external low-cost bids, sustaining such a food policy was fatally compromised (Murray, 1989:107-110). As a non-statutory service, its budgets were being slashed. National nutritional standards had been removed by central government in the early eighties in anticipation of the compulsory tendering. In other authorities this downward spiral was reinforced by an unwillingness to devolve financial resources to schools under local management changes. Overall it reflected the relative unimportance attached to how we feed children and emphasises there was a shared responsibility for the demise of the service (MJ, 2005). School meals captures many dimensions of the impact of marketisation after 1987 and in particular the way development was sought but so easily undermined by the pressures of survival.

Gendering compulsory competitive tendering

In London, women were particularly engaged in the leadership of a mini ‘war’ with the District Audit service that policed compulsory tendering. Local authorities, like those mentioned above, had all been shaped by the influence of ‘municipal socialism’ and the impact of equalities and gender politics in the early eighties. This meant that women like myself from a voluntary sector background, attuned to challenge and innovate, quickly surfaced in these authorities into these key ‘mover and shaker’ roles (Mulholland,

1998:189) such as corporate tendering, policy and client roles. With experience honed in the social movements and running grant-aided projects, such women were quick to grasp the skills of the 'new public management' whilst eschewing the underlying politics. We could also work imaginatively with the high level of uncertainties and cope with the new matrix management styles required. But attending national conferences on new legislation was always a timely reminder that the 'CCT girls' were pioneers. Up to the late nineties, senior management in local government still remained very male-dominated. Typically, I was only one of three women out of twelve heads of service in one contract services management team. This position is now reversed.

A partisan

A key need was for intelligent and robust contract documentation and skilful tendering and evaluation. The support of national¹⁰ and London-wide networks was critically important in researching ways to achieve this. With colleagues from other councils, like Camden, Hackney, Islington, Sheffield and Manchester and research bodies like the Centre for Public Services, different forums were set up which enabled people to regularly share strategies and find the support that would sustain us. Many of these links arose out of the earlier shared histories in social movements. We knew how to organise collectively and were united in challenging, and indeed did successfully outmanoeuvre government policy and the civil servants that we dealt with, to a surprising degree. We remained just within the law and outside the reach of District Audit. In this cat and mouse game we were the mice.

A multi-billion pound contract culture was being opened up in local government services. My duties were clear: to comply with the legislation but also to support the 'will' of the council in minimising its impact. The tendering processes involved the constant close scrutiny by District Audit. A former District Auditor had warned me early on "we go in to Tory authorities to look for corruption and into Labour authorities to look for anti-competitive behaviour". They would come into the service on completion of each tender to closely inspect all the multiple files and paperwork and judge whether we had complied with the legislation or had been 'anti-competitive'.

¹⁰ The Centre for Public Services in Sheffield and the public services trade union, Unison, played a key role in this.

They sought to identify whether political bias against the legislation by Labour councils was evident in the officer recommendations and member decisions made. For each stage in the year-long tendering processes for each contract, the District Auditor wanted to identify any favouring of the in-house direct service organisation (DSO) over competing external private sector bids. The latter included many corporate multinational companies that had the power to challenge these decisions and appeal to the minister, leading to an inquiry. The penalties for being found guilty of acting anti-competitively were very severe. The tender process would be re-run and as punishment that council's own in-house DSO would no longer be allowed to bid. This would mean bearing a direct responsibility for the termination of the employment contracts of hundreds of staff, at a time when the limited safeguards of 'TUPE' legislation had not come into existence. More personally it opened up staff like myself and councillors responsible for such decision to the threat of being personally surcharged. The District Auditor never successfully challenged the robust tendering procedures we had put in place. These sought to maintain and promote quality of services through the development of innovative service standards and policies, such as a radical food policy. In this way it was possible to avoid awarding contracts to the cheapest bid and this strategy enabled us to legitimately thwart the general thrust of privatisation.

Reflecting on this a decade later, I am struck by the high level of personal risk willingly entertained by officers and politicians who chose to work as 'partisans' in this way. This risk taking arose out of a collective dynamic that generated commitment by people with strongly shared values, a subtle intelligence and a fertile ingenuity for subversion. We were small in numbers but for five years or so, I did not feel in any way isolated.

New Labour emerges

Such work was a sensitive barometer of the politics of the majority Labour group members and where their support lay. After the local elections in 1992 an emerging conflict began to appear. Whereas trench warfare with civil servants was to be expected, what was not anticipated was the emergence of an 'enemy within'.

One of my key roles had been to co-ordinate regular meetings of a Public Services Working Party, where contentious differences over strategy around compulsory

competitive tendering were argued out between key politicians, managers and trade unions. It reinforced a collective way of thinking and a constraint on autonomous action by individual services. But after the local elections in 1992 this structure was suddenly abolished. The lead member had left and this decision reflected the impact of a new group then emerging within the majority Labour group politicians. It began to generate intense political conflict and a power struggle amongst the majority group councillors. Many newly elected councillors were people who worked in the TUC, national trade unions, or the Labour Party nationally, who also lived in Haringey. They were mainly young, white men who, in contrast to an earlier generation, had not been shaped politically by participation in social movements. They were a product of student politics allied to a Labour party now fascinated by new media skills and hungry for power. It was apparent that a new group had formed to challenge for the leadership. I registered the significance of the change in quite small ways at first. Evening meetings were called by politicians at short notice and childcare was not seen as an issue to take into account. There was a sense that the 'boys' were back in control after a period when feminist demands had been listened to.

In a provocative local manifesto called *'The Enabling Council'* (Wilmore, 1993) the leadership of this new political grouping set out its thinking and challenged for the leadership. It advocated the contracting out of all the council's public services and a reduction of direct employment to a few thousand employees. This was in sharp contrast to the previous established policy position, which had been to 'defend public services' and retain services in-house. The extreme nature of the proposal at that time meant that it never won sufficient support, but it signalled the direction of the national policy shift to come. There was also increasing recourse to the use of management consultants as the 'New Public Management' agenda was driven forward with a flow of new initiatives and major restructuring: process re-engineering one year, EFQM the next. Some initiatives were subverted, some were embraced.

In one budget-making year, flat management structures were seen as a key source of savings, regardless of the practical circumstances. My proposed restructuring to accommodate cuts was faxed back with critical roles crossed out because they did not conform to a flat structure. I had to figure out a way to work key functions back into yet another revised structure. After 1992 a major corporate re-structuring led to a new

slimmed down five-directorate structure. This model came to be known as the 'doughnut ring' and was a template that was recycled by consultants from local authority to local authority. It was in essence for them a shameless 'cash cow'. As a consequence Housing and Social Services were combined in a new single directorate of 2,000 people. This took several years to implement, only to be unpicked as it proved to be unworkable. The general chaos and stress generated by constant change such as this inevitably left a legacy.¹¹

Central services roles, such as equalities and health and safety, were also decentralised to line managers in directorates without any transfer of additional resources. In principle this mainstreaming was a sensible development reflecting good practice. But by chance I read that it was the client service (like my own) of a local council that had been taken to court when a private contractor ran over a dead body in a park. My contract management responsibilities, had unknowingly, made me accountable for much of the council's health and safety, which meant cutting posts to release more funds to create the necessary health and safety skills.

In retrospect, it is now possible to see that the neo-liberal agenda, on which New Labour came to power nationally five years later in 1997, was being worked out by this new political grouping. They were involved in a learning process using the budgetary practices of local authorities with acute financial problems such as Haringey as a template for national economic strategy to come. Those involved in the process formed a close web of personal and work-related connections extending across politicians, officers and party activists. They would be spotted meeting for shared lunches at convenient meeting places like the TUC.

After 1992, the Labour Party's policy against privatisation began to perceptibly weaken, particularly in London, as it began its covert embrace of a neo-liberal way of thinking. More generally, there was little or no debate about privatisation in the wider public domain. It was increasingly confined to sub-groups within public sector institutions and trade unions. The Conservative mantras of low taxation, efficiency and competition still remained dominant, coupled with a pervasive denigration of the public sector and public

¹¹ In my view this was an indirect but contributory factor in the circumstances that led to the tragic death of Victoria Climbié some years later in 2001. This tragedy involved the collective responsibility of many public authorities across London, but attention particularly came to focus on the failure of procedures in Haringey's Social Services, the borough in which she had died.

services generally. This degraded not just the infrastructure of public services and conditions of service for employees, but over such a prolonged period and without any clear political alternative was now inevitably sapping the morale of those who worked in them. Problems of recruitment, failing management, and acute understaffing were the inevitable consequence. Progressive commercialisation of public services as a dominant ethos was beginning to seem unchallengeable. New Labour no longer articulated any vigorous opposition. Those remaining committed to the idea of a public sector were increasingly isolated. My own sense was of being abandoned.

A creative destruction

Faced with the high probability of a change in government in 1997, I concluded that the service I managed in various forms for a decade would then be 'killed off'. It had been created in response to the Conservative's legislation and its future would inevitably be highly uncertain. Rumours abounded to the effect that in such an event the service would be taken over by the direct service providers, or by the client directorates such as the Education Service concerned to reclaim their 'bit' of the agency. These directorates were eagerly seeking to replace roles being lost elsewhere as a consequence of other government policies.

I had always seen the service for which I was responsible as a temporary structure, a necessary means to defend the foundations of these, albeit imperfect, public services during the Thatcher/Major administrations. The intention was to safeguard their existence for a time in the future when it would be possible to think creatively again about how to improve services without the then hindrance of compulsory tendering. But managers within the service, including myself, had inevitably grown into their roles and benefited from new status arising from the need to meet the demands of CCT. So the perspective of individuals about any future change was coloured by how we envisaged the personal consequences of having to enter into ring-fenced competition for new posts if and when client and direct services management roles were to be 'glued' back together. From a quality perspective, re-integration was the right option, but it was personally threatening to most individuals. In consulting managers about what we should do, there was considerable pressure from most to protect the known and to enter into a 'turf war' of attrition and resist the competitive pressures. A few considered that the service should be

actively 'killed off' in order for it to enter a new period of creative change. This resonated with my own intuitive feelings.

Reason told me that the division needed to move on and if it did not, it would quickly become a 'sacrificial lamb' in the new world. Inspired by a chance reading of Capra's exploration of complexity in *The Web of Life* (1996), I decided that the only path lay in a re-appraisal of its role. The future quality of service required that the different clients and contractors be sensitively 'glued back together' again. The small residual structure of around two dozen staff would then have to face the challenge of rethinking its way back to what an innovative service/policy development role entailed, which was where it had started off ten years previously. But this would of necessity reduce the size of the division by two-thirds and diminish and redefine management post and roles. I considered that in the long term this upheaval would safeguard people's employment, albeit at the cost of considerable change. But I also knew such change would fuel deep anxieties, unleash the fury of some and violate the strong attachments that had been created over a long period. It would seem like a bereavement. I would be doing what the hated management consultants were brought in to do, but this time doing it myself. Despite my early ambivalence to creating this service, I myself had inevitably become very attached to people and a role. Could I manage to do this?

Emotional turmoil

A number of events during the summer of 1996 provided the necessary guidance. Firstly, I have already described in the 'Introduction' how my inner compass was pointing me sharply in a different direction. The culture of compliance was inducing an increasing sense of a loss of meaning. Secondly, I read an article 'Drawing on the emotions' (Brousseine, 1996) in the *MJ*, a local government weekly. This short article described organisational consultancy work with senior local government managers in a local district council, which to my surprise had captured the same emotional turmoil that I was currently experiencing. This was the first and only time I read anything in the local government press that in any way directly reflected my own emotional experience of the changes experienced. Thirdly, I read the speech to the 1995 Labour Party Conference by Tony Blair, the new leader of the Labour Party. It was a very different speech to any that I had ever read before. It reflected the growing adoption of new media skills. Each sentence was less than a line long and repeatedly peppered with key words like 'new'

and 'modern'. While it played well to the conference and the country, it engendered no appetite in myself to work for this new agenda. I had seen its evolution at close quarters, and I anticipated that it would accelerate privatisation.

I decided that I would leave local government, giving six months' notice of my intention in order to bring a new organisation into being, leaving no power vacuum to be exploited by the wider corporate organisation. This decision also allowed me to find the necessary equilibrium to embark on change and contain the very powerful feelings, which I knew the uncertainty of reorganisation would unleash in staff. I could live with the blame and attacks without being swamped by them. If people respected my integrity they would trust my judgement even if they did not like the outcomes. One of the most important lessons that I learnt in the many negotiations with trade union representatives was to calmly listen to what people were saying and with the real intent of trying to explore what they were arguing for. Paying close attention to people's anger and anxiety was the only way to retain their respect in making difficult decisions. With patient negotiation the antagonisms between the multiple 'client' and 'contractor' sides for different services were worked through and the many different 'bits' began to be re-united back into new integrated services. The small residual structure that emerged found itself faced with an opportunity to re-think its new role. At an initial meeting of these staff, one person voiced the question "isn't this management's job?" But once over this hurdle, staff seized the opportunity to take part in the process of letting go of an old role and taking up the chance to imaginatively shape a new one.

Some years later I read a description by Boethius (1999) of a similar process in which she entered into a collective review and dialogue about her leadership of a Swedish mental health organisation. She put her own future role up for question with all the risks of being sidelined. When I came to read the report I was greatly impressed by her courage. But Boethius worked within the autonomous environment of a mental health organisation with strong traditions of open communication. I worked within a wider corporate organisation, which was anxious and paranoid, continually subject to endless financial crises and leadership struggles.

In a profile of managers undertaken of my own authority undertaken as part of a wider longer term national study on leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2003) attention was drawn to

a feminised profile of managers across most directorates, pointing out that individually both women and men consistently underestimated their capabilities compared to the assessment of their peers and superiors. In part this reflected a relatively young management as few people over fifty had survived the high levels of redundancy and early retirement. A commitment to the idea of service rather than one of personal ego was also still strongly dominant. But a more complicated explanation is needed to explore why managers consistently underscored themselves. It was, I suggest, that we felt unsafe and unacknowledged.

An absence of containment

In reflecting back on why this organisation should have felt so unsafe a decade ago, I would now identify two illustrations. Firstly, managers often felt vulnerable and unsupported by the politicians, who were themselves under unbearable pressures to make impossible decisions. In public meetings some councillors would sometimes deliberately use officers as the means to divert public anger from themselves to cover their inability to conjure up financial resources to make the necessary improvements. The new ‘Scrutiny’ meetings (akin to a large parliamentary select committee), established in the mid 1990s, brought together members, officers, representative groups and the general public into a four-cornered event. Rather than promoting a measured reflection, such events would often degenerate into a ‘bear pit’. As an officer, one was at risk of becoming the ‘flack catcher’ and being verbally attacked by both public and councillors alike in ways that were quite improper. As an officer, one is constrained by a duty to represent and protect Members. Yet such mayhem was also an understandable response to the consequences of impoverishment that inevitably unleashed the ‘shrill voices’ of the dispossessed, which require to be listened to attentively if they are to feel heard (hooks, 1989, Young, 1997).

Secondly, the leadership of the organisation seemed unable to demonstrate support to its staff and acknowledge their fears and anxiety. For example, an annual half-day meeting was instigated in the mid 1990s for all the senior staff to meet. A rare event. While a certain cynicism of such events is to be expected, at that time I found myself looking forward to the second occasion on which around 100 senior managers were able to come together. In a hopeful state of mind, I somehow envisaged it as a rare opportunity to feel

supported in the very difficult and often isolating circumstances in which we were all working. I hazily imagined it would be a good chance to reflect openly on problems and failures but also on the relative successes, commitment and resilience in grappling with such a challenge with our inadequate resources. It could all have been much worse but for our efforts. It would, I thought, be a space in which we could collectively acknowledge the difficulty of 'holding it all together' and be energised by mutual recognition of our continuing interdependence.

In the event it was the same pattern as the previous year, the same harangue, the same focus group graphs and the same chief executive berating us, his colleagues. We sat mutely passive. No one challenged. We were afraid to speak. Later in a small group with the chief executive present, the borough engineer quite unexpectedly remarked in quiet voice: "why is it when I come to these meetings I always go away feeling worse than when I came". He spoke for us all; we were being abused and a bullying culture entrenched amongst politicians was spilling out, uncontained by the most senior management. Like some other local authorities at this time it was a dangerous place to work: it "could make you ill or kill you".

A sense of loss

Managing growth is stressful, but managing decline and under-investment is disheartening. It is not just about change. It is about destroying what you have previously worked hard to create in the satisfaction that you were attempting to identify and meet the needs of a very deprived community. In the early years when whole services disappeared senior staff sometimes wept openly when they heard these decisions. But even this is made bearable if there is a wider purpose, debate and discussion and meaning making. But as New Labour emerged in the early 1990s, they rejected the era of the GLC and social movements, which had engaged with developing greater equality. This history was dismissed then and now with contempt as the 'loony London left' (Hewitt, 2005). Its legacy and ongoing contribution to social change became invisible within the new power structure. To think in this way was increasingly confined to marginal groups who no longer mattered. We learnt to talk the new talk of standards and output measurement, of monitoring and review. We managed our business

units with folders full of internal contracts and service level agreements, and we became silent and merged into the new world order.

Old structures fell away as restructuring followed restructuring throughout the 1990s. What had once been valued became denigrated and denounced as the province of 'dinosaurs'. This actually meant people like myself who had once represented the desire for a different kind of change. The newspapers and weeklies of the thinking 'Left' were no exception. I regularly looked in vain through the pages of the *New Statesman* over this decade in search of some reflection of what I was experiencing, but there was no sympathetic representation. Hoggett (1989:31) comments that it was 'an era of anti-thought in which the intelligentsia's only role was to pour scorn on those misguided fools who still speak for commitment' and he adds old attachments could not be left with dignity but rather had to be attacked and spoiled. He sees this as a consequence of embracing something good which failed and in which one resolves never to be caught again.

A new way of thinking

On leaving local government I wanted to explore why some groups and organisations thrive and remain focussed on the task in hand whereas other groups, which set out with the same commitment, ended up racked by destructive conflicts. I chose an MSc in group relations and society. Its mix of political analysis and psychoanalytic thinking spoke to the issues I was concerned with despite my unfamiliarity with much of the theorising.

My master's course in group relations provided many experiential opportunities to explore the emotional basis of thinking and learning where it was possible to make connections with current and previous work situations. In one such week-long conference event I became infuriated by the way another member treated the conference like a game. In response to his continual flow of cynical remarks I found myself speaking angrily about "people who are the cynics of the organization, the surfers, the people who will have moved on when the going gets tough". He aroused in me a sense of despair at holding a public service organisation together, of wanting to believe in it yet seeing people being brutalised and becoming cynical with their commitment to a service ethos perverted.

I described earlier in the Introduction how a previously passionate sense of the meaning of public services seemed to collapse. The ideological shift towards the primacy of market thinking, locally and globally, was in some way fundamentally disorientating at a deeply personal level. The lack of any collective conversation about these feelings meant that it remained largely unshared. This isolation, together with a disorienting absence of any coherent political analysis to make sense of what was happening, gave rise to a melancholy.

In 1999, I attempted to reflect on this lingering sense of loss in a small experiential group. But the consultant and group interpreted what I presented solely in terms of a personal loss of organisational role and identity. This interpretation failed to resonate for me. I had certainly been saddened to leave colleagues, but it was equally the case that I was also simply tired of managing within such a demanding environment. I was confident that I had done my job well and had left the organisation in a measured way, safeguarding as far as I could the values I wanted to see continue. So while change is always temporarily disorientating, this one was very much tempered by my relief from the constant anxiety. I was also by then feeling very re-energised by my participation on the group relations MSc course itself. So the interpretation did not begin to explain the piercing, painful, sense of loss associated with what had happened and was continuing to happen to public services.

I concluded that the consultant was speaking through the dominant lens of an organisational experience alone and was unfamiliar with any experience of the changes occurring in embattled inner city local authorities in London. I was left puzzled by his response and somewhat awkward to have aired strong feelings about something that had clearly no resonance for people in this small group. I now realise that I was trying to understand something that was then not comprehensible to most people at that time. I even discovered some years later that one member of the group assumed I must have been speaking about an experience of redundancy. I was left wondering whether my response was somehow peculiar to my own individual experience and history or did it represent something more collective? Did these raw feelings still exist for others, hidden under the surface, and fleetingly revealed only with people who shared the intensity of this lived experience and the sense of its betrayal? For my masters dissertation I decided to research my peer group and their experience of the transition from political activism to

local government management. These intense interviews confirmed that I was not alone in my experience.

In the summer of 2005, when I sat talking to another researcher I discovered she too had returned to the same era of the social movements in the 1970s. The impact on the social history of one locality was part of a study to explore the potential effect of such a history on present day health care. She had been trawling through one local authority's archive files and encountered the vitality of that historical moment. We contrasted the thinking then and now about public consultation and how the present top-down dynamic is the reverse of that era when the public demanded to be heard via multiple small-scale community action initiatives and vigorous political engagement. As we talked on, we discovered that we had both once written dissertations on public participation in the late 1960s.

She recalled meeting the then chair of a council committee and how he had talked on for several hours conveying his hopes for the activism that had flourished. Then she fell silent for a moment and I noticed her eyes had filled with tears. Her wordless expression resonated instantly with my own feelings of loss. She conveyed the sadness of seeing efforts eventually destroyed. She eventually asked me whether the interview was a certain kind of therapy and I confirmed this thought. I had drawn this same conclusion when I had interviewed political activists like myself about their own transition from the social movements of the 1980s into managing local government and the destructive years that followed. These expressions of feeling seem to underline an absence of anywhere to speak collectively to a sense of this loss. To speak of such feelings in the early nineties was to invite ridicule by the new political class that had come to power. Or, as in my own case, it could be misinterpreted as only a personal rather than a collective experience.

Modernisation

In the period leading up to New Labour taking power in 1997, I found myself placing some renewed hopefulness in the proposed strategy of Best Value, then intended to replace the compulsory tendering legislation. This was a hope that it would usher in a return to innovation and turn away from prescription and manuals. But crucially there was no wider popular movement powerfully shaping this new agenda in a radical

progressive way. People were exhausted. With a manifesto commitment to no tax increases for two years, once in power New Labour provided no increase in resources. Its desire for service improvement was to be based on a strategy of 'more for less'. There was no early action to prevent the growing 'two tier' workforce, which had arisen with contracting out.

Far from receiving any recognition for holding local government together through difficult times, or plaudits for slowing down the pace of privatisation, the tone towards the public sector was strikingly cold. It was apparent that New Labour disliked the public sector as much as the Tories had. Any illusion about a 'new start' proved to be short lived. By July 1999, Tony Blair the Prime Minister, was already talking about 'the forces of conservatism' blocking his path and in a speech to a conference of venture capitalists spoke of the 'scars on my back after two years in government' (Blair, 1999) produced by the unwillingness of the public sector, in his view, to innovate or to provide more for less in the pursuit of 'modernising' public services.

Modernisation increasingly came to mean a continuation of competition, outsourcing and marketisation. The local government market is worth nearly £100 billion and employs approximately two million people. A mixed economy has always prevailed, but New Labour's policy direction was towards expanding the level of private management of public services, reaching into the heart of the welfare state. The strategy of modernisation conceives public service and the ethos surrounding it, as an idea uncoupled from traditional public sector organisational structures.

The end of the nineties was to see an intensification of these changes in all parts of the public sector – health, social care, education and other roles of local government. Established organisational structures began to fragment into multiple agency structures, public-private partnerships and new forms of private and not for profit provision. The public-private divide was being dismantled and there was a sense that local government as a structure was being 'hollowed out'. The increasingly inflexible policies of top-down micromanagement of 'modernisation' through Best Value and the disciplines of the audit culture were generating a mood of greater compliance and passivity very different from the activities and 'creative autonomy' (Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg, 2000:2) still evident a few years earlier.

A critical moment

Public criticism and anger about Britain's increasingly dilapidated public infrastructure finally emerged with the widespread failures of the NHS to cope in the severe flu outbreaks during the winter months of early 2000. Later that year this was followed by a crisis of the privatised railways. Railtrack's focus on rising share value whilst halving its engineering staff and losing control of its privatised maintenance subcontractors, ended in the fiasco of a series of serious rail crashes. The most symbolic of all was that of Hatfield in October 2000. This triggered a 'national collective nervous breakdown' (Hare, 2003) and the public rail system slowed down in disarray for the whole of the following year. The Prime Minister 'took control' and defined the 'modernisation' of public services to be the key manifesto issue for the next general election in 2001.

In January 2001, I commenced my PhD. Making my way to the University of Hertfordshire was to regularly involve hour-long delays at a semi-derelict local railway station in north London waiting for trains that were repeatedly cancelled.

Chapter 6: Emerging themes - 1

What do we learn from these stories of how the ‘past is in the present’? A number of organising themes are beginning to emerge, which also underline the way a complex responsive processes methodology calls for a reflection on one’s own interactions and internal conversations.

Firstly, the stories locate my own deeply personal stance on public services. These reveal how the early shaping experience of ‘living on the edge’ sensitised me to how the right public services can support and change one’s life. The implicit assumption is also that role of the welfare state is about modifying inequality, but the example of the library service represents the way a public institution can take on a significance which can extend well beyond mere ‘service delivery’. Secondly, I participated as a school student in a pedagogical way of thinking which pointed me towards situation ethics. The metaphor of a ‘polar bear sneezing at the North Pole impacting several thousand miles away’ was a powerful image of change. Its lingering influence was to be a shaping presence in my ongoing experience of an international student movement, the social movements of the 1970s and early 1980s, which led on to an active role in developing the then new voluntary sector. This temporarily injected a new creativity into civil society in the early 1980s and fuelled hopes of change and political imagination. In all of this, the influences of ideas around chaos theory and complexity are subtly present.

Thirdly, this innovative trajectory is not to be mistaken for a ‘golden age’. While it was the expression of an attempt to reclaim an ‘absent ethical vision’ (Hoggett, 2000:198) in the increasingly technocratic welfare state of the 1970s, by the mid 1980s it was to collide with the retrenchment and demise of the welfare state as the neo-liberal agenda gathered momentum. My own ‘falling into management’ in local government aptly sums up a pattern for many politically active people who moved from the voluntary sector into local government and proved both able and politically aware in responding to the Conservatives’ agenda to ‘roll back the state. The stories capture an aspect of the lived experience of how the Welfare State was gradually unpicked from the 1980s, which aroused little public interest outside the public sector and local government in particular.

Yet the turbulent feelings it unleashed for people like myself can perhaps be understood by drawing a broad parallel with the impact of Reformation in the 16th Century (Haigh 2002). Like then it was a period of great historical significance and tremendous emotional turmoil in which one was forced to choose where one stood on a daily basis.

Fourthly, the stories convey the experience of what it is like to become part of a shadow narrative and an outsider, both relevant themes of complex responsive processes, to which I will return in Part Five. As the 1990s wore on, commitment to a public sector was being denigrated and ignored in the wider public discourse, and as New Labour shifted its political discourse towards market thinking I, like many others, experienced this as a betrayal. The legacy of this decade is a long, confusing mix of resilience and bitter disappointment, ambivalent feelings of anger, guilt and failure, and the sense of a loss for something that might have been and had been stolen. The narrative thus conveys a melancholia about ‘unfinished business’ and the absence of a collective way of processing these feelings. As a result, people like myself often became isolated in the ensuing confusion. There is a palpable need on my part to have this history ‘heard’ as a first step in a process of developing more insight.

Patterns of change

Gender emerges to play a key role in these changes. It is now difficult to imagine the then significance of the women’s employment projects and how they drove home the simple connection between low paid ‘women’s work’ and this critical but undervalued role in public services. The stories also underline how women like myself emerged from this era of the social movements into senior management roles in many London boroughs, and took the initiative in playing an unplanned but crucial shaping role, in developing oppositional strategies towards compulsory tendering which played a part in modifying the worst effects on low paid manual staff, particularly those of black and working women.

The public service ethos that is revealed here is of being a partisan, working to actively subvert the introduction of the new contract culture through innovative thinking. To act with integrity as a local government officer has always required contradictory strands to be continually reconciled: enforcing top-down legislation and enabling the bottom-up voice of social need. As noted above, ‘falling into management roles’ brought

intense scrutiny by former peers as to whether one had ‘crossed the line’. It highlights the complicated political nature of ethical action and reflection in these roles. The stories also illustrate the relationship going on between politicians and officers. It also captures the crucial moment in time in 1992 as ‘New Labour’ emerged and began its shift towards market thinking. It illustrates how, as the conversation with politicians changes, the bureaucracy and the prevailing ethos is also reshaped.

The threat of financial implosion also appears in the narrative *alongside* the introduction of compulsory tendering as an equally important shaping influence. It emphasises how a weave of factors were impacting simultaneously on inner city local authorities in the UK. It coincided with the severe economic recession of the early 1990s in which the impact of spiralling interest payments precipitated near catastrophic levels of rising debt repayment.

The previous chapter conveys the failure of the leadership to understand its role in containing the anxiety of frontline staff in this situation. Rather, as the New Public Management gained the ascendancy by the mid 1990s, a punitive audit culture took root amidst the turmoil of year-on-year restructurings and with it a more submissive, compliant culture. Whereas the era of the social movements of the 1980s was often highly conflictual and at times quite destructive, the stories convey how it was also participative, intellectual, often liberating and personally very meaningful. An intellectual conversation flowed between universities, the innovative parts of local government, the voluntary sector and social and political movements. But as this social and political movement became increasingly demoralised by the early 1990s, both time and access to such reflective discussion also disappeared for those on the frontline.

In Part Three, I will now turn to a search for a literature to see how it mirrors the experiences conveyed in this narrative and provides insight into the sense of confusion.

PART THREE: IN SEARCH OF A LITERATURE

'Coming up for air' George Orwell (1939)

Chapter 7: Reinventing government

Part Three turns from the voice of experience to the discourses of public administration and political economy. In this first chapter, I will consider the New Public Management and the unfolding of New Labour's 'Third Way' strategy for modernising public services with its emphasis on the increasing role of private finance. In the next three chapters I will consider three shaping debates: the decline of the public realm; a public service ethos and finally the market versus state discussion. I will conclude by drawing together insights into the way this theorising relates to the lived experience of Part Two.

The 'New Public Management'

The early 1980s marked the beginning of the end of a welfare state that the Beveridge Report (1942) had envisaged as meeting social need from the cradle to the grave. After 1979, under the Thatcher government, the role of the state in the economic sector of public utilities was quickly eradicated as the regulatory state was brought into being. In the public mind, such change was then dominated by the privatisation of public utilities, with promotional character 'Sid' evoking the illusion of participation as shareholders rather than as citizens in the new water, gas, electricity, telecommunications and railway companies. But as the previous chapters demonstrated, far-reaching changes were also taking place in local government as tendering and 'contracting out' gained momentum.

These developments were closely related to, but not entirely synonymous with a complex pattern of public management reform, which came to be characterised as the New Public Management (NPM). This was an approach that fundamentally challenged the tradition of incrementalism and professionalism in public administration. Hood (1991:3-20) classically defined its key elements: entrepreneurial style, standards and measurement of performance, output controls, disaggregation and decentralisation, competition, private sector styles of management, discipline in resource allocation, such as monthly finance monitoring or zero based budgeting. My own initial encounter with this management

approach is perhaps captured by the title of a chapter in a then new book on public management called 'Why should anyone measure performance?' (Flynn, 1990: 109).

The New Public Management works to separate direct management of service delivery from political decision-making and thus calls for an audit culture of accountability replacing the old settlement around professional self-regulation. It draws on the application of private sector management theories in human resource management in its restructuring of services into business units, using new market-based accounting practices, performance measurement and quality assurance. Its principles are now pervasive in the texts and courses that teach management for those working in public services. Some texts such as Rashid (1999) have the specific endorsement of the local government's Improvement and Development Agency. It has been widely critiqued. Flynn 1993; Ferlie et al 1996; Cutler & Vine 1997; Clarke and Newman, 1997; McLaughlin, Osborne & Ferlie, (eds) 2002. Drucker (1995) and Mintzberg (1996) have also attacked the adoption of private sector based management theory by the public sector as inappropriate, given its distinctive purpose. Willmott (1993) also brought an early and prescient analysis of its Orwellian language in the use of soft management techniques.

Developed in the UK, the New Public Management has spread internationally and has acquired a wide range of meanings. Various writers warn against seeing the end result in any uniform way and stress that nuanced differences have emerged along the way as a result of origins, obstacles and contestations. Ferlie et al (1996:11-15) identify four different forms that it has taken: *firstly* the new Thatcherite political economy strand; *secondly* downsizing and decentralisation; *thirdly* a quality improvement movement and *fourthly* a public service orientation strand reflecting the fusion of private and public sector management ideas in Osborne and Gaebler's influential text *Reinventing Government* (1992). It was this latter text with its mantra of 'steering not rowing' (ibid:49), which seized the imagination of the political establishment in local government in the early 1990s and was to dominate normative thinking thereafter. It continues to permeate the modernisation ethos.

McLaughlin et al (2002:1) provide a critical overview from the theoretical to the practical and encompass the international and research approaches. Dibben et al (2004), contest the direction of public sector reforms and Wood (2004:89) concludes public sector ethics

need to be located in a broad political economy framework. There have also been explicit critiques about its impact specifically on local government (Cochrane, 1991; Hoggett, 1996; Sanderson, 1998). Writing just prior to the end of the Thatcher/Major years from a critical management perspective, Clarke and Newman (1997), draw on a relational understanding of power (ibid:67) to provide the most comprehensive critique of this emergence of a 'Managerial State' in which managerialism provides the co-ordinating framework for a reshaping of power relations right across the public sector and government itself. They also draw out the 'complex and contradictory' processes of change and Newman (2002:89) emphasises that it is 'still emergent and unstable' and 'conflicts must be managed, contradictory imperatives balanced, and new and old agendas reconciled' (ibid:90).

While the Thatcher and Major administrations of the 1980s and 1990s sought to push local government into the role of merely administering centrally defined policies, far from being defenceless victims of central government, parts of local government devised numerous strategies to protect an independent policy-making role and its 'creative autonomy' (Atkinson & Wilks-Heeg, 2000:2). This corresponds with the experience mentioned previously of devising strategies to subvert compulsory competitive tendering.

Ferlie & Fitzgerald (2000:344) suggest the New Public Management needs to be understood as the consequence of four fundamental forces in society. They are *firstly*, the growth of the middle class and a taxpayers' revolt, which has resulted in social democratic parties converging and triangulating around the template established by the new 'Right'; *secondly*, the new consumer experience and expectations of service industries; *thirdly*, the rise of management functions and a new language replacing that of professional control; *fourthly*, the new forms of performance management made possible by powerful IT. They conclude that taking all of these together a change in political direction would be insufficient to de-institutionalise it.

New Labour's 'Third Way' and modernisation

After 18 years of Conservative government, New Labour's response in 1997 was to embark on its strategy of 'The Third Way' (Giddens, 1998). This claims to chart a course between dogmatic advocacy of the free market, and 'old' social democracy with

its allegiance to redistribution by elected governments as its preferred means of reform (Rustin, 2000:112). The Prime Minister in 1998 stated that the aim is 'a dynamic knowledge-based economy founded on individual empowerment and opportunity, where governments enable, not command and the power of the market is harnessed to serve the public interest' (Finlayson 1999: 271). Mandelson (1996) had already stated that 'there is no alternative to neo-liberal globalisation'. In summary, the government perceived a commercial approach and an enterprise culture of competitive individualism to be an unchallenged good.

Giddens has had an ongoing influential role in shaping thinking around the 'Third Way' strategy in relation to public services. He has argued that a commitment to 'publicisation' of the private sector (2002:67) is a desirable ideological position to bring about the structural reform of public services to make them more effective and responsive to citizens' needs. In summary, in his view public interest is best served where the state collaborates with other agencies, including not-for-profit organisations, business, and third sector groups. This is to be linked to maintaining fiscal discipline, structural reform of welfare to reduce dependency and a new approach to equality, which places the emphasis on equality of opportunity (ibid:39) rather than equality of outcome.

New Labour has embraced a 'modernisation' agenda in which the primacy of the business model and a consumer focus is seen as central to any public service delivery role. It is an approach that seeks to displace politics from its previous interrelationship with running services as an in-house employer. The narrative, which has come to dominate so overwhelmingly, is a pragmatic 'what works is what matters'. But as the rider 'whether it works or not' has increasingly been appended to this, it points rather to the underlying ideological orientation and continuation of the neo-liberalism of the Conservative administrations before it. The extension of market forces and the role of both private sector management practice and finance are regarded by New Labour as the vital ingredient for modernising and improving the organisational form of public service provision. Within this narrative the public sector is caricatured as a victim of 'producer capture', as irredeemably inefficient, bureaucratic, outmoded and needing the private sector to bring about the necessary improvements. Whereas this has been an unspoken understanding in its first two administrations, since securing a third term in 2005, the government's position has become more overt.

Although the New Labour government eventually revoked the 1988/1992 Local Government Acts requiring compulsory tendering of public services, it was seamlessly replaced with strategies that have intensified the focus on procurement and externalisation of services (Whitfield, 2001; Leys, 2002; Pollack, 2001). The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that he does not care who builds or runs schools and hospitals and advocates 'that breaking down the barriers between public, private and voluntary sectors must continue' (Blair 2005).

These different related mechanisms, underpinned by the disciplinary power of quality audits and league tables, have rapidly opened up health, social services, education and housing to competition and externalisation in a way simply not envisaged a decade ago, when Ferlie et al (1996: 225) considered that the public sector 'would shrink no further'. New Labour has transformed the position of public services for the better from that of five years ago, but modernising in ways closely tied to the use of private finance. A fifth of public services are now run by the private sector and the growth rate since 2002 runs at 80 per cent (*Financial Times*, 2005). A new model of public service using 'independent autonomous providers' (Denham, 2005) is being entrenched across the board in which no one should both plan a service and provide it and in which user choice, not good management, has been conceived as the route to better services.

In the nine years since 1997, the government has entrenched commercialisation, with a steady programme of initiatives across a broad front, which range from pushing through the contentious policy of Foundation Hospitals in 2003/4, to introducing US medical suppliers into the NHS in 2004, providing private diagnostic centres in 2005 and GP practices in 2006; breaking up the institution of the Post Office in preparation for forthcoming competition; plans for the tendering and contracting out of local authority new children's services (*MJ*, 2004) and social justice support services like probation (*Guardian*, 2005). In the health service, the predicted drift from manual services towards the clinical process itself has proved to be the case. *The Economist* (2005, April 23:33) noted how the internal market has now been restored alongside a projected externalisation of 15 per cent of clinical services.

In July 2005, the government announced proposals to significantly extend the role of the private sector in speeding up waiting times for routine surgery in the NHS (Hewitt, 2005)

and has proposed reconstructing primary care trusts and, as a consequence and without consultation, the privatisation of community nursing – now withdrawn after vigorous opposition. Together, this third reorganisation of the NHS in eight years has triggered talk of the end of the NHS in England. With NHS Trusts revealing between £500m and £1 billion overspend in 2005, the return to the internal market and introduction of payment by results in 2006 will, if carried through, prompt both hospital closures and intensive outsourcing of back office functions. New Labour's legacy may still prove to be an NHS transformed into a commissioning body.

New levers and contradictions

New Labour has also brought a distinct approach to managerialism using the levers of partnership, standards and consultation in the remaking of welfare systems (Clarke et al, 2000) with both positive and negative implications. Since 1997, New Labour has moved the focus towards an emphasis on community governance in which planning, management and provision of public services is seen as something to be negotiated between a number of actors, including government, the voluntary and community users and the private sector (Cabinet Office, 1999). The emphasis has shifted onto 'cross cutting' assessments across services and 'joined up government', in an attempt to overcome the hard boundaries that exist between different institutions, because expectation of fast communication has increasingly become the norm for users and because of the consequences of tragic failures in child protection cases.

This renewed emphasis on forms of public participation, consultation and user involvement and the language used is resonant of the social movements of the 1970s, but also strangely different. Newman (2000:57) draws attention to how it is an ungendered, unracialised conception of the 'public' with non-antagonistic images of community 'in which competing public are rendered invisible'. It is public dialogue with the politics evacuated from it. She looks at how 'new and old forms are packaged and repackaged to produce organisational forms in which multiple regimes are overlaid on each other'. So the business discourse and restructuring into business units is overlaid on older corporate and professional hierarchies in an unstable settlement with ongoing tensions between bureaucratic and consumerist models of accountability. Central political control, needed to ensure standards, stands opposed to the desired flexibility, entrepreneurial innovation and managerial devolution. So while there is continuity between the new public

management and New Labour's modernisation discourse, this 'modern managerialism' also incorporates some shifts away from competition, tendering and quasi-markets towards a set of tools and techniques to achieve these wider policy outcomes.

Newman (2002:89) rightly warns not to view the evolving shape of the new public management as part of a deterministic model of change. She points out how people can learn to speak new languages and deploy them in strategic forms of action without internalising the values they embody. Discourses can be appropriated by those with 'alternative' agendas.

A gendered change

Seventy five per cent of local authority employees are women and it is low paid women workers who have experienced some of the worst reductions in conditions of service as a consequence of privatisation (Escott and Whitfield, 1995). A two-tier workforce and a high level of temporary contracts have exacerbated the situation. Within local government the pressure to compete means only 20 per cent of local authorities have implemented equal pay agreements properly (Toynbee, 2004). A third of a million women employees earn less than £6 per hour and a third are not included in pension schemes (Wakefield, 2004:52).

The contradictions offered by the new 'managerialism' and performance management, have also created new opportunities that benefited women like myself. Women were recruited in increasing numbers into the lower and middle grades of management during this period of massive restructurings of public services in the early nineties, precisely because they were perceived as better able to manage the emotional cost of such change (Newman, 1994). It is also the case that the 14 per cent of chief executives in local government who are women feature disproportionately in unresolvable conflicts with their lead Members, suggesting that women are being recruited into more problematic situations. New spaces were certainly opened up as a consequence of compulsory tendering in which women were able to take advantage of the new leadership skills desired by more 'transformational' organisational cultures (Newman, 1994a:18-21). Alimo Metcalfe (quoted by Strebler, 1997) argues the case for a specifically female 'transformational' management style in contrast to a male 'transactional' style. But

Hatcher (2003:391-42) warns against this kind of essentialist thinking which precludes changes in behaviour as gender cultures change.

The Private Finance Initiative

After a two-year freeze on spending in 2000, the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, announced that investment in public services would rise dramatically (Brown, 2000). This was the first step in a breathtaking reversal of two decades of decline in public spending. Finally tired of a shamefully dilapidated public infrastructure, the electorate supported investment but, more pertinently, so did the business press. There was none of the usual outcry normally expected to accompany such an unprecedented increase in state spending on public services. This massive increase in public investment and powerfully centralised drive for modernisation of public services in New Labour's second term was clearly to be equated with an increased marketisation and externalisation of public services. It signalled that for government policy it did not matter who provides the service as long as it is publicly funded.

Much of this increased funding was to be channelled through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) into private sector companies undertaking the construction and rehabilitation of schools and hospitals, but who in return would take over their ancillary services and facilities management. In hospitals for example, this involves not only the transfer of cleaning, catering and portering services but also car parking and patient services, such as telephones: all with the potential to produce stable new income streams over several decades for the private finance companies involved.

The design of PFI buildings has also been the focus of increasing criticism, standing accused of being rushed and of an unacceptable standard (Balls, 2005). A choice of ten school designs has now been introduced. But as pressure builds on contractors to deliver higher quality, the leading PFI financiers and operators have responded by pressurising the Treasury. They have threatened that they may switch their funds to projects in mainland Europe that cost less and carry less risk (Broughton, 2005).

Appendix 3 provides a detailed consideration of PFI and how it was imposed in the redevelopment of schools in the north London borough of Haringey and in the

redevelopment of the Edinburgh Infirmary NHS Trust. Both illustrate how PFI can be understood as a form of hidden taxation in which the transfer of financial risk has been transferred to the local taxpayer.

Local Public Service Boards

Lawrence (2002) sees the government's embrace of a 'New Localism' agenda as reinforcing a message that financial responsibility lies not a with central government but locally. The use of PFI is now integral to the procurement of private sector management and service delivery, which was opened up through 'Best Value' and other mechanisms introduced after 1997. Local councils have been pressurised into setting up Strategic Partnerships jointly with the private sector which utilise the Private Finance Initiative and Public Private Partnerships as a source of capital investment. The plethora of multiple partnership initiatives now extends through education and housing in the form of Service Delivery Partnerships of all kinds. This is now being extended into Local Area Agreements and Local Public Service Boards. There are concerns that these new forms are the precursor of local authorities castrated of any actual capacity to wield power.

The rhetoric of freedom and flexibility in the government's emerging policy of 'New Localism' and neighbourhood delivery of public service suggests a proposed restructuring of local government, which could move towards both localism and regionalisation. Regional or sub regional local government structures, each with an elected mayor assisted by a small cabinet, might then sit above a new neighbourhood level focus, in which public service delivery, dominated by relatively few corporate sector monopolies, would subcontract to multiple local providers including a new voluntary sector emerging to fill this role as an acceptable alternative provider.

In this kind of scenario, local authorities would be reduced to procurement and a local conflict resolution role between myriad suppliers and users. Power (but not financial responsibility) would be centralised out of its reach and local democratic politics would become a thing of the past. It is thus possible to envisage how in ten years' time the present 147 larger local authorities and their thousands of councillors could effectively be replaced, not by revitalised and restructured local councils, but by a few dozen key people many of whom would be located in the corporate sector. A form of service

delivery efficiency would follow but at the price of any local democracy with power to effect change.

Blurring the boundaries of public and private sectors

The provision of public services by the private sector, in social care, housing and education has steadily advanced since 1997. Three-quarters of social care provision is no longer in the public sector, with both the NHS and local government withdrawing from much of long-term and residential care. This has been replaced by an £11 billion industry, which is increasingly corporatised. Half of all council housing had been transferred to housing associations or to Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) by 2005. Council tenants are only offered the opportunity to vote for three options to secure resources to regenerate dilapidated estates. Tenants who pursue the fourth 'choice' of remaining as council tenants receive no funding and such estates are left to fall further into disrepair (2004:LGIU). Some ALMOs report that they have not received sufficient resources for their viability and now face cuts soon after their being established, fuelling concern that further down the line they will be forced to turn to private partnerships for funding. Some estates, particularly in London, offer the hidden but ultimate 'glittering prize' for developers; that of highly valued land in desirable locations currently locked up by low-income households.

Local education authorities and social services departments, deemed to have failed under the new forms of audit, are required to bring in private sector management to run their services. Since 2001, five Local Education Authorities in London have been run by private contractors. Finally, in the sphere of technical services, only one Borough Architect's service is left in English local authorities. The rest have been sold off or their residual parts subsumed into client directorates.

In 2002, the Audit Commission even recommended the whole senior management team at Walsall be replaced by a private company (*MJ*, 2002). In response to this market opportunity, Serco presented outline plans to a conference¹² on how they would approach such a task and the kind of board structure they would set up. Such a move was

¹² To a conference sponsored by the New Local Government Network.

eventually pre-empted by the Local Government Association, who negotiated secondments of staff from other authorities.

The audit culture

The government's intention underlying league tables can be understood in part as a useful mechanism through which to identify failing authorities or services in order to subject them to such experiments in privatisation. There has been talk of loosening central controls over local government which in 2005 was dependent on central government for 60 per cent of its funding. This, it was suggested, would be tied to successful performance in local audits. Although a high proportion of councils are now deemed to perform well in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment despite the criteria being tightened in 2005, it has brought little change. Pressure has shifted on the one hand to the Gershon report (2004) and how £30 billion efficiency savings are to be delivered by local government, the NHS and other public sector institutions, increasing the priority given to procurement and the role of outsourcing services in achieving this. On the other hand, the political 'talk' is of the policy shift to the idea of 'New Localism'.

New Localism

Every local authority now makes 1,000 performance measurement returns to central government (LGA, 2006) in addition to multiples of this number generated locally in the process. Every school has 200 performance requirements. The Public Service Agreement targets set overall by government departments, when disaggregated, cascade down the system generating ten times their number (Murphy, 2006). Pressure for change is always necessary but internal processes of self-assessment and peer review set up by local government itself point to an alternative route to that of top-down expensive processes of external assessment by the Audit Commission. The sense, increasingly, is that the grip of such targetry may be nearly exhausted.

Moves to enhance local accountability and control have many advocates around the 'New Localism' agenda (Cory and Stoker, 2003).¹³ Its current policy emphasis is on the revival of a neighbourhood focus and parishes. The 'New Deal for Communities', was the first of such initiatives, set up to facilitate a way of bypassing local authorities, although in practice some projects continued to depend on and work closely with their local

¹³ A New Local Government Network pamphlet funded by BT and Serco.

authority. Funding to promote a new role for charities and the voluntary sector in the delivery of public services has expanded in line with these ideas. The flow of government rhetoric to promote the voluntary sector as an alternative provider of public services has steadily increased. In 2004, government funding was established in the form of a four-year £215 million funding stream called 'Futurebuilders' and a £150 million 'Capacity Builders' fund to bring about this transformation (*Third Sector*, 2005a). The voluntary sector is being geared up for this role through government funded 'hubs' such as 'Changes Up' and 'Build the Future'.

This chapter has provided an overview of the way high levels of investment by New Labour, have both transformed the position of public services since 2001, but also how this modernisation is closely tied to the use of private finance and a steadily increasing momentum towards privatisation. As the New Public Management has spread across all sectors it has also come to imply that there is no irreducible difference between the public and private sectors. I will turn next to consider the debate about the decline of the public realm.

Chapter 8: The public realm

When I started my research, critiques about privatisation were largely absent from any popular public debate, although still a live question within critical theory, the public sector and trade unions. Following the debacle of rail privatisation, occasional articles began to appear in the media signalling the re-emergence of public debate. This had sharpened significantly by 2003. Gathering pace in 2004, it began to take a more philosophical turn. I realised the debate was coming closer to the terrain of my own research about the *meaning* of public services.

The ‘shadow’ discussion about public services began to become more vocal than it had been at any time over the previous 15 years. This shift was very much part of my research environment. I first encountered some of the debates in quite small gatherings, often as works-in-progress given as papers at workshops and conferences prior to their publication. I can recall my response to a speaker, the ambience of the meeting space, the people present, the exhilaration or otherwise of the discussion. I travelled to many different places for these events: community centres and universities, a YHA in Scarborough, a working men’s club in Newcastle, town halls and meeting rooms in Leicester, Sheffield, Bristol and London. Some have been conferences and seminars in a traditional form and others have been free flowing, participative workshops and experiential events. Others were organised around journal readers’ groups or book launches, or public meetings called in response to global events.

This reassertion of conflicting ideas about public services reshaped the emotional map that I had brought to the research process. I was participating once again in collective forms of discussion. This was epitomised for me on the final evening of a large international oral history conference in Rome. Seated in the courtyard of the City of Rome’s elegant council building, the planning group reviewed the conference prior to a final buffet meal under the darkening night sky. They concluded to a general murmur of agreement that through our conversations ‘we had been fed already in mind, heart and soul’.

New Labour's 'double-shuffle'

I found Hall's analysis of New Labour particularly clarified my own sense of confusion as to its intentions. New Labour has never argued any intrinsic case for provision being public rather than private, or for the importance of the public realm. Good policies in themselves are always hidden or muddled up within other practices. In his analysis of New Labour's 'double-shuffle' (2003:10; 2005:319), Hall demonstrates how it has adapted to the neo-liberal terrain it inherited in a significant and distinctive way by what he describes as a 'double regime' (2003:19). He considers that it has broadly renounced redistribution through 'tax and spend' and rejected historic commitments to equality, universality and collective social provision. The two-tier society, corporate greed and privatisation of need were, Hall argues, the inevitable corollaries. The pursuit of privatisation has been central to this, stealthily opening the doors for corporate penetration of the public sector.

So, far from breaking with neo-liberalism, New Labour's embrace of an 'entrepreneurial governance' constitutes, in Hall's view, its continuation but in a transformed way. Under the banner of 'modernisation', marketisation is being installed in every sphere of government in a silent revolution, and market fundamentalism passed off as the new common sense. He argues that the role of the state is not now to support the less fortunate but to help individuals themselves to provide for all their social needs. He suggests that 'those who can must. The rest must be targeted, means-tested and kept to a minimum of provision lest the burden threaten wealth creation' (2003:18). Hall reminds us that ministers step back from the explicit language while subscribing to the principles behind the citizen as consumer (Needham, 2003:25).

He sees New Labour as a hybrid regime composed of two strands in which the neo-liberal is in the dominant position and the social democratic is subordinate. The latter involves certain measures like indirect taxation, the minimum wage, family tax credits, inducement to return to work and the substantial injection of public funds since 2001 into popular health and education initiatives such as Sure Start. But, he argues, the latter always remains subordinate and dependent on the former. Every change in the public sector is accompanied by a further tightening of the 'modernising screw'. Nothing good or necessary is allowed to happen which is not accompanied by more reform, which

seeks to blur the public/private distinction, or which privileges managerial authority, or reforms working practices in a more individualised direction. This two-step 'double shuffle' has been extremely confusing because the subordinate strand succeeds in mobilising popular consent to the more dominant project. Public relations and 'spin' is an essential part of such an exercise in that there is constant linguistic slippage and, as Hall puts it, 'sliding one agenda into or underneath another' (Hall, 2003:23).

Limits

In the wider debate which has been triggered, Lawson (2003) comments 'if we give into the principle of market supremacy then we won't know where or how to draw those lines. Worse still, we end up not knowing that lines have to be drawn at all'. The reference to 'drawing lines' refers back to the conflict opened up in a 2003 speech by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, to the Social Market Foundation, in which he argues that there were *limits* to the market in health. In the run-up to the setting up of Foundation Hospitals (Brown, 2003), Brown modified the original proposal for foundation status by reducing the right of individual hospitals to borrow and charge for treatment in a way that would undermine the principle of equity in the NHS. His position was in turn challenged by 'reformers' who consider he had undermined the original vision for foundation hospitals. This debate may be said to have revealed differences between 'consolidators' and 'reformers', which continues via the 'Choice agenda'. Choice in public services now dominates policies of all political parties regardless of the evidence of demand for it.

The different paths taken by welfare states within the EU highlight how the UK's 'Anglo-social model' (Clark, 2005; Paxton et al, 2005) with its de-regulation, low wage, low tax economy and high levels of inequality is *one* choice. There is also the flat tax option of Eastern Europe, the French and German model with their still protected state utilities but lower growth and higher unemployment, and the Scandinavian option. For example, Finland has a mix of economic liberalisation and a high quality welfare state providing family-friendly free nurseries, free school meals and free university education and a tax rate of 45 per cent. The well being of its people is seen as the foundation of its economic resource and high technology economy and Finland currently has the most successful economy in the EU (Little, 2005). The UK's model in contrast has direct taxation at levels a third lower than Finland's.

However, it can be argued that New Labour's early years of stringency did secure support for an unprecedented level of public investment in the renewal of public service infrastructure after 2000 which has reversed a pattern of decades of decline. Yet it has also embedded competitive and divisive labour practices at the very heart of our social relations. Market norms are thus being widely privileged in our most intimate social relationships. The citizen role is giving way to that of a consumer with unknown consequences as to the nature of the loss involved.

Commercialisation and citizenship

Crouch suggests that the combination of rational expectation and public choice theory has exerted a powerful grip over public policy for two decades and resulted in 'a chronic lack of self-confidence' (2003:19) in public authorities and a loss of belief in the superiority of public planning over the role of the market. This, he considers, has resulted in an effort to continually mimic the private sector, despite its failures and the risks involved.

Public services were designed to provide entitlements or rights – to education, health and social care – and did this through an equitable allocation of resources on a universal basis. This role, in Crouch's view, is now being given over to private business, which does not simply ignore this foundation; it actively undermines it. He warns that once public services are treated in most respects like commodities just like any other, it will be difficult to defend their being subsidised and not bought and sold like any other. He asks, 'how long will the taboo on full privatisation then last?' (ibid:25). He also suggests that 'markets are being fashioned by government in response to firms' requests that they be created' (ibid:53). He points out how in the 'making' of markets in education the authority of local education authorities (LEAs) has been destroyed, turning them towards active participation in opportunities for commercialisation and the hiving off of services. Such practices have become a *necessary* criterion for an LEA to achieve a successful OFSTED inspection so that it will then be rewarded by success in the league tables.

This, he considers, is a betrayal of universal citizenship. Citizenship implies a universal service and this means someone has to do the unprofitable work, whereas cherry picking 'is the essential attribute of a successful government contractor' (ibid:44-53). A vital

skill in private sector management lies in identifying a firm's target market whereas this is only possible in education by denying a child a place and is ultimately socially divisive. So private companies press the government to choose the segments they want, while the public sector must guarantee provision for those in whom the private sector has no interest. 'Residualisation' (ibid:43) means services of poor quality because only the poor and politically ineffective make use of them. He argues that pressure to amalgamate education departments and social services in local authorities only makes sense if their role is to eventually service these 'residual' communities in society. Crouch also points out it is the government not the citizen consumer who is the real customer of the commercialised welfare state. Without the authoritative monitoring capacity of an LEA, few governing bodies of individual schools are capable of effective monitoring of contracts run by multi-nationals who now provide their support services.

Decline of the public realm

In 2004, Marquand initiated a public debate suggesting the public domain was at risk and enfeebled by 20 years of an aggressively interventionist state acting as a vehicle for marketisation (2004a; 2004b:25-28). He considered the public domain to be a 'priceless gift of history' (2004a:32) but states the 'public domain' should not be confused with the 'public sector' (2004b:25) defining it to be more a dimension of life in which commodification has to be avoided and maintains that fair trials, public spaces, free public libraries, disinterested scholarship amongst others, together with freedom from domination cannot be valued by market criteria. Deregulation has blurred the distinction with the market domain forcing intermediate institutions like the BBC or universities into the market. He sees the notion of a common public interest transcending private interests to have all but disappeared. The activities of the British state have traditionally been in the public domain and he asks, 'where does the frontier between the public and private domains now lie' (2004b:26) when the neo-liberal political economy has become so much a part of the mental furniture of the political elite? The axioms of privatisation, deregulation, free trade, low taxation, and budgetary orthodoxy have been internalised and define the limits within which domestic policies are being framed. He sees this as having the potential 'to corrode a set of ethics embodied in distinctive practices' about what being a servant of the public interest entails (ibid:27).

In his view, public disenchantment and loss of faith in the governing system is a response to the hollowing out of citizenship – not its cause. People have increasingly become consumers of public policy with our wishes conveyed to the leadership via focus groups, not via the bottom-up countervailing power of social and political movements. The idea of engagement, debate and contestation intrinsic to a principle of ‘publicness’ and public interest is about our debate as to what should count as the public interest and how it should be embodied in public policy and practice, that is, in public services. It is inherently contestable both in the sense that agreement on it can never be final, and in the sense that it is ‘defined through conflict’ (ibid:27).

Marquand injected a new energy into the debate about ‘publicness’ but I consider his analysis reveals the slippery nature of what we mean by the word public. He brings together a contradictory mix of assumptions in which values are sometimes contested but sometimes seen as intrinsic. His prescriptions to revivify the public realm merely emphasise the role of traditional professionals and the need to strengthen intermediate institutions like local authorities and universities.

In a response to Marquand’s contribution, Finlayson (2003:169-170) draws attention to the need to also look beyond the state and government and at our own behaviours. Do we treat public services like any other commercial service provider and not as distinctive institutions whose existence makes a statement about how we regard each other ... do we ‘choose to make ourselves customers’? His line of thought results from Marquand having posed the following question as to whether the desires from the sixties onwards – for authenticity, direct experience, ‘doing your own thing’, personal liberation and an anti-authoritarian concern to expose the abuses of a reactionary, patriarchal state – were ‘first cousins to the values of market liberalism’ and did this ‘privatist renaissance come at the expense of civic virtues, involving sacrifice and taking up roles and authority? In Finlayson’s view, the levelling of the distinction between the public and the private may be how we have *all* contributed to the collapse of the very idea of the ‘public interest’, with its consequent results in individual as well as corporate selfishness, greed and an acceptance of the privatising of everything. He asks whether this earlier discourse of authenticity mutated into the managerial language of the New Public Management. Finlayson’s questions are important as they return us to our own personal role in the changes that have taken place.

The meaning of the ‘publicness’

At the end of 2004, a major public debate¹⁴ on the contested meanings of ‘publicness’ took place between two political theorists David Marquand and Stuart Hall. Hall acknowledged how the rhetoric of the ‘public realm’ had acted as a timely clarion call, prompting a much-needed debate, but he went on to question Marquand’s analysis, pointing out that his emphasis on the loss of a professional ethos ignored the arrogances and lack of openness by public sector professionals, exposed by a decline of deference and the impact of social movements and also how it excludes the much greater number who do not define themselves as professional. Such prescriptions were, in his view, too reliant on the role of political parties and a return of professionalism, ignoring their limitations.

Hall defines the public realm in a very different way and remains attentive to the connections between the public and other domains. He considers the ‘public’ as a social dimension, not as a separate domain. The idea of an autonomous ‘public realm’ is, he suggests, untenable. Feminism demonstrated how the apparently private domain of the family was saturated by questions about the role of the public: that the ‘personal was political’. In his view ‘the public’ is about the material and institutional expression of interdependence and is not reducible to the individual. The welfare state brought about an institutionally recognised set of alternative criteria of evaluation, which determined how social provision was not to be governed by money but by a different form of social assessment. In Hall’s view, the ‘public good’ is a principle of social organisation about why, when, and how we should govern market rationality. Economic access to public goods is, therefore, not separable from what we mean by the ‘public’. It is not a question of wanting to suspend all markets but of what areas of life should be governed by such criteria. He argues the NHS embodies just such a set of values over market relations and institutionalises this in a place and in the relations between professionals and people. In his view, the citizenry know this, know they are governed by some ethic and are not governed by the criteria to pay. In this way it institutionalises a *live* public ethic.

It is Hall’s emphasis on a lived ethic that I find most interesting. But, equally interesting was the desultory audience discussion that followed this debate, which came to focus on

¹⁴ A public meeting organised by *Soundings* in October 2004.

the need to democratise public services. It eventually flared into life only when women in the audience, finally and forcefully, drew attention to the rich, feminist activist history of the 1970s and 1980s of doing precisely this. This seemed to have entirely slipped from the minds of the, up until then, mainly male contributors.

A new ethics

The shift to a regulatory state is undermining this established live ethic in two ways. Firstly, New Labour has sought to reshape it by remoralising society in particular ways and secondly, policies blurring the public-private sector boundary have opened up the management of public services to new risks of corruption.

Writing during New Labour's first administration, Rustin (2000:116-123) was already seeking to identify why the Thatcher/Major government legacy of constraint, competition, marketisation and regulation had not been reversed by New Labour. He argued that New Labour functioned like a modern corporation: forcefully managed, well disciplined, ruthless towards failure and efficient in its use of the new corporate specialisms of public relations, advertising and the management of product cycles – in this case policies. He draws attention to how modern capitalism needs a new and reshaped ethic different from that of the protestant ethic of abstinence and deferral identified by Weber (1930) and Tawney (1926) (*ibid*; 116-117): one that is orientated towards motivating people around consumption. Hence, the early focus of New Labour's project was on an 'ethical agenda' and of remoralising the population. This was reflected in strategies to inculcate the habits of work and the relationship between effort and reward. This was seen as central if British society was to be remade and become economically successful. In this it drew on the communitarian agenda of Etzioni's rights and responsibilities (1993) and emphasised individual autonomy and a dislike for the historic forms of dependence embodied in the welfare state.

But cautious of its constituency of working class and public sector trade union support, there was no explicit disclosure of a primary commitment to a market economy or to a belief in the idea that private is better. Yet this was already evident in facts on the ground, such as its unwavering pursuit of privatising the air traffic control system and the London Underground. Rustin notes its evasiveness and adeptness at 'turning a blind eye'

and the effective silencing or disorientation of dissident voices in pursuit of this pervasive new ethic and uniformity.

Rustin (ibid:122) also emphasises how the ‘modernisation’ of the public sector is infused with the aim of creating regimes which mimic as far as possible the competition and discipline of markets through intensifying the place of measurable turnover and profit (evidence-based outcomes), the context of inter-institutional competition (league tables), and the power of management (undermining ‘producer privileges’ or protected and safeguarded conditions of employment). In his view, the benefits of all of this for capital are threefold: firstly, in reducing the power of public sector labour and using it more intensively; secondly, in opening up the large opportunities for profit making and capital accumulation in provision of prisons, education and health; thirdly, in the ideological shift of a sector based on values opposed in many ways to the market and remote from the disciplines of measurement, to one of conformity, reward and punishment.

But as he also points out it is a paradox that the new consumer-based managerialism, imposed on the public sector, entrenches further its inflexibility relative to the private sector ‘promoting risk aversion, bureaucratic protectiveness and slavish rule following’ (ibid:124). Just as the private sector was eschewing the worst of the contract culture in favour of ‘best supplier’ agreements, models have been transplanted to the public sector that are out of date. Finally, Rustin adds that, ‘one of the effects of the imposition of quasi-market models is to increase the attractiveness for those subjected to them, of the real as contrasted with a surrogate market. If one is going to be managed, inspected, appraised and resource-constrained to death, in a school or social services department, it might be preferable to be in the actual private sector itself’ (ibid:124).

Old Corruption

Marquand was also concerned about the return of ‘Old Corruption’ (Marquand 2004a:40) and that the ‘dykes’ built by the Victorians to protect the public sphere from corruption have been breached. As Crouch also points out, the post-war public service form was a by-product of Victorian ideas rather than a truly social democratic one (2003:17). An aloof, neutral, rule-making character was developed as a counterweight to unrestrained capitalism by 19th century reformers who took seriously Adam Smith’s concern that the

business world would corrupt politics and vice versa. Politicians and civil servants were seen to need an ethic of their own, which demanded different conduct in which public officials were expected to be very careful with people who represented concentrations of business power. They were expected to maintain a sense of public interest that was more than the sum of the individual business ambition (2003:17).

This longstanding boundary between government and private interests is being fundamentally redefined by the 'modernisation' agenda. All private firms involved in commercialisation recruit a significant proportion of their professional staff from the very public authorities, such as inspectorates and education authorities and hospitals that they are replacing. For example, in 2004, a senior health adviser to the Prime Minister accepted a post as president of a new European subsidiary of the United Health Group, one of the key US private medicine companies seeking a foothold in the UK health market, at a time when it had just been announced that a minimum of 15 per cent of medical operations was to be newly contracted out (Carvel & Stephenson, 2004). This move was then blocked by the civil service's 'watchdog' only for the Prime Minister to instigate a review seeking to relax the constraints over such current delays. In 2006, the company, which he now leads, was awarded the first private contract for a GP practice in a small Derbyshire village. The decision is very contentious and a legal challenge was launched by a local woman councillor to reverse the decision. There is a growing 'revolving door' syndrome' in Whitehall and local government as it becomes the norm for people to move from a public authority role to a private company provider that has won or may expect to win government contracts. Indeed, it is increasingly advocated as desirable career experience and secondments are now increasingly practised. Following his resignation as the former Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn took up a post with a consultancy which part owns Alliance Medical, who run 12 MRI scanners for the NHS (Toynbee, 2006), reflecting just how far crossing the former 'Victorian dykes' is now perceived as unproblematic.

Secondary Corruption

But as the 'Victorian dykes' crumble, the question arises as to whether this is promoting a new form of corruption. Hodgkinson (1997:17) draws a very helpful distinction between primary and secondary corruption. His definition of a public interest perspective involves viewing corruption as the betrayal of the public interest for private

gain and fraud, which still remains relatively rare. But Hodgkinson argues for a sociological rather than the legal perspective associated in the popular discourse with its emphasis on 'primary' corruption, fraud and probity. He argues that there is a change in the nature of corruption and that 'secondary' corruption is now endemic within the marketisation of public services and the introduction of the 'new public management'. It is systemic and structural. The reforms being introduced are the cause rather than simply the context for not just more, but a different type of corruption. Werlin (1994:550) quoted by Hodgkinson (ibid:24) has developed a generic definition of corruption, which is '... partisanship that challenges statesmanship in which self-interest is elevated over the collective'. He sees primary corruption as 'when we expect to be punished if we are caught'. Secondary corruption is when there is an absence of viable statesmanship, which Werlin calls 'partisanship which undermines the polity' (1994:547). There is no concern as such about punishment, feelings of guilt or disgrace, in as much as it is the political system that facilitates or condones the action taken. It is something normal.

This idea of secondary corruption was echoed a decade later in *The Economics of Innocent Fraud* written in the aftermath of Enron by the economist J. K. Galbraith (2004). It is important not to forget that the scale of corruption in the cases of Enron and others was greater than the GNP of very many countries. It was, as Stiglitz (2002) put it, 'of an almost unfathomable scale'. Galbraith argues that corporate power works to shape the public purpose to its own interests, ordaining what is social success and extending its role well into politics and government. In particular, like Whitfield (2002), he notes how the private sector is moving into a dominant role in the previous public sector, extending beyond that of the military industrial complex of the past. As the corporate interest moves into an increasingly powerful position it seeks to serve the corporate interest whether in relation to the public finance or the environment.

Galbraith suggests that out of pecuniary and political pressures, economic systems cultivate their own version of truth, which has no necessary relation with reality. He also draws attention to the way corporate power now lies with management and the appearance of governance is a sham. In his view, most 'progenitors' of practices, which he terms 'innocent fraud', are not deliberately in its service. In his view, they are unaware of how their views are shaped. There is, he suggests, 'no sense of guilt; more likely there is self-approval' (2004:11).

Growing inequality

The current obsessive emphasis on choice in public services can be re-interpreted as an alternative to ‘universal satisfaction, an escape route for the self-confident and articulate, a policy which depends on the admission that some people will be left behind’ (Hattersley, 2004). The corollary of the inability of Enron’s employees to ‘see’ beyond their own immediate personal satisfactions is the acceptance by society in the UK of the burgeoning of extreme wealth alongside widening income and health inequality (Elliott, 2005a). Wilkinson (2004) has powerfully demonstrated that the psyche and social environment matter to health inequality. The stress of living at the bottom of the pecking order in an organisation or society is far more toxic than poor diet. The fairest countries he points out are those that have higher levels of trust and have lower murder rates. In 2000, the UK had by far the EU’s highest proportions of elderly who are poor or very poor (Luxembourg, 2003). There are now 750,000 fewer children below the poverty line than in 1997, but the latest statistics still show a third of children in the northwest of England (nearly half a million) are growing up in households that are below the poverty line, despite the policies to lift a significant percentage of children out of poverty.

In education, the Sutton Trust has reported how the top 200 state schools have been colonised by the middle classes and their standard measure of deprivation is only 3 per cent compared to the national average of 14 per cent. Four times as many poor children live near the best schools as attend them. The Sutton Trust (2005) has demonstrated that ‘the best state schools are effectively closed to less well-off families’ and that we have replaced selection on merit with subtle forms of social selection. Other reforming voices have suggested that 50 per cent of school places should now be allocated by lottery to ensure equivalent banding. But in a ‘choice’ driven public discourse there is little chance for such ideas to gain political support.

Likewise in health, the report of the Department of Health’s Scientific Reference Group of Health Inequalities (2005) has found the gap in life expectancy between the bottom fifth and the general population had widened by 2 per cent for men and 5 per cent for women between 1997/99 and 2001/03. This means that life expectancy in the wealthiest areas is 7-8 years longer than in the poorest areas and the gap in the infant mortality rate between the poorest and the general population rose from 13 per cent higher in 1997-99

to 19 per cent higher in 2001-03. As Toynbee (2005) notes, 'Poverty is not as the government imagine, a line to pull people over, but it is a position on a line. If it tilts too sharply upwards, the pain of those at the bottom can be measured in hard statistics'. The idea of a single low rate of tax, introduced in east European states such as Estonia, was floated within the Conservative party in 2005. If this were ever to be adopted it would undermine the UK's social democratic tradition of redistribution and transfer of resources from rich to poor, in a move to one that favours the interests of entrepreneurs. Elliot (2005b) considers that with so many losers it would be politically impossible to implement such a change in the UK. But the Director of the Adam Smith Institute considers it would accelerate growth and under a 22 per cent flat tax the rich would pay more and the poor would pay nothing (Butler, 2005).

Ethics involves reflection on the legitimacy of the presence of others and public ethics involves reflection on what the state should be doing to promote this. The ethical stance which we take towards inequality is a key defining issue in how one approaches the state versus the market debate. Before turning to the latter in the next chapter, I want to conclude here with consideration of how inequality has historically shaped the role of local government.

History and inequality

Szreter (2002:1-8), a historian, asks whether British society can find the moral courage to turn in a different direction. He looks for comparable answers to how leaders of British society faced a similar predicament in the 1860s, in the heyday of free market liberalism. The vigorous local government of the 18th century was reduced to bickering and promising the mean-minded local electorate lower rate bills just as Gladstone hoped to reduce the income tax to zero. The uncannily familiar story, which Szreter tells, becomes even more interesting for what then happened in the ten years between 1865 and 1875. A revolution in thinking and policy occurred. By 1875 the status of municipal administrations had been transformed so that leading businessmen in Birmingham were queuing up to be elected as councillors, with the young Joseph Chamberlain leading an ambitious programme of municipal spending and a 'civic gospel' (ibid:2), which reinvented the word 'economy' to mean investing in houses, schools, better conditions and pay for workers and beautifying the environment. This new civic gospel of municipal

pride and ambitious improvement spread to Glasgow, Manchester and so on and in London the London County Council replaced its proverbial 'do-nothing' local authorities.

Szreter emphasises that the political magic lay in a moral message which was being raised in the nonconformist clubs and chapels each Sunday and which posed the question 'What was wealth creation for'? What was the value of being wealthy if surrounded by squalor and suffering? (ibid:3). The high-minded, nonconformist preachers aimed to change people's minds, including the rich and powerful, and challenge self-centred contentment, and they also awakened excitement and interest in what they might do about it.

It was accepted that charity and philanthropy were not enough and there was recognition of the role of the local state and to see how housing, education, environment and poverty were all interlinked. The solution was seen to lie in the city and they embarked on long-term loans, which passed the costs on inter-generationally. The flow of ideas between national and local government was two-way and local government, faced with concrete problems, had self-confidence, the resources and the freedom to pioneer new approaches. A 'self-centred negligence' was what counted as high status and the most honourable and noble activity in our society. Although not a golden age Szreter comments that 'the extent of local government during the nineteenth century appears stupefying' (ibid:4) quoting Hanham, a leading constitutional historian.

As he also points out, the present negative animus towards local government is an entirely self-defeating strategy, which has deprived elected and accountable local government of resources, status, independence and initiative over the last two decades. People with vision need to see that devoting their energies is likely to make a difference if they are to engage with community politics in ways that make a visible difference. It is true that northern cities over the past decade have demonstrated an energetic capacity to innovate, in some cases spectacularly so, in their city centres. But it is often limited to the centre and fails to be an inclusive process. New Labour appears to consider that greater equality is achievable only at the expense of a free enterprise economy.

Stedman Jones (2004) also advocates a return to the era of the Enlightenment to re-learn lessons in ambition around combining the benefits of individual freedom and commercial society with an inclusive citizenship and the 'public good'. To this end he argues that Adam Smith (1776), seen as the intellectual origin of neo-conservative laissez faire ideas, should be understood rather as a progressive and that it was the libertarian left, like Tom Paine (1792), who first built on his ideas. He saw that the innovatory energy of the modern exchange economy needed to be curtailed by a framework of law maintained by a combination of voluntary associations and local authorities or, in modern terms, mutual associations, elected local boards, ethically orientated companies and trade unions. Stedman-Jones (2004b) suggests this new language of citizenship, was pushed aside in the 19th century by laissez faire individualism and a language of markets on the one hand, and by socialism and the language of worker and capitalist on the other. In his view, Marx searched in vain for a non-market model capable of rivalling the dynamism of capitalism, which has a built-in interest in meeting new needs and only constructed a regulated non-capitalist society and 'not the post-capitalist society of which he dreamed'...

Stedman Jones (2002) reminds us of the need for engagement rather than for lofty disdain of attempts to reform the political and economic system. Rather than holding a belief that capitalism is to be wholly accepted or rejected as a single system, he argues that it is a progressive relationship between pressure from without and reforming activity from within the political system that is called for. In his reference to the 1790s he points to how it is the interaction of protesters and reformers that has transformed the lives of working people in advanced capitalist societies. Capitalism *is* rapacious but cynicism or silence, in his view, will merely reinforce the rightwing fantasy of a global capitalism without any politics or constraint. He also criticises both New Labour and the 'Make Poverty History' campaign for lack of ambition and suggests they need to return to the 1790s for more ambitious and radical inspiration as to what inclusive citizenship and a notion of the '*public good*' should entail, if there is to be any chance of closing the growing gap between rich and poor (Stedman Jones, 2005). Although almost everyone was poor at the end of the 18th century, the idea that the 'poor are always with us' was, he argues, effectively overturned by Tom Paine and his followers, which set in train innovative proposals including those of universal pensions and schooling.

The role of the local state has been paramount in all of these initiatives and it is to this critical conflict of ideas about the state versus the market that I will now turn.

Chapter 9: Market versus state

Following a steep decline in the rate of profit by the 1970s in the UK (Glyn and Sutcliffe, 1972), the Conservative 'Right' sought to restore the 'right to manage' in order to reinstate economic growth. In pursuit of this, global finance systems were deregulated, opening up new markets to competition in the process. This has involved deploying new revolutionary technologies, promoting the new consumer individualism of post-industrial societies, and commodifying what was previously seen as not for sale, such as water. Since 2004, the UK is also once again dependent on imported oil for the first time since the mid 1970s, as North Sea oil begins its terminal decline. It underlines the vulnerability of the UK economy, which in turn explains the intense pressure by all governments since the 1970s to cut the cost of the welfare state and to find ways to open up access to health, welfare and local government services as a new market for the private sector. Pollack (2002:1) vividly describes the public sector as like an 'unopened oyster'. All of these economic, social, political and technical changes have in turn reshaped the welfare state, along with the purpose, form and values of public services.

Three iconic statements capture the dominant political stance towards the state and markets. They are: 'there is no such thing as society only individuals and their families' (Thatcher, 1987); New Labour's 'there is no alternative to neo-liberal globalisation' (Mandelson, 1996); and finally, Cameron's 'there is such a thing as society; it's just not the same as the state' (Norman and Ganesh, 2006) which reveal how for a resurgent Conservative party, rolling back the state is once again viewed as the defining issue.

What kind of state

An overview of the multiple and contested understandings of the state is not my purpose here. Rather it is to draw attention to the emergence of several new alternative definitions which have recently entered the popular discourse adding to those drawn on in previous chapters. In the 'Market State', Bobbitt (2002; 2003), talks of the replacement of the nation state by the market state as a consequence of globalisation. He identifies three

potential variants: entrepreneurial and minimalist (the least kind to the weak), non-territorial markets, or mercantile and protectionist. Bobbitt was also concerned the state might entirely disappear but Fukuyama (2004a;b), who had once taken an extreme position in favour of privatisation in the 1990s, reversed his views after 'September 11th', arguing that Al Quaida has firmly reinstated the state for purposes of security.

The 'Mutual State', advocated by the New Economics Foundation (Mayo and Moore, 2000), whose community-based thinking is strongly reflected in New Labour policy-making, underpins the steps being taken to specifically enhance the role of the voluntary sector and build an alliance with the private sector in running public services in competition with the public sector. The intention is to bypass local government entirely and recreate it in new disaggregated forms.

In the '*Adaptive State*', Bentley and Wilsden (2003) urge a move away from the obsessive fascination by politicians with systems and restructuring. They incorporate references to elements of complexity thinking suggesting that a form of complexity thinking is finding some acceptance, but in a way that is entangled with a liberalisation agenda. In the post-2005 election period, New Labour has pressed forward with marketisation in parallel with the strategy of 'New Localism'. The most recent idea in Whitehall is 'to let systems become self-sustaining' (Kettle, 2005) and there is much reference to a 'self-organising capacity' (Stoker, 2005:10). This is clearly part of a new and desirable momentum to devolve an over-centralised system. The Chancellor has also stated that the new politics 'cannot be a reality unless we make local accountability work by reinvigorating the democratically elected mechanisms of local areas – local government' (Brown, 2005).

Yet local government cannot regain legitimacy until power and authority over resources are returned to it, so the new-found interest may be driven by a pragmatic need to reinforce *local* financial responsibility for the centrally driven private finance debt that has been incurred. In mid-2006, the shortfall of more than a billion pounds in the NHS has led to suggestions of a possible 50 hospital closures. This emphasis on productivity and value for money reflects precisely how the nature and role of the state has changed, driven by the dictates of globalisation and individualism (Elliott, 2006).

Finally, a more radical perspective on the adaptive state is articulated by Wainwright (2003), who emphasises greater democratisation. In this, Wainwright draws inspiration from events flowing from the self-organising momentum of the World Social Forum in Porto Allegre in 2000 and its subsequent European Social Forums. She likens the era of the participatory municipal left of the early 1980s to an open networking approach and argues that this is a resource to draw on rather than to disparage.

The Anglo-social model

Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000), in their comparative evaluation of public management reform in ten countries, underline just how different to the UK some states like Germany are with its judicial and administrative forms still more important than managerial (ibid:235-243). But in 2005, the inconclusive German election was fought over how far the state should move decisively towards enabling a flexible, low wage, low tax, 'Anglo-social model' in order to boost its stagnant economy. As noted earlier and in sharp contrast, the social democratic models of Scandinavian countries like Sweden, despite a degree of marketisation, still maintain universal services, such as free state-funded nurseries, free school meals for all alongside their successful, buoyant, high tech economy and a cohesive society in which crime rates are very significantly lower than in the UK.

Osborne and McLaughlin (2002: 8-12) look comprehensively at the way the new public management developed throughout the 1990s – at its conceptual development, the empirical reality in the UK, the international comparative context in research, and the terms of evaluation and its future prospects – and conclude that the new public management in the UK is an 'archetype' evolving in ways consistent within their own typology of a 'plural state' (ibid:8). They see the latter as now having come into being and having replaced the welfare state of the post-war era.

Labour's market state

Although the idea of a popular shareholding capitalism has died as shares in the new privatised companies were quickly consolidated by corporate finance interests, the conservative neo-liberal agenda in terms of practice still remains politically unchallenged. For the IMF and World Bank, the hallmark of privatisation is still an integral part of their blueprints for any structural adjustment programmes for developing

countries or new east European states, and the UK is seen as a template. The dominant view which prevails is that privatisation has worked, apart from the one exception – that of rail.

Ten days into New Labour's second term in 2001, a political commentator wrote that there was no 'magic management dust' in the private sector and of the need for the public sector to continue to be an 'independent, self-confident zone of public life – reformed, outward-looking, but not constantly denigrated as second best to the real heroes, the entrepreneurs' (Ashley, 2001:8). But there was no sign then or now, that any of the high-profile failures have fundamentally changed the government's appetite for privatising public services in the UK. In 2003, it defeated the Greater London Authority's long opposition to the privatisation of the London Underground, which had prevented the flow of funds necessary to update it and despite the folly of rail privatisation. The debate within government has remained firmly dominated by the orthodoxies of the New Public Management, set out in its policy position *Reforming our Public Services* (HMSO, 2001).

New Labour's embrace of the market state, its anti-state rhetoric and dislike of the public sector has laid the basis for policy ideas around the 'mutual state' referred to above, to gather momentum as in the 'New Localism' discussed earlier. The new resurgent Conservative Party has also embraced the same territory. A 'Compassionate conservatism' (Norman and Ganesh, 2006) harks back to a pre-welfare state era and re-articulates the view that the role of state should shrink and be decentralised and replaced by charities and self-help. In responding to this challenge the question arises as to whether 'Labour will have lost the voice, or the right, to oppose the demolition of the state by failing to stand up for its virtues now' (Toynbee, 2006).

I want to turn next to the underlying question of whether privatisation has worked to deliver the benefits that are widely assumed. I will first summarise the key critiques by economists who have argued that it does work and then return to consider the arguments by those who consider that it has not been a successful or desirable step. Crouch (2003:4) draws a useful distinction between 'privatisation' and 'contracting out'. In the former, ownership of a previously public resource is transferred to private firms in a complete break. Under the latter it remains in public ownership but is outsourced for 25-30 years in the case of PFI projects, or 5-7 years for contracted-out services. These are timescales, in

which cultural change becomes embedded, which adds another dimension to the question. I will, however, use the term ‘privatisation’ quite broadly below.

The case for privatisation

The case for privatisation drew its initial support in the 1960s from key monetarist economists to which the Institute of Economic Affairs became aligned and which sought to embed it in the anti-Keynsianism pursued by the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher. But it has equally remained central to New Labour’s economic strategy and in that sense it occupies a hegemonic position drawing on wide support. The case *for* privatisation and commercialisation of public services from the standpoint of three key interests is summarised below. They comprise: the new private public service sector, the emergent new form of the voluntary sector and the new political elite.

The private public service sector

The private sector interest in public services is reflected in the new frequency of statements arguing for marketisation and privatisation made by the CBI. The interest is twofold: firstly companies are directly involved in running manual and support services on a large scale, which is now extending deeper into professional services in medicine, education and social welfare along with regeneration roles such as design and planning. This is being brought about by the combination of outsourcing, the use of PFI and by strategic and local partnership arrangements with local councils. Secondly, PFI contracts provide a stable flow of financial income over several decades from public authorities. This is an important new cushion for the financial underpinning of the private sector role in the economy and the shareholder interests which lie behind this.

The last decade has seen the development of a new kind of more sophisticated private sector operator compared to the earlier era of compulsory tendering in the 1980s and 1990s. They are at ease with New Labour values of partnership, choice. This is epitomised by Capita, which has been an active promoter of private public services for 15 years along with companies like Serco and Accord (Stephanou, 2005), who opened up the manual service sector. Capita started life as Cipfa¹⁵ Computer Services in 1984, and was then the subject of a management buyout in 1987. It now has a turnover over of £1.4

¹⁵ Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

billion (Brindle, 2005). Rod Aldridge, the executive chairman, considers it now has 8 per cent of a potential £70 billion market. As chair of the CBI's public services strategy board, he argued that private contractors are more than about boosting capacity or rescuing services; they are about adding value. Their ready access to capital investment and skills necessary in the introduction of innovative new IT systems mean that dramatic cost savings can be brought about, such as the 40 per cent reduction in costs of the DfES teachers' pension scheme (MJ, 2003).

Capita is pressing for all 'back office' work in local government, hospitals and the police to be put out to tender alongside the development of 'shared services centres' (Brindle, 2005). For example, the Capita office in Coventry now handles tax and benefit administration for 12 councils. But each bidding process probably involved four contractors and the completion of the different stages required takes nine months. These 12 procurements have now been moved by Capita into one centre at Coventry to secure economies of scale. But Aldridge argues even further economies of 20-30 per cent would be gained if councils came together to tender one contract in the first place. Changes in support services are being driven by the communications revolution. For example, 50 per cent of people now pay for the congestion charge in London by text or on the Internet, forcing initial payment processes to be restructured.

Like other companies, Capita is now extending well beyond support services. For example, it now runs the management of education services in Haringey. Aldridge has also indicated that he is keen to work with the voluntary organisations and government in enabling the voluntary sector to take over more public service contracts, particularly through providing the necessary back office support for this 'new' sector. He thinks that 'a mix of the voluntary sector's strength, in terms of links with service users and the business process expertise of Capita and others could be irresistible' (Brindle, 2005). These arguments are reinforced by Aldridge's parallel role as a joint author of policy pamphlets published by the New Local Government Network covering themes such as for a cross-sector 'public service ethos'.

The emergent voluntary sector

The voluntary sector was traditionally funded as an independent sector working in a broad alliance with the public sector and sharing many aspects stemming from a not for

profit ethos. Over the last 15 years as grants disappeared, large parts have become dependent on a contract culture of supplying services to the public sector. A campaigning ethos has shrunk into the background. A case for the voluntary sector to become a major player in the provision of public services has been growing over several years (Walker, 2004). Significant government funding for new structures to gear the sector up has been put in place along with capacity building through new bodies such as 'Futurebuilders'. The Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Sector Organisations (Acevo) published a report in July 2005, which strongly advocates the transfer of substantial funding from the state sector to third sector organisations and to speed up and extend the voluntary sector role in delivering public service and continues to vigorously argue this case on behalf of chief executives within the voluntary sector (Aldridge, 2004; 2005). The role of the voluntary sector in the NHS has simultaneously been vigorously promoted by government. In late 2005 the then Care Services Minister advocated the role of the voluntary sector in the immediate aftermath of the storm of criticism following a proposed extension of the use of private suppliers in the NHS, announced at the Labour Party annual conference.

The sector spends £25 billion and is small by comparison to the public sector. But a parallel can be drawn with what happened with housing associations in the 1980s. They managed 100,000 homes in 1974 and now manage 1.8million. In Acevo's confident view it is not a question of whether it will happen, but when. The reasons for using the 'Third Sector' as Nick Aldridge the author of the Acevo report, argues, is because of its focus on users, its freedom to be innovative and that it is driven by its mission (Shifrin, 2005). The CBI's director of public services has also suggested that the voluntary sector should look beyond relationships with the government when delivering public services and partner with the private sector companies. *Third Sector*, a private sector resourced trade magazine, funded a conference in late 2005, on 'Aligning corporate and voluntary objectives' (*Third Sector*, 2005).

The political elite

The political arguments for privatisation and marketisation amongst New Labour politicians is grounded in four strands of thought. Firstly, the public sector and local government in particular is disliked by many New Labour politicians for, in their eyes, a perceived unwillingness to innovate and to become more entrepreneurial in the face of the challenges of economic liberalisation (Leadbetter, 1999). A 'silo mentality' and

'producer capture' by public sector workers are other frequent criticisms. Secondly, a strand of thinking outlined earlier called 'New Localism' (Milburn, 2005), advocates devolving power and resources away from central control and towards frontline managers and local neighbourhoods. It is seen as being about empowering citizens as consumers and breaking the old relationship of dependency on the state, by equipping people with the personalised support to prosper in the flexible labour market. This viewpoint is articulated by the advocates of the 'Mutual State' and is accompanied by the calls noted above to expand the role of the 'Third Sector' to work alongside the new private sector suppliers.

Underlying all of the above is the search to make £30 billion efficiency savings promised during the election to fund the development of front line services without the need for tax increases. Finally, the unspoken assumption is that this strategy will enable New Labour to retain power and successfully 'outflank' the Conservatives by occupying their political terrain and thus secure a fourth term.

Specific political advisers and relevant 'think tanks' have been key to developing these strategies: Le Grand on health; Adonis on education; Corry, the former director of the New Local Government Network, on local government. Amongst the 'think tanks', the role of the Social Market Foundation has been particularly influential in advocating the choice agenda in education (Rossiter, 2005) and have advocated more competition in public services generally to counter what is seen as a public sector culture which 'stifles entrepreneurialism' and innovation (Mathiaison, 2005).

Following the 2005 election and the return of a New Labour government for a third term, there has been a rapid extension of plans for privatisation and marketisation. In health this is represented by the return of the internal market and a comprehensive payment-by-results system across the whole NHS, by the expansion of the use of private companies providing clinical services, and the introduction of the consumer 'choice agenda' in 2006. In local government, boards and local service agreements with partners in the private and voluntary sectors will be the key vehicle for the new localism agenda. In education it is represented by a highly contentious proposal to devolve power to individual schools, greater parent power and a withering away of local education authorities if schools opt into partnership with sponsoring bodies or are taken over by private companies. The

final outcome remains to be decided, but turning education authorities and the NHS into commissioning agents and contracting out services remains central to the government's overall strategy.

When New Labour came to power in 1997, public services like the NHS were perceived to present two key problems. Firstly, there was chronic under funding inherited from the Tories over several decades. This is a situation that is now nearly remedied in terms of European health comparators. But secondly, it became apparent this extra investment was not buying the consistent improvements it should in the time available because of rising costs. The spectre that looms for New Labour is of a populist Tory government that would one day appeal to the growing discontent of the middle classes fleeing the NHS into private medicine and likewise into private education. Only the corporate private sector is seen to have the capacity to deliver the 'choice agenda' in time with its ready access to funding kept off the public accounts balance sheet and the 'know how' of the new technologies which is so integral to the changes in communication with users. Evidence in overall support of the option of 'choice-and-competition' is now deemed to be proven by falling waiting lists in England, which are outstripping performance in anti-choice Wales and Scotland (Hari, 2005).

The case against privatisation

Corporate failures

In his investigation of the Hatfield rail crash in October 2000, Jack (2001) observed that the rail debacle arose from a 'quagmire of divided responsibility and incompetence, inspired by an ideology that placed adversarial money bargaining over human and technical co-operation in which 'the contract' was divine'. Railtrack had been unable to manage its maintenance contractors like Jarvis and Amey and subcontractors such as Balfour Beatty. The Cullen report into the Paddington rail crash drew the same kind of conclusion. By 2001, the six-year experiment with rail privatisation was deemed a failure by the public. It was replaced by a social not-for-profit enterprise and then full return to public ownership by 2004. This has been characterised as 'rowing, steering ... and crashing' (Martin: forthcoming).

In the gas industry Transco (2001) was similarly found responsible for failing to renew a gas pipe network, which resulted in fatalities of residents. It had laid off 1,000 engineers in 1997 and admitted it was left critically short of people to maintain safety. Failures around water supply during summer droughts also provoked consternation at the evidence of 'fat cat' salary levels. Five years on in 2005, legal judgments on both the rail and gas failures and fines of £15 million each have emphasised gross negligence and, in the case of rail, pointed a critical finger at the Conservative Party for introducing the rail privatisation policy. However, the CBI when commenting on the verdict quickly distanced the failure of the rail company from other privatisations and indirectly signalled the significance of public services to the corporate market.

The growth of the bug MRSA in hospitals is widely attributed to the lean but low quality cleaning companies. The catering company, Compass, has seen its stock rating slide in the aftermath of the public criticism of its failures in relation to commercial catering in schools. The international privatisation of electricity and water supply and the global opening up of utilities as a market has also pointed to the failure of the flagship water privatisation in Tanzania in which it was revealed that DFID paid £36 million to the Adam Smith Institute and Price Waterhouse Cooper to advise third world countries on privatising their utilities (2005).

In local government, for example, Bedfordshire CC entered into a now typical 'strategic partnership' with HBS Business Services Group (CPS, 2004), in which over 500 staff were transferred in 2001 in a 12-year £269m Strategic Service-Delivery Partnership covering financial information technology, human resources, school support services and contracts/facilities management. However, losses increased and performance was poor and in mid-2005, the Conservative-run council terminated the contract with one month's notice and has started discussions on the transfer of services back in-house (*MJ*, 2005). In 2001, Southwark Council, as a 'failing' education authority, was pressed into privatising its education services. Two years later it experienced the sudden withdrawal of the contractor, WS Atkins. They were not making sufficient profits and its share price was falling. The council re-let the contract to another private supplier. In 2005, it has finally retaken the contract back in-house. Such re-tendering procedures are expensive processes in time and effort and the transfer of staff is likewise destabilising.

Economic assessments

In an assessment of privatisations the economist, John Kay (2000), has shown that following almost every privatisation, stock hugely outperformed the market in its first two years and under-performed thereafter. He considers the civil servants responsible for the early privatisations were credulous and that they uncritically absorbed the confident assurances of investment bankers about what markets would and would not accept. In *The Truth about Markets* (2003), he challenges the oversimplifications of market fundamentalists and opposes handing over public services to private businesses, arguing that we want the private sector's efficiency but do not want its values. He considers the profit motive is not appropriate for schools and hospitals and advocates disciplined *pluralism* or endless trial and error – autonomy with audit and accountability. He also thinks that success is about developing little stories, not grand visions (ibid, 2003a).

Propper et al (2002) has published research on the relationship of competition and quality. She argues that competition in the health service is associated with higher death rates or conversely competition is associated with lower quality. Death rates for two groups of hospitals were compared which were similar at the start of the 1990s, before the introduction of the Thatcher reforms. But when compared after competition in the NHS was in full flood, the hospitals that were competing most strongly had a far higher death rate than the ones with no competition. By the end of the decade when Labour modified the sharpest aspects of the market, the death rates for the two groups reconverged.

In addition to this, Burgess, Gosage & Propper (2004) have produced a further startling analysis showing that people in the south are generally in better health than people in the north, but people in the north have better hospitals. Using mortality rates and government star ratings for 2001-2002, they found that financial resources, catchment areas, and whether it is a teaching unit, could not account for the disparities in hospital performance. They concluded that the key factors were rather the differential between public and private sector pay in the area. In some areas like London the public sector is priced out of the market and public service employees out of the housing market, which encourages high quality individuals to take a job in the private sector. They found that the ratio of public to private sector pay was the control factor that mattered most, over and above teaching status, resources per head of population or ill health, when it came to

achievement of individual targets like numbers waiting for in-patient appointments, trolley waiting and so on. In other words, the relative decline in public sector pay was having an impact on the quality of the workforce. Burgess, et al, conclude that the ‘implications of these results is that some of the performance of NHS Trusts may be less related to managerial ability than to the labour market in which the trust is located’.

In *The Great Divestiture* published in late 2004, Massimo Florio analyses the period 1979-1997 and takes the supposed ‘truths’ of privatisation and demolishes each of them (Elliott, 2004). He argues that the sell-offs did not ‘halt overmanning’ as there had been massive job losses already. In electricity, increased productivity arose from substitution of gas for coal and there was no discernible consequence for ‘private sector dynamism’. Florio concluded that he had been unable to find sufficient statistical macro and micro evidence that output, labour, capital and total factor productivity in the UK increased substantially as a consequence of ownership change at privatisation compared to the long-term trend. The notion that nationalised industries were producer driven and privatised industries are consumer driven is also central to the new orthodoxy. But again Florio argues there is no discernible difference with states that retained their public ownership structures and he concludes that the real drivers of lower prices have been external factors in cost regulation and market structure. These overshadow the shift in ownership regime. The biggest change is the impact on different groups of consumers. The net beneficiaries are the wealthiest 10-20 per cent and the hardest hit are the poorest 10-20 per cent, paying increased tariffs and losing jobs. Privatisation in the UK was therefore an integral part of a social rift and a rise in inequality unequalled anywhere in Europe (ibid:2004).

He concludes that there is no evidence for privatisation waving a magic productivity wand. What was gained was the ability of firms to set prices, to have access to capital markets and to restructure more quickly. These, he maintains, were all feasible within a remodelled and restructured public sector. The reason this was never attempted had little to do with economic efficiency and far more to do with ideology. What was lost, according to Florio, was the sense of a ‘public realm’ and an unwillingness of governments at the end of the 20th century to assume certain social responsibilities.

A new corporate-welfare complex

Whitfield (2002) provides a radical analysis of the impact of the 'Third Way' on public services and welfare states, which anticipated this kind of development. He argues that the state is facilitating forms of globalisation by promoting private finance of the infrastructure and the marketisation of public services. Global structures such as the World Trade Organisation and World Bank and the EU are still vigorously committed to the privatisation of public services. He argues that the growing extent of public private partnerships and the private finance initiative (see below) together constitutes an emerging 'corporate-welfare complex' analogous to the function of the military industrial complex. He also explores the alternative priorities of innovation, equality and investment as a strategy, which could sustain and improve the welfare state and provide a very different model to the one grounded in the performance management model of the New Public Management.

Incorporating the voluntary sector

The strategy to transfer public sector services into the voluntary sector is already deeply controversial within the voluntary sector. It has now translated into a very conflictual debate and a clash with the National Council of Voluntary Organisations who recognise how this will end a distinct voluntary sector ethos that has encompassed campaigning. They and others see the independence of the sector being undermined by this transformation into a service delivery subcontractor (*Third Sector*, 2005b) and by moves by the larger charity sector to draw closer to the private sector noted above in seeking contracts.

Taking sides

Privatisation and commercialisation have powerful advocates that this route offers key efficiency savings, consumer choice, and tight central control over public expenditure – all deemed critical for the UK economy to survive in a competitive world. When I began my research at the start of 2001, the commercialisation of public services had become the standard discourse outside the confines of critical management theory, trade union policy and those parts of the public sector still fiercely resistant. It is also the case that under New Labour's programme of investment since 2001, others have also come to some kind of settlement.

Markets distort and debase the nature of public service provision and bring subservience to corporate interests. However, Lukes (2006:6) draws a helpful parallel when he suggests instrumental relationships can also be a valued counterpoint to mutual relationships and more intimate settings. So, whilst emphasising the negative impact of markets on inequality and on undermining citizenship, he leaves the door open to a more nuanced understanding of the role of the private sector. The dynamism of the market reproduces pre-existing inequalities for individuals, classes, regions and countries and ‘amplifies inequalities of class, gender and race’ (ibid:6) such as can be seen in the sale of human body parts or privatisation of water, but an equally valuable point is that states can ‘disregard and extinguish local knowledge’ (ibid:12), which can lead to major errors.

But Lukes also suggests that we should not lose sight of the fact that the dynamism of markets is also indispensable to states. Markets more positively are effective distributors of knowledge, just as states with their role in welfare and social insurance are absolutely indispensable correctives to markets. Neither, he concludes ‘is a panacea for the ills of the other’ (ibid:12). Lukes’ analysis is helpful in that it is a pointer to a more nuanced understanding of the role of markets and of different parts of the private sector.

A fuller discussion of ‘What kind of state?’ can be found in Appendix 4.

Chapter 10: A public service ethos

In blurring of the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors in its 'modernisation' of public services, New Labour maintains that it does not matter who provides the service as long as the ultimate ownership remains in public hands. Does commercialisation change the culture of an organization, or does this blurring of boundaries call into question the very idea that the public sector operates with a unique underpinning philosophy that shapes a different ethos?

The traditional public service ethos

Crouch (2003:59-61) describes how public services have traditionally involved both the professionalism of public administration and the professionalism of delivering services, such as welfare services, teaching and medicine. The former, he argues, returns us to the Victorian concept that a healthy capitalism requires a state that maintained the rules that regulated the market system and was neutral in its relations with individual businesses. This model transferred into the forms of administration required by social democratic welfare states: not being in the pockets of business lobbies and dedicated to the delivery of impartial and therefore universal and reasonably egalitarian services. As Crouch points out these very qualities meant a public service that was elitist, aloof, remote and not adept at communication and thus often deemed arrogant. It is this in various ways that the social movements of the 1980s railed against. As Crouch also points out it is to Scandinavia that one must look for the more developed habit of openness and transparency. These states had a longer time to develop this concept compared to the few post-war years available to the post-war Labour government in the UK. The popularisation of 'Put people first' was a trade union slogan which only originated in the early 1980s to mobilise against the spectre of privatisation.

Crouch (2003:60) also points to how there has been no fundamental challenge to the centralised character of British public service in New Labour's reforms, because 'the commercialising and privatising state needs central administration'. The emphasis on the customer friendly private sector is thus a misnomer as it is the public authority that is the

actual customer. The rhetoric of 'choice' through private sector involvement masks a reversal of transparency and openness as contracts are shrouded in the cloak of commercially sensitive information, which calls for council meetings that award contracts to be closed to the public. Similarly, the promotion of the 'new localism' may be the vehicle of both community engagement and dismemberment of local government mirrored by a corresponding increase in centralisation.

Drawing on Pratchett and Wingfield (1996), it is possible to identify the broad amalgam and sometimes contradictory influences underpinning the varied references to a public service ethos: *accountability* (hierarchical and political neutrality), *bureaucratic behaviour* (honesty integrity, impartiality and objectivity), *public interest* (on occasions more important than needs of the organisation, profession or self), *motivation* (altruism, social value and worthwhile) and *loyalty* (recognising public servants are typically involved in often complex and conflicting loyalties to employer, user, service user and different local communities). Whitfield (2001:254) also adds to the seven principles of public life (Nolan, 1997) those of participation and involvement, equality and competence. Taking account of the different legacies from which it has evolved, a public service ethos can be broadly defined as accountable bureaucratic behaviour, distanced from direct pecuniary interest; shaped by characteristics of fairness, impartiality, probity and trust, concerned for actual communities and motivated to serve these publics through a loyalty to democratically defined service and professional values. Social justice has traditionally featured strongly in this but emotional well-being does not.

While concern for efficiency, economy, and effectiveness has a proper place in meeting the social reproduction of communities, it is not in the same sense as in addressing the certainties of managing a supermarket to which public service delivery is increasingly likened. A private sector ethos, as Jacobs (1992:30-31) points out, also operates within a quite different moral syndrome with its prime obligation being orientated towards making a profit for shareholders. Ethically, managing public services means engaging with a wide range of day-to-day dilemmas and attempting to reconcile multiple conflicting viewpoints and meanings.

A new public service ethos

A public service ethos stems ultimately from a deep recognition of the underlying interdependencies and human well being which are expressed in material and institutional ways. The critical question is whether it is only non-market relations that can fully take account of this. The argument for and against the public sector having an intrinsically different set of core values was put to a key Parliamentary Select Committee on Public Administration in 2002. The trade union delegation, under some pressure, defined the essential characteristic of a public service ethos as ultimately one of 'kindness' and argued that this would be differently manifested by an outsourced hospital cleaner working for a private contractor, than by an in-house service with a more continuous and holistic understanding of their role.

The emerging private public service sector presented a very different argument. The case was put by the founder and chair of Capita, one of the earliest and now most important private public services providers (see Aldridge and Stoker, 2003) and published by the think-tank 'The New Local Government Network' (NLGN). It proposed that all service providers, whatever the sector, can and should be prepared to advance a 'new public service ethos'. They base this around five criteria: a performance culture, a commitment to accountability, a capacity to support universal access, responsible employment and training practices, and a contribution to community well-being (ibid:17). These five points reflect good practice in terms of quality and human resources management. A well-run private company with motivated staff could achieve these just as a poorly managed public sector organisation could fail.

The Select Committee (2002) adopted the perspective represented in the NLGN pamphlet, endorsing its well-argued position that private companies providing public services should develop an appropriate *new* public service ethos. Although it accepted that there is no reason why the public service ethos cannot be upheld by private and voluntary service providers, it suggested that it needed to be reinforced by building it into contracts of service and employment to prevent it being 'put under strain by the profit motive'. The chair of the Select Committee, writing subsequently, also rejected as a myth any equation of a public service ethos with public *sector* ethos (Wright, 2003). He then

conflates this with a dismissal of the idea that people who work in the public sector are 'somehow kinder, nicer or more altruistic than people who work in the private sector'.

In his capacity as chair of the CBI's public services strategy board, Aldridge has since widely promulgated his vision of a new private sector public service ethos focused on customers and their needs. The CBI's Director of Public Services has also stated that the notion of a public service ethos particular only to the public sector is 'not only incorrect but insulting to private sector employees who deliver excellent standards of service to users on a daily basis' (Williams, 2004). More recently, Corrigan (2005), a former government advisor, addressed this question of ethos and acknowledged that there is a difference between public and private sectors. But his argument then focused entirely around a supposed unwillingness of public services managers to accept strong public direction. In his view, 'tough management accountability is imperative' as the basis for public confidence and of maintaining any kind of public sector at all.

Homogenous management styles

One difficulty in pinning down the organisational manifestation of any distinctive public sector service ethos is the increasingly homogenous nature of management practice across all sectors, with the 'new public management' mirroring private sector business practices. Whitfield (2001:111) argues that fragmentation into business units during the 1990s promoted an inward lookingness in local authority staff. This development places the interest of one's own part of an organisation over the interests of wider organisational and social objectives. The key feature about this emerging new ethos in local government service is that it emphasises a 'competitive, contractual, insular and adversarial culture' (ibid:112 quoting Pratchett and Wingfield 1994:34), which quickly undermines older notions of interdependence and communality of interest. It increasingly leaves those services, singled out in turn for outsourcing, isolated and unsupported. The comprehensive introduction of payment by results into all hospitals in 2005 will likewise intensify competitive rather than co-operative dynamics. Interdependence and non-commodified forms of relating are thus being deliberately eroded and with it the character and distinct public sector ethos, which flow from the underlying foundation.

Conversely, when a private company is overseen by a public regulatory authority and employs significant numbers of former staff who were previously in public sector

employment, it is also not surprising if it displays similarities and degrees of apparent 'publicisation' in which business begins to look a lot like government (Sellers, 2003: 608). This suggests that in the short term a private sector environment may very well reproduce behaviours that echo the familiar forms which a traditional public service ethos takes. Hebson et al (2003) has shown how the primary identification by manual employees transferred under TUPE into Public Private Partnership hospital cleaning contracts in the north of England continued to lie primarily with the *institution* and not with the new private contractor now employing them. They also noted how such staff were also alienated by the style of management of their former in-house service, illustrating how the business model and common style of management is colonising the public sector and eroding the sense of different day-to-day behaviours by management expressing a distinct ethos.

In a context that is so fluid it is difficult to make sweeping judgements about individual organisations. There are well run private companies that can make an important contribution to a step change in the public sector and likewise public sector organisations that need to be fundamentally overhauled. Similarly, there are public sector institutions that are increasingly characterised by a business model, but still staffed by people committed to a traditional ethos. So in attempting to find some firm foundations around the question of ethos, it is necessary to view this against the underlying development, which is one of an emerging handful of new corporate sector suppliers.¹⁶

The impact of emerging monopolies

The recent consultation on the proposed privatisation of the Probation Service (Travis, 2005) has highlighted how if a company like Serco, which already runs a wide range of services including prisons, were to bid for a contract, it would now encounter multiple conflicts of interest and be open to accusations of financial benefit by virtue of recommending prison sentences which would in turn promote its income stream from prisons. This simple example points to an irony: within a decade a handful of companies could emerge from competitive mergers and takeovers segmenting a market, to become responsible for public welfare services 'from the cradle to the grave'. Unlike the post-war

¹⁶ Around a dozen major companies are increasing monopolies along with their subcontractors.

vision, the role of pecuniary interest and shareholder value will lie at the centre of a system funded by the state and moving towards co-payment.

This has implications for what is meant by a public service ethos in three ways. Firstly, fierce competition generates employment practices that are incompatible. Cohen (2003) describes how when the first duty is to shareholder value and the logic of maximising short-term returns, this drives all before it. It can translate into extreme personnel practice such as 'rank and yank' (ibid:203-205), a personnel tool wielded by one in five US companies in which high fliers are very richly rewarded in merit reviews and rejects are pushed out. He argues that in Enron, it precipitated ferocious office politics in which people attacked other people's integrity, morality and values and the assessment process co-ordinated by its Peer Review Committee in his view all but guaranteed fraud as managers learned that telling the truth could get them fired. Cohen (2005) notes more recently that 'ranking and yanking' is now to be introduced into the Bank of England:¹⁷ those at the top will get merit rises, those at the bottom will be warned that if they do not meet targets they will be out.

The relevance to a public service ethos is that this management style undermines not just a co-operative work ethics required in many roles but also the capacity for independent judgement, which is an important part of the role. 'Speaking truth to power' in a variety of situations is precisely what is called for in the role of public servants to protect the public interest, but may not earn one a good individual appraisal. As Crouch noted (2003:40), both local education authorities and their staff are now rewarded for commercialising their services and by implication criticised and shamed when failing to do this.

Secondly, as many companies seeking to penetrate and expand in the UK public services market are US-led, the transfer of cultural patterns and characteristic employment behaviours are important. The conclusions drawn by Alimo-Metcalfe (2002:4) in her major study of transformational leadership qualities across public and private sectors showed that the British model of leadership was very different to the US model, with the latter emphasising charisma and vision rather than the 'model of leader as servant'. In addition another key finding is the very markedly lower score placed by the private

¹⁷ By the new head of human resources previously at GlaxoSmithKline.

sector on the value of 'acting with integrity' compared to that defined *across* the very different parts of the public sector (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2003:30). Norms of probity differ very markedly between the two environments. For example, a Treasury official recruited from the private sector was sacked for buying drinks when meeting a delegation and claiming the cost back through expenses (Leigh and Evans, 2005).

Public choice theory

Public choice theory has powerfully shaped this new template now being applied to all public services. It is rooted in monetarist thinking. The theories of Milton Friedman (1980) and the idea that the role of corporations is only to take responsibility for maximising profits and returns to shareholders (Hayek, 1944) became cornerstones of Conservative thinking in the early 1970s. It reflected Hayek's views that state planning was the enemy of freedom and justice and was legitimised by antipathy to the perceived failures of social engineering. A new rationality of government emerged in the Thatcher era, focusing on individuals taking responsibility for themselves as the state was downsized. Whitfield (1994:21) notes public choice theory, or economic rationalism gained new followers in the 1980s with the growth of 'bureau-maximisation theory' (Niskanen, 1971) and other associated economic currents. He summarises this theory's claim as that the growth of government is due to the private interests or ambitions of bureaucrats whose aims are directly related to the size of their budgets. According to this theory, organisations produce a much larger output than is needed because of the absence of market forces. So public choice theorists believe that all but a few public goods should be provided by the market (Dunleavy, 1991).

Finlayson (2000a:110) argues that the influence of 'public choice theory' was crucial to the growth of 'contracting out' and 'internal markets' alongside the earlier selling off of the assets of the public sector. It is conceived of as a neutral objective method of political study in which economic theories of decision-making can be applied to non-market choices. The behaviours and rationality assumed by utilitarian and individualistic models of economic choice are put to use in making sense of those choices in the public sector as though they were the same as purchases in a supermarket. Bureaucratic action is understood as a private choice made by individuals and thus, he argues, 'economic theory colonises political science' (Finlayson, 2003:29).

All this underpins the move, via the introduction of the ‘new public management’, to the now pervasive measurement of inputs, assessments, and league tables in schools, hospitals and universities. Le Grand (2005), the social market theorist and now influential government health policy-maker has long articulated the argument for an NHS run on payment by results, an idea to which New Labour has turned resulting in the third reorganisation of the NHS in eight years. What is startling about Le Grand’s and other such commentaries on the need to introduce choice into public services is the complete absence of any discussion of the nature of the tasks involved. It is a wholly managerial and economic discourse. Finlayson’s (2003b:30) suggests this sort of approach is very damaging for democratic politics because public choice theory treats problems as managerial rather than political. It is a system of control and rule rather than a plan for political change. Crucially, he points out ‘it has nothing to say about what we actually want a public service to do’ (2003:31).

Although the reality of the assessment regime changes culture and values, in itself it cannot decide on what to change those values to. That is a political decision, which is related to more than individual choice. So the ‘New Public Management’ masks how encoded within it comes a set of value judgments about public services (ibid:30), which as the discourse shifts into a narrow notion of efficiency, undermine their fundamental underpinning politically and organisationally. It entrenches the values of the market rather than public service indirectly through the roles that we take up as workers and as users. In this way individual behaviours are being re-shaped as ‘public servants’ come to see themselves as ‘business managers’ (Finlayson, 2003:114), rewarded in their everyday roles for being ‘purchasers’ or ‘contractors’. Personal achievement in a personal appraisal will come by demonstrating effective contracting out, policy and delivery are split, and politicians are distanced and separated from responsibility for the specific nature of the public realm.

Public reasoning

But a long-term commitment to the use of the private sector brings with it the more fundamental loss of collective notions of what constitutes the public and the public interest. As Clarke and Newman (1997:108-109) point out it works to challenge the

legitimacy of any claim to speak for the public. Finlayson, (2003: 36-39) summarises the different costs attached to this. Firstly, it denies the need for political decisions by replacing the participation in politics with participation in the market. Secondly, consumerism in itself is not enough to shift the distribution of power. In spite of the rhetoric of 'choice', taking away bureaucratic systems of power is not the same as giving power to the user. Thirdly, he argues that contradictions will always arise in the different dimensions of our lives and that it is politics that can articulate them and establish a new way of ordering – it is the glue which binds the increasingly blurred spheres of state, individual, society and economy. Public reason, he argues, is to reason in public and by a public. It is an attempt at the public level to think about what is best for all as well as ourselves (ibid:38).

This highlights the dilemmas that underlie the simplicities of the 'choice' agenda, whether it is about nutritional standards in schools or euthanasia. We have to balance our individual needs and perceived rights against our relinquishing those same rights so as to avoid damaging more vulnerable others in society. It is why managing the most basic public services continually raises complicated moral judgements.

Different moral communities

A powerful message has become embedded over two decades that the public sector is parasitical and unproductive and its staff either overpaid or superfluous. In an analysis of the recent General Election, Walker (2005) concluded that the key argument most constantly deployed in the election was still the idea that public administration was wasteful and that this remains the implicit message of the 'modernisation' of public services.¹⁸ The government are deploying the necessary cost of salary rises to deflect criticism of NHS overspends in 2006, without qualification of how the new internal market has increased transaction costs, monitoring costs, and the repayment consequences of PFI. Overspends can no longer be borne across the NHS but by each individual institution. This follows the logic of introducing the market so that unit costs

¹⁸ Competing manifesto claims for £30 billion efficiency savings from the public sector were being sought following the inquiry by Sir Peter Gershon into efficiency savings (2004).

are available as a comparator and also to enable the introduction of competition with private medical interests.

Revaluing bureaucracy

Jane Jacobs (1992) argued that the public and private sector work domains constitute two contradictory different 'moral syndromes' (ibid:53): that of the 'commercial' and that of the 'guardians' (ibid:215). In her view the role of bureaucracies is to serve the public openly and above board, whereas this may be quite inappropriate in the commercial world. She suggests that combining fundamentally different moral practices does not work and that confusing the different spheres can result in 'monstrous hybrids' (ibid:93). There is a blurring of roles, which as Hodgkinson (1997:17) argued, has given rise to the institutionalisation of 'secondary corruption'. Is it time to revalue bureaucracy and the ethos which it manifests?

A public service ethos means lived customs, not specific to particular organisations but shared across the sector. This ethos is shaped not just by its welfare roles but also by how the public sector functions as bureaucracies. Bureaucracies stem from a modernist view of the world and rational-legal forms of authority. Contrary to popular sentiment, bureaucracies have a positive role and function in society as both Du Gay (2000) and Clegg (2004) point out. They take on roles, which define the balance between the particular and the universal, the individual and societal needs. Although *bureaucratic* ways of working are problematic, it is grossly inaccurate to caricature the British welfare state in this way (Crouch, 2003:58).

Du Gay seeks to rehabilitate this negative understanding of bureaucracy, and draws the important but usually ignored distinction between bureaucracy and bureaucratic. In this argument, a bureaucracy is a unique kind of moral institution for the organisation of public affairs which is committed to norms of impersonality, neutrality and objectivity – all essential to the continuous contestation of public purpose and a means of containing moral ambivalence. Du Gay (2000:41) takes both MacIntyre (1981:77) and Baumann (1989 xiii; 1994:14) to task for their critiques of bureaucracy. Both argue that bureaucracy embodies an instrumental rationality, with technical questions being split from ethical and aesthetic ones; a view classically represented by the theme of Arendt's description of the 'banality of evil' (1958).

But it is not bureaucracy per se which is responsible for hierarchy or instrumentalism. In Scandinavia 20 years ago, a progressive social democratic movement humanised and decentralised the welfare state within a public sector form, far more than was the case in the UK (Crouch, 2003: 60). Furthermore, it can be argued that the network-based, contractual, inter-organisational partnership world of the 'new public management' constitutes a different form of rationality. It is just as much an assertion of power and hierarchy, albeit more hidden, through the way centralised command is concealed by these new forms of decentralisation (Clegg, 1990).

Bending bureaucracy

Newman (2005:193) has taken forward arguments noted earlier that the new local government is an unstable settlement. She argues it is not a simple story of hollowing out of government but one full of tensions and contradictions. This, it is suggested, places much more emphasis on a sense of agency and the possibility of 'ethical rationality' (ibid:198), unlike the more usual assumption of an absence of personal enthusiasms in the separation of office from personal preference. She points out that it is not what 'actors' do but the process of meaning making that they are engaged with as they negotiate the discursive field of New Labour's policy and management systems' (ibid:200) which matters, symbolically drawing on different attachments and identifications. This is the antithesis of bureaucratic discourse and she concludes they are involved in 'bending, rather than breaking bureaucracy' (ibid: 204). I found Newman's theoretical interpretations particularly resonant with and validating of, my own experiences narrated in the stories of Part Two.

The difference between private and public sectors

Hoggett has also developed the argument for a revaluation of bureaucracy from a psychosocial perspective. Hoggett has written widely on local government and the politics of welfare and strongly argues that the public and private sectors *are* different (2003:1). He considers there are four distinct sets of administrative values underlying effective bureaucracy (2005:169): keeping it visible and accountable, keeping it lean and purposeful, keeping it honest and fair, keeping it robust and resilient. But concentrating on 'lean and purposeful' has reduced the question of public services to service delivery whereas, in his view, the public sector requires to be understood in a different way.

Firstly, he argues, it is the site for continuous contestation of public purposes. Secondly, public bodies like local government play a vital role in ‘containing’ the disowned aspects of our subjectivity. To reduce public services to merely a question of the delivery of services is then to commodify such relationships, and ‘to strip them of their moral and ethical meaning and the potential meaning, inherent in the very concept of citizen, but marginal to the concept of consumer’ (2003:2). In contrast to the apparent simplicities of government targets, the actual reality of managing a library or swimming pool is as much one of grappling with complex policy issues and interpreting who has access to what level of resources. So public organisations and those who work for them are always intimately concerned with equality and value conflicts in society that are inherent and irresolvable (ibid: 2). In his view, the ethic of care to an individual has to be constantly balanced against an ethic of justice to those potentially present, which can only be kept in mind in an abstract sense. A business approach alone will elide such complex value questions.

Public sector workers

Hoggett (2000:147) considers that it is easy to denigrate public sector workers rather than seek to understand how they are often caught up in a contradictory logic responsible for both ‘care and control, equity and rationing, and empowerment and exploitation’ in which there will always be tension between users and workers who face each other in a relationship of conflictual interdependence. He returns to the work of Lipsky (1980:41), who coined the phrase ‘street level bureaucrat’ in relation to public officials like teachers, nurses, police officers, housing, planning, and benefit officers and points out that politicians with an eye to electoral appeal are often far from clear what they want. They may indulge in a collusive contract with the electorate by deriving some of their legitimacy from not confronting the electorate with realities in a ‘contract of mutual indifference’ (Geras, 1998). Public servants are frequently pushed into classic scapegoat roles – blamed for things that neither citizens nor governments will properly address. As Lipsky argued, ‘a typical mechanism for legislative conflict resolution is to pass on intractable conflicts for resolution (or continued irresolution) to the administrative level (1981:41). As a result, the unresolved value conflicts re-emerge at the level of operations as impossible tasks, adding to the already considerable ethical complexities of day-to-day roles.

In sharp opposition to this way of thinking, Le Grand (2003:29) ignores such ethical complexities with which public servants grapple on a daily basis. He argues that far from public service workers being seen as ‘knights’, they may just as easily be ‘knaves’ (true) but then connects an often-perceived insensitivity or arrogance as arising from being in a monopoly supplier position. In his view, competition and user choice have the moral virtue of increasing fairness and respect for service users in a way that other systems do not. He argues his case around the benefits of public managers being necessarily interested in the financial health of an institution and that this does not have to be ‘knavish’. Fear that users would be damaged if the financial health of an institution declines, suggests for him that the spirit of caring is being retained. This viewpoint is reflected in one medical director’s comment about the impact of the current introduction of payment by results on a Foundation Hospital. He reports “there is much more financial awareness, especially of our responsibility to control costs ... It has led to greater rigour about our plans and their financial implications” (*Economist*, 2005).

Being clear about financial constraints is important and clearly does have a key role to play, but reducing health care management to such narrow parameters is also deeply concerning. In my own experience, managers for whom ‘the budget is the budget is the budget’ are dangerously out of touch with their own feelings and with the painful predicament facing ultimate service users. New technocratic norms of procurement, commissioning and contracting are now contesting the social democratic value system of the public sector, which has sometimes leant towards a socialist perspective. While this still shapes the dominant ethos, key workers such as project managers now move back and forth across the blurred public/private boundary with ease, applying common business values, whether it is project managing a new housing estate or the facilities management of a local hospital. This underlines how ethos is not a fixed thing. It is constantly influenced by social, technical, political processes and reworked by individuals in a day-to-day contestation of ideas and processes.

Chapter 11: Emerging themes - 2

The literature of Part Three draws on critical management theory, a political economy perspective and critical social policy. This literature tracks the changes, which has taken place in public administration over the past two decades as well highlighting key debates, which began to gradually re-emerge after 2001. In what ways has this literature helped me to make sense of the experiences described in the stories of Part Two?

The literature has brought a much clearer focus to the blurring of public, private and voluntary sector boundaries and why New Labour's 'double shuffle' is confusing (Hall, 2004) and also disturbing. The rapid growth of new corporate monopoly providers of public services, allied to the new centralising procurement roles in local government, pose a real risk to citizenship (Crouch, 2003) and to our capacity to reason in public (Finlayson, 2003). The unexpected nature of the counter-cultural argument for a revaluing of bureaucracy (du Gay, 2000), underlines just how deeply embedded the norms of the business model have become. Similarly, the analysis of public choice theory (Finlayson, 2003a; Needham, 2003) reveals how the audit culture and choice agenda are so powerfully built into day-to-day processes. Finally, the pressure on local authorities from central government to enter into public private partnerships has swept all before it, including memories of the near catastrophic, financial implosion of some local authorities in the mid 1980s described in Part Two,¹⁹.

The meaning of publicness has emerged as a much more slippery theoretical concept than I had imagined and as something which is not fixed but is in a constant dynamic contestation. This is especially reflected in the competing narratives as to what a public service ethos now means. The stories of Part Two convey how I saw myself as a 'partisan' rather than a 'technocrat', in the way Hoggett (1992:133) speaks of being a 'reflexive partisan' and, following Gramsci (1977:175), of this being about passion and a fusion of anger and love. Newman (2005:204-205) also introduces the concepts of

¹⁹ The NHS overspend of over £1.2 billion in 2006 has triggered a similar response in some hospitals and can be accounted for in part by the unanticipated impact of PFI.

‘partisanship’ and ‘bending bureaucracy’, together with the observation that discourses can be ‘appropriated’ by those with alternative agendas (2002:89). This all resonates strongly with the stories of Part Two. Being a partisan in this way raises fundamental questions about the absence of a political, ethical and emotional dimension in the way a public service ethos is generally understood and which is ignored in both the traditional and more recent utilitarian interpretations of ethos.

Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg (2000:2-6) also argue that local government has remained a site of ‘creative autonomy’ despite being the continuous butt of central government, of all political shades, since the early 1980s. There is little general recognition of how a different subculture exists in local government compared to other parts of the public sector, and how it is more reflective of bottom-up democratic processes and of being a site for political struggle around the inequalities of gender, race and class in society as well as organisationally. This has inevitably been modified with the impact of the new managerialism but has not been eradicated. It is certainly a very different history to the more centralised NHS, civil service and the top-down cultures of higher and further education. This is reflected in the way local government addressed equalities issues over two decades earlier.

A more complicated story

With the exception of the work just noted above, along with Hoggett’s analysis of why the public and private sectors differ which begins to take us in the direction of the psychosocial literature on public services, the literature overall places little emphasis on a relational understanding of power and how interpersonal social interactions shape this power relating in a complex responsive processes way. The feeling life or the lived life to which it gave rise is absent. For example, Rustin (2000:120) writes of being ‘silenced’ which echoed my own experience, but this kind of resonance is rare. The stories are suffused with emotional turmoil and ethical dilemmas and reveal a much more complicated story than that which is conveyed by the mainstream literature of Part Three.

Several conclusions follow from this gap in the literature. Firstly, the administrative and cultural legacies of the public sector still, by and large, reinforce a style of talking and thinking in which the emotional basis of public services is comprehensively ignored.

There is still little importance attached to reflecting on the emotional impact of managing decline or marketisation. Generally speaking, both the traditional and the new utilitarian cross-sector public service ethos (Aldridge and Stoker, 2003:17), fail to consider how and why emotional and ethical dilemmas are so integral to day-to-day public services roles. Secondly, theory tends to distance and locate causal reasons elsewhere. So while I find the discourse of markets versus the state is conceptually illuminating, the polarisation leaves little space for the actual lived complexities of the new situations being encountered and of the way in which we engage with the complicated web of relationships and allegiances being brought into being.

Capturing experience through stories allows the paradoxical and the muddled to emerge in contrast to the certainties which theorising most seeks to illuminate. In Part Four I will now turn to story again in order to convey experiences of public services over the years 2001-2005. I will then return to complexity and psychosocial literatures in depth in Part Five and consider how they can bring new insights into their interpretation.

PART FOUR: FROM SILENCE TO VOICE

'To tell as story is a point of resistance' (Alessandro Portelli: Rome 2004)

Chapter 12: Stories

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Chapter 13: Emerging themes - 3

As I approach Haringey's Central Library in Wood Green, I am shocked to see its tiled fascia is still entirely ripped off. The once sleek, long building has a battered and semi-derelict appearance. It is as if it was someone who has had their face badly burnt. I had seen it in this state some years before, but had merely assumed it was in the process of major maintenance work. I quickly calculate that it has been in the same state for four years.

It is early 2001 and I am some months into starting my research. An intensive reading of the local government 'trade press' had seemed a helpful way for me to sense the contemporary mood. As they were not available in the university library, I had turned to the central library in this my own London borough and a library, which I had not been in since leaving the council four years previously. Collecting my box files of the *MJ*²⁰ from the reception desk, I find a table and settle down to speed read through several years of this weekly magazine. I had read both this and the *LGC*²¹ meticulously each week for a decade following the intricacies of the latest government Directives affecting my work, or to gauge and to interpret the 'political winds'. The long years of the Conservative government's onslaught on local government took place largely outside the public eye but were captured in its pages along with New Labour's more recent impact.

I had left local government just as the new government came to power in 1997 and had never read the *MJ* during these intervening years. I worked my way steadily through the boxes, catching the evolution of 'Best Value', the expansion of the audit culture and the onset of league tables. But as exhaustion set in, I realised that along with taking in the facts and figures about the evolution of an audit culture, I had also been absorbing the tone of the ministerial pronouncements. These came thick and fast, with page after page showing photographs of the then Minister for Local Government or her advisers, exhorting and urging, threatening and condemning. It felt unremittingly punitive and entirely focussed upon threat and failure - week after week. I looked constantly for some

²⁰ *Municipal Journal*.

²¹ *Local Government Chronicle*.

words of recognition and acknowledgement of effort or simple words of encouragement to people who had quietly held public services together through the Thatcherite 'reformation' and who had looked forward to this new start as a hopeful return to innovation and creative energy. Instead, I absorbed its message of 'shame and blame', and with it an acute sense of having been force-fed. I left the library with a strong sense that something had been 'shoved down my throat'. So *that* I thought was what had been happening in local government since I had left and felt a cold fury on behalf of former colleagues, but also relief; this might have been *my* weekly read had I still been working in local government.

The library's semi-derelict façade itself also spoke to me of another story. Built in the mid 1970s, its aesthetic outline had brought a gracefulness to this north London High Road. I had warm memories of precious hours in its reading room, writing and researching, briefly released from the care of a young baby. This central library, like my own local library re-awakened in me a sense of peacefulness, of always having been 'well fed'. The library-using population sitting around me also bore witness to its duty of care to the waves of refugees and migrants who pass through this borough. In the corner as always, sat a group of older men; exiles from Cyprus in the 1970s, using a table of the library's reference section as a mutation of their daily café culture.

Haringey, I find myself thinking, is like Sarajevo before the fragile legacy of its Ottoman diversity had been destroyed by ethnic conflicts and civil war a decade ago. A quarter of all UK immigrants from all over the world passed through this borough in the 1980s to mid 1990s. One hundred and thirty three languages are spoken in some schools and minority communities now make up well over half its quarter of a million population. Global relationships are present in its every detail. Tensions around race and redefinitions of identity arising in British society wash through it. We returned the first black MP to Parliament in the early 1980s, and as leader of the local council, Bernie Grant had been at the forefront of a raft of innovative local government policies and practices during this period. I recollected how the Library Service itself published *Connections* in 1983, a groundbreaking local history, which tracked the borough's history through the lens of slavery, and Britain's colonial and post-colonial history. It catalogued its early settlement by a black people from the mid-17th century and the major post-war migrations, which settled in the borough from the West Indies, and

subsequently from south Asia and more latterly Africa and now Eastern Europe. I feel a certain pride at the memory of *Connections* and its small but symbolic contribution to shaping the cultural emergence of 'black Britishness' that emerged *here* in the early 1980s.

But from this high point, over the next two decades I had witnessed as a council officer, the poignant and precipitous decline of the Library Service. The tileless façade reminds me how, as a weak, non-statutory service, the libraries would be repeatedly 'thrown to the wolves' in the competitive pressure to survive, balance budgets, and generate 'savings' to maintain frontline statutory services like education and social services. These thoughts return me to the ruthless financial management of the 1990s; how any under spend in service budgets was claimed as corporate property on a monthly basis, whilst any overspends were left, for services like my own, to resolve. Council committees faced endlessly impossible choices as they reconciled lobbying from every corner of the borough. As councillors struggled to make sense of their choices or to avoid making a contentious decision, they would ask for ever more information. As I prepared my reports, I would sometimes imagine I was just feeding a 'gaping mouth' with an insatiable appetite.

New league tables were also emerging with dozens of quantitative performance measures re-channelling scarce resources into new monitoring systems. Managing significantly under-resourced services meant inevitable failure. Such failure brought with it the risk of being shamed on the front pages of the evening paper following which politicians would vent their spleen on officers. But, all other options exhausted, they would eventually be driven to find the extra resources for development to avoid further bad publicity. But this solution inevitably involved robbing another service and increasing its risk of failure. So underneath the façade of any development lurked the failure of others. I knew the survival and development of my own service had doubtless contributed to the Library Service's demise. It seemed the past was a confusing weave of having been victim, oppressor and bystander.

In the autumn months following September 11th the fear that was unleashed was a constant presence, whether travelling by tube or passing the Fire Station on London's Euston Road where banners pointed to the connections with and support for the fire service workers of New York. Its deeper impact was also revealed in quite small incidents. In the week following, I attend a conference where, anticipating that one particular workshop would be very popular, I make sure that I arrive at the room a little bit earlier than I need to. As I had anticipated, the room fills quickly and people are still squeezing in well after the speaker has started. The speaker then emphasises that he wants it to be a dialogue and as the lack of space means latecomers are creating more and more interruptions, a block on entry is imposed. The workshop then continues smoothly and purposefully.

At the final plenary of the conference there is some general comment on the positive value of the discussions and some expressions of concern to the American delegates. Then a woman suddenly starts to speak about her few minutes of complete outrage at being kept out of the workshop that I had attended and describes her momentary violent feelings. She conveys the anger, confrontations and general fracas that has gone on outside the closed door of which those like myself inside the room had been quite unaware. She goes on to question what this expresses about global power relations and our reflections about September 11th. If she could be so angry, albeit momentarily, at being excluded from a mere workshop she asks, what did this say to us more generally about inclusion and exclusion? Someone follows this up by talking about how they had felt inside the room and I am reminded of my own rather smug feelings of having anticipated the crush by arriving early and relief at not having to struggle to find a seat under the scrutiny of others. I became acutely aware of being privileged and of how, in some sense, at that moment in the room we were experiencing the meaning of the global power relations of inclusion and exclusion.

A few months later in January 2002, and I set off to another conference 'Change is Possible: how emotional literacy can transform public services'. This has been organised by Antidote, the campaign for emotional literacy. I am looking forward expectantly to a

mix of talks and experiential work and my first experience of a dramaturgist theatre group.

I notice the conference is sponsored by BT and Serco but my momentary concern about this is quickly sidelined. Funding of voluntary and public sector conferences by private companies is becoming increasingly commonplace to make such events possible.

As I enter the spacious conference room at Church House beside Westminster Abbey, my eyes are immediately drawn to an eight-foot high exhibition space with the logo '*Today's highly successful business results*' stretched across it. Its grandiose shape dominates a corner of the room to the left of the speakers' platform and its looming presence immediately irritates me intensely. I feel impelled to go and read it. The boards describe how Serco run different local government services including education.²² In my role five years previously, I had been responsible for its evaluating tenders from this multinational company for large refuse and street cleansing contracts. I know that they now manage education in local authorities like Bradford and Walsall, run private prisons in America, and are a vigorous funder of conferences run by the think-tank, 'The New Local Government Network'.²³ I am struck by the boldness with which it is now carving out a role, not just in seeking to run education services but associating itself with developing greater emotional literacy across public services in general.

Over lunch I approach Marion, one of several Serco representatives at the conference. I find out that she is an ex-local education officer who is now working for their education company. I am curious about her transition. As we chat she talks animatedly about her experience of 'moving across' and tells me that she has not changed, nor has the ethos of public service that she brings with her. She has more resources now and tells me that in many ways "it is better than before". But then she adds a rider: she feels less sure about whether the ethos she brings will survive in the longer term among staff who do not have her background. I warm to her and feel attracted to her energy and ambition. I am also aware of my own ambivalent and confusing feelings. Is her experience proof of the transferability of a public service ethos into an emergent private public service sector or is this viewpoint morally unacceptable?

²² Now extended to cover diverse public services from IT to university pensions schemes.

²³ An energetic local government think-tank funded by private sponsors.

Later in a pre-prepared scene, the theatre company plays out its reading of a bureaucratic style of relating in a popular caricature of self-serving public servants. It is very well acted and makes us all laugh. They then ask the conference members for situations that they will then improvise, which we can then subsequently re-adjust and replay. This will allow us to draw out the different paths in which power relations have been or could have been played out in that particular situation depending on who intervenes.

Ian, an older man volunteers his experience of the closure of his university physics department. I had earlier been paired with him in a small discussion session and enjoyed our conversation. The group skilfully play out his story in the familiar, gruesome way of office politics. He is set up as the sacrificial lamb to secure the future of the wider science faculty. But in doing this they also play him as ‘old Ian, the old codger’ and some people begin to laugh. I feel increasingly uncomfortable. Ian is then asked to comment on this first run and he speaks with a note of bewilderment in his voice asking with some feeling, “ But where was the passion?” I feel quite moved by his question, understanding that he was fighting less for his own job than for something much bigger – for the place of physics and his understanding of its potential contribution within a humanities orientated university. The theatre group had missed the point entirely. I feel for Ian, as though he had been bullied yet again here in this very room. His passionate sense of loss and denigration resonate for me, as does the deaf ear with which he has initially been heard. His impassioned position had been collapsed into a stereotype of a mere struggle for personal and organisational survival.

The conference delegates are mainly a mix of voluntary and public sector including some people from higher education like myself. There are also quite a number of organisational consultants who apologetically reveal this fact acknowledging the antipathy it evokes. I recognise two delegates from Haringey where the Victoria Climbié case²⁴ has just broken in the news. I admire their courage to speak in this gathering. It is as though they sat under an unspoken cloud of shame, bearing witness to a complex level of emotions actually present but unarticulated in the room. I am aware how closely I still identify with them.

²⁴ The death of the child Victoria Climbié was the subject of the Lamming Inquiry in 2001.

The two-day event ends with smaller numbers of delegates asked to actively re-imagine and argue out scenarios volunteered by one individual about conflict within an organisation. An excited dynamic develops. I find my own contributions ignored and lapse into silence. As the event concludes, the person who volunteered her story angrily erupts complaining that her story has been taken from her. Another delegate adds the criticism that the ‘theatre of the oppressed’ was being misused. As the session ends we three briefly acknowledge each other as outsiders excluded from the dominant group. I go home confused, wondering why I could not have expressed myself more effectively but also thinking about how the sponsorship of the conference would have covertly shaped the event and the assumptions about what public services mean. The politics of welfare and its impact on emotional life had been missing. In a passing comment 18 months later, another delegate I meet refers back to “that appalling conference”.

III

_____ Private choices _____

Following the Antidote conference in January 2002 and my conversation with Marion, I wanted to talk with more people working in this new emerging *private* public service sector. I was curious to find out how people experienced the very significant transition. Within the public sector and trade unions, people who *chose* to work for such companies, as distinct from being forcibly transferred or “TUPE’d over”, arouse strong feelings of betrayal and a perception of self-interest over a commitment to a ‘public service ethos’.

Underlying this development was the huge surge in the government’s programme of public investment after 2001. The emergence of new private public service companies was increasing rapidly. I was alerted to this change when Josie expressed her feelings about applying for a community work job with a company called Renaisi located in a nearby local authority. As she flicked through the new style of expensive, glossy brochure that she had just received, she suddenly burst out in irritation: “But just *who* are these people?” Checking the brochure did not reveal the lines of accountability and ownership either of us sought and expected. Over the next year, I increasingly notice how publicity about companies like Capita, Tribal, Vertex, Agressor, Jarvis and Atkins was becoming widespread. They were emerging everywhere as sponsors, of new public

service award schemes or of the New Local Government Network conferences and pamphlets which mediated the government's modernisation discourse for public service managers and politicians. It signalled to me their access to political power and growing influence in reshaping public sector structures and policy agendas. I noticed how senior job changes reported in the local government press reflected the increasing numbers of people beginning to move back and forth between local authorities and these private companies. I decide to seek out conversations with more people in these changing organisational environments.

The new corporate sector

I am travelling across London in the early summer of 2003 to the head office of AZTEC, which co-ordinates government service contracts countrywide. I had heard a representative speak about not just running services but about preparing to take over the corporate management of a whole local authority. Their modern offices are located along a suburban highway, a long walk from the tube. When arriving at a Town Hall or Civic Centre, I normally have gained some sense of the local character along the way. I am struck by the absence of connection to any sense of place. This rather isolated office seems free floating and unrelated to any sense of history or memory. But once inside the building, I notice the usual local authority service terms and depot functions. It is both strange and familiar.

Jenni has a senior role in the company. She is welcoming and tells me how she had first worked for the NHS after university but had found the organisation stifling. In particular she described a punitive culture as the administration battled and cajoled professional staff into the introduction of an internal market. She had hated being so intensely disliked by professional health workers and the lack of any sense of common purpose. She left and had moved on to social services but this proved to be like "jumping from the frying pan into the fire". She quickly moved on and joined a major management consultancy, which eventually put her in line for her present role. This she had found "liberating". I pick up a lingering sense of hurt as she recalls the vested interests and complex politics of the health service. This continues to fuel her ongoing dislike of the political nature of public services. She refers several times to the need for a "firewall" against "shareholders" (meaning councillors and trade unions), and what she sees as a failing political culture. She also goes on to comment about what she sees as the "brutality of

the blame culture” in local government and the turnover of chief officers. In her estimation “people give their life only to get the sack and an early death”, adding that there is no material reward in it at the moment. Her company in contrast would move people she says, expressing a passionate belief in AZTEC’s leadership and management style and its “why can’t you” rather than the “can I?” culture. She thinks the company sustains its values through good communication and mentions how management are good at capturing stories to celebrate “softer values”.

This division of AZTEC had grown quickly as a public service organisation with 70-80 per cent of the staff from the former public sector included in its leadership. But, she adds that the next generation are “more commercially minded”. When I ask her about whether there is a public service ethos she responds confidently that there is and it is about “the impact you make and the value which you give for the right price” adding that it is about personal and ethical behaviours as you take on a duty of care burden. She adds that “you don’t have the same ethical edge in a management consultancy”. I ask her then about the intensity of emotions that such work generates for her but in reply she slips into the management language of culture and values and I am not clear what feelings are evoked for her. I have crossed, it seems, into something that is outside of the established norm.

Peter’s experience is very different. He worked for the Southwark local education authority. After a poor OFSTED inspection and government impatience to experiment with privatised management, the service was privatised in 2001/2 under a five-year contract worth £100 million. He tells me how he was transferred over to WS Atkins under TUPE conditions, but also how he is very aware that if he now sought promotion he would lose his protected conditions of service. So after two years, he is now leaving to return to local government in another authority. I am curious about whether he experienced conflicts of interest. He tells me that he felt that “sometimes I didn’t know whether I was an Epsom²⁵ person or a Southwark person”. This phrase seems to convey the sense of confusing slippage between organisation and place, duty and attachment and continues to resonate in my mind. He tells me he is also concerned about future financial problems for the company in making the contract pay.

²⁵ WS Atkins HQ.

Within a year of our discussion, Atkins had indeed pulled out of the contract because of their failure to make enough profit. It left the council with having to re-tender the contract, which was relet to Cambridge Educational Associates. In 2005, the service was taken back in-house.

Some months later I talked to an influential policy maker about local government change and asked him had he ever worked in local government. He immediately declared 'No!' and quickly added that friends had told him that he would be 'bored'. I left our conversation feeling in some way shamed.

IV

A place to think

I tutor a course on 'women and management' in a university continuing education faculty. The group is usually, but not always all women, ethnically very diverse and representing many different kinds of organisations. In one early session I plan to focus on different ways of perceiving equality and diversity policies in organisations and then I will turn to identifying a typology of how different types of organisations manage equality. Students will then assess their own organisations in group work. After settling a new latecomer into the group and some introductory comments, I start by talking about the three faces of power: the power to determine what can and cannot be done; the power to determine what can and cannot be said; and the power to determine what can and cannot be thought or felt.²⁶ I follow this with a story about how an organisation had all the right policies but no women on its senior management team level. When the unwritten rules about not speaking in the formal domain about this gap are accidentally shattered, the conversational life of the organisation is radically reshaped. The shadow conversation is integrated and the appointment of women to senior roles quickly follows.²⁷

After some general discussion about how this pattern resonates, one student raises the point that her single homeless organisation is dominated by women at the management

²⁶ Lukes, S. (1991) *Moral conflict and politics*. Clarendon Press Oxford.

²⁷ A story used by Stacey (2003b) *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics* pgs 365-367.

level and this shifts the terrain of the discussion. I am pleased with this contribution as I want to begin to open up the differences *between* women and I steer the discussion further into what equality issues arise in women-dominated organisations. I am aware that this shift mirrors the group itself and what is happening in the here and now in the room and how it could trigger strong feelings. The thought passes through my mind as to whether I will be able to contain the emotions that could erupt and I am aware of my own momentary anxiety.

Different views are expressed over parental leave and the sense of discrimination that single women feel is sharply articulated by several women and becomes the focus of discussion. Beyond this the group struggles to differentiate differences between women, ignoring or avoiding obvious differences such as race. To illustrate a more multi-focal and dynamic interpretation of equalities, I draw a hexagon²⁸ to show how multiple and shifting connections can be made between different inequalities. They then quickly identify race, gender, age, disability providing many different illustrations and examples of discrimination from a gender *and* ... perspective. Two categories remain latent. Sexuality eventually emerges dramatically in a very personal story. Catharine suddenly tells the group that she is a lesbian but to voice this in her workplace (an NHS Trust) would be a career disaster. A few voice more progressive organisational situations but this is quickly countered by others as particular to gay men. In describing the impossibility of coming out at work she has made the connection very directly and with great force to the 'terrain of the unspeakable'.

After this the group struggle to name the eighth category of the hexagon and I tell them eventually that it is 'class'. At this point Karen, who has just joined the group, speaks for the first time. She speaks powerfully about how surprised she is that she never thought of class and continues with a story. She had gone to a 'top' university in the north of England with a high intake of public school students. Coming from a working class background, she described how she had increasingly experienced this as a painful narrowing of the 'social space' she could inhabit. As she put it, "I lacked the necessary social capital and eventually this caused me to drop out of university". This story moved me as it resonated strongly in some way with my own experience of coming from the north to a similar kind of situation at a college of the University of London. I tell them

²⁸ Newman, J & Williams, F. (1994) Diversity and Change in J. Newman, and C. Itzen. (1995) *Gender, Organisation and Change* Routledge pg117.

how when I came south I painfully discovered for the first time that I had a northern accent. I have enough distance now to laugh along with everyone else! I go on to tell them that it also took me a year to be able to use the main library as I lacked the confidence to find out how it really worked, hoping my story will encourage those students who are still cautious of using the library.

Karen then comments how Catharine's story has prompted her to think about tackling sexuality in her organisation as her term project on 'managing change'. This would be totally new territory for her small voluntary sector organisation. The rest of the class are still digesting the fact that they individually will be choosing the theme of their project report on managing change and there is some rising anxiety about this. Karen has only just joined the class but has instantly found a theme. I draw attention to how her transforming idea emerged so quickly and unexpectedly out of our joint conversation.

In a later term, during a break in the three-hour evening session, Gina mentions how she finds the themes that we are addressing keep resonating strongly with her current concerns at work in her new role as a manager. They reflect issues arising for her work in a hostel for the homeless, where she is grappling with researching and writing a narrative about the ethics of a new quality assessment process which will incorporate an emotional assessment of homeless users of the service. She tells me the class has become a place where she could talk about things. She felt calmer and as a result she said, "I can think more clearly". I recognise that she is referring back to comments I had made earlier in the previous term, about how a manager's role was to help the organisation think about itself, about its own processes of development, conflict, survival, task and the difficulties inherent in keeping this meaningful.²⁹

In the same group, Tara has been struggling for several weeks to write an essay about management style that should have presented her with little difficulty. During a mini tutorial it is clear that she is stuck and her thoughts lack any coherence. She goes on to describe how her organisation is in flux. The drug project for which she works is being integrated with the probation service. In her view, the drug project workers, both men and women, are more 'feminised' and they are being overwhelmed by the probation service culture, which is very different. As a result, staff are quietly leaving, particularly those

²⁹. Cooper, A. (2000) 'The state of mind we're in' *Soundings* London.

like her who receive no therapeutic supervision. I can see why she has been drawn to the essay because of the turbulent impact of conflicting management styles that are directly affecting on her. But the orderly lists and diagrams in the management literature systematically analysing organisational management style do not reflect or help her understand the incoherence of her current situation. I suggest that to introduce a reflexive approach would be to face the reality of her own feelings about what is going on. Over the previous two terms, despite asking me to explain further about reflexivity on two occasions, she has shied away from using any kind of reflexive approach and has stayed close to the 'objective' style of writing of her previous degree course.

Several weeks later, she describes her project to the class. She has been able to research her case study, face the unsettling impact it was having on herself. In her completed essay she launches into a narrative which strongly incorporates her own reflexive voice and conveys the powerful emotions of competition and the confusing organisational dynamics which have been let loose. Her case study and her own learning, have it seems become closely connected up.

The paperwork committee

I meet other sessional lecturers for double marking twice a year. Tutors from across the range of subjects in the social studies group second mark a sample of work from courses other than their own. In a break from marking, the programme manager draws us together for a short review of the previous term. It is a rare chance to reflect collectively. We discuss how there is rising pressure as government funding is now tied to student completions for which the evidence is the submission of assignments. Yet some courses, like anthropology, are used by some students to refresh and revitalise themselves and to open themselves up to new ideas or to allow themselves to 'think' outside their work environment. This can mean that they have minimal interest in yet another qualification. A tutor for this programme points out all of this and how this pressure is putting her course at risk along with rising aggravation of having to coax such assignments out of the unwilling. I question the sudden increase in the number and variety of evaluation forms that we now have to administer. The programme manager somewhat defensively replies that we have no choice – the 'Paperwork Committee' now requires it of us. We all burst out laughing on hearing about this Orwellian committee for the first time, whilst

registering its long shadow and significance to the survival of the Faculty, as 2003 draws to a close.

A year later over a Christmas lunch I talk to Nini about the absence of resistance in higher education to the new business model. She quickly corrects me and tells me of her year of opposition but how this gave way to her making the system work lest it all collapse. But she tells me that she now feels “split in two: into the one who thinks politically and the one who now administers the system”. She feels that courses are being gradually turned into commodities rather than what adult education should be about. As she puts it “the accountants are now in the ascendancy”. Nini tells me that despite this she finds her work is very meaningful and she has no desire or expectation to be earning £70K. But she also points out that this was now the norm among her peers who left university with her and were working in the City. They could now afford to live in £300k lofts in their early thirties.

Nini then adds that this year she feels “flat” despite it being the time of year to start thinking about the new programme which usually brings a buzz of excitement with it. She finds the emphasis of the faculty’s new stated objectives on partnership to be a meaningless goal as working with multiple partners has always been seen as good practice. The department is, she feels, increasingly cut off from the political and social influences inspired by Freire’s writings³⁰, which are the lifeblood of a radical continuing education. Educational thought in adult learning, in her view, is visibly becoming subservient to the economic and ever closer to the interests of the Home Office. Vocationalism and foundation degrees are now the new currency. Others join in our conversation and it is pointed out that ironically the changes are all happening under the umbrella of social justice. ‘Adults’ are getting younger with the focus on the economically active 18-30 year olds and even the 14-19 age group is now coming into the picture.

I sense in this conversation how the creativity that I have always associated with the best of adult education, is slipping away. I offer the suggestion that part of the problem is that there is no longer anywhere to ‘think’ at work or in trade unions. This comment is enthusiastically received. People immediately and spontaneously bring up powerful

³⁰ Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Penguin.

images to describe how they feel. For one person it is like being “ asphyxiated”. Another vividly describes being in the staff group as like “ trying to hold up the masthead which has broken away from the institution underneath”.

V

Treasured libraries

From being one of the best services in London in the early 1980s, Haringey Libraries had withered over the following two decades. I had come to barely use my own local library. Despite its attractive, ‘Festival of Britain’ style of design, a dreary shabbiness took over. Grimy windows remained uncleaned from year to year. An outside fountain stood silent. Few new books appeared and the issuing of overdue notices had stopped along with collecting fines. Opening hours had been severely reduced. The library had been regularly threatened with closure and relocation, like most of the borough’s other nine libraries. In anticipation of this, books were cleared from the extensive shelving of the reference library in anticipation of closures and centralisation and it had taken on a forlorn appearance.

For over a decade during the 1990s, local politicians facing the unenviable situation of financial meltdown showed no interest in libraries. Any limited new investment had been channelled into higher profile leisure facilities, which had generated overspends. A non-statutory leisure service like libraries, with no strategic role and therefore no status, was an easy budget to pillage as a source of financial subsidy for its overspending sibling. A move into the Education Service only reinforced its low priority compared to the overwhelming statutory needs to fund struggling frontline schools. Without any public targets to meet and under severe financial cuts libraries were simply ignored. The idea that libraries were part of the welfare state so as to enrich communities and enable a richer social life seemed to have been lost.

In July 2001, this library service was condemned by the Audit Commission and the council established the first UK Public Private Partnership with a private company called Instant Libraries, which then took over management of the borough’s Libraries, Archives and Museums Service. This had followed soon after the privatisation of the management of the Education Service and its transfer to Capita following an earlier critical OFSTED

report triggering government pressure for some form of private management initiative. Did it matter that my own local library service was now being run by the private sector and what would be the consequence?

In 1999, just two years previous to this privatisation, a vocal user group had published '*Looking Forward*' which meticulously detailed the history of the decline of Haringey Libraries from one of the best to having the second most meagre budget and a stock fund expenditure at *half* the London average. This report challenged the then District Auditor's view that all branch libraries be shut on grounds of value for money. The council's own 'Best Value' report had also recommended two similar options: closure of either half or all the branch libraries in order to fund a single new centralised structure. This was vigorously challenged as a case of 'cuts disguised as restructuring'. Aware that in 2000 the Library Association and Local Government Association were due to report on setting standards for local libraries which would then be the subject of a government audit, the user group warned with considerable prescience, that 'we may well find a library equivalent of OFSTED producing an equally damning report on Haringey's library service if they are not improved in the near future'³¹. In February 2001, an Audit Commission inspection did indeed condemn the Library Service. Within five months the council had appointed Instant Libraries.

I began to notice small changes following the switch to the new partnership. An underused wing of my local library was reallocated to Connexions; a desolate inner courtyard was cleaned up and replanted; windows were cleaned and replaced; scaffolding up for three years was removed as unfinished maintenance work was completed; computers at last appeared in a space prepared for them several years previously; and most important of all new books and DVDs were on display and opening hours extended once more. The security porter was replaced by CCTV and the rubbish regularly accumulating around the entrance that he had always studiously ignored also disappeared. The airy upstairs reference library began to recover and books reappeared from storage to grace its shelves once more, along with smart, comfortable new seating close to the periodicals. An ad hoc café was launched.

³¹ FORE! (1999) *Looking Forward* pg 27.

When I inquired about what had happened to bring these changes about, a senior council officer told me that in the external audit of the Library Services by the Audit Commission, the service had performed so badly that it was rated “off the scale”. The audit report records the council as providing ‘a no star service *that will not improve*’. This damning verdict was of a service spiralling into a terminal decline. Yet another senior manager commented caustically that “they had unopened boxes of new books which they used as door stoppers”! And that resources allocated to them to purchase computers had never been spent. The implication was of thoroughgoing management incompetence, a service incapable of helping itself and riddled with a small mindedness peculiar to libraries.

But the derision in her voice also alerted me to an angry defensiveness if not lurking guilt. Clearly there had been a complete management failure but where, I wondered, was the collective responsibility for this neglect? Where was the analysis of the financial asset stripping which underlay such a pattern and why had it become so entrenched? It was too easy to now just ‘blame the victim’. I could all too easily imagine how a fear of spending the budget by the library management could have become entrenched when constantly bullied to generate an under spend to subsidise its sibling leisure service. I had sat on two directorate management teams alongside the head of service responsible for libraries. His focus was entirely on safeguarding the financial needs of the newly launched and politically prioritised Leisure Centre. Now the sting of strong public condemnation had prompted vigorous action.

I wanted to find out more about what had precipitated the neglect and why the library staff had become so negative, disempowered and demoralised. When I casually asked a member of staff in the early months what she thought of the new management she muttered, “we could have done this if we had been given the right support”. I went to see the new management in the summer of 2003. They had a dramatic story of success to tell me. With an additional £200,000 a year, an extra £100,000 capital for building work, plus, most importantly, the ability to fully spend its own budget on the libraries alone, the service was being transformed, buildings maintained, windows cleaned, cafes opened and hours extended. Visits had increased by 93 per cent and issues by 43 per cent. The service was also now understood as a significant part of a social regeneration strategy. All local libraries were visibly alive with inclusive new initiatives from reading groups.

storytelling, and outreach work to the many different language groups. The service had also been highly commended nationally winning a local government award for most service improvement – all within two years.³²

The Managing Director told me that Instant Libraries had been set up by librarians undertaking predominately commercial work. It now employed over 250 staff but still had a small company ethos although it had become a PLC and was accountable to shareholders and by implication also vulnerable in the longer term to takeover by the predatory corporate sector. I asked them whether it was possible to operate a public service ethos as a private company. She calmly rebutted the implication that there was any difference to a public service ethos in what they did. She went on to say very clearly that “I don’t think that people working for public libraries or local authorities in general have an inbuilt public service ethos” and continued that while some staff had clear ethical aspirations most staff were more motivated by clear aims and pay as by thinking “we have to do this for the public”.

She herself was passionate about the service and fighting for its rightful place. But she told me she had felt the same about other industries that she had worked in as well so it was not to do with books per se. It was about really making things work. She was quite comfortable with making a profit and indeed would feel uncomfortable about not making a profit, as “a private sector organisation can’t exist without profits, we can’t develop without profit”. Shareholder pressure now existed but if you do a good job you get more business. She saw an Instant Library person likewise as completely flexible and good at what he or she does. She brought an entrepreneurial instinct and strong customer focus that was sensitive to diversity issues and developing the role of libraries for minority group users. She was animated with a *desire* to combine what was best about a university library with the ethos of the shop/café in the museum and supporting any initiative that tempted people through the door. I could identify with her passion, recognising in it something of my own experience of bringing an energetic and semi-entrepreneurial voluntary sector way of doing things into the public sector.

The scaffolding, which had stood outside my local library for four years, has been removed but the battered façade of the Central Library has defeated her. Faced with

³² *MJ* Local Government Service Improvement Award 2004.

these ‘major works’ she settled for rendering and painting the ground floor external walls alone. A year after our conversation, I wanted to see whether she had managed to replace the tiling but its scarred façade remained intact. But to my surprise I found the library open and buzzing with activity on a Sunday morning, and exactly in tune with local needs. I too have returned to using my local library’s reference room, which bathed in sunlight from its clerestory windows, is a pleasant place to work. One day, I recognize a street sweeper reading a paper during his lunch break and a young Iraqi man who lives in a nearby hostel and is studying on his day off work. The library at this moment, expresses for me something very fundamental about a public space: that we can all access it as equals.

I feel full of admiration for what Instant Libraries had achieved; their clear-sighted energy and focused attention had returned pride once again to the staff and service. Following its critical audit, the library service was brought under the authority of the Chief Executive to whom Instant Libraries was directly accountable in the first phase, allowing it a prolonged honeymoon from the rigours of inter-directorate competition. But with close attention of the Chief Executive, a small but significant level of additional resources, together with their clear-sighted energy, the question formed in my mind as to whether this was such a fundamentally surprising outcome. Was there some ingredient that a *private* company alone had brought to its transformation? Sitting listening, I felt a certain envy at the opportunity to take up the challenge under such conditions. In essence it was not then such an intrinsically surprising outcome.

When I talked to the director of Instant Libraries, I was very aware of her day-to-day frustration with the way bureaucracy fails, but this also triggered a certain cautious, and defensive response on my part. Alongside a story of ‘look how it now works’, I was aware that there was another story. The complicated politics from which Instant libraries had been ‘split off’ could not just be swept aside. For two decades Haringey Libraries had been viewed by politicians in the poorer east of the borough as an expendable luxury. It was labelled as an under-utilised service and one for people who had had a good education in the west of the borough who could afford to go to bookshops. The composition and methods of the campaign group reinforced this perception. In short, libraries had been viewed as peripheral to the needs of an impoverished, multi-racial borough. Instead they became perceived more as assets in terms of their land value and

potential for development, which could then sustain other more necessary services. Thus a wider and more complicated ideological and cultural conflict was being worked out in this small microcosm. After nearly a decade, the continuing tileless façade of the Central Library points rather to a still live plan for its demolition, relocation and centralisation rather than rehabilitation and enhancement on its present accessible prime High Street site.

I talked to campaigners against library closures about how they had understood the conflict. They emphasised the inclusive nature of learning that cuts across class and racial divides in comparison to what they had seen as fundamentally defeatist thinking by decision-makers and politicians. They remind me libraries are being closed in neighbouring Tower Hamlets and being replaced by 'Ideas Stores' where "dusty books" are marginalised. They are, I was told, "flashy new community centres full of internet terminals", aimed at attracting the young. While this is an important and worthwhile aim, it is at the cost of an enduring love for local libraries and the sensuous, imaginative role that books provide in our culture.

This underlying contempt for libraries is a reminder of how the New British Library was mercilessly derided during the long years of its construction, delays and cuts. Yet when it opened in 1998, the longstanding critics were instantly silenced and beguiled by its beautiful interior and the new ease of use. This labour of love for architecture and books seemed then like an epiphany in public awareness about libraries, helping to prompt the setting of the new standards and a growing recognition of the widespread neglect of our library heritage. But as I sit writing this story about libraries, I receive an unexpected and synchronous email from a colleague who lives in a neighbouring borough. She has attached a photograph of her local library. It is of a graffiti-style poster, which she has helped to paste up on its wall. It states: 'Our *Treasured* Library – 1 Year On. Closed by the Lib Dem Council in the Name of Progress'.

In 2005, there is growing pressure and proposals to make savings and increase efficiency by closing libraries and for procuring books nationally and not locally. While there is clearly legitimate potential in some areas for centralised book buying to minimise the costs of administration, the quirky legacies of radical book buying which are to be found in particular localities could all too easily be homogenised away. A study in 2005,

commissioned by the government, proposes stripping libraries of their 144-year-old right to choose books under plans to reorganise the public library service. Acknowledging a cost to local democracy, a national agency would be set up to run libraries, which would largely replace current control by a patchwork of 149 larger local authorities responsible for library services. Staff would be redeployed from back offices to deal with the public. Not surprisingly, such proposals for the privatisation of library purchasing have been advocated by the former chief executive of Waterstones, one of the UK's major booksellers.

V1

Public spaces

As I drive across the borough, I am aware of just how much the council is deeply associated with a specific territory in my own mind. Everything I pass tells a story: the trees, parks, lampposts, nurseries, schools, libraries, leisure centres, housing estates, the recycling and waste management facilities, street and environmental improvements, town halls and civic centre, and the many invisible health, welfare, planning and enforcing services taking place within them. Together they support the 'social reproduction' of the many communities that make up the borough of Haringey.

It is mid 2003, and there is a buzz of new building work. I pass a school being transformed from decades of under funding by the impact of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and cranes hang above the half- built and long awaited extensions to the old workhouse buildings of my local hospital in a nearby borough. I talk to people in local government and find just how much the mood has shifted in the five years since I left local government. The financial turbulence of the nineties has stabilised, at least for a while and the huge inflow of current public investment has given rise to a mood of optimism. In exchange for capital funds and under duress from Whitehall, they have embraced the menu on offer of private partnerships, PFI, and outsourcing. It is as they repeatedly tell me "the only show in town".

A senior manager speaks to me enthusiastically about using LIFT³³ and a director brushes aside my concerns about PFI, seeing it merely as “an expensive way of raising money”. The practical opportunity to rebuild and rehabilitate after two decades of managing decline has sidelined their reservations and concerns. I talk to senior staff in different parts of government and in several different cities and find them in the same purposeful, confident mood. I am struck by the commitment that I encounter. Having survived the 18 years under the Conservatives, they seem inured to the present government’s rhetoric of shame and blame. There is quiet rather humbling resilience about this. But at the same time I remain concerned that their incremental compliance will come with a long-term cost of the fundamental erosion of local government.

I talk to Anna, a local council tenant, about whether she will vote for the proposed arms length organisation or ALMO,³⁴ which is now the only way the council can secure the government funds needed to rehabilitate the housing stock. A ‘vote’ for it will deny her the option to remain under council control. She is undecided but thinks the need for funding is now so acute it will override her concern to retain her democratic rights as a council tenant.³⁵ In a neighbouring authority, tenants have voted against it. They fear the new forms of ownership will eventually mutate into a full privatisation. They are very aware that their homes stand on a finite asset – that of land. A redevelopment scheme for a south London estate in 2004 proposed the sale of the high-value land with a frontage onto the Thames riverside for the construction of private houses, in order to part-fund the redevelopment. Tenants were to be rehoused in new high-rise blocks. Not unsurprisingly, the scheme was rejected as “stupid”. But in the absence of funds to renovate it, a year later a decision has now been made to tear the estate down.

Procuring public design

As a society we now want improved public services alongside low taxes and neither the politicians nor the public want to talk about this contradiction. In the run-up to the 2005 election, both main political parties focused on savings to be achieved by central and local government. These savings point to a future intensely driven by procurement, locking councils further into PFI and partnerships with a relatively small number of

³³ PFI for health services.

³⁴ Arms Length Housing Association.

³⁵ The vote goes in favour of the ALMO.

private companies. Procurement has emerged as an increasingly powerful cause and effect in the marketisation of local government and the NHS as the purchasing of goods and services becomes central to identifying much of these savings.

My separate conversations with Mark and Duncan reflect very conflicting viewpoints as to how procurement should develop. As commissioning agents they are the crucial interface between the public sector and private sector contractors and also new providers of public services through social enterprises and the community sector. But there is an organisational power struggle between the growth of centralised procurement structures and arguments for embedding procurement in service structures that remain closely connected to users. This split is also reflected in the green arguments for more local sourcing by suppliers versus the supposed efficiencies of large-scale suppliers.

Mark, a civil servant, was closely involved in central government's support systems for promoting and implementing PFI within local government. He is vehemently adamant that only the take-up of PFI and use of the corporate sector to both design and build could achieve the required physical transformation of the public infrastructure. He quotes comparative public/private performance completion statistics to counter my criticisms of the low quality of design of a significant proportion of the new school and hospital buildings now emerging. But our conversation ultimately alerts me to another unspoken and more powerful underlying message. I sense how the strategy being pursued is primarily seen as a race against time, in which the public sector was not to be trusted to deliver. The (then) perceived threat of losing the 2005 election and any reversal of the current huge growth in public spending was more important than any concerns about the eventual quality of the resulting built environment, the marketised social structures around it or potential for local taxes rising as a consequence. In this scenario it is facts on the ground which are perceived as transforming the political landscape and embedding a public expectation of improved facilities and standards so as to block a return by any Conservative government to the 'private affluence and public squalor' (Galbraith, 2004) of the 1990s.

But Duncan offers me a very different viewpoint, highlighting for me the price being paid by this strategy. He is setting up an approved list of design consultants for a local authority in the north of England. He tells me that some of the architectural practices that are applying to go on this list are "very, very good", and the eventual approved list will

give his local authority access to the very best architects and design consultants when the in-house service cannot undertake work. Many practices that are applying to go on the list, he says, convey a passionate commitment to the quality of what they do.

But in contrast to these small firms, he finds those from the corporate sector are almost uniformly pushy and rude and adds caustically: “They send us files you can’t lift, but are not capable of addressing the specific questions we have put to them.” In his view, the marketing people are too involved and he adds that overall they operate at a much lower level of understanding about what quality really means to suit his purposes. Yet to his dismay these now large multi-disciplinary firms can now quote a track record of contracts secured with local authorities. Such authorities, having sold off their own in-house technical services, turn to such companies to sublet work to them. He speculates that the reason why this is happening is that it is just more convenient for their small number of procurement staff doing the work. Also, people with financial skills, like accountants and surveyors, dominate in these roles. The conclusion he has drawn from careful scrutiny of such companies is that many councils now receive “a very poor quality of service” from the term-contracts they have negotiated with these growing companies. Our conversation is pervaded with his frustration at witnessing how the legacy of many in-house council architectural and design services has almost totally vanished within a decade. Other professional and political voices that should have spoken up to protect them have been silent, leaving them exposed and isolated.

Duncan’s role is to establish criteria for an approved list, which will allow the authority to select private architects on the basis of quality not just cost. This requires a capacity to interpret and define what quality means in an aesthetic and social sense and yet be robust enough to withstand legal challenge by companies that are rejected. Aiming to do this makes life much more complicated but is, he tells me, vitally necessary as the alternative to turning to such corporate companies. He also considers that the procurement of this kind of quality design cannot flourish away from a close relationship with an ongoing “intelligent client”. He strongly believes that procurement needs to be embedded in some kind of ongoing in-house design service. His own operates as an agent service in an interdependent relationship with the budget holders, such as housing or education services, and through them with the multiple and sometimes conflicting interests of user groups.

But the extension of the internal market in the public sector is tearing these delicate interdependent relationships apart. The service now stands at risk of being privatised in the same way as most other technical services sooner or later. He believes that, ironically, they are likely to be sold off to one of the companies he has rejected as inadequate for placing on his the approved list. There are competing agendas in play: old departmental rivalries, the pressures to cut costs, the seduction and simplicities of the pervasive market ethos; a philistine ignorance of the arts and aesthetics, and ignorance of the complexities of contract management in design and construction. The directorate would directly benefit from their multi-million pound sell-off. Without a clearer insight and renewed trust in what public architectural services do, he believes there is little hope that they will survive. This means a central procurement service will take over.

If the service does not survive what could be lost, in Duncan's view, is the essence of what the best public design service should offer. In struggling to translate what such 'good public design' means, he argues that the in-house service holds the accumulated collective memory of local aesthetic and technical needs, and the impact of complex legislation and power struggles by communities shaping the allocation of resources in relation to building and development. In his estimation the design service is a multi-disciplinary professional guardian of the community's "intellectual capital" in relation to the built environment. He considers a stand-alone centralised procurement structure will have only a passing knowledge or interest in any of these issues. Cut off from day-to-day debate and conversation, he argues, they become prey to the pressures of the budget alone, and the inevitable rigidities such systems bring into being. But, I suggest, would not putting a couple of architects with enough autonomy into such a structure overcome the problem? He agrees that it would help but adds that it is only in a functioning department that the "relevant questions" continue to arise and "if you are not working in this way on a day-to-day basis you inevitably simply become cut off" is his conclusion.

Establishing an approved list, which ensures a concern for beauty as well as cost, will, he hopes, in some way hold the line, even if the architectural service itself does not survive. But launching a campaign to revalue public architecture is what he would like to do. I remind him how school meals suddenly became an unforeseen political issue in early 2005, not just because a celebrity figure addressed it with insight and imagination, but

because it tapped into a latent public anger about the fallen standards in a ‘Cinderella’ service, largely invisible, traditionally derided, but important to women in many different ways. It has taken 20 years for the dangers inherent in how school meals have been procured to come home to roost. I recount to him how society endorsed a view that a cost-driven, cheap food, user choice service would satisfy social needs. Now this social need has bitten back with a vengeance. PFI and procurement structures are similarly cut off from in-depth and ongoing professional and service related conversation. They will, I suggest, be the midwives to future ‘turkey twizzlers’. Duncan agrees and argues that the idea of public design services needs to be rediscovered and the selling off of existing services by local authorities to low quality contractors needs to be understood as a form of “public asset stripping”.

A year later we meet again and he enthuses about how his department and the now agreed new approved list of small suppliers of specialist firms are now engaged in a mutually energising series of conversations. From this, a creative, participative, dynamic has flowed prompting ways to develop new work around sustainability. The risk and effort has been worthwhile, demonstrating a sense of political imagination.

V11

Splitting childcare

In 2004, local government was given responsibility for a ‘New’ Sure Start programme providing integrated children’s education and health provision for all. This decision gave rise to much debate, reflecting fears that once transferred to local government this now well-funded offspring of the Treasury would lose both resources and its innovative edge. Was it possible for local authorities to continue the style of local management pioneered by the original Sure Start projects? One evening, waiting for a meeting to start, I was introduced to Karina, the overall co-ordinator of several Sure Start programmes and she readily agreed that I could come and visit the project to continue our conversation.

I discovered that all her staff were employed either by the health service or the local council, in this case mainly by the latter. But they were independently accountable to a Local Partnership Board. User groups in the project that I visited also had a small share

of the budget under their direct control. Although there is great emphasis on meeting targets, she went on to outline how the project was visibly engaged in a complex weave of activity. It aimed to create much wider and immeasurable communal benefits in an area of high immigration and change. The care of young children was clearly seen as a focal point around which personal and inter-communal relationships could be strengthened. She described how one volunteer trainee was pioneering work as a 'doula', a traditional role within the Somali community. The doula's role was to support new mothers who had given birth, but particularly picking up the needs of women suffering from post-natal depression.

The project had the financial resources to back up this kind of innovative parent-generated initiative. The potentially contentious overlaps with health visitors illustrated how projects like Sure Start require an emotionally intelligent management style in order to work across the complex range of organisational and skill boundaries encountered in childcare. Listening to the range of projects underway, I commented on just how an early 1980s 'democratisation' and community development and thinking appeared to have quietly resurfaced in Sure Start.³⁶ It seemed that autonomy and a generous funding level has allowed considerable scope for innovation alongside meeting the inevitable multiple monitoring targets. Karina agreed with my observations. She also thought that it was quite possible for this innovative approach to be mainstreamed into the future local authority-run programme. Her response inspired a sense of hopefulness in me that the rekindling of the creative impetus around childcare could be generalised.

But later that week Yvonne, a social worker with the same council, tempered my optimism. She pointed out that under the new changes, Sure Start will come under the overall umbrella of a newly appointed Director for Children, who is charged with the policy of integration set in motion by the Lamming Inquiry. She pointed out that Sure Start responded well to the ideas of the 50 per cent of mothers who had the time to become involved, but it was important to not forget the other half. She was reminding me that its performance was not immune to challenge and warning me that if Sure Start does not secure the generous financial resources it currently enjoys, its creativity and capacity to respond with ease to new ideas would be undermined. Crucially she also pointed out how it only has a peripheral role in child protection. Under the new

³⁶ Lamming, H. (2003) *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry*. London HMSO.

restructuring, it might be drawn closer to pre-child protection duties. If this happened she said, it would become harder to retain the present trust and easy confidence of parents. Yvonne's cautionary note had highlighted for me how Sure Start's success was deeply entangled with its being kept away from the 'impossible task' of child protection. This was currently split off and allocated to social services.

I then went to visit a local authority nursery to gauge how the 'new' Sure Start ethos might translate and whether its user accountability structures could survive integration into a new council-run service. Laura manages a local authority nursery in inner London. She recalled to me the upsurge of interest in local management committees in the mid-1980s and how she had put forward her own request to set up a management committee with real teeth and the ability to hire and fire staff. It had been turned down. In turn, she had refused to set up "something just for appearances sake". So the period of experimentation in social services had been short-lived compared to other council services.³⁷ She thought that in schools it had become entwined with the wider agenda of Local Management of Schools (LMS) and a nascent privatisation. This had reshaped school governors' roles and, she noted enviously, this had secured the heads of primary schools much more autonomy than she had ever had. Social services, she thought, had become drawn in the opposite direction by the growing and contentious needs of child protection and the Children Act, as society responded to abuse scandals and, in parallel with this, social workers themselves came to function as scapegoats for society.

While energy and optimism had been immediately transparent to me in the Sure Start project with its long leash of accountability and generous flow of resources, the world of social services seemed very different and constrained. My overriding sense was of intense top-down pressures and a pervasive anxiety. Laura described in detail the use of 'name and shame' in the group of managers meetings she had to attend monthly. She felt the central interest lay in the statistical returns each month and saw herself as at the end of a feeding chain, which began in the Department of Health. The anxiety surrounding these figures was very high. It meant that on a monthly basis, she said, you would be either publicly berated or, as the measure of your success if your figures were high enough, be handed a box of sweets. She found this practice simply demeaning and a form of bullying. She felt bullying was now deeply entrenched in the service and she

³⁷ See examples in Appendix 1.

had personally witnessed it from the very top down through service managers and to people in her position. As a manager, she suggested, you were pushed into becoming a bully and this applied just as much to women as to men. If you were unable to produce the right percentages for the monthly performance management meeting and the monitoring of targets, you would, she thought, eventually be driven out, regardless of your capacities as a good social worker.

Laura captured for me the contrast between the destructiveness of much of what senior management was concerned with and a continued sense of creativity involved in looking after young children. Her face lit up as she told me how much she still loved the *work* and how she felt supported by her strong staff group and involved parents. Of the hierarchy above her she said with frustration, “They do not know and aren’t interested in what we actually do”. She said that she came away from meetings, which she was required to attend, “feeling so angry”. As a result she now effectively worked with no formal support or supervision, actively choosing to avoid contact with the structures, which should, in theory, be helping her to reflect, process her feelings, and be aware of best practice. Even positive attempts to support staff using outside consultants, were, in her view, simply undermined by this underlying destructive and controlling culture.

I was left with a strong sense of how the computer-driven model of improvement, called the ‘Integrated Children’s System’, was now increasingly dominating the management of the nursery. Ticking its boxes on time was what now seemed really valued. From where Laura stood all that now mattered to the senior managers was whether “the figures looked good and their backs covered”. When I asked her what happens to her own professional judgement, she told me that her capacity that it was becoming increasingly difficult to analyse what all the monitoring data meant and this was even more difficult for students who now came in with different skills and expectations. Her own training had included psychodynamic awareness of child development and she said regretfully that this was no longer valued. She pointed out that a child at risk would once have been seen daily in her nursery. Now the system called for them to be monitored once every six weeks: but ‘ticking the box’ did not necessarily mean the child received the attention it really needed. It was, she felt open to merely the appearance of care.

The twice-yearly staff away day was as an important place for Laura and her staff to collectively reflect and evaluate their experience of the nursery. But this year even the agenda for this was being pre-set “from above”. I was left with the sense of a management that was suspicious and paranoid rather than necessarily vigilant and cautious. Its actions were driving concern for the emotional relationship involved in childcare to the margins of its role. The senior management had become disinterested in the “work itself” and the quality of emotional contact and intimacy no longer figured highly. Laura had concluded that all of this must emanate ultimately from, as she saw it, “the needs of an autocratic government” which was bouncing down the system.

Integrating Sure Start might well be the basis for a reorientation, reducing this beleaguered sense of isolation. Some other local authorities less affected by the risk culture have worked away consistently to innovate and take forward the demands of childcare campaigns. The creation of new Children’s Trusts and the investment that accompanies this represents the opportunity of a generation. It has also introduced a new cadre of officers to take forward its implementation and children’s services have suddenly become a career opportunity instead of a backwater. But Andrea, a long time co-ordinator of innovative childcare services through these lean years of funding, to my surprise shares how disheartened she feels. She had just successfully progressed a longstanding initiative but had now found herself admonished by the new management that had taken over. She had been told that “it was not yet in the *Plan*”. Her sense of purpose and inspiration were as a consequence now draining away, at the very moment when 25 years of resilient campaigning for childcare was about to secure recognition. Her sense of meaning and creativity were being drawn away from her.

VI11

Public infrastructure

As I enter the waiting room of the Accident & Emergency department of my local hospital, a former Victorian workhouse, I realise it has had a makeover since I was last here five years ago in 1999. The person on reception asks my name and postcode and my details flash up on a thin, black computer screen. I am suitably impressed with this latest IT. It is only 9 am on a Saturday morning and the place is quiet with less than a dozen

people waiting. Together we represent the colourful diversity of living in a London borough.

With nothing to do I find myself observing each person as they were doubtless observing myself – a middle-aged white woman. There is a young white mother near me with a feverish little boy in her arms; beyond her an elegantly dressed woman of south Asian appearance, then a young white man in a stained tracksuit and a tall, dignified west African man with an injured foot, accompanied by a woman wearing a vibrant orange veil. To my right there is a man in a wheelchair. Are we all as curious, I wonder, slotting and labelling each other by gender, race, ethnicity, disability and class as we wait to be called, or is this my own interest in a growing mutation of ‘Englishness’ and the increasing difference between London and ‘England’? I move on to the surroundings and note the new seating and how it has been carefully laid out in semicircles mirroring the colourful swirls of the shiny floor with its warm yellows and reds. The grim, serried ranks of seats of my previous visit are now clearly a thing of the past. I feel a sense of being cared for by virtue of the surroundings that are sunny and uplifting. Everywhere sparkles. I just wonder how this squares with the hospital’s one-star rating.

After a wait of 15 minutes, I am seen by the triage nurse. From his accent I decide he is Turkish Cypriot. He sits at a desk facing a computer then turns to speak to me in a pleasant way as he takes my details. He does not wear a uniform and later I remember the only people in uniform I see are the two African cleaners who meticulously dust and clean the floor and clean the toilet whose door opens directly onto the waiting area. I note this with relief, as I am feeling a little nauseous.

I wonder how many others failed to get themselves into a GP appointment the day before and with no emergency surgery on Saturdays now come to the hospital. I sit for an hour waiting to be called through the double doors to be treated. During this time two people are sick in the disabled toilets. Neither closes the door. We are all within earshot of the retching and watch how the cleaner then brings them a paper bowl to keep beside them. Behind me the young man talks to himself in a stream of incoherent, excitable comment. I next see him being escorted by a doctor back through the double doors to the clinic. Soon, two policemen rush into the waiting room searching for someone and I realise it is the young man that they seeking. Later I see them speaking to him nearer the entrance but eventually they leave without him. A woman then falls to the floor as she is called

by the triage nurse. She is urged to rise to her feet by herself and then make her way to a bed behind the triage nurses. By now I am wondering will I collect a label 'not ill enough' in an evolving hierarchy of illness that is coming to replace my earlier pigeonholing?

After an hour I hear my name called from the double doors by a doctor. He is a young Asian doctor in his mid-thirties and ushers me into a cubicle. I notice beneath the used paper towelling on the side of the leather bed an area the size of a dinner plate, which has been worn away, revealing the hollowed out space where the inner stuffing should be. It is held together only by sticky masking tape. He catches my eye and apologises as he clears the paper towel away, replaces it and then invites me to step up to sit on this patched area. "You obviously need more money," I say, as I hoist myself over the patchwork of sticky tape. "And it matters how we vote at the next election", he murmurs in reply. I am surprised and smile at his directness. After this exchange he introduces himself and examines my 'infected insect bites', which he diagnoses as shingles. He then goes out to get a second opinion. A tall young black doctor with glasses puts his head round the curtain into the cubicle and nods confirmation of the diagnosis approvingly. Sorting out my fantasies of mosquito bites, cat fleas and ant bites from what is now an advanced viral infection has given them a little moment of cheerful job satisfaction. After making out the prescription and carefully taking me through it, he says goodbye and directs me to the pharmacy on the basement floor below. I find my way to the pharmacy down a stationary escalator wondering if this is to save money or perhaps it is broken?

In the pharmacy a young white woman answers my bell ring, smiles and takes my details and then tells me I will have to wait for about ten minutes. I find a seat in the two rows of facing chairs in this small, gloomy corridor space. I notice instantly how all the chairs are threadbare and that the material hangs from their arms exposing their frame beneath. Many seats are badly stained and I avoid one in particular. I wonder whether they have all been trashed, but conclude that they are all so similarly run down they bear witness to the still deep-seated material poverty of parts of the NHS, belying the front of house improvements. As I sit there my overriding sense is that this is an insult to society - this shabby environment in which I have to sit and in which the pharmacy staff have to work and ask people to wait. The customer care designed waiting room above seems to have

given way to a third world scene of dilapidation. How can this be I thought angrily in one of the richest cities in the fourth largest economy in the world?

As I wait, I compare it to my visit to the Treasury on Whitehall to meet a civil servant. I had marvelled at the beautifully rehabilitated building with its five-star reception and café and also compared it to my own previously elegant but deeply shabby Victorian town hall in north London. The pharmacist then asks to speak to me, and once again I am struck by how exceptionally pleasant the staff have all been to me. I am conscious of a thoroughness, consideration and a generosity of spirit, that are all at odds with the dilapidation around me. I feel moved and impressed by their capacity to work in this place and to ignore their material surroundings. It is, I conclude, a three-star experience in this one-star hospital. But I feel upset for them that they have to bear this label. I realise too that they will of necessity largely ignore it as they hold this crumbling infrastructure together. It is just how it is.³⁸

As I wait on my stained, threadbare chair, nurses in their blue tops and trousers come and go to another pharmacy window just in front of me. Two African nurses express pleasure at meeting each other. Their arms twine around each other as they stand in front of me and then holding hands for a moment they chat animatedly together as they wait. I remember Denise telling me how she hated being in hospital and the thing that made it bearable was how an African auxiliary nurse would gently squeeze her toes each time she passes as a reminder not to lie in bed with her ankles crossed.

1X

Emotional labour

Towards the end of a discussion with trade union interests about tendering for a care home contract, I tentatively suggest it is important to build a stronger emphasis on the emotional capacities of staff into managing a care home. I follow this up with a comment that emotional well-being, unlike social justice, has always had a tenuous place in the welfare state. There is an awkward silence and I feel somewhat embarrassed when no one responds. I had crossed some sort of a line. But travelling home on the train I also think that this was a significant moment. I had spoken for the first time about the emotional

³⁸ Finally being renovated in late 2005.

basis of public service, something still surprisingly difficult to articulate in political and trade union circles. Yet emotional labour needs to be thought about and fought for in the same way as one would bargain over the value of mental and manual labour. But to do this means we have to be able to think about how emotions are experienced and understood in relation to the complexity of public service roles.

The care of strangers

Donal tells me about the time when a woman came into his environmental community centre in west London and slipped past reception. The woman was drunk and demanding “giz us a job”. He talked with her about volunteering and eventually she left. Later someone comes to tell him there is a woman in the park, lying half naked by the sundial. His choice is to call the police or to go and talk to her. He tells me how Annette, a young administrator, steps forward and offers to talk to her. She finds out that woman has just lost her children into care. She returns leaving the woman fully dressed, albeit not for long. Donal reflects on the duty of care to strangers who are drunk and effectively waste their time. An environmental centre is not a hospital or social services: it is not part of their job description to ‘care’, but they do. We ponder about what in Annette’s background enabled her to step forward and respond with kindness and empathy. I also point out that he has told me before how each new generation of local kids trash their facilities, until with time and painstaking effort he and his colleagues draw them into the work of the centre so that their destructive energies are calmed. He could call the police, but deliberately chooses not to do this, because the vandalism would put their parents in council tenancies at risk of eviction. He tells me, children who have vandalised the project will return next day “expecting to be received with open arms” and they are welcomed back.

The absence of care

Martha has combined a role as her sister’s carer, with being a lunchtime supervisor and playground worker in a primary school in south London. She is also someone who has played an active role in many different creative community campaigns. I like the way she can immediately connect up small local events with a wider incisive political understanding. One day I meet her outside a library. She is a different person, struggling to hold herself together. I hold her hand as her voice starts to rise loudly and she is shouting. I’m aware of the curious gaze of those passing by as we stand together and I

listen to her story. It is both moving and confusing, with its complicated interwoven strands of being let down by community care and her new fear of also losing her council home. She is incandescent about the local council and heaps failure at its door. As we part, she shouts defiantly in an echo of the recent events of ‘September 11th’, “I can be a terrorist too”.

She has been pushed beyond to the limits of her endurance by the complex interplay of a failing community care system; by becoming lost in the labyrinthine benefits system which is punitive and threatening; and most recently by her well-founded suspicion that her council home, which has needed expensive structural renovation for some years, is being covertly targeted to be sold off. Its sale would generate a much needed £1/2 million income for her cash-strapped council as well as avoiding these now enormously expensive structural repairs. Completely vulnerable and seemingly powerless, she fights for her rights tenaciously: writing, copying, filing, and ringing up. She tells me “I rang up to speak to Mr Coates and I don’t know who the officer was because he’s not there at the moment – but I just briefly explained – you know about the severe disrepair here, but I said, also I said I’m in disrepair too. Oh you must be exaggerating, he said. So I said, no actually I’m not”.

It is a long and complex story of repeated misunderstandings and a continuous absence of empathy by housing and social services staff to comprehend the situation. She rages against the “treachery and betrayal” which she has experienced in how care in the community simply failed her as the carer of a family member with a severe mental illness. This has been compounded by the subsequent threat to her very home. A degree of emotional insight on the part of those dealing with her case would have cut through the manifest injustices piling up one on top of another. I know how an under-resourced service dealing with too many demands and deprived of adequate resources can easily become hardened and unfeeling, and treat people as if they were just so much ‘collateral damage’. I listen to Martha’s story many times over the year, sitting amidst the growing structural disintegration of her home, which has now been propped up by scaffolding for several years. This is itself a disturbing invitation to burglars.

I too had grown up in a similarly dilapidated house, been engulfed by crises and had a brother who had failed to receive appropriate care. So Martha’s situation resonated strongly for me. It was an alarming situation and I had no solutions to offer. I could only

listen intently to her impossibly complicated and harrowing situation. But as she talked I would find myself becoming strangely calm. This calmness was unfamiliar, a new and learnt capacity and a direct consequence of my own experience of therapy. I was able to just be with her, allowing her talk in a way that enabled her to hold things together. We talked politics and she drew a certain kind of strength and calmness from seeing the parallels between her own plight and the more global theft taking place in parallel at that same moment in Iraq which we discussed. I found these perceptions of how related processes are somehow at work were full of insight.

A year later, with the help of legal aid and against all the odds, Martha tenaciously takes her case to the Ombudsman and they find in her favour. The council is held to account, recompense eventually agreed and the structural rebuilding of her home finally scheduled. She builds up a relationship with Mr Aziz, the council's building surveyor, who relates to her with consideration and kindness. But when building work begins and she has to move out it triggers renewed anxiety. Harassment by the benefit system, which is slow to keep up, also means she receives threatening letters which plunges her back into acute fearfulness. But very slowly over many months as her house is reconstructed, a degree of trust is rebuilt and her health starts to improve. Eventually she returns to her now beautifully renovated house. But the legacy still remains: psychologically she still feels that her "home" has been stolen from her.

Over these two years, Martha would paradoxically sometimes voice a vigorous ongoing belief in the collectivity of public services in a way that was still full of passionate idealism. It was in her terms a "diamond". Her sense of rights and entitlements in relation to the council remained undimmed. Their "failure and deceit" in relation to this, explained the emotional intensity of her sense of betrayal. But in setting wrongs to right, the council exemplified a due process of care to a weak and vulnerable citizen and a reassertion of a benign 'kindness' in the relationship of Mr Aziz, the council's building surveyor. This was an important step in rebuilding some mutual respect.

Both Donal and Martha's stories reflect the complexity of the emotional life, which underpins the often conflictual interactions between users and workers in all kinds of public services. By the end of the year I would add my own story of the care system to theirs, as my mother slipped into advanced Alzheimer's disease. My sister and I were

anxious and bewildered. The process of settling my mother into a residential home had been like starting school; only our roles had been confusingly reversed. One evening the senior nurse calmly explained to us that none of us know how we will be if our brain begins to disintegrate. The loss of independence was also extremely painful for my mother. But eventually she tells my daughter proudly “this is where I live” as she briefly recovers and connects to a particular member of the staff, to other residents and to her room. But as the disease progresses she becomes intensely fearful and alarmed by any noise and movement. Some staff find it difficult to move beyond a defensive cheerfulness, but others demonstrate an intuitive capacity to relate in a very authentic way. They calm her fears and transform the anxiety momentarily with gentleness, humour and kindness. Mortality and human frailty, terror and suffering seem to be everywhere during these months. I feel challenged and ill prepared for this commonplace experience of living and dying about which we cannot speak.

This reality of aging and the inevitability of dependency sit uneasily within our new social expectations of self-sufficiency and ever improving images of retirement. I am also upset that the mainly women staff I meet are called upon to work in such an emotionally demanding way for £12,000 a year. I decide to draft an article for a political magazine about the care system and about how not all forms of dependency can be managed away. But my sub-editor has a disability and I sense her prickliness towards my theme. Another health professional also queries my emphasis on dependency. She comments, “Is dependency inevitable? In my work trying to promote positive health we try and dispel stereotypes of old people always being decrepit, they are not always!!! So need to guard against this ... dependency is not inevitable or ill health in old age”. Quite so. But at that moment this does not square up to my experience of human frailty and my own vulnerability and sense of failure. It feels as if there was no language for such talk in mainstream political discourse.

All this makes possible the erosion of social care. In order to plug a shortfall in funding, a nearby hospital trust is closing its stroke recovery unit, regarded by NHS auditors as the best in the country. A Conservative member for the London Assembly welcomes the decision saying “Continuing care should take 30 days, but stroke victims at QMH are taking 90 days on average ... more rehabilitation should take place at home. We need

faster recuperation, not letting people wander around gardens ... If you need looking after you can get a nursing home which is not on the NHS".³⁹

Compassion and terror

Over the following months I attend two group workshops run by OPUS⁴⁰, which explore emotion and politics. At a workshop on the meaning of compassion, the first speaker⁴¹ talked about her experience of working with survivors of the Nazi holocaust and described how compassion gave way to irritation when there was no simple solution. She understood this as a fear of letting a dangerous world in and of becoming contaminated by it and she draws out how easily we dehumanise when we are not able to acknowledge the hidden distress of another. She describes how a hospital for survivors had five years later succumbed to a totalitarian order on its wards. The bed sheets were tightly and rigidly folded. Her story prompted images in my own mind around the care of the elderly, of my own irritations and the wish to push away unspoken fears of suffering and death. The second speaker⁴² talked about the capacity to be indifferent and not to be emotionally disturbed and I recalled an adage: 'the more we feel and the less we act, the less we feel'. We reflect on the difference between pity and compassion, of our feelings of shame at becoming an object of pity and, conversely, how we rely on intimacy and kindness when we have been dependent.

But in the following small group discussion two people both quickly speak of wanting to leave the workshop, of being unmoved and irritated by the absence of apparent structure in the talks. They had even been switched off by the same stories and anecdotes that I had found quite profound. They chose to stay because the group is small and they feel a certain guilt about abandoning us. Their comments make me feel defensive and pitied in some way and the speakers' images of the hospital return to my mind. Later a man tells the group a story about when he had just arrived from West Africa, and had found a young girl in the street who was upset and nearly naked. He had picked her up and taken her to the police station. There, the police had immediately asked him how long he had been in the country. Afterwards, his friends told him what a dangerous thing he had done. He concluded that in our risk-conscious society he would not now risk such a

³⁹ Mullen, M (2005) Stroke victims told to go home ... *Ham and High* 2nd September.

⁴⁰ OPUS Workshop (Organisation for the Psychoanalytic Understanding of Society).

⁴¹ Helen Bamber former Director of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture.

⁴² Paul Hoggett Professor of Politics UWE.

compassionate response, that fear rather than ‘emotional giving’ had also come to shape our moral response.

The second workshop addresses terror and our task is to select a group to reflect on the meaning of one of the following: terror, terrorism, terrorised, or terrorist and to then enter into dialogue with other groups over the other three. I am indecisive whether to explore the terrorist in myself or the terrorised, but sign up for the latter. This group turns out to be all women except for one man, although the workshop overall is evenly gendered. It is 2003, and we talk generally about the feelings of terror we have experienced such as when we have had to evacuate from tube stations during bomb scares. But as we try to enter the state of mind of the terrorised I move back into the powerlessness of being a child terrorised by a violent village schoolteacher. I remember with satisfaction an older sibling eventually hitting the teacher who had beaten her little brother. Others describe feeling like a ‘terrorist’ in the midst of periods of emotional turbulence. There is it is felt a closeness to feeling terrorised and being a terrorist.

No other groups seek us out and the delegate we eventually send, in an effort to make contact with the terrorist group, is rebuffed.

X

_____ Moral dilemmas _____

The conversation at a dinner party in 2001 turns to the five local education services in London, which are or soon will be run by private contractors. Aidan then tells us about the new education sub-contract he has won in China, but suddenly realises that this will be managed by this same local ‘education-construction’ company, which now manages his borough’s education service. A note of awkwardness hovers over the conversation as we recognise that finding work may now mean *this* kind of work. The questions flood into my mind. Is this colluding with the ‘new order’ or is it now an almost unavoidable and an inevitable aspect of work as public organisations change and mutate? We are it seems, each surrounded by acute moral and ethical dilemmas in our day-to-day lives. These questions are clearly on all our minds as Aidan starts to tell us about the recent Czech film he has seen. *Divided We Fall* is about the Nazi occupation. In this film, he

says, good people lose their qualities and weak people show courage: the oppressed in turn become monsters. It seems who is good and who is bad is not to be easily fixed.

The manager

In the early autumn of 2001, I join a group of other women to spend a sunny Sunday afternoon discussing whether to write a feminist critique of the current policy developments on public services. We are a mix of current and former local government managers, academics, and journalists. For some time, in separate conversations amongst us the same questions and concerns had emerged. Five years before we had all been drawn into defending often unsatisfactory public services so we could improve them 'later'. But this *was* 'later' and the question 'what do we think now?' was now uppermost in all our minds. A key question for our discussion is whether there is a distinctive women's position. I have talked in the past with many of those present and know our responses to the direction of changes in public services arouses deep feelings.

But the conversation today is more ironic and as we chat and gossip waiting for late arrivals someone asks, "How do you prevent a contract for a council service being awarded to a company when it is involved in the arms trade?" In response to this question those of us with experience of contracting chorus that there was still legislation in place⁴³, which specifically prevents any such ethical intervention by a local authority. We talk on about the ways we can sustain thinking about ethical questions amidst this kind of constraint. In the midst of this, Brenda cuts in and pointedly describes the reality of life in her local authority. She says, "one manager will tell another, you can't do that – they're my outputs"! She goes on to add, "You know we all live by lying now". I laugh along with the others at her irony but I also feel my stomach tighten and find myself needing to say, "This is a kind of corruption which we are all caught up in". After a moments pause she replies, "That is a scary thought". There is a silence before we move on to discuss the agreed task of the meeting. We prepare a meticulous plan for drafting a pamphlet allocating the writing tasks between us. But somehow there is no energy to actually bring it together. The moment slips away: each of us sidelined by 'other things'.

⁴³ The 1988 Local Government Act has since been repealed.

The caterer

Ella is a student in my class. She is a catering manager with a large private company providing services to a hospital. I summarise the consequences of privatisation for women particularly in manual jobs and the class discusses the implications of the flexibility of labour. I am curious about how she will view the impact of the past privatisation on her own staff. She tells the group that she knows that the workers lost their pension rights and both holiday and sick pay were much reduced when they transferred from the NHS to this catering company. But she conveys no sense of loss and I am aware there is an absence of anger. It is for her a distant history. In contrast to this, her identification with the patients is very strong. When I ask her whether she feels attached to the company she wrinkles her nose and shakes her head with a long “nooo ...” I have become aware how poorly supported she is in her role by her manager but over the first two terms she maintains a resigned acceptance to this.

In her final term of the course we are discussing ‘the moral manager’. Ella suddenly begins to tell us about an acute dilemma she has just been facing which explains why she has missed several classes. She had instigated the checking of staff passports in compliance with company regulations and as required by the NHS contract. Next day a significant number of well-liked and longstanding staff she had known for quite some years had not arrived at work. They simply disappeared. It is clear that her action had revealed their status as illegal immigrants and being African herself she now feels very distressed by this. The company is now acutely short-staffed and managers have had to cover. Other managers had implied she should have simply ignored the regulation as they had always done. Ella courageously chooses to talk about it and reflects on the ethics and emotional consequences of her action in her next assignment.

The lecturer

I am second marking a pile of social policy scripts from a course on the management of the social care system. Each student provides case studies from their own research into different parts of the wider care system including illustrations of different stages involved in the process of identifying care packages. By the end, I am struck quite profoundly by how there is a complete absence of any expression of emotion in any of the writing. Yet the care system is saturated with distress all of which arouses intense emotion. I am sure that in individual discussion I would encounter expression of such feelings with most

students. But these essays suggest the 'care system' is a place of reason at best or is emotionally frigid at worst. My own immediate experience of the social care system has made me very aware of the multiple meanings of 'care', and the way on occasions boxes can be ticked off, when there has in fact only been the appearance of care.

For a moment, I consider raising my concerns about the absence of any feeling content in these essays with the course tutor who is sitting across the table to me. But I sit and worry whether my second marking role gives me any legitimacy to raise this question. Second marking is stressful and demanding enough and this year we are flustered by a new marking system. My thoughts race on ... what would I say to whom? The course criteria reflect what is happening in social services and it satisfies the traditional objectivity of social science teaching. It makes no demand that students bring their feelings into their learning through, for example, the use of subjective methodologies like narrative. This is entirely up to the tutor. So I am caught in a quality audit process in which deeper issues about the assessment of learning have no place in this context. I feel caught up as the end product of a system that does not seek an expression of feelings. So in the end, I too 'tick the box' just like the social workers do, telling myself I will raise it somewhere else ... but where?

A year later this story forms part of a paper for an adult education conference. I send a draft to a colleague and she replies instantly telling me how moved she is by the stories. We meet to talk about them further, curious how our political interest has crossed once more after a long gap. Each of us draws energy from this recognition that there are new ways to find a voice.

The planner

The locality in which I live has many strips of 'back-land' garages, which have become the subject of planning applications seeking to build new houses. My local council is now regularly granting planning permission to developers who submit schemes for often poorly designed houses inappropriate for these small strips of land. The back-lands provide a highly valued, wild life habitat, garage spaces and the benefits of small car repair works and storage. In the autumn of 2004, the campaign group in my own neighbourhood received short notice that a new application for planning permission would go to committee in ten days time. Although this has been a longstanding

application over six years, this was only the second time that it had actually gone to committee. Each time it had come forward, it had been withdrawn following effective local pressure. Time is short, but a last effort is made to drag the action group into life. A visit to the planning office to check the application then alerts the campaign to procedural discrepancies.

Planning officers work to a very tight eight-week turn around target and it is now a highly pressured job accommodating the political pressures and the often unrealistic time constraints. As a result it is difficult to recruit staff and there is chronic understaffing. To meet their targets, planning applications are now being contracted out to private consultants who also prepare the actual reports for council's Planning Committee. In this particular case the report by a consultant was recommending acceptance of the planning application. As it was authorised by the Planning Officer, the implication was that it fully represented the professional views of the council's own officers.

When a public servant gives advice to councillors on a decision of this kind, they are bound by protocols requiring a professional and unbiased judgement of the contestation of views. But this report was profoundly misleading. It drew solely on technical advice provided by the developer's own consultants. Nor did it acknowledge that this was the source of the information. The consultant's report provided evidence that suggested there was no parking problem and that no one wanted to lease the garages. Yet the site file included earlier evidence, supplied by the council's own arboricultural and engineers' Services, which contradicted all these points. This and other substantial evidence submitted by the local action group itself by its own technical consultants was simply ignored in the report. There was also no reference to the action group itself.

The action group responded with a substantial and closely argued letter that strongly hinted at the potential for a future complaint of maladministration. Our hint of maladministration subtly implied the threat of a more serious charge of the corruption of professional values and standards without putting this into words. Whether the planning officer recommended approval was not now the sole issue. It was a more fundamental question of confidence in a public process of decision-making that was also now at stake. After an initial rebuff by the planners, the action group was eventually informed by the Chief Executive that the item was to be withdrawn and would be resubmitted in a revised

form to a later committee. Several months passed before it returned to the committee, where in the context of the by now vigorous local campaign it was turned down on the basis of its poor design. But the principle of development is not rejected. It has subsequently returned, but this time with fewer and better designed houses.

Those in the action group with a local government background shared a collective sense of concern about this fundamental loss of professional integrity. As a former town planner, I felt quite shocked at this clearly routine transgression of established practice. Was the erosion of a professional ethic due to the ruthless pressures of the eight-week target? Did the move to general managers in local government make them more susceptible to political and hierarchical demands? An independence of mind is required in giving technical advice to politicians. As a chief officer you have to stand up to the pressures to which politicians will subject you. The authoritative voice of the 'Borough Engineer' of the past has now disappeared. Such roles lie buried low down in the hierarchy and no longer carry the same weight or influence.

We discussed the matter intensely and concluded that this planning officer's overriding need would be to hit their targets, avoid any planning appeals and manage the 'impossible task' that their job has become. Their professional role has been undermined and in this context the outsourcing of a sensitive report to a consultant would appear as pragmatic and natural solution in the context of the pervasive ethos of partnership with the private sector, which is now so integral to the 'new public management'. In summary, we concluded that the planning officer who put his name to the report would not think he was doing anything fundamentally wrong or unethical. The moral values of public management had fundamentally changed. But what was now entrenched as normal was, we concluded, 'secondary corruption'.⁴⁴

A time for reflection

To reflect on day-to-day moral decisions described in various everyday forms is it seems centrally important to a live public service ethic. As commodification becomes pervasive it is no longer enough to rely on the assumed sensibility of the public sector as a particular moral community or a public service ethos embedded in common norms, practices and ways of relating. It has to be something living and re-worked afresh in

⁴⁴ Hodgkinson, P. (1996).

these new commodified environments. But this in turn requires a safe place to think about the kind of dilemmas involved. A spirituality group allows me to do some of this thinking. We meet monthly for 90 minutes and the time is shaped by readings which people bring around which to reflect alongside time for some meditation together. We sometimes reflect on day-to-day dilemmas of our public service workplaces like the stories above in a way that integrates the emotional life surrounding them.

But it is difficult to carry this over into the workplace itself. Donal described how he had brought his personal inspirations about working for an environmental project to a team discussion arranged to discuss this. He had talked about the thinking of Meister Eckhart, a 15th century Zen-like mystic who speaks of four spiritual paths.⁴⁵ But he had then been quite disappointed that the ideas had found little resonance with his colleagues. I tell him that I too find that these four paths are a helpful way of framing reflection on day-to-day life. They are return to the ‘revision de vie’ method of my youth movement era. He turns to me and says, “Write something”.

X1

_____ Finding my voice _____

In an attempt to reflect on how my stories have emerged I draw a pointed hat (representing the final stages of the story making process) that sits above ‘experience’ represented as a square divided into multiple boxes. Each ‘box’ represents the distinct and sometimes powerful dynamics of a particular group I am involved with. The ‘Walls’ between neighbouring boxes are sometimes soft and permeable, but others are quite rigid and kept very firmly apart. This represents the way I allow my different worlds to cross over or be kept separate. In the last months of 2004, some of these ‘Walls’ start to ‘crumble’ through a series of synchronous events.

I had been invited to attend a series of afternoon workshops on the future of public services. It is organised by a trade union sponsored think-tank with a view to an intervention in the 2005 general election (then just less than a year away). It is the first sustained discussion of its kind for many years and along with a spate of new books about public services, which have begun to challenge the magical thinking about

⁴⁵ Eckhart’s four spiral paths were via positiva, via negativa, via creativa and via transformativa.

markets, I take it as an indication of some kind of renewed energy. But the central thrust of discussion is still within the familiar groove of a political economy focus. Some contributions widen the terrain of discussion. But my interest in widening thinking to encompass the emotional and moral basis of public services does not find much resonance.

The European Social Forum

In the late autumn, the European Social Forum came not just to London but also to my own doorstep at Alexandra Palace in Haringey. I drew the attention of the class I teach to it. A Brazilian student smiles and quickly reminds me how it is a spin-off from the first World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre in 2000, which became the touchstone of renewal for the movements around participative democracy. The European Social Forum is an 'open space' for a three-day exchange of ideas on the theme of how 'another world is possible.' It has already been held in Florence and then Paris in 2003. I had not gone to these events but I had picked up on the excitement they generated. On both occasions they had drawn huge numbers into discussion about the environment, social and economic policy and, crucially, the renewal of imperialism and war. I resolved to go and rearranged my holidays.

The London event is not very well promoted perhaps relying on the Internet where the programme itself appears huge and overwhelming in its choice. I register the day before at Conway Hall in central London, joining the long queue of people in the sunshine snaking round Red Lion Square. The programme in paper form turns out to be as thick as an evening paper with each event printed in five languages. There are hundreds of plenaries, seminars, and workshops catering to the diverse interests of the 20,000 registered delegates coming to listen, talk and exchange experience. There are also other fringe 'free' conferences and events all over London.

The following afternoon I take a bus to the conference centre at Alexandra Palace. A mile away it becomes stuck in traffic and I decide to walk and take a path that climbs up the steep grassy hill towards the main entrance. It is an unpleasant, grey, drizzly afternoon, and there is hardly anyone in sight. I imagine Florence, the setting of a previous Forum and with it an image of sun, warmth, and pleasing cafes. Trudging up the final hill to the entrance, I can see only a few people selling their newspapers and feel

depressed by the sight. By now I am convinced that people have simply spurned this London event and it will prove embarrassingly small and indicative of the weakness of social movements in the UK compared to the rest of Europe.

But as I step inside the entrance, my mood changes instantly. I am hit by a wall of sound and am bombarded by snatches of conversation in many different languages as people surge round me, moving purposefully between different forums. I feel almost intimidated by the scale and numbers of people as I seek to find my way to a specific hall. This is as large as a football pitch and two plenary events are taking place within it, separated only by screens and a row of stalls. I pick one side that is already full where 700 people are waiting to hear two Israelis and two Palestinians in dialogue. I stand at the back wondering whether to stay. But as the session begins, I am immediately caught up in the power of the stories being told.

For the next session, I move on into the even larger Great Hall. It is split into two five star shaped spaces, separated by black screens and each with its loud speakers and a row of translating booths. Between the two spaces is an avenue of hundreds of stalls. Each plies information or sells their campaigning wares. At least 5,000 people must be in this literal 'Babel'. I cannot understand the layout and head for a side café to consult my programme. The noise level is quite disorientating and I cannot decide where to go next. Sitting at a nearby table I recognise a former local politician who was once chair of a committee responsible for waste management and with whom I sometimes had a prickly relationship. But I decide to go and introduce myself. He is pleased to see me and we are both suitably amused to be sat amidst the unseemly detritus of leaflets and paper accumulating everywhere. Our conversation becomes quite animated as we find a new common interest. We swap email addresses with a view to campaigning together. It leaves me feeling quite energised. This chance meeting has given me a sense of belonging to the Forum and from then on I am at ease in negotiating my way around it.

The following day I quickly learn to pick and choose the themes that interest me and exit quickly from the drab and rhetorical. I gain a startling new insight into the EU's 'Bolkenstein' Directive' which proposes deep and extensive marketisation of European public services. The Transnational Institute and the Seattle to Cancun Network both explain its impact and how local authorities in France and Germany are now joining in

campaigns for 'GATT-free' zones. The rest of Europe, now facing this new experience of marketisation of its public services, is exhilaratingly angry. I learn to work my translation box and earphones, and the problem of multiple languages disappears. I get quite used to blocking out the cacophony of background noise from neighbouring workshops. There are 500 volunteer translators operating across 15 languages at the Forum, making this 'babel' possible. They belong appropriately to an organisation called 'Babel'. They want to see new technologies around the act of translation itself. This could produce new forms of immediate conference summaries, reflection and forms of memory. It is both a revelation and contentious.

I leave energised by my experience but cannot help noticing how few people I know have come to the event. A week later, at a public meeting to hear Stuart Hall and David Marquand debate the 'Public Life', I tell someone how much I enjoyed her workshop at the European Social Forum. She too remarks in reply, on how few people she knew were there and says that she had heard some people dismiss it as being for young people. Someone else then comments "But why wouldn't one be interested to find out what young people think"? Later, I go to eat with Joe and ask him why people in our peer group networks around local government largely chose not to go to either this public meeting or to the Forum. He tells me that he had asked himself the same question and had come to the conclusion that people no longer 'read' or were able to think beyond the job. "It is all just too demanding," he says and much more tightly constrained than five years ago. It has become, he said, "dangerous to engage with challenging ideas". The discussion he says too often remains for managers at the level of "getting one over the Director of Education", in the internal power struggles.

This resonates with my own thoughts and I go on to describe how I had begun to feel cut off from the wider context before I left my local authority and desperately needed the oxygen of a reflective space to think. We have both recognised how important this need is in our lives. I press on more boldly with a question that concerns me. "Should I have stayed in local government?" I ask. He replies with a firm "No", and encourages me to renew my attempts to speak about the emotional basis of thinking and learning in our milieu. He tells me about a recent innovative meeting at the Tavistock Clinic about emotionally intelligent policy-making and how this had successfully drawn a speaker from the mainstream of local government into this unfamiliar territory. I leave feeling

uplifted by our conversation.

Local government and the psychosocial

OPUS⁴⁶ represents the main place for potential interaction between the world of public services professionals and that of a broadly defined psychosocial reflection on society which addresses the emotional basis of public services⁴⁷ It organises workshops and events such as ‘listening posts’ and ‘social dreaming’ matrices. But this audience is usually almost entirely composed of people working in the caring professions, organisational consultancy or academics with a background interest in psychodynamic thinking. As I sit down at a table, I suddenly realise I am sitting opposite someone with common roots close to my own policy domain of local government. I have never met anyone close to my own former world of local government at a psychosocial event and I have continued to feel quite reticent about revealing my own deepening engagement with psychodynamic thinking over the past five years.

The opening talk strays into some debatable politics and I sense an immediate frisson from across the table, which leaves me feeling acutely embarrassed. After the talk I quickly raise the ‘dodgy politics’ in an effort to assuage our mutual discomfort. This is well received, but a flow of defensive comments confirms my fears that the talk has reinforced a more general scepticism. I am then left with my own turbulent feelings about this collision with my previous world. As I calm down, I decide that overall it is a positive development and has begun the process of bringing about a needed integration of my old and new selves. Later I hear someone comment that they never thought someone like myself, coming from a “lefty local authority background”, would have survived a group relations masters course. By the end of the day, I also recognise that I have had multiple conversations about the connection between group relations and complexity thinking. The idea of living with fewer ‘walls’ has become more manageable.

Speaking from experience

On the second day of the conference a keynote speaker⁴⁸ addresses racism. In the course of a long and challenging talk he considers the deaths of both Stephen Lawrence and the more recent case of the nine-year-old Victoria Climbié. In an aside, he touches on the

⁴⁶ Organisation for the Psychoanalytic Understanding of Society.

⁴⁷ An earlier series of forums in the 1980s/1990s was called ‘Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere’.

⁴⁸ Fakry David. OPUS 2004.

role of Haringey Social Services. This becomes the temporary focus of discussion. The atmosphere is electric. From the audience a consultant working with social services departments highlights how social workers are haunted by the death of this child. But in my own experience so are most other staff and indeed so am I, despite having left three years before this tragedy happened. On the many occasions during my research when it has arisen in passing and unprompted, I have silently identified with a sense of catastrophic failure.

I realise that I am probably the only person present who has worked *for* the authority in a senior role as distinct from *with* the authority as an external consultant. I feel that I must speak from this experience as a contribution to understanding the question “why did this happen”? But at that moment I am unable to think what it is that I want to say in the plenary discussion, paralysed by a fear that I will sound defensive rather than contribute some insight. The speaker goes on to argue that while not without blame, Haringey Social Services also functioned as a scapegoat for the wider medical and welfare system, just as in turn it was to scapegoat its own most junior social worker. In his argument about racism, he has shifted the purpose from blame to seeking to understand why in both cases a well meaning white policewoman and a senior white female consultant failed in the moment when it mattered. He argues his theoretical insight⁴⁹ around the gap between conscious thought and unconscious processes. In his view, we can all be momentarily paralysed by an unacknowledged racist template or deep structure in our psyche, when fear is activated. This moment, he argues, has to be distinguished from the subsequent collusive process of denial and cover up, if we are to move on from blame to understanding. This argument releases me from a way of thinking inherited from the often unhelpful legacies of some forms of race awareness training.

In the following discussion groups, which encourage us to connect up our own thoughts and feelings to the speakers’ contribution, I find myself explaining what it means to have worked for Haringey Council and to have experienced the inspiration of its earlier courageous leadership and pioneering innovations around race. But how as a bullied local authority it had slid into a bullying culture whilst facing the rapid and complex social change of impoverished communities and its own deepening impoverishment. Through punitive government policy, I point out how this council was deliberately and

⁴⁹ A contentious theory in complexity terms that is represented in the work of Fahad Dalal (2002).

repeatedly stripped of funding necessary to ameliorate the growing levels of poverty in the 1980s and 1990s. Recalling how someone recently referred to Haringey as a ‘ghetto’, I suggest that such demonisation allows wider society to assuage its guilt at ignoring poverty.

After the conference I wake from a dream in which I have arrived late for a workshop. The large, high ceiling room has different tables at which people are working in groups. I feel an outsider and I am anxiously observing others to find out what they are working on. I pick up that one of their tasks involves finding a musical theme but then notice that someone nearby is also drawing. I can just make out a shape in the form of an ‘H’. It is a ground plan for a design. The group then moves outside and is looking out over an empty space below us. Someone announces that a new building is to be constructed on this site and it is to be a new psychiatric teaching hospital. Returning to the ‘musical’ task, I hear the words from the song ‘Biko... Biko... you can blow out the candle but you can’t blow out the fire’.

The dream speaks to me about finding authority and agency amidst lost dreams and destructiveness and about the connection between different ‘H’s in my working life. Perhaps something significant could emerge out of my connection between Hertfordshire which is planning to build a new teaching hospital and Haringey where I first heard the song ‘Biko’ in a women and girls’ project 20 years earlier, led by a young black poet who led us in a loud and furious singing of these lines. The theme of a psychiatric ‘Hospital’ suggests to me that it is the capacity for ‘emotional truth’ that had to be nurtured in some way, although behind it lurks the alternative spectre – that of an H-block prison camp.

X11

_____ Gender, sex and power _____

Since the early 1990s, there has been a significant increase in women moving into management roles although the top jobs are still male-dominated. As a consequence there is now as much of a pay difference between women, as between men and women. The uses and abuses of power have become less obviously gendered in some areas but more

hidden or unseen in others. Yet the dynamics of gender and sexuality play an important and changing role in organisational life in both creative and destructive ways.

In 2002, I help to initiate the planning of a conference on *Gender, Sex and Power at Work* as part of a group relations collective. Such a conference offers a different approach to a traditional conference of papers and lectures in which the emotional content is largely suppressed. Instead, different events will allow undercurrents to emerge and be explored and then be linked back to more theoretical concepts. Such a psychodynamic way of working enables reflection on the interactions which arise in the here and now with conference members speaking *from* their experience rather than *about* issues. This we hoped would offer a fresh way to explore the masculine and feminine dimensions of gender dynamics in organisations.

As I undertook early marketing around the conference brochure, I became acutely conscious of how I was publicly revealing my own involvement with the emotional basis of thinking and learning, for the first time. I had remained reticent in sharing this experience with others from my local government past. In taking up the role of ‘conference organiser’, excitement and anxiety surfaced in equal measure as I emailed the draft brochure to a small number of individuals and public bodies for comment. I was particularly keen to test out a response from the mainstream of local government and my former peer group. The tenor of one reply that I would receive back was particularly important to me. But this reply read, “A quick response is that I don’t think local authorities would send people on it as it seems very ‘touch-feely’ for them – struggling to keep up training on very concrete issues – and it is expensive for equalities staff who traditionally have small budgets”. The ‘touch-feely’ comment touched a raw nerve. I had feared precisely this response and had worked hard to find a familiar venue and keep the costs low. Some weeks later over an informal dinner, I once again tentatively decided to promote the event. But I was struck by the initial response from several people. They had immediately asked, “But what are the outcomes going to be”? So the response felt mainly curious at best and met with enthusiasm by only one or two individuals.

Power struggles

One of the interests in planning the conference was to work in a way that openly processes our own gendered group dynamics through making visible the emotions that lie

below the surface and to learn from that experience. During a visualisation session aimed to help us review our sense of direction after some differences had been encountered in the wider group, we produce a large collective drawing made up from our individual sheets. My contribution is to draw a large tanker and darting alongside and going in different directions are several small boats representing our own small group as well as other rather more established organisations. My drawing represents in some way my understanding of the necessary well-being and solidity of the public sector (tanker) role and the flexible but more transitory voluntary and community sector (small boats) whose role in part is to challenge the established paradigms of the former. To my surprise I am challenged for my lack of ambition by one of the men in the group. For him the small size of our own 'small boat' signified something about the absence of potency in the group. He reminds the group about my drawing on three occasions and each time I feel stung by his remark.

The group becomes racked by power struggles around the organisation of two events. Although the two groups are evenly gendered they somehow represent in my eyes a polarisation of 'feminine' and 'masculine' styles. The wider group now becomes an unsafe place to bring the inevitable anxieties around planning a conference. It has become a court where the planning group will be held to account. We must contain the emotional experience and difficulties of conference planning ourselves. During a two-day meeting to review the 'structure', direction, roles and responsibilities of the wider 'organisation', the depth of underlying 'professional' and institutional conflicts expressed in our differences is addressed. But the expression of the antagonistic feelings between the different sub-groups remain suppressed, until it is more fully revealed in a social dreaming session. During this event two women report their overnight dreams about losing a 'son'. A man tells a dream about being suffocated through pressure to his throat by his wife, lying with her head against him. Another man speaks of a dream in which he cuts the throat of his first wife who has cheated on him in the dream. The images are murderous and violent and the question of fidelity is left hanging unspoken in the air. Who has cheated on whom? Later a man suddenly comments, "Perhaps, *we* are your first wife who is having her throat cut? It captures the power struggle and the depth of competition, which is driving the unspoken group dynamics under the surface. Is our intent to be a 'small boat' in a collective movement alongside others, or our own 'big tanker'?"

Over the next year the group completes a leadership change and a welcome calmness settles over our meetings. The key roles are taken on by two women and a man. Together they assert a renewed, sensuous 'holding' over the group. The group immediately develops a renewed intimacy and enjoyment in its own conviviality as well as struggling to understand and heal the depths of hatred that had been plumbed. We seem nourished by our own conversation as much as by addressing our task. The group seems more at ease with its mature leadership as we continue to reflect on the turbulences of gender, sex and power at work.

Women and power

At the start of the inter-group event of the actual conference, we are given a choice of three themes around which to self-organise ourselves into groups: femininity, masculinity and power. The questions of how these relate to sexuality will, it is assumed, inevitably arise in all groups. Besides the plenary space where the group can seek consultancy at any time, there are three rooms available, two of which will have consultants present in situ. I decide to attend the masculinity group thinking it would be interesting to explore my own 'masculine' energies but then notice that someone I am close to is making her way to this grouping. I make a quick decision to switch to the power group that is already rushing out of the door. I belatedly follow them out.

I find a large group of women ensconced in the room without a consultant. There is just one man. The initial 'leaders' of the group repeatedly congratulate themselves on securing this room. It is seen to have been an empowering act, an act of freedom. But having secured this, the group seems unable to focus beyond this achievement of power. We spend the next six hours circling around each other, exploring power struggles between women in our organisations, the experience of having power as women, and some periods of intense struggle for 'power' between people in the room. Someone repeatedly vents her frustration as to whether this is a useful way to spend her time and I find myself feeling responsible for wasting her time. I begin to feel desperate to get out of the room and I volunteer as a delegate to approach the other groups who are by then meeting and interacting together. When I return to report back the group has already forgotten I had ever gone. The only male in the group makes several tentative attempts to raise sexuality but he is ignored and it gains no momentum.

In the reflection at the end of this event, it is clear that the femininity and masculinity groups had had conversations they did not wish to share and the power group had nothing to share except its power struggles. I feel a sense of failure about the stuckness and flatness of the power group. Was the theme too wide or just too difficult? Next morning I realise that it is precisely what is interesting. The power group experience could reveal something about the difficulty of women working together, and about the desire to punish the absent men. Power talk had functioned as a defence against any talk of sexuality, but of more interest was how we had steered well clear of emotional intimacy other than in some angry clashes. In summary we had never really shifted from a normative understanding of power to explore a feminine perspective on power.

In the final small group event several women from the power group are also present. For a while I feared we might continue along the same track. However, one of the group is pregnant and this starts to assume a powerful presence. It prompts someone to speak of the coming dependency of a child but another to say how she has outgrown 'all that'. I speak about how my understanding of dependency has been changed by my mother's illness and how I saw how it now also involves surrender. The mood in the group changes and the consultant quickly draws attention to how we are differently engaged with each other. We go deeper into an understanding of what surrender means in relation to aging, autonomy, death and the ending of the group.

After the conference I have a dream in which a woman is framed against a wall covered in graffiti. She is a rather tough looking 'power woman' but to my surprise s/he announces she is pregnant. I began to reflect on why I had not opted for the femininity group. My sense in the moment of making the decision was of it offering less to learn. This is a view I found echoed by other women. There is a shared sense of knowing one's way around femininity. The most common draw is usually the power group. Yet the femininity group had proved to be the most creative group and had had the most capacity to talk about sexuality and the meaning of gender, sex and power in the workplace.

_____ **A practical ethical author**⁵⁰ _____

In the run-up to the 2005 election, I make interventions in two workshops at a major conference on ‘Beyond the market’.⁵¹ The first workshop is on higher education. A strand of the debate focuses on the new fee structure and its impact on institutions with part-time students. But the talk drifts off into mere criticism of the people in ‘management’ roles who are implementing this. I decide this is an avoidance and suggest a different challenge for academics present. I want to draw attention to how people no longer find it easy to understand moral dilemmas in the public service workplace as the old structures are reshaped by commercialisation. I suggest, “if public services are a particular kind of moral community, then people like ourselves, whose business is to be thinking about these things, need to promote new ways of enabling people to engage in thinking about the moral dilemmas they face in the workplace”. I describe how in my own research I keep meeting people who feel there is no place where they can ‘think’ about these things anymore. The workplace is too dangerous and trade unions likewise are caught up in the scramble for survival rather than development. Kate turns to me afterwards agreeing enthusiastically. But the trade union speaker is wary of my use of the word ‘moral’. I register that this is a word that carries baggage and clearly needs handling with care. But it is one that I increasingly feel I now want to have a place at the core of my thinking.

In the second workshop we discuss the government’s strategy of ‘New Localism’. I point to how the simplistic rhetoric about ‘community’ and ‘relationship’, used by government to promote new structures of public services provision, ignores the emotional conflicts that are unleashed in small groups. The purpose of many public services and the people who are attracted to such work is often suffused by raw emotions. This can immobilise and tear apart community groups, as I remind those of us there with such experience know only too well. This needs to be anticipated in altruistic structures.

⁵⁰ Shotter, J. (1993) *Conversational realities*. London Sage p. 148.

⁵¹ Conference *Beyond the market* organised by Catalyst. November 2004.

Taking the initiative

Towards the end of 2004, as member of a management committee I am suddenly faced by an unexpected staff turnover crisis. We have to decide whether the organisation should wind down, try to seek a partnership or recruit again. We all argue independently for it to continue in some way but accept its days as an autonomous organisation are ending. This brings a heightened awareness of how much this often tenuously funded but independent voice has always meant to me. The director then refers explicitly to his own coming retirement in several years' time. This introduces a shared acknowledgement that this is also about a generational handover in the making. So the specific context in which we must make this decision poses not just questions about the value we place on the survival of this independent organisation, but in a sense also what kind of intellectual capital our generation want to pass on and protect. We explore what would be the risks to such 'intellectual capital' in a partnership with another organisation. There is sadness but also hopefulness in our thinking, which begins to merge into a question about how we value our own historic endeavour.

Thinking about the organisation's survival is a spur to my own thoughts on where and how I would like to develop some of the new thinking embraced in my thesis such as around story, complexity and emotions. I suggest in discussion the importance of creating new ways to reflect and 'think' about public service work. In particular I suggest that using 'story making' as a process is a helpful way to nurture and retain certain ways of thinking and to mobilise new kinds of bottom-up research. I describe how the City of Rome has appointed an oral historian, which has allowed the silenced stories from the city's past to emerge and I repeat his comment: 'that to tell a story is a point of resistance'. The other members of the committee respond to my enthusiasm and suggest I work up my thoughts on how to organise such an event or process which could launch my ideas about using story in relation to public sector change, including perhaps an oral history movement in local government itself.

This conversation prompts me to draft such ideas in a more formal way for the continuing education faculty of the university in which I work, with a view to preparing a funding application for such a venture. I also begin to see how taking such an idea forward could set in motion a discussion which could enrol many different interests.

XIV

Recognising the same patterns

As people leave for home, the size of the group gets smaller, and the conversation becomes more intimate. We begin to connect more deeply rather than swapping gossip. Lydia works for an ‘Excellent’ local authority (in the language of a recent audit) and she suddenly remarks that she thinks her local authority is totally utilitarian and service delivery driven in its thinking. Targets are attained but you could, she says, easily spot aspects that do not work. She says, in short, that there is “no sense of meaning” for her in it any longer and no other managers with whom she can really talk about this. Others who have been converted to the measurement ethos try to challenge her viewpoint, pointing out the benefits it brings in the drive for efficiency. Someone notes the hopeful movement towards ‘soft’ outcomes. But Lydia persists and others join her in acknowledging the distorting impact of the present targets and audit culture.

Lydia’s comment resonates strongly with me. She has voiced in an uncannily similar way the very same feelings that had driven me out of local government and in some way into writing a thesis. Her comments tapped into the deeper questions that had come to concern me and I found this very confirming. I suggest to her that what we are seeing is the logical result of the ‘business model’ and of hard systems thinking: this way of thinking can only lead to this kind of dead end or sense of stasis as it shuts down the bottom-up movement of ideas. I add that we end up thinking like a machine and there is less and less room for us to invest or find any sense of personal meaning. Staff turnover is low and their commitment is still high she says; it is management who are feeling cut adrift. This prompts me to share the visual metaphor, which had stayed in my mind of staff ‘holding up a masthead which has broken away from the institution’. One that is powerfully suggestive of how public sector management has lost its way.

Over the final weeks of writing I have encountered several experiences, which have recalled the same rawness of feelings that drove me to want to uncover the meaning public services. In doing so, I have also found myself. In trying to make sense of my own experience, I now stand on more solid ground and have a renewed desire to speak and act. I have a sense of growing confirmation of some of the themes that emerge in this

narrative. For example, the procurement of public design momentarily gained a national focus and with it a recognition of why a sense of loss that has accompanied the dismantling of local authority design services⁵² and how it speaks to me of the wider sense of dispossession of the public sector inheritance.

My narrative has also come to an end just as perhaps a fundamental meaning of public services is revealed in the capacity of states to respond to disaster. The co-ordinated and courageous response of the emergency services to the multiple London bombings of July 2005 has been widely acknowledged. But the inadequacies of the response to the huge flood disaster in the southern states of America a month later has prompted critical reflection. I am moved to conclude with a comment made soon after this disaster: “For 25 years the ‘Right’ has been denigrating the public sector, telling us that government is always the problem, not the solution. Why should we be surprised that when we needed a government solution, it wasn’t forthcoming”?⁵³

XV

Storytelling: endnotes

Avoidance of emotions

As I join a group discussion about childcare my immediate attention is focused on who is present. The numbers are smaller than expected and of the twenty five present all but three are women. I decide the low attendance points to avoidance of discussion about emotional life and a rare opportunity to bring political thinking and feeling life together. The theme is to be the conflict of ideas, which has arisen around the new national strategy to provide a universal childcare service. Some people think this strategy in its present form, is in conflict with ‘why love matters’ when working with small children.⁵⁴

The discussion develops in an exciting, free flowing way with strongly felt views being expressed. The focus comes to rest on how this new childcare service will be overwhelmingly provided by poorly qualified and untrained staff. Someone tells a story of their visit with policymakers to Denmark, noted for its longstanding universal nursery

⁵² Warpole, K. 2005; Elliot, L. 2005.

⁵³ Krugman, P (2005).

⁵⁴ Gerhardt (2004:15).

provision. When asked about their 'outputs', their host pointed out they did not believe such things were necessary. They were just expected and trusted to provide good care, as all staff were graduate trained.

I share my story of the oppressive management of day nursery staff and of 'splitting' childcare. This triggers other stories about the low quality of training and support for nursery staff. Someone then suggests seeing childcare more as a craft skill, which is followed by a heartening story of the impact of introducing simple, low-cost infant observation techniques into a nursery, which successfully develop the emotional capacities of nursery staff. We return to the relevance of the co-operative nursery movement of the 1980s and discuss our own experiences of parent involvement. I leave this discussion feeling connected, energised and wanting to take the discussion further, conscious how much of it had been resonating with my own research and wanting to organise a more local discussion.

Not being able to think

A week later I sit in on a local government 'think tank' discussion. Over coffee there is much talk of the 2005 local authority league table results, which have just been published. Most of their councils represented have done well in this complex game of winners and losers with its strange, new, shared language. These local government officers are pleased but also furious that a new criterion, added by the government, became the focus of bad publicity. "We are not loved by government, despite delivering more savings than any other part of the public sector" is the sentiment expressed. Someone adds ruefully, "the NHS is loved by everyone, despite being appalling managed financially". In the face of a manic level of activity and evident exhaustion I find myself unable to think. In the absence of a certain curiosity, which would allow room to play with ideas, I feel hesitant to even mention my research. On my way home, my thoughts turn to a management committee meeting I will soon be attending and ponder my imagined response to the question 'so just what was your research about then ...?'

Bringing it all back home

As my research colleagues settle down to discuss my thesis, there is a reference to my use of the metaphor of 'crumbling walls' to convey the lowering of boundaries. This is then followed by an observation about an underlying sadness in the stories but someone

else interprets this as anger. The stories have clearly resonated with their current experience of the health service cuts. I am surprised and caught off balance at the re-emergence of the powerful emotions of these old themes. I am also moved by the sense that something has been understood and that others find the stories are meaningful but which in turn also leaves me feeling revealed. I hasten to point out there is also narrative movement and I feel new energy but the conversation shifts away onto the safer ground of economics. A member of the group, who works for a new private public service sector contractor, then speaks with quiet confidence of how “we run Liverpool”. He views my home city as a project, rather like building a motorway. I want to shout, “this is nonsense” and to draw attention to the democratic deficit implicit in this casual remark. But I stay silent feeling overwhelmed in the moment, as though my whole thesis is somehow condensed into our moment of interaction and power relating.

Some months later, I share a platform with a chief executive from the voluntary sector in a seminar to talk about complexity theory and public services. We share a common interest in complex responsive processes of relating as being our shared research methodology. But our dialogue polarises as the role of local politicians and the public sector is dismissed and I recognise that conversations with key people in an elite network, are about advocating the emergence of a different kind of voluntary sector. So I pose the question, “but just who is talking to who here and who is being excluded?”... and then point out that “this is the voluntary sector getting into bed with the corporate sector!”. I ask in conclusion, “is the elephant in the living room here not the loss of local democracy?”

Speaking truth to power

A few weeks later, the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (Acevo) a pressure group of larger charities within the voluntary sector, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the National Consumer Council announce a campaign ‘to shape public services to the needs of the public, rather than producers’⁵⁵ Their stated desire is to drive up quality and increase user satisfaction through the supposed advantages of voluntary sector flexibility and freedom to innovate, specialist skills and closeness to users. The charity they quote as having achieved significantly better outcomes emerges as having been set up by a drinks company on whose board are

⁵⁵ Bubb and Scott (2006) ‘Making public services better for users is what really matters’, *The Guardian* 9th May.

the CBI and finance companies supported by a new private-voluntary sector lobby group.
56 57

Several weeks later in April 2005, New Labour announce the launch of its 'Let's talk' initiative to 'rescue public services', through talking to 'outside opinion formers'. These are listed as: 'Acevo, the CBI and The National Consumer Council'. I write a letter to a national newspaper⁵⁸ pointing out that far from being 'outsider opinion formers', they seem in fact, to be part of a new emerging, power elite of 'insiders'. For example, the Director of the National Consumer Council, an active agent in the collaboration noted above, was, as the former Director of the New Economics Foundation, a co-author of the '*The Mutual State*' which has been particularly influential in the development of New Labour's 'New Localism' agenda. My letter pinpointed how covert conversation and new linkages are developing between one part of the voluntary sector, the CBI, and corporate multinational interests and government. The following week my letter generates a full-page, counter-attack,⁵⁹ bearing witness to the sensitivities involved.

My endnote is about the experience of taking a stand, speaking truth to power, countering a new orthodoxy and provoking a public debate about the meaning of public services. I had, it seems, found my voice and shaped from the interactions that I was experiencing, found too my own ethical perspective as to where I stood and what I thought.

⁵⁶ Serwotka (2006). 'Call time on privatisation', *The Guardian* 28th April

⁵⁷ The Employment Related Services Association.

⁵⁸ Murray (2006) 'Public services on the sofa', *The Guardian* 19th May

⁵⁹ Mayo (2006). 'Shining a light on service', *MJ* 1st June

Chapter 13: Emerging themes - 3

These 15 stories of ‘From silence to voice’ cover a wide canvas and represent my own subjective experience of public services since 2001, as a user, producer of public services and as a citizen. I will gather up some of the emerging themes under two broad headings: firstly, the ‘market versus state’ themes which resonate with the public services literature discussed in Part Three (reinventing government, the public realm, market versus state and a public service ethos) and secondly in relation to ‘inequality and emotional life’. These themes point towards the need to draw on a different literature and in particular to that of complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking to which I will be turning in Part Five.

Market versus state

School meals (Story VI), parks (Story IX), continuing and adult education services (Story IV), and public libraries (Story V), are all undervalued, under resourced non-statutory services which rarely feature in any theorising. Yet it is they that emerge in the stories as key metaphors for a ‘public sector’, which is inclusive and affirming of the importance of human well-being and equality of access. So it is ironic that ‘Treasured libraries’ (Story V), a story about a library service which fell into terminal decline, is also a story about its successful regeneration by a public private partnership.

I found local authority managers were surprisingly sanguine about the use of the private finance initiative, believing that government pressure to use it was merely an expensive way to raise money. It was also the case that I too felt relief and pleasure at seeing the replacement of my local shabby hospital and schools (Story VI). But the two differing stories about procurement in ‘Public Spaces (Story VI), surface a shadow side of the shiny new schools and hospital buildings. It describes the pressures to use PFI and to enter into private partnerships, which has led local authorities up and down the country to sell off their own technical and design services. Unlike the wide concern over education or health reforms, this development has aroused little public interest. The reality is that public institutions are being asset stripped of their collective intellectual capital, which in turn represents a withering of their capacity for local democratic decision-making. The

procurement stories warn of a local government pressured by government demands for huge efficiency savings and seduced by the claims of a corporate sector. In its own way, Story VI 'Public space', is a tragic story of a dispossession, and one that reveals how local government has been slavish in enabling a powerful cross-sector technocracy to evolve around procurement, which is now closely interconnected with the evolving new private public service sector monopolies.

Oppositional market versus state thinking, echoes through many stories. In 'Emotional Literacy' (Story II), a voluntary sector initiative funded by the corporate private public service sector set out to promote the idea of more emotionally aware public services, but I found myself quite disturbed by the experience and its contempt for public bureaucracies. Some stories convey forms of 'publicisation' of the private sector as in 'Private Choices' (Story III) and Treasured Libraries (Story V), but many more stories such as 'Emotional Literacy (Story III) and 'Public spaces' (Story VI) capture the commercialisation of the public sector. The final story 'Storytelling: endnotes' (Story XV), is an encounter with the emerging corporatisation of the voluntary sector.

In 'Private Choices (Story III) and 'Moral dilemmas' (Story X), I found, to my surprise, that I empathised with frontline staff working in the new world of the private public service sector in their day-to-day dilemmas. I was drawn to the sense of desire animating the small firm responsible for re-generation of the library service (Story V), but aware how it split off its own interest from more universal concerns. I was also curious how the releasing of desire and imagination was a common theme to both this project and the development of an approved list by a local authority, to enable creative joint work with small, high-quality firms and excluding the corporate sector (Story VI, 'Public spaces'). All these stories capture my own ambivalences and a sense that uncertainty and confusion *are* the hallmarks of a public sector which is both abusive and to which one is also committed ('Confusion', Story I).

All of this has given rise to a more nuanced understanding of 'markets' on my part, and a less simplistic 'state versus market' opposition, reflecting Luke's (2006) position. The important message, which I have drawn from the stories of both Parts Two and Four in the slide towards becoming a regulatory market state, is that a desire to do things imaginatively calls for much more sophisticated forms of procurement involving a lot

more extra effort, insight and political will, if we are not to succumb to a handful of private monopolies and more ‘turkey twizzlers’, replicating the story of privatised school meals. In believing that a distinct public sector ethos is necessary, we need to explain what needs to be protected from commodification, why and how. For example, in ‘Storytelling: endnotes’ (Story XV), I confront an advocate of an evolving alliance between the CBI and the larger charities. An alliance with the CBI will bring growth and satisfy ambitious individuals in the charity sector, but at the price ultimately in the longer term of dependence on the corporate sector and the loss of the creative autonomy of a distinct social sector. There are, I believe, still clear lines to be drawn.

In the story of ‘the planner’ (Story X) we see how the privileging of efficiency and loss of a professional value base leads to routine outsourcing of a planning application to a consultant, who then chooses to use research provided by a developer, implying it is the council’s own research. This example resonates strongly with Hodgkinson’s (1986) concept of ‘secondary corruption’ and illustrates the ultimate dangers for the polity of this cross-sector new public management, which blurs and confuses boundaries and rewards systems. It suggests that the ‘dykes’ that the Victorians built are, as Marquand (2004a) suggests, *there* for a purpose to maintain public trust and that the risk of ‘hybrid monsters’ (Jacobs, 1992:53) is a real one when we allow these distinctions between public and private sectors to break down. It emphasises the centrality of theorising just why the public and private sectors are different moral communities and why the revaluing of bureaucracy (du Gay, 2005) matters.

Equality and emotional life

Several stories convey the growing inequality in society and how its acceptance means that society is ignoring the social suffering this engenders. This was laid bare in several examples, particularly the painful story of ‘I am a terrorist too’ (Story IX), which drew me into the sheer desperation which dependence on a careless, punitive state brings about in a person’s life. More generally, the public squalor stemming from two decades of neglect of public infrastructure was revealed in the small details of my hospital visit; the outpatient’s bed with a hole in it, the broken escalator, the filthy chairs in a waiting area. Markets deepen inequalities. Those who benefit from their dynamism are people who are not poor or from impoverished communities.

'Splitting Childcare' (Story VII), about the management of childcare, highlighted how more women in management does not of itself change a controlling public service management culture. In contrast, the story 'A place to think' (Story IV), reveals a continuing education class as being used as a safe place for women to 'think' about their work and resolve day-to-day ethical dilemmas, in the absence of the necessary relationships that enable this to happen in the workplace. But in promoting a conference on 'Gender sex and power', I found that this theme was still widely considered too be "touchy-feely", even by women in local government management and a timely reminder of just how uncomfortable it still is to talk about emotional life in public services.

Many stories illustrated how individuals working in the public sector still continue to work in resilient and thoughtful ways. The attitude of the adult education staff (Story IV) bears witness to a reliance on their own values and to a capacity for 'partisanship' (Newman, 2005:205). This stance is also conveyed by the procurement manager in the story 'Public spaces' (Story VI), painstakingly constructing the high quality, approved list of design consultants in deliberate defiance of the more general embrace of corporate sector. The nursery manager (Story VII), similarly demonstrates an admirable capacity to split off from a performance measurement ethos continually encroaching further into her experience of the actual work of caring. They all emphasise a developmental mindset rather than one of survival: choosing to be a partisan rather than a technocrat.

The stories express the feeling life that lies behind the 'new public management'. For example, in relation to the audit culture, I capture the feeling that something had been 'shoved down my own throat' (Story I, 'Confusion'), and as a lecturer experience the feelings of resentment at the need to comply with a new 'Paperwork committee' (Story IV). A much stronger sense of disorientation is conveyed in the metaphors used by other continuing education staff: one felt 'split in two' trying to make the systems work, another felt 'asphyxiated' and left 'holding up the masthead which had broken away from the institution' (Story IV). The sense is of feeling abandoned and without real leadership. These potent images reappear later in 'recognising the same patterns' (Story XIV), during my discussion with senior local government managers about the merits of the performance culture. One manager suddenly states categorically that her work "no longer has any meaning" echoing precisely my own words a decade earlier.

Many stories in Part Four are in summary about moral dilemmas and an illustration of emotional life, ethics and politics coming together. In contrast to this dominant focus in the stories, the mainstream literature on public services still remains strongly orientated towards a rational stance. In Part Five, I will turn to the discourses of complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking in depth, in order to reflect further on the storytelling from these two theoretical perspectives.

PART FIVE: MODERNITY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

In most description and analysis, culture and society are expressed in an habitual past tense. The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products.

Raymond Williams (1977:128-129)

Chapter 14: Complexity thinking

Complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking were both briefly outlined underpinning my approach to narrative methodology in Part One. I will now return to complexity thinking in more depth, including its development as a science and its relevance to thinking about ethics, emotions and politics in relation to the storytelling. My starting point will be how it has been an unrecognised but shaping influence in my own life. I will then briefly consider its place in scientific thought in order to underline how complexity ideas help to radically challenge the pre-eminence given to a rationalist approach in research with its emphasis on detachment and scientific measurement. Tew and Wheeler (1994:7) have suggested that complexity theory may enable the subjectivism of experience to become a part of the scientific account of the world and they cite evidence of what they see as a rapprochement underway between science and humanities, which potentially enables the split between feeling and knowing to be overcome. I will then consider the relationship of complexity thinking to politics, before turning to a consideration of how complex responsive processes of relating is expressed in my storytelling and has refreshed my own thinking about public services.

However, bringing complexity together with psychosocial thinking raised unexpected, conflicting philosophical perspectives and resolving this has itself become part of my overall narrative. In the following chapters, I will turn to the discourse of psychosocial thinking, and its particular contribution to understanding the emotional basis of public services and to the storytelling. In the final chapter of Part Five, I will consider why bringing complexity and psychoanalytic discourses together, despite the problems that have arisen, is very pertinent to re-thinking the meaning of public sphere in the context of 'modernity'.

A hidden legacy

While I was still in secondary school and a member of a radical international student movement, a visiting speaker in 1963 described how 'a polar bear sneezes at the North

Pole and a storm blows up over Peking' which triggered much discussion. This brief incident seems to have touched me in a particularly deep and lasting way, imprinting in me a sense of my own agency despite my then position of relative powerlessness. It shaped an enduring sense that everything one does matters. Since then, I have had no awareness of its resonance with Lorenz's butterfly metaphor (1972) and was never consciously aware of complexity ideas until a decade ago. This student movement was also strongly influenced by its Brazilian members who were at that time directly engaged with Paulo Freire's transformational thinking around adult literacy prior to the military coup of 1964, which resulted in his exile. I was subsequently attracted to the early, non-professionalised forms of action research inspired by Freire's dialogical approach (1970), which as we shall see later connects back to some forms of complexity thinking.

Reflecting on why I now find myself attached to a Complexity and Management Centre within a Business School, I have begun to recognise some sort of emergent process at work in these disparate experiences. I can now see how these isolated events over the years are suffused with a latent interest in ideas out of which chaos theory and the later complexity theorising has grown. Each event exerted an unexpectedly strong attraction for me, without my realising their common source or connections. For example, in the course of writing this chapter I have become aware that the writing of the palaeontologist, Teilhard de Chardin (1959, 1965), who interested and excited me whilst studying geology at university, and who was also particularly influenced by Poincaré's (1908) early work on chaos theory at the beginning of the last century. The late sixties was also a time when I was drawn into discussion about 'Situation Ethics' (Fletcher, 1966), which flourished briefly before it disappeared from public discourse. I am now intrigued to discover that it drew on the same 'pragmatist' philosophical roots that underpin the theory of complex responsive processes.

Three decades later in 1996, a chance reading of a magazine article by Fritzof Capra had an immediate resonance for me and I made sure to attend the lecture that launched the publication of his book, the '*Web of Life*' (1996). Drawing on Maturana and Varela (1987) and the 'Santiago Theory' of mind, which challenged the longstanding Cartesian divide of mind and matter, Capra argued in a way accessible to a large and diverse audience the radical idea that cognition involved the whole process of life including perception, emotion, and behaviour. That evening I consumed chapter after chapter of

his book, standing for hours in a cold and windswept tube station as I waited to meet someone off a delayed flight. I had become convinced that it could in some way be relevant to my then experience of local government where I was at that time involved in a major organisational restructuring. My epiphany with complexity thought was inevitably not more widely embraced and my thinking was then buried in the familiar format of committee reports.

During this same period, I also attended an innovative workshop on 'new concepts of organisation'.⁶⁰ It stands out in my memory as a rare opportunity to think very differently about managing in organisations at that time. The workshop was drawing on the 'new physics' and talking the language of complexity. But much to my disappointment a second follow-up workshop six months later was cancelled for lack of interest. It seems that I had witnessed the brief, but short-lived, moment when complexity thinking was picked up and then quickly dropped by local government (Battram/LBMB, 1996).

Finally, during my MSc in group relations, organisations and society⁶¹ at the end of the 1990s, I became particularly interested in Bion's work and his understanding of the oscillation of creativity and disintegration (Eigen, 1993), unaware of how this echo of chaos theory also drew on Poincare's work (Rustin, 2002:270). I was also intrigued by the emerging critiques of systems thinking by Palmer (1998, 2000), who challenged the familiar language of 'inner and outer' again drawing on the 'new physics'. A seminar in the autumn of 2000 brought together papers with a range of different interests in complexity, including one by Ralph Stacey from the University of Hertfordshire. Then, by a series of seeming chance events, within months I was starting a PhD on story, based within the Complexity and Management Centre of the Business School at the University of Hertfordshire. Soon after I started, my different fleeting brushes with complexity ideas up to that point was rapidly overtaken by a series of new published works beginning with Stacey et al (2000). These flowed from the new discourse of complex responsive processes of relating evolving over the previous five years. This literature was to be the focus of the PhD group that I had joined.

⁶⁰ Greater London Employers Authority workshop run by Elizabeth Henderson. January 1997.

⁶¹ MSc in Group relations, organisations and society at Bristol UWE 1998-2000.

I will first of all map some of the broader scientific origins of complexity thinking and its relevance to politics before turning to this specific literature in more depth.

Complexity and science

Although the word ‘complexity’ has multiple meanings, the science of complexity requires a clear distinction from the merely complicated. The biologist, Brian Goodwin (1994), refers to it as the ‘potential for emergent order in unpredictable phenomena’ and for a self-organising capacity to be present in nature and the social (1997:112). He describes how science has been revolutionised by the subtlety of four ‘awakenings’ (2003:14) of which complexity is the most recent.

Firstly, *relativity* implied there is no absolute frame of reference, no preferred perspective giving one observer authority over another in observing natural processes. Secondly, the *quantum realm* revealed that what is observed also depends on what the observer chooses to look at. The units of matter and those exploring them cannot be varied independently and are governed by an intimate entanglement. Thirdly, *chaos theory* demonstrated how behaviour cannot be predicted accurately beyond a limited period of time. Lorenz (1972) connected a long-standing puzzle about planetary motion to human experience by working on equations for weather patterns using Poincare’s method of mapping complex dynamic patterns. He observed with the help of computers, a new and beautiful mathematical object now known as the ‘Lorenz attractor’. He coined the immediately graspable metaphor of how ‘a butterfly flaps its wings in Iowa’ could lead, via the strange dynamics of the weather, ‘to a typhoon in Indonesia’. Perhaps the metaphor that I had heard a decade earlier in my student movement was a prefigurative form of this, arising from his early papers, or perhaps it was merely a prescient Chinese proverb. Fourthly, in the 1980s and 1990s came the emergence in various branches of science of *complexity theories*.

Complex systems are those made up of many diverse elements that interact with each other according to well-defined rules. While it is possible to understand their behaviour in isolation and to have an understanding of their rules of interaction, it is impossible to predict coherent behaviour in complex situations made up of many elements. In an analogy of biology, the Tierra computer simulation (Ray, 1992 quoted in Stacey 2003a:

240) demonstrated iterative non-linear interaction, which revealed self-organising emergent properties from which new forms of interaction emerged.

All of this conveys the sense of evolving eco organisms: that the earth as a living organism and human societies are radically unpredictable. In the wake of the BSE disaster, Goodwin advocated 'sensitive participation in the processes in which we are immersed' rather than continuing with the fiction that we can exert control from the outside as objective detached observers with predictive knowledge of the outcomes of manipulations' (1997:122). He advocates a 'science of qualities' rather than quantities, and a shift of focus from the individual to relationships and the collective. Goodwin argues that complexity thinking in general has transformed our view of nature and in his view these developments in science reinforce our need to find participatory ways of relating to reality, which involve intuition or non-inferential knowing. Only this will give us insight into the qualities of organisms, families, communities and organisations allowing us to recognize whether they are healthy or stressed, integrated or fragmented, coherent or disturbed (2003:14).

The place of narrative or 'thick description' (Geertz, 1988) is therefore a key way of representing our complicated and 'complex' reality. Goodwin is not suggesting that what is learned from a reductive scientific tradition is not respected. It has and will continue to bring benefits. But the message is clear that it is not enough. Complexity theory leaves behind the idea of the dispassionate observer or researcher and the reliance on the precise measurement of reductionist scientific method. But until the narrative turn in social sciences over this last decade, it was only the marginal discipline of depth psychologies in human sciences that refused to accept this prevailing orthodoxy of the detached rational observer. They retained an approach of engagement with, in group terms, the capacity to study organisations as the experience of subjectivities and insisted on the legitimacy of feelings and the retention of narrative in its approach (Rustin, 1999:66). An understanding of complexity legitimises in quite a powerful way a qualitative approach to research: one in which knowledge is as much about intimacy as about power.

Politics and complexity

Capra considered his own complexity thinking had never achieved any purchase on politicians in the USA. But my own sense is that complexity thinking is much closer to the experience of the political and policy domains than the currently dominant ethos of centralised planning and control in the UK 'driving' change. One need look no further than the 'Hutton Inquiry' in 2003/4 for evidence of the way in which key decisions were made in non-minuted conversations 'around the sofa' in No 10 Downing Street. The visceral emotion, which infused this inquiry, is not untypical of the political process more generally.

The 'think-tank', Demos, has encouraged several attempts to modify the hard systems ideas that currently dominate the thinking of politicians. This includes the 'connexity' thinking of Mulgan (2004) and the 'mental models of citizenship' (Bentley et al, 2003). Chapman (2002) also argues that public services are complex adaptive systems and that the rigidity of imposed targets will ultimately fail. Skidmore and Bound (2005) have drawn the parallel of governance with the metaphor of jazz. They argue that the role of governance is to create 'building blocks' in order to liberate the ingenuity of a wider set of actors.

While I would take issue with some of the content of these papers, they are a positive indication that there is more talk in government about the need for fewer targets and a shift to 'softer' outcomes. Practicality alone has dictated some reduction in targetry. But equally, these papers all fail to address Cooper's (2001:353) analysis as to how and why the shift from a welfare state to a regulatory state constitutes 'a threat to government', driving politicians ever further into the embrace of an audit culture and hard systems. They ignore, he suggests, the underlying anxieties generated by this shift to managerialism. In summary, they all gloss over the problematic nature of power and dependence in human existence and the complicated nature of human relating. They are all still locked into a form of systems thinking, which devalues the affective aspect of communication.

Although working in a complex adaptive systems framework, Byrne (1998) does track the connection of politics and complexity thinking in a more substantial and interesting way and has won some readership within the world public services. He argues that

complexity thinking was initially taken up in politically different ways. In particular he suggests that Europeans were drawn to the work of the chemical physicist Priogine, and philosopher Stengers (1984), because, in his view, it allows for, and might even be said to require, political engagement (2001:198) compared to the approach in the US conducted around the Santa Fe Institute, which suggests a more expert led, technocratic, post-political form of governance. Byrne (ibid:146-150) uses the underlying, self-organising principles of complexity theory to think about more effective forms of radical politics. He emphasises the potential of local action with global implications, countering the disempowerment of thinking cast in terms of global systemic determination. He understands complexity as more than just ‘complicated’ and, as every new condition means the system changes in response, so there is always this potential for change and adaptation. He also stresses that there are no universals; in other words we cannot establish complex systems that always hold.

Drawing on Cilliers’ work (1998), he argues that it is unethical to try to understand systems from outside and that this points toward ‘a different style of knowledge’ (ibid:144-145) and of the need to know from inside through participation in the world. He considers Friere’s (1982) ‘dialogical knowledge’ through ‘being and doing’ offers such a way of knowing. He suggests we can never have enough knowledge of a really complex system to produce a useful working knowledge of it, despite the sophisticated and useful technology of representation of cities such as Allen’s modelling techniques. In Byrne’s view, Allen is quite aware of the limitations of such modelling and restricts its use to helping to understand the past and the present but not the future. It helps to set agendas for different actors as to what would be a good or bad thing and for whom (Allen, 1997:178).

Inequality is identified as a powerful determinant force in interaction. A flexible, unequal capitalism, which does not generate social exclusion, is seen as impossible. Change and restructuring in the economic sphere is massively exclusionary, degrading local democratic governance and allowing corporate power and the personally rich to acquire disproportionate influence over governance at all levels, which induces passivity and a sense of inevitability. So Byrne is particularly concerned to relate complexity to selection of targets for social action and interventions. He poses a question: ‘is it possible to select some things which matter more than others – no one single thing but a combination in

which there is a setting of limits?’ (ibid:146) and draws an analogy to ‘twiddling the knobs on a music centre to get the sound we want’. He also argues that only local democratic systems based on informed reflexive action of the people *in* the systems themselves can provide a workable model for local democracy. The mantras of global systemic determination are, in contrast, disempowering.

Freire’s (1970) conception of participatory research, of praxis as action and reflection, of an understanding of power as not given but created within an emerging praxis in which co-learners are engaged, all seem still as relevant as when I encountered these ideas as a student. Although Byrne leans towards the language of complex adaptive systems thinking, in drawing on Freire he does emphasise co-creation and not being ‘outside the system’ and the importance of dialogic forms. Complex responsive process of relating, however, takes us more fully into a process, and away from systems entirely.

Complex responsive processes of relating

Complexity ideas have largely been incorporated into organisational literature in a way that stresses an adaptation of systems thinking. In striking contrast to this, ‘complex responsive processes of relating’ (Stacey, Griffin, & Shaw 2000; Stacey 2001; Stacey 2003 and 2003a &b) is a theory of human interaction that is grounded in a critique of systems thinking. It is still a largely unknown way of thinking in the discourse around public services and for that reason I will set out its main components before drawing some insights in relation to the storytelling of earlier chapters.

In this theory, systems thinking is seen to privilege the individual, the biological or the system, rather than simply giving attention to social interaction, with power lying outside the system. Complex responsive processes is, therefore, an important philosophical challenge to the dominant mode of thinking within management and organisational discourses. It offers an understanding of a radically social emergence of the self /individual, which is continuously evolving through the groups we belong too and through which we imbibe changing social norms. Individual and group identity emerge and evolve in everyday interactions of self with self and self with others. It points to the power of the social and cultural in our minds and to the illusion of the isolated, rational, individual. Crucially, one’s own interactions as a researcher cannot be marginalised from the process of research.

Stacey et al (2000), and colleagues at the Complexity and Management Centre of the University of Hertfordshire have brought together the work of the sociologist, Elias (1939, 2000), and his 'process' understanding of the social. This is combined with Mead's (1934) theories of symbolic interactionism and placed within the wider framework of the natural sciences of complexity, neuroscience and group analysis (Foulkes, 1964). Elias tracked societal changes, for example, through the history of manners (1939) and in doing so, Stacey argues (2003:33-35: 2003a: 300) he anticipates complexity thinking and the impact of self-organising local interaction. Elias suggested that the actions, plans and purposes of many interacting individuals constantly give rise to situations that had not been planned, intended or created by any one of those individuals but is a 'self organising process of emergent change in patterns of relationship' (2003:56).

For Mead, mind, self and society arise simultaneously and for Elias, the individual is the singular and the social is the plural of interdependent people. Mind is, therefore, understood as a social process and mind, self and relationship are forming and being formed by each other at the same time (Griffin, 2002:149). In other words, the individual is formed by the social while at the same time forming it and our worlds are always profoundly inter-subjective. For Stacey et al (2000) organisations are about an evolving identity not about conforming to a known order and certainty. Drawing on Elias, human identity is understood as having two inseparably interwoven aspects: an 'I' and a 'we' identity, as individual *and* social and as an aspect of inclusion and exclusion and thus power relating (Stacey, 2003a:328).

Human relating is self-organising and emerges in a way in which interaction and power relating patterns itself. So the meaning of what we are doing also emerges in such interaction. There is also a conscious and unconscious coexistence in the present of our past and prospective futures, which influences the response that we make in the 'living present' (Stacey 2003:145). Conversation is seen as the key analogy for the complexity sciences. Some conversations are 'stable', that is habitual, repetitive or stuck with no potential to transform. The 'unstable' conversation in contrast has felt qualities of liveliness, fluidity and energy, a grasping at meaning and coherence along with excitement and at the same time tension (ibid, 2003:79). Ordinary everyday conversation between people is, therefore, perpetually creating the future in shifting patterns of power

relating in which individuals and collective identities are inseparable. Each individual is simultaneously evoking and provoking responses from others, so that the particular personal organising themes emerging for any one of them will depend as much on the others as on the individual concerned. The theory stresses interdependence as well as power relating. Anxiety, and constraint are constantly present, and will always result in Elias's 'established' and 'outsider' groups (ibid:121), who is at the centre and who is at the margins, or in complexity terms 'legitimate' and 'shadow' themes (Stacey, 2003a:364) patterning experience.

The idea of 'bounded instability' also conveys the notion of how some conversation can be free flowing, as represented in the spontaneity of jazz (Noble, 1999; Aram and Noble, 1999), while others can be stuck and enervating or chaotic.

A challenge to systems thinking

Complex responsive processes of relating, therefore, offers a way of thinking which, displaces systems thinking into a secondary role, as part merely of 'ordinary management' (Stacey, 1993:69). In its focus on being in control, systems thinking inhibits recognition in theory and practice, of just how novelty, spontaneity and failure arise ongoingly in interaction and constantly generate modification. The quality of 'as if' it were a system, is lost. Systems thinking notably fails to capture the experience of how ideas actually emerge at the interface of political and policy domains in public institutions *before* being translated into plans and systems. It does not allow for the kind of emotional turbulence involved in political processes or how the best made plans are sidelined and fail when the kinds of conversation in which people invest their own meaning do not occur.

Narrative-like structuring of experience

Narrative, story and conversation are thus the key analogues for understanding complexity thinking in human relations. Stacey considers that there is a 'narrative-like' structuring of human experience and draws on Bruner (1990) and his notion that the self is an autobiographical narrative that is continually evolving (2003:76-7). Human experience is 'story like' and we construct intricate narratives in our relational communication, as we account for what we are doing and make sense of our worlds. Stacey is suggesting that all human relationships, including the communicative action of

the body with itself (that is Mind), and the communicative action between bodies (that is the Social), are storylines and propositions, which at the same time construct the relationship. Similarly, the silent conversation of each individual and their public interactions are manifested as 'themes', which organise individual and collective experience in the living present. We are each simultaneously evoking and provoking responses from others, so that the particular personal organising themes emerging for ourselves will depend as much on the others. (2003:78). The distinction between narrative themes (conversation) and propositional themes (procedures) and the different ways both organise the experience of being together is also emphasised (Tsoukas, 1997). Although social constructionist thinking such as Shotter (1989) was influential in the earlier development of the theory, Stacey strongly asserts the importance of the body (2003:113) and thus firmly distinguishes complex responsive processes from the more radical social constructionist writings of Gergen (1999) and others.

Ethics and ideology

Within this discourse of complex responsive processes, Griffin has suggested that staying with the experience of interaction and negotiation 'in the moment' provides us with an alternative way of thinking about ethics and leadership. What is ethical emerges in our accountability to each other in our daily relating. (Griffin, 2002: 205-:207; Stacey, 2003a:395- 397). It means eschewing a systemic concept of organisational leadership grounded in autonomous individuals who formulate visions and values. Griffin considers this mystifies leadership, eliminates paradox and abstracts ethics from direct experience, locating it in some external, idealised whole. He considers this has given rise to a notion of universal codes of conduct, which provide the basis of present day business ethics on which individuals are to judge their own and others' behaviours. From a complex responsive processes perspective this is not a search for a universal value by autonomous individuals in a Kantian sense. In the context of a systems driven way of organisational thinking, he sees it as a surrender of one's autonomy to a vision endorsed by the leadership and as such it induces a sense of powerlessness.

In the perspective taken by complex responsive processes, ethical interpretation is thus understood to emerge in interaction itself. It consists not in adapting to the fixed realities but in constantly recreating the world we are in. In this, the theory moves away from any

notion of a system lying outside experience and causing it and follows a Hegelian view that an ethical life of any particular 'people' arises from the patterns of entitlements, commitments and acts of mutual recognition (Pinkard, 2000a:171 quoted in Stacey, 2003:208). Hegel, in common with Elias and Mead, takes the viewpoint that the individual and the social cannot be separated. Griffin underlines how Hegel says that in the master-slave relationship ultimately the slave allows the imposition of the master's norms.

This analogy usefully underlines how one is constantly confronted by whether to comply with or to subvert a decision. In this way of thinking what each of us does or says matters, even though we do not know the outcome of our actions. From a complexity perspective small events may be amplified to global significance. The central notion is, therefore, one of the importance of everyday conversation and story as the ways we communicate, develop our thinking or create an ethos that 'is'. Values, norms and ideology are all contingent and negotiated afresh in each specific situation. This is ethics as an ongoing negotiation and interaction, which is not thought out before action, and ethics in which 'truth' is contingent on and particularised in relation to the situation. So, in summary, it is in everyday conversation and the ways in which we communicate in local processes that we are creating *meaning* (Griffin, 2003:18).

As complex responsive processes, human experience is a temporally iterated interaction, so any concept of a whole is a temporary imaginative construct arising in the interaction, which gives rise to a sense of continuity and coherence. The emphasis is on the 'living present' (Stacey et al, 2000: 52-53). Transformation is seen as arising in the capacity for spontaneous individual responses and the amplification of small differences in iterated habit from 'one' present to the 'next'. We reconstruct and reinterpret the past in each present, which in turn shapes our expectation. Complex responsive processes theory places great emphasis on the moment-to-moment impact of interactions we engage in. But as Stacey and Griffin (2005) point out, it is a misunderstanding to think that this means that social and self-formation proceeds anew in each present. 'Processes of social and self-formation ...have a history and this history is both potentially repeated and potentially transformed in each present' (ibid:16).

Bringing the past and future into the present also underlines the central role of temporal thought alongside biological time. The concept of the 'living present' also resonates with the cultural criticism of Raymond Williams (1977), who argued that descriptions of culture and society are habitually in the past tense, so that relationships and institutions and formations in which we are involved, are converted into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes. As a consequence, only fixed explicit forms are brought to bear in analysis and 'living presence is always, by definition receding' (ibid:128-129). He considered this reduced relations between people to relations between concepts and obscured the 'complicated flows and processes' that sustain community. For this reason, Williams considered that his novels were part of his theorising (Harvey, 1996:28, quoting Williams 1989:319). As with complex responsive processes of relating, it is in narrative that a dialectical, and process form of understanding finds expression.

Avoiding reification

In arguing that ethics consists not in adapting to fixed realities but in constantly recreating the world we are in, Griffin (2005:27) moves away from any notion of a system lying outside of experience and causing it. What each of us does matters; even though we do not know the outcome of our actions. Connecting this back to public services, this central notion returns us to the importance of everyday conversation and story making in shaping and sustaining what we mean by publicness and a public service ethos. It is in how we communicate that meaning arises, and it is in this, not rhetoric, that ultimately it is sustained.

I find an interesting resonance here with Hall's cultural theorising about the 'public' referred to in Chapter 8, in which he emphasises how the 'public realm' is a social dimension not a separate realm, in which interdependence and a non-commodified relationship are expressed in material and institutional ways, between the public as citizens and not as consumers. Social provision is to be governed not by money but by a different form of social assessment and principles of social organisation about why, when, and how we should govern market rationality. The NHS, in his view, has embodied just such a set of values over market relations and institutionalised it in both a place and in the relations between professionals and people. We know we are governed by some shared ethic, which does not involve the criteria to pay.

Change is constantly challenging us to choose in our day-to-day interactions. Griffin (2005) conceives of this in terms of leadership. Although working from within a very different discourse, there is also common ground here with Newman's analysis (2005) of leadership. She argues against a deterministic understanding of managerialism in public services discourse, arguing it has given rise to an unstable settlement and the appropriation of discourses is always present.

Ideology

Ideology is a concept used in multiple ways. It can be a disparaging term, which suggests the political views of someone else are unsound and detached from what works, or it may be used to suggest a rigid and stuck policy position resistant to the pragmatic evidence of events. Finally, it may be used to imply the absence of any coherent underpinning ideas or values to sustain the will to act. Complex responsive processes of relating puts ideology, along with power and emotion, at the centre of social relationships, but in a somewhat different sense to those above. Following Elias, it is seen as at the centre of conversation, and gossip, which work to sustain or undermine official ideology.

Ideology in this sense emerges in a self-organising way to be constantly deconstructed. It is conversation that preserves the current order by making it seem natural or, alternatively, subverts it and in this way organises the behaviour of the group (Stacey, 2003a:325). Streams of gossip stigmatise and blame the outsider or praise the insider, distinguishing 'us' and 'them', stigmatising the weak and attributing 'charisma' to the powerful or as other binary oppositions (Dalal, 1998:118-119). But stigmatisation will only stick where there is already a sufficient asymmetry of power and the silent conversation of the 'I' confers the superiority or inferiority at stake. Mind is, therefore, always taken up with power, ideological relating and emotional interchange of self to self and self with others.

Legitimate and shadow narratives

The possibility of the evolution of novelty depends critically on the presence of 'microscopic diversity' (Allen, 1988a) and sufficient differences. Similarly, conversation that is 'free flowing' evolves and is energising, whereas a series of monologues or stuck conversations is enervating. Bakhtin (1986 quoted in Stacey, 2003a:327) understood dialogue as always a tension-filled experience pulling on the one hand towards unity, merging, agreement and monologue, and on the other pulling away towards multiplicity,

separation, disagreement and dialogue. Although dialogue constructs meaning, the meaning of language used still lies in the nature of the communication. It is determined by whose word it is, who it is for and how it is said and not in the abstract sense of the words themselves. Bakhtin (ibid) considered the unity of official ideologies on the surface always covered over a multiplicity of unofficial ideologies so that the legitimated and dominant narrative can be understood as merely hiding those of the marginalised and silenced shadow narratives.

Research practice

This theoretical development of complex responsive processes of relating has been taken forward within an intensive experiential context of a three-year doctorate programme. Stacey and Griffin (2005: 13-38) have now developed a research practitioner methodology to accompany the previous theorising. As already noted earlier in Chapter 2, they refer to this as ‘taking one’s experience seriously’ (ibid:15) and of exploring complex responsive processes of human relating as a second order reflexivity. This means exploring our own experience of interaction with each other and the way this is patterned. It is about trying to understand the nature of an experience in which identity is under perpetual construction. The experience to the forefront here is the experience of interacting in the physical world, although this would not preclude exploring more metaphysical or spiritual themes which arose out of this. A research narrative is intended to be ‘explicit and ordinary’, eschewing poetic licence (ibid:23). But it is also reflexive in so far as the narrator is making explicit the way of thinking that they are reflecting in the construction of the story, explaining why it has the focus it has and how the narrator’s past experience arises in the present interaction so shaping the selection of events and their interpretation. It requires the narrator to explicitly locate their way of thinking about the story being told in specific traditions of thought in a critically aware manner.

Research then is seen as an interpretation, a subjective reflection on personal experience subject to an iterative discussion process with one’s peers and experience itself. That said, it always still needs to resonate with the experience of others and be persuasive to them. The value of this kind of research is seen as presenting accounts of what people actually experience with all its ‘uncertainty, emotion and messiness rather than a highly decontextualised accounts and their hindsight view’ (ibid:7-14).

Complex responsive processes of relating brought a radically new perspective into my own narrative work demanding that, as a researcher, it was *my* story that was to be told. I have already described the reluctance with which I initially viewed this: reflecting on one's own power relating and ethical actions is not an easy option to take up. I have come to characterise this in my own mind as a form of 'horizontal' research and a way of revealing the power relating processes in which one participates and through which, as a consequence, we are always influencing the processes of change. As a methodology it now takes its place alongside two other options with which I have worked: 'upwards' research which explicitly investigates powerful elites in society and the more prevalent use of 'downwards' research in the social sciences, which can also contribute to enabling social control of the less powerful in society.

A different emphasis

I have been part of independent PhD group drawing on the same complexity theory, but my own research approach has evolved in a way which appears broadly consistent to the recent exposition of a research methodology by Stacey and Griffin (2005) outlined above. But there are differences. I use metaphor, symbolism and dreams more freely, and take more poetic licence in the stories. I was also interested to experiment with forms of storytelling that allowed the stories space to speak for themselves allowing their meaning to amplify. I wanted to avoid a sense that narrative was primarily there as a vehicle to justify existing theory. My starting point is rather the role of narrative reasoning but the conceptual ideas of complex responsive processes summarised above are reflected in the storytelling in the following ways.

Interpreting the stories through a complexity lens

Legitimate and shadow narratives

The dynamic of the 'legitimate and shadow' or 'established and outsider' shapes the narrative, particularly the later stories of 'Past in the present' (Part Two), which captures the change to being progressively silenced, denigrated, forced into a shadow role and incorporation into the powerful new narrative of 'the market'. It reveals how my own social identity was also shaped in this powerful dynamic of change. The earlier stories are then, in part, the 'unfinished business' of this history, emphasising how, two decades on, the past was still directly impinging on the present.

Iteration

The storytelling itself, together with the alternating theory and reflections, are a way of conveying the non-linear process of sense making about a process of change which I myself found I could not understand and was deeply confusing. This search is driven by the 'not known' as much as the known. So it involves a repeated return to themes from different perspectives, which in the stories reveal shifts and incremental change emerging ongoingly rather than in an orderly, systematic way.

Local and global

Whereas levels and boundaries are intrinsic to a systems thinking, complexity eschews them. The global is in the local and vice versa. In the story 'I am a terrorist too!' (Story, IX), a contemporaneous, renewed imperialism resonated deeply in this experience of mental breakdown and the consequence of a cumulative failure by the local state to care well for its most vulnerable citizens. My own earlier story, described in the 'Introduction' of a 'collapse of meaning' in the mid 1990s, is a response to the deepening contradictions of managing the 'new public management' and it was experienced in a deeply confusing and personal way. Yet with hindsight, I can see how the global was washing through my own life. A decade on, Nairn (2006:134-139) writing of this era of a gathering momentum in globalisation, places particular significance on the 'dismissal of meaning on a global scale' and 'a loss of bearings', arising from the belittling of the sustaining role of national identities and the defective pretence at democracy.

Conversation and transformation

At the outset of my research, the conversation around public services was stuck but by the close, the stories are conveying the sense of a more free flowing state of mind, in which new ideas are mutating out of the diversity, muddle and uncertainty encountered. There is a palpable sense of forming and being formed by the dialectical contestation of ideas being experienced and of the transformation of my own identity taking place, reflecting the central 'I-We' dynamic of Mead as drawn on by Stacey (2003:238). As the narrative 'From silence to voice' of Part Four, progresses, I begin to find my voice and the tone gradually becomes more confident once more. The active engagement in 'Finding my voice' (Story XI), develops through 'Gender, sex and power' (Story XII), and on through 'A practical ethical author' (Story XIII), and finally 'Storytelling: endnotes' (Story XV). This emerging momentum of change can be attributed to the incremental effect of conversation with others and to my own internal conversation reflecting on this: to, in other words, complex responsive processes of relating.

Amplification

For example, I was drawn back into active local political engagement, by a quite chance decision made while I stood amidst the cacophony of the European Social Forum wondering whether I would leave (Story XI). At that critical moment, I decided rather to go and speak to someone who I saw sitting in a café which set in motion an unexpected train of events. We decided to work together politically on a new local campaign. That such a small event amplified with unanticipated consequences, also forcefully emphasises the relevance of the ‘butterfly flapping its wings’ metaphor of chaos theory, and how human experience is shaped by such small moments of decision continuously emerging in an unplanned, self-organising way.

Avoiding reification

In their different ways, Griffin (2005:22) above, but also earlier in Part Three, Hall (2004) and Newman (2005), each point us away from an empty reification of the concept of a public sector or public service ethos and of turning it into a thing or a fetish. It must find live expression in daily relating and interactions with their unpredictable outcomes. My own encounter with the NHS in ‘Public infrastructure’ (Story VII), expresses a sense of how something was understood in a very live way, between myself and the medical staff, despite the material dilapidation. Similarly, in ‘Emotional labour’ (Story IX), there is an alive presence in the care demonstrated by environmental centre staff, but very absent in the way housing management staff fail to express empathy in their response to a vulnerable tenant, but who in turn recovers a degree of trust once again in the relationship with a building surveyor. In each example, it is the capacity for human relating which is the shaping factor of how a public service was meaningful or abusive.

An ethical awareness

As a research methodology, ‘working with oneself and others’ required that I reflect on my own dilemmas and power relating as a teacher, researcher, daughter, patient, political activist, in all my multiple encounters with public services. Griffin (2005:28) argues that it is staying with these experiences of interaction and negotiation ‘in the moment’ in this way, that we encounter an alternative way of thinking about ethics, understood as constantly emerging in interaction itself rather than as merely a received set of rules. This understanding of ethics calls on us to be conscious of how we are connected to

every event we make happen and happens to us, through small incidental moments of choice and adjustment (Kertesz, 2006).

We are drawn into behaviours as a consequence of powerful social norms, engendered by, for example, the competitive pressures of new league tables. So, in the stories of 'Moral dilemmas' (Story X), as a lecturer I 'tick the box' unable in the critical moment to do otherwise'; in the story 'we all live by lying now', lying has become a necessary norm. The story of the 'planning officer' reveals how a traditional ethical stance has given way to a new ethos in the pragmatic pursuit of efficiency. In contrast to this, we also encounter the unruly voice of conscience and the resilience of the 'the caterer', as do other staff transferred to or working in the private sector in 'Private choices' (Story III).

Releasing desire

The procurement officer (Story VI) seeks to pin down an essential quality in selecting firms applying to his approved list. He defines this as the desire to do something really well and innovatively. The library service is, for example, also revitalised in the story 'Treasured Libraries' (Story V), by the presence of just such a 'desire'. Both examples illustrate how this suggests small companies rather than the corporate sector is where a more creative synergy lies.

Complexity and 'modernising' public services

Complexity ideas are thus highly pertinent to critiquing the top-down, controlling style and systems thinking which now so dominates government public services policy making, with its pervasive, business model, and its anxiety-driven, obsessive focus on measurement, control and inspection. It has encouraged a political discourse, which is judgmental and focussed on the failure of the public sector. The 'conversation' across the sector feels bullying and leaden. This is not to say that systems and routine will not always be a political priority or that opposition and conflict are not very much part of the territory. But a capacity for difference and spontaneity, so essential for the play of ideas, is suppressed under the pressure of the pervasive culture of compliance.

Byrne (1998; 2001) and Stacey and Griffin (2005), albeit in different ways, invite us to think differently about causality in public service 'systems' and to acknowledge self-

organising processes at work in ways that could reinvigorate thinking about public services and return it to a more balanced contribution of local democracy. Over the last few years, advocates of change have begun to adopt the language of adaptive systems and complexity. As exhaustion with targetry sets in, complexity ideas are emerging in the new discourse of 'New Localism' with its agenda of 'double devolution'. The meaning of this is twofold.

On the one hand, complexity thinking offers a way of subverting the dominance of systems thinking and the command and control assumptions which have so underpinned the 'Soviet tank' model of government (Caulkin, 2006) over the past decade and is influencing a welcome return to a potential reinvigoration of accountability by local politicians for neighbourhood priorities. It is becoming both a vehicle for a language shift in which the use of terms from complexity discourse have begun to appear, such as 'self-organisation' and 'self-sustaining systems'. But, on the other hand, the language shift is a mere slight of hand to sustain current ideology. The new government discourse is promoting the voluntary sector as a major alternative supplier of public services alongside the new private public service sector monopolies. Nowhere is there any positive focus on local government itself. There is a generalised assumption that the voluntary sector is community-based and intrinsically offers the capacity to be more innovative and adaptive. The voluntary sector does have real strengths but, under the intensification of the contract culture, it now can also mean something very different to the innovatory legacy of the social movements of Part Two. The larger charity sector now wants to compete with the public sector as an alternative provider of services, and follow in the path of Housing Associations.

Ethics as politics

Politics has always revolved around conversations, personal connections, influences and conflicting interests such as this, but complex responsive processes of power relating also draws our attention to a situational ethics arising in our interactions and thus to my own engagement with all of this. In 'Story telling: an endnote' (Story XVI), I found myself in a complexity seminar alongside the chief executive of a major charity discussing complexity thinking and the public sector. In response to his dismissive comments about the role of local authorities and local councillors, I expressed the perception (correctly as it later emerges in the story) that he was moving to work more closely with the private

sector transforming longstanding relationship of the voluntary sector to local government.

This story brings together what complex responsive processes of relating means. It reveals and invites reflection on the power relating that one is encountering and the complicated flows and processes in which one finds oneself. As a mode of enquiry its starting point is not one intrinsically opposed to asymmetries of power or for social injustice in the way familiar to a critical social policy discourse. Insights that arise in discussion arising from this way of thinking can become enrolled in the service of very different, conflicting politics, as the example above illustrates. So what then does this offer to a public services discourse? It is an approach which requires that one reflect on one's own practice and thus gives ethical reflection a central place, in which narrative expression is given a special validity. All of this seems critically important to rethinking a public service ethos or to understanding why the public and private sector are different. It underlines for example, how we are making the choice in our day-to-day lives, whether to be a technocrat or a partisan. It is also in engaging with this dimension that we may recover our political imagination as to how best to respond to a changing public service context. As Griffin, (2005:29) notes, 'motivation emerges in the political'.

Chapter 15: Irreconcilable frameworks?

When I began my own research, I imagined that I would be bringing together my new encounter with complexity ideas and my own recent completion of a masters course in group relations, organisations and society, which had introduced me to the emotional basis of thinking and learning. Both discourses share much in common. Both complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial theorising are concerned to integrate power relating, a radical social understanding of the individual, and both see learning as an interdependent process. Emotion and power are understood as arising in social relations, particularly group and societal relations. They are both grounded in experiential practice and learning as experience. Each discourse is seeking to modify the emphasis on the intra-psychic from their different depth psychology inheritances, and move beyond relational and interpersonal psychologies into a more radical awareness of the social and group dimension. They both understand the individual and the group as inseparable, while at the same time retaining an 'I' that matters. Both retain an awareness of the importance of body although in very different terms.

Both discourses draw on relational and inter-subjective psychologies and this lineage can be tracked back in Mitchell and Aron's *Relational Psychoanalysis* (1999). In the case of complex responsive processes this is to be found in the chapter about the work of Stolorow and Attwood (1992) and in the case of the psychosocial studies in the chapters by Eigen (1981,1993), writing on the work of Bion and Winnicott and the chapter by Benjamin (1988).

Critiquing psychoanalytic thought

In the discourse about complex responses of relating, the focus is on how we are forming and being formed by the social at the same time. This, it is strongly argued, is a very different theory of psychology to not just humanistic, existential, and cognitive psychologies, but also to psychoanalytically derived thinking with its sense that the body's inheritance still matters although understood very differently by the different strands of analytic thinking.

Stacey (2003: 264) considers complex responsive processes to be deeply in conflict with the metapsychology of psychoanalysis with its traditional notion of system and boundaries, internal and external, inner worlds and mental space. Although Stacey recognises that psychoanalysis brings a rich insight into exploration of human fantasy, emotion, destructiveness and pathology, he is fundamentally critiquing its philosophical underpinnings seen to be grounded in Kantian thought. Like Dalal (1998) he regards the use by the Institute of Group Analysis of both the theories of the Freudian influenced 'orthodox Foulkes', alongside and distinct from a 'radical Foulkes' (ibid:68) consistent with Elias, as mutually inconsistent and an obstruction to the evolution of new meaning.

Stacey moves away from the ontological priority given to the body in Freud (and also object relations theory albeit within a very different theoretical discourse), and draws on attachment theory and the work of inter-subjectivist and the relational psychoanalysis of Stern (1983), Stolorow (1994) and Schafer (1983, 1993). Freudian instinct theory, in particular, is the focus of his critique (Stacey, 2003: 130). In his view it is the vicissitudes of attachment-separation that pattern the mind and society. The role of a group analyst is then one of analysing emerging themes in interactions rather than, as he sees it, interpreting intra-psychic fantasy, defences and repressions (ibid:330).

Stolorow and Attwood (1992:370) identify unconscious processes in three ways: as pre-reflective, dynamic, and unvalidated. Stacey (2003:137; ibid:253) modifies and reworks this as *communicative interaction* in three ways: in the medium of protosymbols or direct bodily communication of feelings; as significant symbols not yet formulated and unvalidated; and as reified symbols or taken for granted and automatic. Stacey also critiques Schafer's work as moving from the notion of an internal world but stopping short of the notion of social selves and Stolorow likewise, is seen as remaining focussed on the two-person analytic relationship. Neither completes the step that Stacey is concerned to elucidate in which he replaces 'the' unconscious (2003a:135-7), by 'unconscious processes' and a notion of bodies communicating directly through the medium of symbols.

He continues to use the term 'unconscious' but only in this sense of 'bodily communicative interaction and power relating that is unconscious in an individual's mental and social sense at the same time' (ibid:137). Following Mead, this interaction

may be in 'protosymbols' where the gesture of one body does not call forth in itself the same response as in the one gestured to, and bodies resonate together unconsciously. If using 'significant symbols' like conversation, the gesture of one calls forth in that one, similar responses to those called forth in the other. This creates the capacity for being conscious. These processes constitute what Elias calls 'habitus' (Stacey, 2003:66).

In complex responsive process theory, some analytic concepts are more compatible than others, with for example, transference and counter-transference seen as useful concepts because they translate into forms of patterning and can draw attention to rigid, repetitive distortions of communication. But projection and introjection or 'containment' are seen as problematic terms as they rely on the spatial metaphor of 'inside' and 'outside' and a sender-receiver model of communication. As such they have no meaning for complex responsive processes. In Stacey's view feelings cannot be 'put into each other'. The concept of projective identification is firmly rejected and reconceived as direct communication in protosymbols and the resonance of one person's body rhythms with those of another. The abstract spatial metaphors of 'inside' and 'outside' or 'containment' (ibid: 278) also fall into question and their use is rejected.

Irreconcilable frameworks?

As my awareness of the irreconcilability of the two theoretical frameworks sharpened, I increasingly became caught up with the incompatibility of language and use of specific concepts and considered abandoning my legacy of psychosocial theory that I had intended to bring into my research process. But this felt like too great a loss and also unhelpful in relation to drawing on and critiquing the related public services discourse. The psychosocial literature also holds something that I find absent in the complexity literature. This absence is the rich and insightful descriptions of human nature, and the reflection on actual emotional experience found in the analytic traditions and paradoxical thinking of Winnicott, Bion and others.

I have found myself returning again and again to puzzle over and understand more clearly what the complexity and psychosocial discourses have in common, where they overlap, and how they are in conflict. Both discourses are evolving and both are involved in rethinking and challenging of the paradigms that have held sway in two institutional

arenas: the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) and the Tavistock (Lawrence, 2002). In relation to the IGA, the focus of discussion is around the complexity thinking being introduced by Stacey and Dalal outlined above. Within the psychosocial discourse, the deficiencies of the Tavistock group relations paradigm are noted in the following chapter. In each case these newer critiques represent the emergence of a 'shadow discourse' now in conflict with the dominant mainstreams.

Having embarked on a research methodology with a view to drawing on two discourses to shape my narrative approach, it now seems more like having entered into a 'mixed marriage' without fully 'converting' and embracing one at the expense of the other. All the usual advice is that this is not a sensible thing to be doing. But I have used that metaphor advisedly. It is not a passing 'affair' and I find myself deeply engaged with both despite the fact they are not compatible. The positive side to this experience is that it has placed me in a position of novelty where there is the possibility of a creative mutation of ideas if the experience of difference can be held in some way. So my approach to narrative has remained pluralist and retains this mix of two frames of thought. They serve different needs. I draw different things from them both in terms of thinking about narrative, albeit at the cost of some theoretical consistency. The emphasis on learning from experience in both discourses brings something fresh and critically important to a mainstream discourse about public services, which is overly theoretical and searching for the recovery of political imagination.

Critiquing complexity

Stacey's criticisms of psychoanalysis are primarily argued around an analysis of Freudian derived thought. The reductionism of orthodox Freudian theory is marginal to mainstream psychosocial theory with its largely object relations orientation and which itself is moving into dialogue with relational psychoanalysis. Also Symington and Symington (1996). point out that Bion did not believe in *the* unconscious as a separate entity in the way for example Stacey criticises Freud. But that said, complex responsive processes and psychosocial theory clearly do have some different orientations. Stacey (2003:13) considers this to be a fundamental difference between a Hegelian dialectical based tradition with that of a Kantian tradition with an underpinning of systems thinking, boundaries, and wholes (ibid:263).

There are several areas within complex responsive processes of relating which I want to critically explore in anticipation of the following chapter on psychosocial thinking and its place alongside the more mainstream public services discourse. These are the use of spatial metaphor, the place of emotions and the absence of a gender perspective.

Temporal thought and spatial metaphor

The complex responsive processes perspective avoids the use of spatial metaphors, as notions of boundary and container have no meaning in process terms. There is no notion of an individual 'holding' or 'containing anxiety' in the sensuous or psychic language used above by Winnicott or Bion. This language is reconceived as the qualities of relational patterns that account for the capacity to live with uncertainty. Boundaries likewise are reconceived as power relations. In eschewing the spatial metaphor, complex responsive processes of relating asserts the primary importance of temporal thought.

Noel-Smith (2002) has explored how and why psychoanalytic thinking abounds with so many spatial metaphors to discuss temporal psychic processes such as 'containment', 'transitional space', 'projection', 'psychic retreat', Plato's cave and so on. She suggests that 'space is often used as a metaphor for other things, including time, whereas time is rarely used metaphorically but is often represented metaphorically' (2002:35). In other words, time structures and underlies all these analytic spatial metaphors. Reasserting temporal language directly is thus desirable. Temporal thought underpins subjectivity and reflexivity and is independent of both linear, biological time and space. It is associated with the capacity for insight accessed through a suspension of 'memory and desire', which Bion, echoing Keats on 'Negative capability', describes as 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubt without any irritable reaching after fact or reason ...' (Keats, 1999).

I would argue that there is always a fundamentally temporal meaning to the spatial metaphor of 'containment'. Spatial metaphors used in this way are poetic not literal in their meaning. Many of the world's religions tell their '*in the beginning*' stories and myths through different forms of spatial metaphor. Noel-Smith (ibid:404) attributes this to the state of loss that accompanies our entry into thought: the absent space within the mother's body becomes an imagined state of bliss. While this is open to debate, it does return us to the sheer physicality of bodies, of the difference between women and men.

and of how we are always acutely conscious of physical distance and closeness between ourselves and others or the way a space is filled as an expression of power, whether it is someone standing on our foot or occupying our country.

My storytelling includes the particularity of places. The role of local authorities is about the social reproduction in particular places and the power relating which shapes them. So, while I appreciate the logic of the arguments presented for the avoidance of spatial metaphor in complex responsive processes of relating and the association of spatial thought with systems thinking and boundaries, I would also like to open up an argument for a re-reading of space in complex responsive processes thinking so as to address place and space from the perspective of radical geography which sees both as about power relationships. Harvey (1996:53) argues for dialectical and relational thinking but equally for recognition of how politics is always grounded in historical and geographical conditions and a relation to nature. He suggests dialectical inquiry is a process which produces temporary 'permanences' (ibid:8) such as organisation, institutions, programs which stand to be supported or undermined by continuing processes, in order to change anything in a meaningful or directed way.

Massey also argues passionately for the distinction of place and space and against 'simple opposition between spatial openness and spatial closure' or spatial fetishism (2005:165). In her view, space can be conceived quite differently in much more open and multiple ways, which are not reducible to a post-modern 'surface', but in ways that are relational, as social and also highly gendered. 'If space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power geometries of space'... 'Places not as points or areas on maps but as integrations of space and time' (ibid:130). She describes her shift in imagination when she appreciated that a mountain like Skiddaw, strongly associated with permanence and place, was merely an 'immigrant rock' (ibid:137) just passing through from its origin in the southern hemisphere. Massey argues that complexity theory has the potential to force spatiality to mean something different and argues that 'no longer can space be the ultimate pinning-down and stabilisation, through scientific representation of the fundamental laws of the world. Rather spatial configuration is now interpreted as a significant factor in the emergence of the new ... what we mean by space has been revolutionised' (ibid:128).

Emotion and power

The strength of the discourse of complex responsive processes is that it focuses attention on the shifting power relations of all processes of relating. The weakness is in its representation of emotion. The early published literature of complex responsive processes of relating takes the route of an abstract, philosophical and epistemological discourse about mind. As noted already, the reference to emotion in this early core literature (Stacey et al 2000; Stacey, 2001; Stacey, 2003) is one largely of a theorising about the process of emotion, using terms such as the ‘mutual resonance of gestures’, the experience of ‘interaction’, or the pre-symbolic ‘dance of bodies’. It makes the argument that feeling and knowing are one and the same, but does not attempt to convey the experience of human relating, interaction and engagement. This is left for narrative to address. But having argued for the importance of narrative work this is quite marginal in this early work. As a consequence, my initial encounter with the theory felt strangely disembodied for a discourse about human interaction.

This early core literature thus represents a split between development of theory and the turbulence of the experiential practice and actual processes of relating which are the focus of the theory. Forged in an experiential, residential context this split is naturally tempered. But in my own more isolated position, I found that I needed to turn back to psychosocial literature as a source of insight into emotional life. Also psychosocial thinking and the critical stream of public services discourse are now engaging in a much closer dialogue (du Gay, 2005). So all three discourses I chose to work with are now engaged in a three cornered dialogue, which was not the case when I started.

A gender gap

Organisational theory is typically conceived in gender-neutral terms although, as Acker argues (1998), it is saturated with covert gender assumptions. Moss (2004:273) has described the patterns of avoidance that he experienced in a group analytic practice around gender and sexuality although not in the wider discourse. Such themes, while always very present in experiential practice, have also been strangely absent in the group relations literature of Obholzer and Roberts (1994) and French and Vince (2000). Recent work by Huffington et al (2004:49-67), seeks to fill this gap and the experiential group relations conference in 2005 (Story XII) was the first to specifically focus on gender, sex

and power at work and think about these themes and try to understand how gender and sexuality at work are covertly and overtly influencing behaviour in both creative and destructive ways. A 'masculine subjectivity' (Kerfoot, 1999:189) dominates group norms in organisations, suggesting gendered power relations not only shape the processes of relating but also pattern a discourse.

Complex responsive processes as a theory and method of inquiry adopts a gender-neutral language perfectly appropriate in an epistemological discourse. Recent narrative work, such as Williams (2005), however also lacks a gender lens. A more substantial gender awareness in the discourse would have perhaps revealed different interpretations. Noble, Barker and Healey (2000) attempt to unpack some implicit gender implications of certain metaphors woven into the discourse as a consequence of the power relating which formed it and I return to gender interpretations of the story 'Gender, sex and power' (Story XII), in the following chapter on the contribution of psychosocial thinking to shaping and interpreting the stories.

Chapter 16: Psychosocial studies

Complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking are two relationally orientated discourses, which share a concern with the relationship between the individual and the social. In the last chapter I described how a conflicting rather than shared philosophical perspective exists between them. In this chapter, I will now discuss why psychosocial theory is still relevant to addressing a discourse about public services.

Psychosocial studies

Psychosocial studies has emerged within the academy over the last decade. It ranges from conceptual and theoretical writing across social policy to culture and politics. However, Cooper and Lousada note (2005: 211) empirical work remains rather sparse relative to the theorising. Psychosocial studies explore the non-rational understanding of the human subject in relation to organisational, social and political issues. Drawing primarily on the object relations tradition and a body of theories and therapeutic technique, it is a perspective, which focuses on the interrelations of the personal, social and the political. It emphasises the powerful impulses, emotions, and desires, which characterise the life of individuals and groups. The self is seen as being continuously formed in relational and emotional dialogue and as a multiple self, mediated by unconscious passions and primitive fantasies, subject to the interplay of destructive expression, creative reparation, splitting and projection.

It draws significantly on the post-Kleinian object relations school of psychoanalytic thought, particularly on how Bion (1961, 1970) understood that primitive psychotic processes in groups, institutions and culture play a much larger role in our lives than was understood by classical Freudianism. A more hopeful, integrative side is expressed by Winnicott (1974, 1975, 1976), which emphasises culture and democratic practice positively, particularly through his concept of 'transitional space' which he describes as an intermediate area of experiencing. Others who write within this tradition include Bollas (1987) and also the contemporary inter-subjective writers such as Benjamin

(1988). In relation to narrative, this psychoanalytic strand of the discourse has always long valued a role for narrative and poetic influences.

The associated 'group relations' tradition, which pre-dates the growth of psychosocial studies, is a movement which organises temporary, experiential conferences around varying themes such as power, authority, leadership, competition. Different small and large group events within such conferences enable collective and individual reflection on the social, group and personal dynamics that come to be generated during the conference. Direct consultancy with organisations is also available through institutions such as the Tavistock Clinic and Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and other institutions working in the same tradition.

This group relations tradition or 'paradigm' (Palmer, 1998; Boxer, 1999) has been criticised for its over reliance on therapeutic models and lack of understanding of power mediated through social and political influences (Cooper, 1996:137), and for using an outdated systems way of thinking in which the relations of power between the state and public institutions, between professionals, citizens and service user are largely absent (Hoggett, 1997:134). It is thus in the process of rethinking its response to a decentred, networked environment, in which a 'primary task' is now better understood as a primary process, if one exists at all. New experiential events, like that of social dreaming (Lawrence, 1998) which were previously eschewed by a rigid orthodoxy, have also now become mainstream in the last few years.

But underpinning these different viewpoints is still a shared perspective which recognises human frailty and finitude and which accepts the painful experiences of suffering, dependency, generation, and death as central to human experience. The primary mode of communication is, therefore, seen as an affective one, where the concern is as much with the music of emotional experience and with unconscious desires or envy as with the abstract content of the narrative. It assumes that thought is a mutual, affective, interactive and embodied phenomenon but still shaped to some degree by patterned or deep structures of the mind without conceiving these as entities. For example, when exposed to intense fear, violent splitting and paranoia⁶² can be stimulated. Such 'deep structures' of a

⁶² From a neuroscience perspective Solms and Turnbull (2002: 277) identify four key 'emotion command' processes.

theoretically consistent kind (Rustin, 1995:239) are equally seen as amenable to transformation once a capacity for thinking reasserts itself or is developed.

Thinking remains conceptually grounded in what Schore (2001:317) metaphorically describes as semi-autonomous 'right brain to right brain relationships', before and beyond language. This is a neuroscience analogue of projective and introjective processes, and may still be seen as analogous to Stacey's 'dance of bodies' (Williams, 2004: 5). From an attachment theory viewpoint Gerhardt (2004:15) speaks of how 'our minds emerge and our emotions become organised through engagement with other minds, not in isolation'. Hoggett (2000:39) similarly argues that the human subject cannot be understood except within an encompassing intersubjectivity. There is shared agreement here from different perspectives that we are profoundly intersubjective beings.

Whereas the Lacanian tradition tends towards a deconstructive mode of engagement with political discourses and 'changing the word rather than changing the world' (Hoggett 2000:35 quoting Sivanandan, 1990), the object relations tradition has always insisted on exploring the positive as well as the negative poles of emotional engagement. This translates into attempts to think constructively about social organisation and understand it as a site of both alienation and development (ibid:39). It sees mental pain and anxiety as constituting valid claims on social attention, which should qualify 'the logic of markets and bureaucracies as arbiters of social life' (Rustin, 1995:24). Parallels in relation to helping professions are drawn with how in the infant-mother relationship the parent must be strong enough to cope with the infant's aggressive liveliness and demand for separateness and how problems arise when we are not strong enough to survive the ambivalence of gratitude and resentment.

Emotional life and public services

Amongst the key antecedents of this kind of psychosocial approach with particular relevance to public services is the diverse work of Menzies Lyth (1969; 1988). She researched welfare institutions where respect for emotional experience was lacking. This work, along with others, fed into the development of the Tavistock consultancy to organisations and into the group relations tradition noted above (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994:7). She showed how the highly stressful work of nursing, which easily stimulates primitive anxieties, was organised on the basis of a denial of emotional experience.

demonstrating how in the face of anxieties aroused by illness, bodily decay and dying, nursing took on the characteristics of a 'social defence system'. The particular rigid practices and rituals constituted a 'place to hide from psychic pain' (Young, 1994:163), and avoid experiencing the overwhelming emotions involved. So the training of nurses was not to become 'too involved', to remain 'detached', and patients were depersonalised.

Today, practice has improved but, arguably, actual feelings can still be as much masked by training in new customer care practices. The avoidance of the unconscious and unspoken emotional processes involved is still a dominant ethos throughout much of the social welfare system and public services. Menzies Lyth spelt out how individual defences become embedded as co-created institutional practices. A feature of institutions designed to enhance human welfare is how they can be suffused not with the altruism of their overriding purpose, but overwhelmed by the social defences which people evolve which can then result in quite inhuman practices (Young, 1994:163). This is still a rarely understood aspect of the welfare system, nor how it interrelates with the paranoid need for certainty among politicians and their unwillingness to recognise that social failure can never be entirely removed.

Analysis of the complicated emotional life and politics of welfare services drawing on a psychosocial approach is best exemplified in the body of work of Rustin (1991, 1999), Cooper (1996, 2001, 2004) Cooper and Lousada (2005) and Hoggett (1992, 2000, 2001, 2002), together with others working in this tradition. A new dialogue⁶³ has also developed linking this psychosocial thinking with critical theorists such as du Gay (2000, 2005) around the discourse of public services. More generally, psychosocial studies also draws on a wide interdisciplinary approach related to public services, which includes social policy literature around welfare (Williams, 2000, 2005; Twigg, 2000), social psychology (Hochschild, 1983, 2003; 2005) and the work of a wide range of social and cultural theorists such as such as Elliott (2000, 2001, 2002) and feminist writers like bell hooks (1989) and Young, (1997).

⁶³ Open University- Tavistock Centre joint conference: 'Governed states of Mind: Thinking psychoanalytically about governance'. March 24-25th 2006. St Hugh's College, Oxford.

Theorising emotions

As the stories of Part Four show, it is important to both introduce discussion about emotion in public services discourse but also move it firmly away from an equation solely with services with overt caring or customer care roles. It is necessary to also address the place of emotion in the apparently rational role of the bureaucrat, the housing manager or a worker in an environmental centre. Emotions are never absent in the public service workplace, whether public, private or voluntary sector. Indeed, the supposed rationality itself represents emotions that point to a need for control and order and the avoidance of the playful and spontaneous. Three different discourses now seek to introduce or reveal emotion at work (Murray et al, 2005). They are: emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996), emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) and more psychodynamically influenced relational depth psychologies. But an awareness of emotions understood through a psychodynamic lens has a very tenuous place in the systems driven public service workplace. Outside the psychosocial strand of the discourse there is still an absence of any robust acceptance of the emotional basis to public services and how this shapes a distinct ethos.

From within the discourse, Cooper and Lousada (2005) illuminate the social and psychic dynamics of the developing new culture in welfare and consider which forms of feeling are facilitated and which are discouraged in the cultures and structures of modern state welfare. Hoggett (2005:167-189) has strongly argued that the emotional roots of public service are key. An understanding of the affective processes and roles of institutions is needed to counter the rational service delivery, public choice and internal market theories of Le Grand (2004). Hoggett also suggests that it is reparative feelings and multiple early identifications that bring many into welfare roles, as my own story in Part Two suggests.⁶⁴

Hoggett and Thomson (2002:106-123) also propose the concept of a ‘democracy of the emotions’⁶⁵ in which reason and emotion are not split in the ways that are so familiar. They argue for a ‘passionate rationality’ and emphasise how emotions are never not in the public sphere and contrast this with the somewhat deformed legacy of the labour movement’s rules and constraints about what is permissible to talk about. They see the task is to create a forum where different groups can bring their fears, resentments, and

⁶⁴ Eric Miller Memorial Lecture 2005.

⁶⁵ Originally drawn from Giddens (1994) but used here in a different way.

hatreds to a space where they can be ‘contained’ and become bearable and thereby be transformed (ibid:120). Such an approach is one that acknowledges the creative and destructive role of emotions in relationships between public services users and workers, and is concerned to develop a politics of interdependency through more awareness of how to use dialogic forms of relating which, start from asymmetries of powering society. But ‘deep democracy requires strong local government’ (ibid: 622). We are moving in precisely the opposite direction.

Containing social anxieties

As noted in Part Three, Hoggett (2005) argues that the public sector and private sectors *are* different and the role of the former needs to be understood as much more than service delivery (ibid:169). Like Finlayson (2003), he argues, it is the site for continuous contestation of public purposes. But more specifically he emphasises how public bodies like local government play a vital role in ‘containing’ the disowned aspects of our subjectivity. By this he means the undigested conflicts and social anxieties that arise in everyday life for all of us – fear of death, illness, pain (Menzies Lyth, 1960), destitution, violation (Williams, 2000), failure (Sennett, 1998), hatred of dependency (Hoggett, 2000a b). If we cannot individually and collectively contain these experiences ourselves, in his view we project our fear, contempt, and hatred onto others. All institutions, but public service organisations in particular, then play an important role in minimising this ever present turbulence of emotion and affect in society. To reduce public services to merely a question of the delivery of services is then, in his view, to commodify such relationships, and ‘to strip them of their moral and ethical meaning and the potential meaning inherent in the very concept of citizen, but marginal to the concept of consumer’ (2003:2). The psychosocial tradition in contrast seeks to emphasise the importance of emotional capacities, emotional containment and social anxiety.

Emotional truth

The *only* assumption underlying Bion’s thinking (1962) was that ‘the mind grows through exposure to truth’. Symington and Symington (1996:3) conclude that by growth of mind, Bion meant the ability to act more consistently in relation to emotional truth and the process through which truth evolves or is blocked. In his view there is a continuing

decision as to whether to evade mental pain or to tolerate and contain it and thus modify it. If painful feelings are 'evacuated' it results in a refusal to think and a blockage in mental development in which a 'hatred of learning' dominates. The pleasure principle and avoidance of pain, which was so germane to Freud's thinking, is replaced here by a quite different motivational principle, which is truth together with the idea that someone would choose pain rather than evade it, in its pursuit.

Knowledge therefore has to be experienced and is not just an intellectualised knowledge of concepts and logic, of tested evidence and deductive arguments. It reflects the distinction of *knowing* someone as distinct from knowing *about* someone. Bion considered it was much easier to know about something than to live it: 'having a piece of knowledge about oneself is not at all the same as getting to know oneself through experiencing those aspects of the self in relationship ... To come across one's ruthless greed in relation to another is quite a different matter from intellectual awareness of it' (ibid:28).

Truth-in -the -moment

French and Simpson (2001:55) translate Bion's assumption as a 'truth-in-the-moment'. This view requires an understanding of truth as only accessible in-the-moment. While we may have memories of truths experienced in the past or a desire for truths as we would like them to be, these are constructions that fall into the realm of the *known*. The unknowable but imminent reality is available only in and for the moment (French and Simpson, 1999:5). Bion called such movements from truth into knowing 'transformations'. A capacity to stay at this edge between knowing and not knowing is an essential and often painful requisite to any real learning. French (1997:492) sees the core activity of teaching, management, research and consultancy as involving just such exposure to truth-in-the-moment. The moment of real insight cannot be controlled or predicted; it is, as it were, a gift gained when one stops thinking about it and learns in the experience⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ Both Bion and Winnicott drew on the mystical apophatic tradition, which thrived in the Eastern Church, and which turned away from the notion of concepts and ideas of the western church. The unknown writer of the *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks of how 'by love he can be caught and, by thinking never' (Nichols, 2001:74). The movement briefly flourished in the west in the fourteenth century with Eckhart, St John of the Cross and the Beguines before it was stamped out, re-emerging centuries later in such movements as the Quakers and Shakers.

An emotional experience can also make its presence felt initially as much in the sense of something absent, not there, as a 'known but unthought' (Bollas, 1987:280). The emotional experience that elicits change is not always to be equated with sensation or feeling and something communicable. It can be argued that primary emotional experience is not at all like this. Armstrong (1998:100) calls this a 'mental passaging' involving 'projective identification', or alternatively 'resonance' within a complex responsive processes of relating viewpoint. By resonance Foulkes sought to explain the echoing of themes and feelings through a group in which identifications are created from one member to another in ways that can awaken and heighten emotional awareness and a social bonding (Nitsun, 1996:23). Stacey, from a complexity position, argues that this does not require any notion of sharing. 'Each individual is bodily resonating in their own unique ways without sharing mental contents or putting feelings into each other' (2001:105). All viewpoints emphasise that it is not a private matter and only arises in relationships between people.

Emotional capacities

Talk about concern and caring can be utterly devoid of any emotional giving of the self. Symington (1994:133) notes how 'emotional giving' is not about words. The development of emotional capacities incorporates an awareness of the emotional basis of thinking and learning (Salzburger-Wittenburg, 1983: 53-77) and draws on concepts outlined above which underline the problematic nature of staying open to experience. The whole process of thought is seen as inhibited by the impact of intolerable emotional experience or by the more common experiences of envy and hatred.

Whereas Bion emphasised the disintegrative aspects of human experience, Winnicott is concerned with integration and the springs of hopeful, creative imaginative living, likening this to 'shared playing' (1974:44-61). He thus sees that compliance always comes at a price and brings with it a sense of futility for the individual associated with the idea that nothing matters. He considers individuals have 'just enough experience of creative living to recognise that for most of the time they are living uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine' (ibid:76). So the experience of having worked creatively means it then becomes intolerable to think too much about what has been lost.

In clarifying the etymology and different uses of the word 'capacity', French (1999:1220) draws attention to two fundamentally opposed conceptualisations of learning in contemporary life; on the one hand 'learning from experience' and on the other, learning as skill acquired in a linear way such as defining learning outcomes, the approach which now dominates current educational thinking. In French's view, learning from experience is multi-dimensional: not only intellectual but also the emotional, actual and political. The notion of 'capacities' does not imply content and effort but rather a striving for greater depth. Such growth expands the ability to 'hold', 'contain' or, manage for oneself or with others more and more dimensions of experience (ibid:1220). French is not implying levels or stages but rather the emergence of our subjectivity. In this process, disintegration is seen as having as much value as creation (Eigen, 1993:213).

Cooper and Lousada (2005), Britton (2004) and French (2001), are all voices arguing for the place of experience and capacities over the current primacy of skills, competencies and the measurable in public services. But the importance of a capacity for 'not knowing' is a concept that is fundamentally in conflict with the pressure for order and control in public services. In Kerfoot's reflection on managerialism and masculinity in the public sector of the 1990s, she argues that 'all persons, regardless of their sex, must 'become' masculine' (1999:189). In her view, this reflects the dominance of a mode of being as a manager, which privileges control and certainty as fundamentally necessary to achieving success. As a consequence, intimacy is displaced or becomes instrumentalised as part of a manufactured sense of community. Kerfoot poses the question, "What other possibilities are there for an intimacy that is non-instrumental in its orientation"? (ibid:192). Drawing on Seidler (1989, 1992), she compares the pressures to be in control and 'on top of' situations with the transient, unique 'in the moment' nature of emotional intimacy that calls for a 'letting go' (Kerfoot, 1999:187). As this can never be fully replicated and is neither amenable to instrumental control nor being learned, it is an uncomfortable place for the 'masculine subject' (ibid:188).

Containment

For Bion (1962) the essential task in life is the development of the capacity to contain one's own experience by being able to think about it and crucially it is the function of the social environment to nurture this capacity. Hoggett (2000a: 41) interprets this as how an experience that can be contained leads to thought and development. But when pain

cannot be given words, it is suppressed and leads to impoverishment rather than enrichment of the self and others. If anger, despair, anxiety cannot be given voice it is somatised, or projected onto others, or avoided through social defence mechanisms. A capacity to be in a calm, receptive state allows the other to evoke something of their painfulness in oneself, – something which at that moment they are unable to tolerate.

Benjamin (1998:108) similarly writes of a facilitating environment as one that can contain our fears, resentments and hatreds, help us face them and come to terms with them. Williams (1996: quoted in Minsky, 1998:166) draws an analogy with a ‘teapot’ to describe what a failure of containment means. She suggests that rather than presenting a metaphorical concave absorbing presence, a ‘mother’ may also present a convex surface to her baby where she herself demands attention for her own needs. The ‘spout’ here then represents how, as a mother, one can pour into a baby one’s own unconscious projections, so the baby has to endure these confused emotions and demands as well as its own. In due course this returns as anger or depression.

Finally, in an analysis of current forms of organisational change in public institutions, Cooper and Dartington (2004:14) vividly describe our bewildering experience of the vanishing ‘institutional container’ and with it the capacity of individuals to process the psychic pressures, tension and uncertainty of organisational life through the medium of relationships. This absence of organisational containment in the way people come to interact in individual and group processes is exacerbated through new forms of flexible matrix management. The new public management style with its continuously re-written script provokes a remorseless uncertainty and vulnerability both in managers and in politicians for whom the audit explosion provides some sort of defence (Cooper 2001: 353) albeit with forms of subversion and ‘strategic compliance’ (Cummins, 2002:116). All these processes shape how politicians view and relate to public service workers and how the latter relates to users as all become caught up in impossibly contradictory situations.

Social anxiety

In times of individual crisis and collective social anxieties, public institutions are perceived from a position of need, dependence and as a source of support. Social anxiety, following the London bombings in July 2005, erupted in the public domain in new ways

which people in public roles and institutions were called upon to respond. What matters then is the quality of relationship: whether in the moment of interaction there is a sense of trust and support that can transform anxiety into calmness and resilience. Public meetings often call for such an authoritative capacity, which can contain the swirling affective mayhem. In the concept of 'asymmetrical reciprocity', which critiques the deliberative democracy of Habermas from a feminist perspective, Young (1997:343) calls for 'deliberative spaces', which enable the 'shrill and angry voices' (hooks, 1989), to be heard with moral respect and the raw emotions to be better understood (Hoggett, 2000b:148).

Intimacy

Intimacy is conveyed by the capacity to listen, by the tone of voice, touch or eye contact. It is about allowing 'the other' into our consciousness. It takes us into the territory of service, kindness and compassion and into questions of depth and truth rather than shallowness in relating. Quite simply *how* we talk to each other matters, as does our own silent conversation, which shapes our experience (Stacey, 2003:363). An instrumental quality management approach, which emphasises the measurable through audit processes, fails to address the existence of these more powerful forms of relating.

To assert the place of intimacy and relationship in public service work challenges the assumption that we can commodify everything and send everything off to the market. Authentic relationships cannot be standardised or be reduced to the mere appearance of something. In her analysis of the 'deep acting' in customer care roles, the work of sociologist Hochschild (1983, 2005) writing on 'emotional labour' offers a different way of understanding the invisibility of 'emotional work' required of many public service roles and the intimacy which is integral to it. Whereas emotional intelligence was quickly absorbed into management thinking, emotional labour has been largely ignored until recently and acknowledged only by the more therapeutically informed within public services (Murray, 2005:7-10). So it is encouraging that a key trade union leader writing about the role of low-paid women staff in public services has made the connection to 'highly emotional work' and demanding emotional labour' (Wakefield, 2005:50). Yet it is a lone voice.

Lloyd Smith (1999:120) and Smith (1999:114) highlight the relevance of Hochschild's work to trade unions and nursing. Twigg (2000:138) locates bathing and intimate care in relation to gender and power, arguing that the management of the body is central to community care but that the managerialist approach of much writing on the care system obscures this. Fotaki (2005:30) points out the central contradiction that now lies at the heart of policy making driven by 'Choice': in health, doctor-patient interactions are in reality driven by deep yet concealed fears of survival which severely limit one's autonomy as a patient. She concludes an omnipotent phantasy drives government policy making. Public policy making is characterised by a grandiosity, which denies the realities of dependency and vulnerability.

Interpreting the stories through a psychosocial lens

Capacities

The theme of emotional capacity is present in many stories as spontaneous small gestures: in not retaliating against destructive children (Story IX), in rescuing a neglected child (Story IX), in the way a nurse touched the toes of a patient on passing (Story VII), and in my talking with students (Story IV). The theme of capacities also resonates with my own research process in that emotional as well as intellectual and political capacities have all been challenged. In the story 'I am a terrorist too' (Story IX), I was aware of needing to sit with someone's painful expressions of fear without resorting to problem solving. Problem solving is the default position for a senior manager in local government and to acknowledge 'not knowing' what to do, other than to listen attentively was a new capacity which cut across many carefully acquired skills.

Containment

The failure of containment is described in the story about an annual meeting for senior managers (Part Two). It reveals how those in formal leadership roles resorted to blame and scapegoating rather than demonstrating to staff a capacity to bear and contain the negative projections of politicians. They were unable to cultivate their own inner authoritative presence, which enables reflective thinking to occur. This failure of senior management to contain the turbulent emotions, which were spilling out of the political domain, meant it was *their* needs that were contained not those of the staff.

Similarly in the first story of Part Four ‘Confusion’ (Story I), when I left the library after checking the trade press on the successes of ‘modernising local government’, I once again felt the same feelings. The flow of images and strained expressions of a bullying and blame culture felt like something had been ‘shoved down my throat’ and this resonates strongly with Williams’s (1996) teapot analogy drawn above. It felt like a cumulative absence of any sense of nurture by a government reliant on an authoritarian, punitive language and despite the paradoxical injection of massively improved resources overall. Similarly, my encounter with an outpatients bed in ‘Public infrastructure’ (Story VII), with its hole ‘the size of a dinner plate’ from which the stuffing is spilling out and its sharp contrast with the glossy reception space and suggested the same dissonance. Yet, in contrast to all of this, my feelings towards staff in this shabby hospital were filled with warmth, and by a sense of calm in the library reconnecting me to the sense of feeling well fed.

Vanishing organisational containment is reflected in ‘Private choices’ (Story III) where a manager working for an education contractor in a south London borough mentions that he was sometimes confused as to whether he was “a Southwark person or an Epsom person”. This same local authority now also employs 40 per cent of staff on temporary and agency contracts and the human resources function is itself now outsourced to a multinational company. A significant proportion of staff are effectively self-managing their own employment and emphasises the radical reordering of organisational life.

As familiar relationships vanish in constant organisational restructures, people are seeking support or containment of anxieties in other ways. A continuing education class that I teach is used in just this way as in ‘A place to think’ (Story IV). Later in this story, adult education staff themselves spontaneously volunteer images of their present experience. They express it variously as ‘asphyxiation’ or as themselves trying to ‘hold up the masthead which has broken away from the institution underneath’ in a commentary on the way management has lost its way. I find myself repeating the same powerful metaphor in a later story (Story XIV), when a senior local authority manager suddenly states that the work no longer has any sense of meaning in an uncanny echo of my own state of mind a decade earlier.

The flow of later stories can also be understood as a growing capacity on my part to contain my own emotions pointing to an increasing 'inner authority' (Obholzer:40-41). It is a reminder that 'the shell that protects also kills' and an overly contained environment can also inhibit development (Bion, 1984:72). In my case the 'walls' between the three discourses I have been using begin to crumble.

Social defences

The advent of the client-contractor split in compulsory tendering, described in Part Two, showed how quickly anxiety and feared humiliation generated taking sides and intense departmental rivalry. In the local authority nursery story 'Splitting Childcare' (Story VII), staff were reliant on their own emotional relationships but with the risk of unreflectively bringing about routines which defended against the anxious feelings experienced of child protection work. In this case an experienced supervisor provided this for staff, but lacked any reflective space for their own need within the oppressive wider departmental management structures. Constant restructuring, pressures of performance monitoring and under-resources, mean that management fail to model the psychological support staff need in order to provide this for their service users.

In the 'Absence of care' (Story IX), housing management staff misread a complicated situation and then compound this by a bullying, arrogant response which nearly broke someone. In the care of the elderly (Story XI), the institutional defence took the form of a brittle cheerfulness in some staff in which little emotional giving was taking place in intimate exchanges. The implication is that kindness and compassion cannot be prescribed or audited into being. While the absence of sufficient financial resources certainly creates cumulative pressures, it does not of itself explain why or how such attitudes become embedded or could be ameliorated. The final story of 'Emotional labour' (Story IX) underlines how easy it is for social defences to take root in care homes and even in hospices, echoing the accounts of the experience of caring for survivors of concentration camps and how compassion was quickly replaced by impatience: bedclothes were drawn ever tighter in a search for control over suffering and the need to defend against the psychic pain of failure.

Power and intimacy

The story 'Gender, sex and power' (Story XII) strongly conveys the power struggles and murderous feelings of envy and betrayal below the surface in the process of merely organising a conference. It illustrates the underlying emotional dynamics of any group decision-making process. It also reveals the gendered nature of the battle over ambition represented by the recurring image of 'small boats versus a big tanker' with its broader parallels for the relationship of a voluntary sector to a public sector. The story of the 'power group' at the actual conference also highlighted how 'having power' and 'feeling powerful' are quite different. A group composed mainly of women encountered great difficulty in forging any sort of emotional intimacy or interdependence. This only came later with the experience of surrender and vulnerability.

This story resonates with Alizade's attempts to rethink power and her description of 'feminine power' (not to be equated with gender) in which she connects power to service and what she calls 'social mothering' roles (2002: 99-108). She is emphasising the paradoxical link between power and the capacity to be vulnerable. Similarly, Benjamin writes of a 'letting go of the destructive illusion of the phallic contract' and the 'intersubjective moment of surrender' (2004:167) emphasises how power, sexuality and gender exist in a complicated and still under-theorised relationship. Power relating and gender are also the central theme of the final Story XV, focussing on interactions taking place in my own research milieus and is also present in 'A place to think' (Story IV) about teaching.

Emotional labour

In my encounter with a senior government policy advisor (Story III), it was implied that to work in local government would bore him. Our conversation left me feeling demeaned and belittled and emphasised how disconnected policy makers can become with the actual work of public services. The stories of 'Emotional labour' (Story IX) underline how such labour is central to what public services workers do in housing management or environmental services just as much as to social services. These stories about human dependency contrast sharply with the societal ethos of self-sufficiency and individual autonomy of government policymaking. They each draw attention in some way to how on behalf of society many public service frontline and management roles deal on a daily basis with dependency, failure, death, fear and shame.

They may respond with a generosity of spirit, kindness, compassion and intimacy or if social defences are strong by an absence of care or empathy and a bullying arrogance. In 'Emotional labour' (Story IX) a feeling capacity was crucial to the work of an environmental services officer who encountered the distraught and out of control amongst the open spaces but it was crucially absent in a housing management interaction. Overall, these stories tell us how public service work is intrinsically about the ethical dilemmas thrown up in day-to-day management and the problem of how service costs and efficiency are to be reconciled with human need and actual care. As the story about second marking and the emotion-free social policy scripts bears out (Story IV), this is somehow completely ignored in the wider discourse.

Kindness

The trade union representative viewpoint put to the Select Committee in 2002 on defining a public service ethos, described in Part Three, argued that a public service ethos was represented by acts of 'kindness'. This statement contrasted sharply with the coherent list of systematic recommendations put forward by the representative of the private public service sector. 'Kindness' seemed nebulous and unconvincing in comparison and did not impress the chair of the Committee. It also ignores what the shadow side is of such 'kindness'. The conscious desire to do good is, as noted above, accompanied by a hatred of service users and authority relationships in altruistic environments can become dysfunctional. I want to argue, however, that the trade union viewpoint did in some way point in the right direction and takes us away from the instrumental language of Aldridge and Stoker and the Select Committee. In the end it did place human relating and questions about intimacy, authenticity and the non-commercialisation of human feelings (Hoschschild, 1983) at the centre of what is meant by any public service ethos.

A critical mourning

The voluntary sector of the early 1980s and public sector of the 1990s can be understood as a very lived expression of 'ethics with no distinction from politics' (Eagleton, 2003:128). For those like myself who actively sought to work within politically progressive local authorities and the related voluntary sector, many aspects of life were cross-linked in multiple ways. One was held to account for one's actions ethically and politically in and beyond the workplace. So it was an era of heightened emotion and

creativity, if also intolerant, divisive and constraining. The central grief of the story of 'The past in the present' (Part Two) is the loss of this collectivity where one was able to speak and reflect from one's own experience in a quite new way.

Reflecting on an earlier decade of confrontation between social movements and the Italian state in the late 1960s, Passerini (1988, 1996) concluded it was the loss of power that was her central grief. She writes of how 'the question of power was a way of recognising transcendence in a secular sense of being able to influence the march of history. That power could be addressed in daily life, as well as in formal politics, meant that one made an effort to participate in reality and understand it' (ibid:132). She captures here the sense of agency and solidarity, which the experience of collectivity engenders, and is deeply connected to a sense of meaning. Balbus (2005), also reflecting on this same era, argues that a loss of political imagination and political depression arises from the failure to collectively mourn what he calls 'the movement mother' (ibid:85). He argues that such a social loss needed to be mourned socially and that this needs to be a critical mourning which recognises the intense ambivalence and that we are responsible in part for the loss otherwise we fall into a false identification. Both Passerini and Balbus emphasise that the process is painful as it reawakens other earlier experiences of loss. A sense of loss, sadness and melancholia, which appear repeatedly in the storytelling of Part Two, is thus a necessary precursor to a return of creativity. As Balbus (2005:85) notes 'grief transforms loss into growth'.

A recovery of desire

The stories of Part Four, 'From silence to voice', focus on the years after 2001 and convey the eventual letting go of this earlier sense of loss and confusion. They capture a movement from melancholia through mourning to a letting go of the past and a reorienting towards the future. A shift takes place with a gradual reassertion of a more optimistic frame of mind and the recovery of desire. Something fresh has been glimpsed amidst the defeat of the social movements of the 1980s and traumas of the 'modernisation' of the local state during the 1990s. A sense of meaning and identity in being a partisan and recognising this quality of resilience in others begins to re-emerge and I find myself re-engaging as a citizen once more with the will to reason in public.

What prompted this shift? It can only be accounted for by the process of engagement itself and the intense conversations and reflection on the ethical dilemmas of day-to-day living, which researching my thesis has involved. So this transformation and a lifting of a 'political depression' (Balbus, 2005:81) can be understood as illustrating how meaning making arises: by and through a process of reflection on one's own social interaction and ethical engagement and taking one's own experiences seriously and making sense of them (Stacey and Griffin, 2005:14).

In the final chapter of Part Five, I wish to place the complexity discourse of the previous chapter, and the psychosocial discourse of this one, within the broader canvas of the impact of modernity on the public sphere.

Chapter 17: Modernity and the public sphere

Some of the formative influences in adopting a narrative approach and complexity ideas raise the question of the place of post-modern thinking. This is contentious and confusing territory stretching across the political spectrum from the early post-modern 'deconstruction' of rationalism by Derrida, to Fukuyama's triumphant celebration of liberal democratic capitalism (Appignanessi & Garratt, 1996:168). Post-modernism is generally associated with a linguistic turn and in certain extreme forms with a value relativism. This is a position in which every truth claim is as valid as any other, and which, in the view of its critics, has been politically and morally disabling.

So there are many stands within post-modernism and different realisms and it is a complicated question as to where one stands and why. However, I see the questions of truth and objectivity as central issues to understand and resolve in relation to the use of complex responsive processes and psychosocial thinking. A further problem is that existing ontologies (what exists and is it real) and epistemologies (the criteria by which we come to know what constitutes knowledge) do not properly accommodate either affective expression or the role of researcher as a co-producer of narrative in the way complex responsive processes suggests.

In this chapter, I will pick a path through some relevant debates of post-modernism and their relevance to the philosophical differences of complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking, addressing the emergence of a 'new modernity' and questions of truth. I will then turn to how the way the present deregulation of public institutions has deeper, psychic consequences.

Post-modernism

Modernism arose as a movement against the traditionalism of the end of the 19th century. It embraced reason, the power of science, linear or utopian social progress, universal truth and the probing of depth and historicity. Post-modernism, or 'modernity', in contrast emphasises the pluralistic and plastic character of reality, expressed in a variety

of symbol and language systems. Spatial thinking tends to replace temporal thinking (Rustin, 1999:110). It is seen as replaced by a horizontality of immediate connections in which instantaneity is seen as spatial and equated with a depthlessness, commodified present (Jameson, 1991). The story of modernity is reworked away from an internal, unfolding story of Europe alone and a world preoccupied by history.

Post-modernism can stand in opposition to realism in which everything is ultimately reducible to matter and endorses idealism which claims that only the mind exists; the things we see, touch and hear are illusions and nothing other than the products of our mental processes. There is no objective reality there that is not constructed by the observer for different and changing purposes. Narrative and post-modern thinking are also closely intertwined. Bruner argues that 'Contrary to common sense there is no unique real world that pre-exists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language' (1986:95). Similarly, Gergen (1986:143) claims 'there is no independently identifiable real world referents to which the language of social description ... is cemented'. He implies that language is the only reality we can know: 'words are not maps of reality. Rather words gain their meaning through their use in social interchange, within the language games of culture', (quoted in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998:133). We speak ourselves into existence through the narratives we create.

The positions of complexity and psychosocial thinking

The philosophical differences existing between the psychosocial and the complex responsive processes interconnect with this question of post-modernism. On the one hand, complex responsive processes leans strongly towards a Hegelian idealism and has engaged with post-modern discourses on narrativity such as Bruner (1990). But overall it rejects any post-modern association, retains a central place for an objective ethical interrogation of its own narratives and does not abandon all claims to truth. (Stacey and Griffin, 2005:20). On the other hand, although some strands of social policy focus on power relations, such as Foucault and Zizek, and are sometimes categorised as post-modern, psychosocial thinking is generally associated with a critical realism or transcendental realism (Bhaskar, 1986). In psychoanalysis, for example, the struggle for emotional truth is seen as central and equated with coming to know 'reality'. For example, transference is not seen as a metaphor but as a 'real' phenomenon (Bell, 1999:6).

Social constructionism

Socially constructed ways of thinking about gender challenged the rigidities of previous grand narratives and the notion that 'biology is destiny'. As a consequence, the understanding of male and female roles in society has changed radically. Society also now places value on the authentic voice of personal experience as a consequence of the rise of the new social movements from the 1960s. But with all this has come the heightened individualism and pluralist assumptions about power in western society. Unified political struggle has become subsumed under the primacy of multiple discourses and the plurality and indeterminacy of the social. Solidarity, conviction, the common good or the very idea of movements uniting round a big picture or sharing in 'grand narratives' to constrain excessive wealth and power has become a problematic area of analysis. Green (1995) asks 'is the problem a post-modern state in which there is no one locus of power but a fluid and indeterminate multiplicity of networks and relationships? Or are we just not very good at analysing the structured power relationships that exist?' Foot (2002) too has analysed the systematic employment of the language of 'community' and 'empowerment', which is interwoven with the proliferation of fragmented community and locality based regeneration programmes. She concludes this leaves the deeper realities of inequality, disempowerment and the loss of local democracy unarticulated.

According to Sennett (1998:116), living in 'flexible time' without standards of commitment, authority, or accountability engenders an ironic view; a state of mind in which people are never quite able to take themselves seriously because all is contingency and fragility and so too is the self. He points out that irony does not stimulate people to challenge power and suggests one moves from believing nothing is fixed to 'I am not quite real, my needs have no substance' (quoting Rorty, 1989:73-74). Sennett argues that a psyche that dwells in a state of endless becoming carries the risk of never developing a coherent life narrative, which can make room for the gravity and pain of failure, if failure is just another incident (ibid:133). So post-modernism can seem to champion the superficial, and be oblivious to the asymmetries of power. A too thoughtful awareness of multiple realities can also result in paralysis. It leaves no room for commitment or being a partisan. Meltzer (1975:241) argued that political action can only ever proceed from an imperfect basis. To act decisively one must have some sense of being 'right' and so one

must then temporarily suspend doubt in order to act upon what seems like the most justified position

So, on the one hand, post-modern theory captures how the familiar landscape is dissolving and speaks to our fears and uncertainties about the fragmenting changes we are living through, but on the other hand often obscures the shaping themes organising this experience, particularly the aggressive dynamics of corporate capitalism. In Derrida's view the jubilation of Fukuyama's liberal democratic capitalism hides a truth from itself – its own precariousness (Appignanesi and Garratt, 1996:165). Although the post-modern 'Third Way' consensus politics still remains ascendant, we are now seeing its shadow; the rise of the far right parties in the UK and EU and the riots in France in 2005 and 2006. Mouffe (1998) anticipated this would be the consequence of the emphasis on consensus politics, which in her view, is an avoidance of the essential dynamic of different viewpoints required for any transformational politics.

Fifteen years ago, Fiona Williams (1989) criticised traditional social policy for being blind to the gendered and racialised nature of the subject. A decade on, the concern is that the human subject is *only* conceived of as socially constructed and it has become a new orthodoxy. A contrary discourse, which emphasises the embodied and emotional nature of the subject, has emerged in opposition to this (Craib 1995, 1997; Hochschild, 1983; Shilling, 1997; Williams 1998; Hoggett, 2000). The criticisms of the social constructionist approach in social policy are that it is both 'over-socialised' (Schilling, 1997) and disembodied. Intimacy and morality become matters of discursive communication. It privileges cognition and language over emotion and affect. Hoggett calls for an 'affective ontology' (2000:143 quoting S. Thompson) and a 'passionate rationality' (2002:106) which recognises that the body is the original site of affect and that emotions saturate our consciousness. There is much common ground here with Stacey, (2001:57) who also concludes that the social constructionism of Gergen (1999) simply ignores the human body.

Eschewing limits and emotions

Rustin argues that what is missing from the post-modern discourse 'are the limits to human freedom posed by our bodily and psychic natures' (1999:112-118). Lost from sight are the unavoidable constraints of life - continuity, reciprocity and mutual

recognition. What, he wonders, will hold humans together in this fully individualised and reflexive world and how will they manage the 'anxieties of autonomy'? The psychoanalytic tradition has resisted the idea of self-determination without limits and, in his view, insisted on the unavoidable 'facts of life': of gender differences, generation and mortality in human lives. He speculates that we now live in a hubristic world of our own making in which we are near to abolishing the constraints on our experience of nature. But he reminds us that this celebratory state of mind is a consequence of power: a power that silences most ways of thinking about the world different to our own. We all live its assumptions (consumption, pleasure, gratification, competition) in which our western gaze scarcely perceives this as only one world among potential others. It is now so powerful in our lives there appears to be no alternative and so it becomes difficult to even think about. We know there is something wrong with our world but are choosing 'to turn a blind eye' (Steiner, 1999:86). We both know and choose to not know the 'truth', engaging rather in a deep complacency.

Minsky (1998:219-226) reflects on why post-modern Lacanian psychoanalytic theory about language and desire is now so seductive and irresistible for social and cultural studies in academia or, as she puts, it the 'fragrant theory and the sweet scent of signifiers' (ibid:211). She finds the work of Kristeva and other post-modernist feminist writers fascinating and illuminating (as I do), in the many ways in which they suggest new ways of looking at aspects of identity, representation and culture. But she challenges the widespread rejection of biological factors, bodily sexuality, personal experience and intuitive wisdom as a source of 'truth'. She questions why academics balk at the possibility of the existence of 'a tangled web of biological, cultural and unconscious elements which produce at least three ways of knowing' (ibid:219). She asks why does the eclectic use of theory produce such concern when no theory is perfect? She is questioning what is at stake emotionally and concludes that 'thinking' has become a substitute for feeling and sexuality; a form of dissociation to deaden and blot out painful feelings associated with loss and deprivation. It is an attempt to use knowledge as a form of mastery in which the body is metaphorically shampooed and deodorised through the medium of modern linguistics before it can be handled without fear of contamination or emotional pain. She concludes that we 'prefer signifiers and abstract notions of desire to desiring bodies and a notion of knowledge, 'truth' and morality derived from embodied personal experience' (ibid:225).

Minsky compares this kind of theory knowing to three other ways of knowing: intuitive awareness of how to be oneself and relate to others; knowing through the ability to use reason; and the capacity to represent the world poetically through the play of unconscious desire (ibid: 219). It is reminiscent of how Gilligan (1988) writes about knowledge, which does not come from detachment but from living in connection with oneself and with others and from being embedded in the conditions of life. Gilligan was responding to earlier studies that suggested moral consciousness was more strongly developed in young males. In arguing for a different, relational starting point by girls and women, she argues for the inclusion of responsibility and care against universal models of moral development but in a way which has opened her to criticism as taking an essentialist line of argument (Hatcher, 2003:398).

Critical realism

I find myself hovering somewhere between a non-realism (everything is a human invention or projection) and a critical realism (there is a mystery and a strangeness to the universe which we never get completely to comprehend) and a desire to include *experience* of the material world. Johnson and Duberly (2000:149) following Beck (1996:7) perhaps point a way to resolve this. There is, they suggest, an alternative position between hard relativist and realist choice and that it is a mistaken but common view that realism and social constructionism are mutually exclusive. They attribute this popular equation of positivism and realism to Rorty (1979), Hammersley (1992), and Burrell and Morgan (1979), who ignore the possibility of combining alternative epistemologies with realist ontology. It is thus possible to see very different understandings of realism at work. Hammersley defines realism as 'the idea that there is a reality independent of the researcher whose nature can be known', and that the aim of research is to produce accounts that correspond to that reality (1992:43) whereas critical realism rejects such an empirical realism as an example of the 'epistemic fallacy' that lets the question 'what can you know' determine the notion of what exists (Bhaskar, 1978:36). In Johnson and Duberly's view (2000:150-151), Bhaskar constructs a critical realist philosophy around a social constructionist epistemology and realist ontology and therefore eschews any attempt to collapse epistemology and ontology into one another (as with a relativist post-modern position). 'Truth' is seen as more than the outputs of a language game.

Burkitt (1999:72-73) charts a different course to either constructionism, or Bhaskar's critical realism, in his exploration of human embodiment within the ecosystem. Like Bhaskar, he embraces the social constructionist frame (ibid:69-70) in so far as knowledge is created in relational and joint activities. But he considers that social constructionism is not that successful in addressing the multi-dimensional nature of experience in which knowledge is the product of relations of humans within their ecological niche. It finds material relations 'vexing' and, in his view, 'it has a problem in dealing with the reality of things – that complex materiality of the relationship within and between ecosystems' (2000:71). He thinks it has got too caught up in 'the turn to language', which tends to reduce all social analysis to text and he wants to replace this textuality with communality. The emphasis on discourse has a problem with granting an existence to things that are essentially non-discursive, such as patterns of relations, bodies, objects and physical settings. He notes that while Shotter stresses the material and sensuousness aspects of relatedness in his notion of 'knowing of a third kind' (ibid:71) this is only in respect of humans. There is no attempt in constructionism, he suggests, to explicate a meaningful relationship of human to the non-human world and thus to show how our constructed, communal reality can be in many complex ways a changing material reality.

Burkitt emphasises communities of shared practice and the placing of action before theoretical reflection. In this he draws on Merleau Ponty (1962:140), who sees a unity between body, space-time and consciousness; that is, the latter is always situated in a particular location and all knowledge is embodied and situated. He argues that the division between ontology and epistemology can only be fused through the concept of the 'active body', which possesses socio-physical powers of transformation; that is to say through collective action. In his view, humans not only transform the world but we also reformulate our bodies in the process. The human body is ultimately unknowable because it is open to endless transformation (ibid:88-89).

These concerns with the narrow canvas of social constructionism are reinforced for me by the work of the ecologist/philosopher David Abram (1996). In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, he describes in a story form how his research into magic and medicine in Indonesia took unintended paths and came to focus on non-human nature as part of an engagement with an oral, indigenous culture. Abram's vividly conveys his own coming into awareness of reciprocity with the earth, its numinous powers to sustain or extinguish

human life and the sense that this sensuous world is the dwelling place of the gods. Caught in a storm and seeking shelter in a cave he describes watching intently how spiders wove webs across the cave entrance. He says, 'I sat stunned and mesmerised before this ever-complexifying expanse of living patterns upon patterns' (ibid:19) becoming aware of the intelligence that lurks in non-human nature. It was a moment that 'temporarily shatters habitual ways of seeing' (ibid:19). He continues that 'It was from such small beings that my senses first learned of the countless worlds within worlds that spin in the depths of this world that we commonly inhabit and I learned that my body could, with practice enter sensorially into these dimensions', such as the meaningful song of birds commenting on events in the surrounding earth or a non-verbal conversation with a bison (ibid:19-21). He conveys how the animate powers that surround us are construed in western thought as having less significance than ourselves, and a generative earth is also seen as devoid of all sensation. Linear time falls away in Abram's writing and we are held in cyclical seasonal time. He speaks to a different kind of knowing, of the 'Real' beyond our understanding.

A new modernity

The complicated nature of post-modern 'truth' was articulated by Edward Said (1979: 272-273). He argued that representation is interwoven with other things besides 'truth' and that 'the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representation, because they are representations, are embedded first in language and then in culture, institutions and political ambience of the representor'. We must, he argued, 'be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is ... implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the "truth" which is itself a representation' (ibid:). He was writing about colonisation and how it results in conflicting narratives that we have to choose between. Frosh also sees the work of serious post-modernists⁶⁷ as an assault on the dangers of fascist and authoritarian states of mind through its challenge to metanarratives and he is particularly concerned with what he sees as the important contribution of post-modernism and its interest in 'otherness, strangeness and exile' (1997:98). But he also thinks the absence of a political stance of its own, coupled with the playfulness of much post-modernist work, left it open to the accusation of cynicism and nihilism.

⁶⁷ Lyotard, Baudrillard, Hebdige, Jameson, Zizek (Frosh 93:98).

So post-modern thinking has brought about creative insights as well as more negative outcomes. Wheeler (1999) suggests that the really positive contribution of the post-modern is that we once again are beginning to accept the mysteries of human impulses and we are even becoming 'suspicious of unemotional, calculating reason' (1993:32). Although romanticism sought to emphasise the inner life of the imagination in a reaction to rationalism, the making of the modern self was a profoundly masculine affair (Rutherford 1999:72). Wheeler sees post-modern anti-essentialism and constructivism as having undone the stranglehold upon thought of bourgeois ideologies (1994:13) enabling a turn to the lived body and the complexities of the human and non-human world.

I find her argument that modernity induced a condition of failed mourning or cultural melancholia particularly telling. In this reading the disenchantment with Enlightenment rationality, which had aimed at human emancipation from myth and superstition, was, therefore, an encounter with loss. Failed mourning is an inability to let go and move on. The lost object is kept through internalisation but also punished for going away. Proper mourning, in contrast, transforms the shattered self and there is a re-symbolisation of experience so that old certainties and values are reconfigured and understood in different ways. But she suggests that as the distinct spheres of knowledge we have inherited from the Enlightenment philosophy and modernism break down, there is a possibility of a 'new modernity', and a healthy cultural mourning is at last possible.

Wheeler brings together a sense of an *époque* shifting in our own times and of a new movement to overturn what we understand science to be through new interdisciplinary consciousness studies and a reconsideration of modernity's separation of science from the arts and the humanities. Out of this may emerge 'new scientific understanding in which the subjectivism of experience can become a part of a scientific account of the world' (1994:7). One recent strand of neuroscience has advocated a dual aspect monism, that is, we are one 'stuff' but perceived in two different ways: as when we look at ourselves in a mirror and through our capacity for introspection (Solms and Turnbull, 2002:56). For Wheeler, this change is to be found at the heart of the contemporary sciences of complexity and neurobiology, but infused with an understanding of affective experience and literature as a source of knowledge.

Reason, emotion and objectivity

This kind of new synthesis also needs to address Hobsbawm's (2005) view of history as a human interaction with the environment which has now created a disequilibrium, potentially beyond the ability of humans to absorb and control: a transformation of humans from a 'neolithic to nuclear humanity'. Like most historians, Hobsbawm vigorously argues against relativism and identity politics and suggests that what is being seen as important is 'not rational explanation ... not what happened, but what members of a collective group defining itself against outsiders – religious, ethnic, national, by gender, lifestyle or some other way – feel about it' (2005:11) and, in his view, this is the invention of 'emotionally skewed historical untruths and myths' (ibid). He considers history is concerned with problems and how and why such problems – paradigms and concepts – are formulated in different social/cultural environments and historic traditions in order to explain the transformations in society. He vehemently attacks 'the stampede to post-modern subjectivity' in other disciplines and what he sees as a denial of a reality that is 'objectively' there, not merely constructed by the observer for different and changing purposes with no search for causal patterns and regularities in the past; just endless possibilities (ibid:11).

However, what Hobsbawm is saying here does not equate, in my view, to a positivist belief in a self-explanatory reality. He embraces the idea that we are 'making history' in a web of interconnected human activity and considers change over the past 10,000 years is too great and far too rapid to be explained by genes and memes. In his view, it can only be cultural and material. His reference to an 'open endedness', has a distant resonance with a complexity perspective. But his concern is that in the past this momentum was constrained by reproduction and the need for stability in human collectivities. However, his rejection of finding any value in the subjective or belief that emotion can be entirely removed seems very rigid. There are always powerful affective influences at work, which underlie the 'objective reality' of which he speaks.

Truth

Cultures make sense of the world in different ways and what some see as fact others do not, but Eagleton cautions that if truth simply means truth-for-us then there can be no conflict between us and other cultures, since truth is equally truth-for-them. Post-modern relativism then becomes just a way of avoiding conflict (Eagleton, 2003:103 quoting Williams, 1985). But he also insists that things that are true at one time can cease to be true at another and new truths can emerge. Truth is not absolute, it is just truth. It is discovered by argument and experimentation and it also means conceding error when it is found to not actually be true.

Popular science still strongly promotes the meaning of science as a transcendent, disembodied truth. It is a very entrenched culturally shaped viewpoint and change is resisted. Kuhn argued that in seeking to interpret the world we have created habits of thought called 'paradigms'. Holloway (2001:45-48) interprets this as working systems of interpretation that endure until others succeed them which work better for us.

Interpretations valid for their time give way when they no longer work to resolve increasing anomalies. Contrary to our image of a steady and peaceful accumulation of discovery and invention, science is punctuated by crisis. This makes the 'truth' contingent upon who and where and what we are. It is not fixed or absolute and we shift our loyalties pragmatically when a better explanation comes along. There are no fixed values. He argues that Kuhn's legacy will be remembered because he taught that the process of science was fundamentally human, that discoveries were the product, not of some plodding, rational process, but of human ingenuity intermingled with politics and personality – that science was in the end a social process. Thus, it is possible to understand science as a particular kind of narrative enquiry into the meaning of the things.

In Holloway's view, if 'narratives are to retain their power they must be capable of constant reinterpretation and must adapt to changing understanding of meaning. If this is made impossible because of the anxieties of the 'guardians of the myth', then they will suffer the same fate as 'Ptolemy's astronomy' (2001:61). A key aspect in the waning of a paradigm is the loss of the power of its key symbolic forms to move us. Kuhn (1970:67-68) observed that 'the emergence of new theories is generally preceded by a

period of pronounced professional insecurity'. Britton (1998:201-202), views this as a period of destabilisation in which 'fear of exile', or betraying an affiliation can engulf one. The breaking down of familiar paradigms noted in the previous two chapters in relation to the orthodoxies of the IGA and the Tavistock is one illustration of this.

Ethics, emotions and politics

The difficulty of speaking in a different voice is always present in any social group. In contemporary social movements, Walzer (1987:39 quoted in Hoggett, 2001:18), suggests that what is required in such groups is not detachment but a 'connected critic', one who can stand 'a little bit to the side but not outside' (ibid:61) in speaking truth to power. It is an uncomfortable role to take up and one which is inevitably experienced in scrutinising one's own ethical practice or challenging the current received wisdom as emerges in Part Four.

Eagleton (2003:128-129) makes a very direct connection between ethics, emotions and politics. He writes that for Aristotle, ethics was a sub-branch of politics: not to be political is not to be ethical and have a moral life, that is to say a 'fulfilling life', depends on it. Desire is understood as the motive behind all our actions and Eagleton sees radical politics as the re-education of our desires. Just as we are also dependent on others for our physical survival, he emphasises how moral capacities such as care, selflessness, vigilance, and protectiveness are social attributes. We rely on sharing our affective and communicative life with others, otherwise we literally do not become persons. For Eagleton the moral and material are two sides of the same coin (ibid:169). He argues for valuing objectivity, dispassionate judgement and bringing disinterestedness to bear as the opposite of self-interest. But he points out how this is an arduous and emotionally taxing affair as it is about grappling with self-deception. 'Objectivity requires a passion for doing the kinds of justice which might throw open your most deep-seated prejudices to revision' (ibid: 134).

McCabe also writes that 'Virtues are dispositions to make choices which will make you better able to make choices'. Leading a 'good life' is then not about achieving a set of theoretical truths. It is about how society can support a set of habits, perceptions, desires which help us to play out our part in social life, to negotiate and to recognise that our

own self-fulfilment is inextricably bound up with how others achieve theirs. This discussion of ethics return us to complex responsive processes of relating and Griffin's argument (2002:205-207), which emphasises that it is staying with the experience of interaction in the moment that provides us with a way of thinking about the place of our own ethical practice rather than compliance with externally defined norms such as espoused by business ethics. It is in making ethical interpretations that our own meaning making arises.

The psychic costs of privatisation

The current received wisdom remains that privatisation is for economic good and consistent with the more individualised society we have become. But reflecting on the psychic consequences of the commercialisation of the public sector, Long (2001:202) has also suggested that the privileging of competition and individualism with its values of self, greed, consumerism, acquisition and exploitation, has promoted the emergence of perversion. Long argues it induces forms of relatedness, which are infused with abusive intent, and expressed in sadism, voyeurism, denial and concealment. We are drawn into experiences of 'turning a blind eye' (Steiner, 1999:86) to poverty, climate change, sexual slavery and other changes consequent upon economic changes.

While deregulation of public institutions is an integral part of the pro-market restructuring of the economy, it also relates to a far-reaching privatisation of politics in the broadest sense underway— of the individual, citizenship and moral responsibility (Elliott, 2000:14). Elliott argues that both modern and post-modern influences are present in this process. He sees Giddens (1991, 1992) as locating the modern search for identity, of 'life planning' and 'life lived as project' constantly projecting the present into the future as a spurious form of self-mastery. On the other hand, the post-modern subject reflexively scanning the imagination (ibid:18) promotes a heightened sense of individualised self-understanding and desire.

But in Elliot's view, there are risks as well as the opportunities and freedoms gained with this. Deregulation has meant the 'communality of risk' (ibid:14) is being 'dumped' into this new individualised world, along with the denial of the actual risks we face as a consequence of globalisation and the diminishing protection for social life. The 1960s

maxim that the 'personal is political' is being lived in reverse (ibid:14) and as a result we can drift, Elliott suggests, from 'seduction to seduction, anxious to keep disabling anxieties from breaking into consciousness, and revelling in ... sensory pleasures' (ibid:14). This is the terrain of the narcissistic 'minimal self' (Lasch, 1981) and of Sennett's belief that radical restructuring of the labour market under a flexible capitalism begets a character structure geared towards the superficial, the fleeting, the fragmented and fearful of dependent relationship (1998:140).

Elliott suggests that 'certainties have fragmented into questions which are spinning around in people's heads' (2000:21, quoting Beck, 1991). Living in this world of constant crisis can lead to psychic and emotional burn-out. He suggests this privatising of collective risk insurance alongside the rise of the supra-individual is 'traumatic' for many of us. It makes us vulnerable to fantasies of 'ordering the chaos of Otherness' (ibid) and the addictiveness of economic efficiency as this involves a 'powerful wish fulfilling view of the social world as impersonal and *law* like' (ibid:23). This works to reduce political questions about the future of society to managerial ones, in which techno-science is seen as being able to solve interpersonal and ethical issues and which ignores their actual anxiety-promoting dimensions.

In practice this is precipitating the risks of fundamentalism, desire for 'strong' government, support for far right parties, and an ease with which civil liberties have been swept away. Elliott suggests that we need to connect such risk to our social institutions and processes of governance. He sees the repair of damaged communities as involving the containment of the torn halves of society: self and other, private and public, theory and practice (ibid:23). In this scenario, privatisation, whether of self or the public sector, limits and constrains freedom of thought about social alternatives.

All this is pertinent to reflecting on why the idea of the public sector and its sense of meaning has become blurred and confused. A world bound up with the certainties of the post-war welfare state, assumptions of dependency, care 'from cradle to grave' and the solidity of 'Victorian dykes' between public and private sectors, is giving way to something very different. The present day reality is one fifth of welfare services are already provided by the private sector and this and the role of the voluntary sector is set to continue to grow rapidly.

Mobilising fictions

Drawing on Winnicott's idea of a 'transitional space' (1971) where a paradox is tolerated without being forced into some resolution, Hoggett (2000:124) suggests that it is through the stories we tell ourselves as a group that we come to act collectively. If there is a shared sustaining faith in an 'illusion', it is possible to project this into the future, and act into this in the present by finding a name and becoming active. If group members are racked by envy or dependence, the imaginative energy and desire cannot be created or sustained, and the group will be immobilised.

Holloway (2001:61) also speaks of the potency of 'fictions' by which we live in this way and the fear that if the present one is understood in a different way it will lose its power, but equally if it is only defended in traditional ways it will not survive. Hoggett considers the idea of universal provision is just such an illusion or 'mobilising fiction', which is both absurd *and* absolutely necessary. We have to re-discover this narrative in a new way. The old story is not dead but under modernity in its present form it is losing its potency. If we defend this 'mobilising fiction' in traditional ways it will not survive.

Chapter 18: Conclusions

In this final chapter, I wish to return to the key questions posed in the 'Introduction'. Following this I will summarise my own contributions to knowledge.

The key questions

My four key questions outlined at the outset (p.13) were: has something been 'stolen' and if so what is it? Does it matter whether we send our public services 'off to the market'? Does the public sector remain a particular kind of moral community in a way that readily translates into a distinct public service ethos? What will sustain and mobilise the meaning we invest in public services as the traditional taken for granted structures of the public sector continue to erode?

- *Has something been stolen?*

It is possible to draw different conclusions to this question. I have variously identified the significant operational transfer of public services to the corporate sector and in particular stories about local authority sale of technical services which can be understood as dispossession, asset stripping and loss of collective intellectual property by local communities. Thus, the use of the metaphor of colonisation in the story 'Something stolen' in the opening 'Introduction' is entirely appropriate.

However, the sense of a 'loss' of which I am writing can also be understood in another quite different way. My thesis is also about a working through of my own experience of a loss of meaning, which followed from the failure in the 1980s to reclaim the ethical vision of the welfare state, as described in the stories of Part Two, 'The Past in the present'. These social movements prompted an intense level of social interaction and lived expression of ethics with no distinction from politics (Eagleton, 2003:128). It is such local processes that underpin the making of meaning (Griffin, 2002:18). Living subsequently in compliance with a dominant, dynamic, market-driven, new public

management ethos, emphasised how something creative had been experienced or which could have been brought into being, and was now lost. The central grief is the loss of the sense of solidarity and collectivity and how this gave way to blame, denigration and a profound sense of disorientation. But the 'critical mourning, which Balbus (2005: 80-90) suggests in relation to an earlier era, also involves recognising all the earlier ambivalences which were also present. I am certainly not implying that it was a 'golden age', as the social movements had collided with the decline of the welfare state.

Successful mourning enables a fuller and more creative engagement with the present, in which blame can give way to anger, guilt be owned and shame replaced by self-respect for what was attempted but failed (Merill Lynd, 1957:158). The later stories of Part Four, 'From silence to voice', onwards from 2001, are a reflection of how I myself progressed through a narrative exploration of whether a public sector might remain meaningful under marketisation. This movement, from melancholy through mourning and on towards a sense of creativity, suggests that the absence of political imagination over the last decade has been shaped by the failure to collectively engage in this 'critical mourning' process of what was lost, and became a silenced narrative.

- *Does it matter whether we send our public services 'off to the market'?*

The public sector 'oyster' has indeed been prised wide open and a financial crisis in the NHS is a more recent consequence of the specific role of private finance in modernising hospitals, which will now drive further commercialisation of health services (Pollack, 2004; 2006). One fifth of all public sector services have already been transferred into the mainly corporate private sector. A rigid template underpinning government thinking has brought market forms and competition into the heart of welfare provision, progressing a culture in which efficiency and cost savings are now privileged above the value placed on local democratic process.

Harassed by government into driving down costs and into using the private finance and partnerships to do so, local authority politicians and managers have opted for the route of quick and easy outsourcing to the corporate sector. As a consequence, a handful of corporate monopolies are being brought into being, which are exercising day-to-day authority over a widening area of public service provision and which is now extending its

reach towards enrolling parts of the voluntary sector as a sub contractor. An apposite analogy can be drawn here: contrary to traditional Reformation story, it was actually the Catholics, who, albeit reluctantly, made the incremental day to day changes actually happen in a story of both resistance *and* compliance (Haigh, 2002; Duffy, 2001).

However, there *are* also still alternative movements to the finance-led procurement models that are developing. The story about technical services showed how, by imaginative thought and effort, it was possible to redirect procurement decisions towards smaller firms with a quality and sustainability edge, which shared a creative and partisan viewpoint rather than technocratic perspective. The same *desire* to do things well is true of the library story – although the circumstances here are somewhat different. An interesting paradox then arises in which a public sector partnership, working with small, high-quality private firms, may end up forging a creative alliance which works in opposition to the kind of local authority client management which assumes a narrow focus on delivering immediate cost savings through outsourcing to the corporate sector.

This has encouraged me to think about the private public service sector in a more open and differentiated way as the site of a struggle for ideas and ethical purpose in itself. As the numbers of former public sector staff rise within its wider ranks, trade unions will also organise more effectively within it. This turns the primary focus of attention back towards what releases desire and creative endeavour in an organisation and what fuels mediocrity. Finding answers to all of these is to be a partisan rather than a technocrat following diktats, and it is to ‘bend bureaucracy’ (Newman, 2005:204-205). The thinking of Griffin (2002), Hall (2003) and Lukes (2006) are relevant here to a more nuanced ‘market versus state’ perspective, which avoids a simple reification of the public sector but also rejects the strategy that a corporate led private public service sector is to be the preferred provider.

- *Does the public sector remain a particular kind of moral community in a way that readily translates into a distinct public service ethos?*

A solid, ongoing commitment to maintaining, developing and democratising a public sector still remains my cornerstone position, calling for dogged resilience whilst seeking imaginative responses in the face of the overwhelming pressures towards cuts.

outsourcing and commercialisation of the welfare state. The meaning of 'publicness' is ultimately to be understood as a social dimension of society which models and gives expression to our need for interdependence and is concerned for social justice. It is about how we choose to designate areas of life we do not want governed by market criteria and shareholder value. Jacobs (1992:53), Hoggett (2003:1) and Du Gay (2000:41) have all pointed to how the public and private sectors *are* different moral communities, and the public sector with its in-built redistributive orientation still visibly represents a much wider purpose than mere 'service delivery'.

However, sector boundaries *are* being blurred by commercialisation. This homogenising pressure is now increasing and palpable in many stories, including the voices of nursery managers, adult education staff, education managers, the highest levels of senior management, as well as my own. There is a profound sense of confusion and, for some like myself, an acute clash of technocratic versus partisan values. It calls for considerable resilience when a lifetime commitment to a valued welfare role may now be "discontinued". In technical roles, such as planners and procurement with which I am most familiar, staff with project management skills are able to move with ease back and forth across the public-private sector boundaries. It means thinking is increasingly shaped by private sector dominated professional values, such as quantity surveying and accountancy and a business model way of thought. This is entrenching new norms in key functions of local government and the NHS through their day-to-day interactions, negotiations and power relating and fundamentally reshaping their perception of what a public service ethos means.

A public service ethos has traditionally been deeply shaped by social democratic and redistributive values, which have sometimes leaned towards a socialist perspective. But it is not a fixed thing. While these traditional values of a public sector ethos still widely endure in the stories, they are constantly influenced by the political process itself and reworked by the day-to-day contestation of ideas adopted in practice. These powerful new procurement and project management roles are the crucible where fundamental change is now taking place and a deeply market driven and even more technocratic view than before is becoming embedded. A new cross-sector public service ethos, grounded in the business model and public choice theory (Aldridge and Stoker, 2003:17), has been adopted by government, which further validates this. And yet, as the stories show, there

are still people who contest this pattern and in the most technocratic of spheres. It was precisely here, deep in the heart of the bureaucracy, that I myself worked as a partisan with contrary ethical and moral values as Part Two showed. So there is also a much more complicated lived experience at work, which is more political, ethically driven and which calls for an emotional basis to thinking about ethos. Finally, a renewed awareness of the important role of the 'dykes' between public and private may also return, if corruption and lack of trust undermine the necessary role of the public sector.

- *What will sustain and mobilise the meaning we invest in public services as the traditional taken for granted structures of the public sector continue to erode?*

The meaning of the welfare state, which still resonated surprisingly strongly in the 1980s, was about the common good, creating forms of collective provision, democratic control over markets and greater equality and social justice. In the intervening years consumerism, individualism and a politics without roots have come to dominate. It now means recognising the 'barbarians' are now decidedly inside as well as outside the gates (Cavafy, 1963). We need to re-interpret and adapt to a changed understanding but not necessarily less powerful meanings of publicness. It is important to disentangle our identification of the public sphere solely with the institutional forms that have existed for over half a century as the 'public sector' and consider where it might also find new home(s). This still means vigorously opposing further marketisation of the public sector, as a public sector *is* still necessary because the inequalities and power elites created by markets have to be constrained. However, the 'mobilising fiction' has become confused and, as Hoggett suggests (2000:124), the task is to revitalise its symbolic form so it continues to move us.

The stories assert the central place in this rethinking for human relationships and our interdependence in opposition to the present pragmatic and utilitarian language of procurement led, cost saving, performance management ethic. It is also the case that in any new commercial context, ethical and moral dilemmas and emotional demands on service providers of welfare services will remain just as complex and problematic. Internal quasi-markets and PFI will generate great instability and may even collapse if indebtedness spirals. The new systems may all prove to be an unstable settlement. From a user perspective and the individualised, atomised society we have become, it may

become increasingly important to have public bodies which can accommodate to new social pressures which are emerging around risk, anxieties from bombs to bird flu, the erosion of social welfare benefits, rising levels of mental ill health and poverty, and the demands of climate change and sustainability. All require collective responses and collectively agreed social values. Some may indeed re-assert themselves through sharp new contradictions, such as requiring the public to save water, knowing such actions will maintain the profits of privatised water companies. This may not be sustainable politically. Redefining what we mean by the public sphere may as a consequence move back up the political agenda and revitalise the need to ‘reason in public’. But for this to happen we need more imaginative forms of public conversation and a place to do such thinking.

- *‘Can public services remain meaningfully ‘public’ outside the formal boundaries of a public sector and could new or transformed meanings be possible’?*

This is an additional question that reframes the last two questions, to which I would conclude that a more complicated narrative is called for: one that will stretch the formal boundaries and allow for new and transformed meanings to emerge. For a new ‘mobilising fiction’ to re-animate our shared sense of publicness once again, we need a different form of public conversation. For example, one which utilises narrative forms as much as discursive forms of reasoning and draws on metaphors to capture what publicness means to us, in the way public libraries, with the implication of holding and containment, appear as a powerful expression of my own understanding of the public sector.

Finding new ways of using narrative to express social and emotional needs and the ethical dilemmas we face would return us to a more collective, conversational form of public life and more broadly, reshape the important role of local democratic decision making. Griffin (2001:79) emphasises ‘meaning is not attached to an object or stored but perpetually created in interaction’; it is only in social interaction, in which ethical decision-making is intrinsic, that we generate and find meaning.

Contributions to knowledge

I would like to draw attention to key contributions that this thesis makes.

- *A three-cornered discourse*

A key contribution of my thesis lies in bringing together debates around three discourses and working across sometimes problematic boundaries. Firstly, I have brought complex responsive processes thinking, with its emphasis on an ethics, into engagement with the more political discourses around public services, together with the emotional based literature of psychosocial thinking about the welfare state. Secondly, I have explored how psychosocial thinking and complex responsive processes discourses ‘rub up’ against each other. Thirdly, I have noted how the idea of ‘forming and being formed’ underlying complex responsive processes thinking resonates strongly with the cultural theorising of Raymond Williams and his understanding of forming and formative processes (1977:128-129) and the role of the novel in addressing this.

The three discourses are: firstly, a public services discourse shaped by public administration, critical management, critical theory and social policy; secondly, complex responsive processes of relating and thirdly, psychosocial thinking in relation to public services. When I started my research these discourses were, with some exceptions, distinct and distant. The mainstream public services discourse had little interest in psychosocial thinking, and complex responsive processes influences had distanced itself from psychoanalytic theory. However, each seemed to offer something useful in my own mind in exploring my own experience of the meaning of public services. Five years on, a new dialogue exists between psychosocial thinking and critical social theory specifically around public services, drawing on the work of Du Gay (2002, 2005). Complex responsive processes of relating and psychosocial thinking are also engaging in further debate⁶⁸.

It should be emphasised that the three discourses are very different and it is not a question of finding a synthesis. Rather, that each discourse offers ways of thinking which seem relevant to the other two, and brings something useful to rethinking the making of

⁶⁸ OPUS discussion. London, September 2006.

meaning. My contribution in furthering this has been to bring them together in an accessible form.

- *Learning from experience*

As the market state impinges further on the welfare state, perhaps the greatest need is the recovery of a political imagination. Theory alone cannot pave the way for renewed creativity; it has to arise in some way from our own experience. As Stacey notes, it is our own silent conversation, which in the end shapes our experience (2000:362). With the benefit of hindsight, a key part of my research endeavour may actually lie in thinking about how to learn from experience. It may be about pedagogy and what kind of conversation can revitalise discussion about the public sphere and how we can recover and re-symbolise a ‘mobilising fiction’ (2000:124). Story writing has emerged in the thesis as one way of reflection, one way of working with myself and others. The unique understanding that complex responsive processes of relating brings to narrative has shaped an approach in which I as the researcher have been the narrator. It has propelled me into what I have characterised as ‘horizontal research’, rather than ‘upwards’ or ‘downwards’ forms of research. It has meant examining and revaluing my *own* relational experiences in relation to diverse public service themes and theories.

I noted in Chapter 2 that Stacey and Griffin’s (2005) recent elaboration of their research methodology has some correspondence with Cooper and Lousada’s (2005: 211) insistence on an emotional relationship between the researcher and researched and an awareness of what is happening to ourselves. My own research approach developed prior to both these research positions being published does resonate with both, albeit with some differences. My own original contribution is perhaps to a new kind of ‘political ethnography’, which Bunting (2006) has called for.

- *Story as methodology*

Politics is about acting and choosing between one path or the other. Stories, on the other hand, allow ambivalence to surface, permitting a more complicated and paradoxical understanding to coexist. This allows for the fact that sometimes there is no logical framework into which conflicting understandings can easily be reconciled. Honest story

making is dangerous to a political domain that likes to stifle ambivalence in favour of compliance with one or other received view. It allows the unexpected and unwelcome to emerge as in stories such as the bullying and abusive management and neglect of emotional labour.

Story is a carrier of emotions and story making provides a route towards engaging with forms of reflection which are less split off from the underlying emotional experiences. Objectivity, as pointed out earlier, does not mean being uninvolved. It does not mean truth can only be discovered from some detached position. From a complexity point of view we are never 'outside' the process in this way. Rather, it points us to the dangers of self-deception and the need to see things from different perspectives. I found that writing stories tended to disrupt or subvert my own attempt to impose a theoretical structure or predetermined analysis on them. The stories in the long narrative of Part Four sometimes provided unexpected perspectives for me. They introduced a certain kind of reflexivity in their own right. For example, the story of the privatised library service challenged me to recognise that this particular privatisation had produced many benefits whilst also pushing me to an understanding of how a much deeper social conflict was being played out in this microcosm.

My own experience of using story as a methodology has been that it has revitalised my own reflection of what the public sector means for myself. I have inevitably also been very changed by participative, interactive, conversational process of writing stories about the past and present struggles over the meaning of publicness. This demonstrates the kind of energising process that results when there is a real connection in discussion with our own emotional and moral stances towards events in which we find ourselves. As Portelli, an oral historian, points out, 'to tell a story is a point of resistance' (2004). The final story of Part Four 'Storytelling: endnotes' (Story XV) illustrates an amplification of ideas that I never anticipated. It conveys my own sense of being caught up in a self-organising flow of ideas and of forming and being formed by a debate. My decision 'to speak truth to power' led to unanticipated results and provoked a passing debate in the national media. Differentiating my own viewpoint within a group that shares complexity ideas also revealed how different politics will still arise from common theorising about methodology. Being able to tolerate this difference has also brought with it an inner authority in my own ethical capacities.

- *A place to think*

Two practical suggestions have arisen from this. Firstly, that there was 'nowhere to talk' or 'nowhere to think' arose frequently in my conversations with other people, suggesting that our conversation was a place to think. So I want to emphasise the need to value the multiple ways in which 'a place to think' could be nurtured where people can express themselves in a way that replicates storytelling about themselves in the way I have demonstrated in the thesis. This is familiar in various forms of experiential work and action learning but not familiar outside of this. Stepping stones are needed to nurture new kinds of conversational form, which enable a more open kind of talk that can offset the growing insularity of working in business units. For example, university continuing education initiatives were once conceived of as 'extramural' or beyond the walls, and links with trade unions, local government and the voluntary sector, once valued, have decayed. Some networks are being renewed, such as between the TUC and universities.

Secondly, oral history is one of those spaces that have emerged to fill the growing democratic deficit. One of its concerns lies appropriately with recovering silenced narrative. I would like to promote an oral history movement in local government that would begin to reflect on the still very contested narratives, which are such a shaping shadow presence alongside the new modernisation agendas. Memory work is an important way of retaining continuity and generational legacies in a time of very rapid change and are to be distinguished from nostalgia. Constant restructuring truncates the work of mourning as change programmes get 'driven forward'. My own narrative in this thesis can thus be understood as a contribution to this wider and more collective process, which could begin to resolve the still deep, visceral aversion in much of New Labour's thinking towards local government, which arises from the still bitterly contested understandings of failure in the 1980s. My own storytelling has been a way of seeking to have something 'understood' from which the following insights have followed. The following summarises some of the key points arising from the three summary chapters on 'Emerging themes', and from the interpretation of stories in Chapter 14 and Chapter 16 of Part Five, using a complexity and psychosocial lens respectively.

- *Insights in relation to public services theorising*

Shadow narrative: the stories in the thesis surface a ‘shadow narrative’ (Stacey, 2000:376), one which has been silenced by the dominant, legitimated discourse about the market and new public management. They reveal a more complicated story, which is a contribution to both social history and to understanding how agency and political imagination can be lost and recovered.

Gender: Gender is a thread that emerges in both stories and theory. I record how women activists in the campaigning voluntary sector of the 1980s won acknowledgement, for the first time, of the significant role of low paid women workers in public services. I also describe how women (like myself) then moved from the voluntary sector into local government management in the later 1980s and 1990s, taking up their own authority and providing strategic leadership of a local government opposition to compulsory competitive tendering. Its legacy has been to ongoingly modify the male-dominated public management structure, if not the underlying masculine culture. The stories of a ‘power group’ at a group relations conference also show that women who have power do not necessarily feel powerful away from the trappings of authority. The expression of emotions and intimate feelings *between* women proved every bit as problematic as between men, contrary to the stereotypical narrative of some women in management literatures, such as Strebler (1997). The implication is of the need to engage with a deeper understanding of feminine power (Alizade, 2002:99-108)

Blurring the boundaries: I have mapped the blurring of sector boundaries between the public, private and voluntary sectors, reflected in the significant and growing privatisation and commercialisation of the public sector, and also moves to groom the voluntary sector, not just as an alternative public services delivery role, but also one close to the corporate sector. The stories also link the growth of monopoly corporate suppliers to poor quality of procurement in local government as well as to government intent, and the dangers of ‘secondary corruption’ (Hodgkinson, 1997). At the same time, I also argue that a more nuanced ‘market versus state’ perspective is possible and it is important to distinguish sub groups within the private sector, drawing a clear distinction between highly motivated, smaller companies and the corporate sector.

Partisans versus technocrats: In the earlier stories, I describe myself as a partisan in local government, carrying forward values from social movements, and in Part Four encounter similar contemporary partisans. It illustrates how technical roles deep in a bureaucracy, as well as frontline caring roles, can be infused with passion and subtle forms of resistance to the concrete, technocratic ethos that increasingly dominates public service technical and managerial domains. These stories contribute to a literature on ‘partisanship’ (Hoggett, 1992 and Newman, 2005) and ‘creative autonomy’ (Atkinson and Wilks-Heeg, 2000), bringing a specific gender perspective to it. I suggest also that the exercise of ‘creative autonomy’ is still much more present in local government than other parts of the public sector, reflecting the continued bottom-up democratic strand in its culture. This is much more muted in the NHS or universities

Public service ethos: I also underline how a public service ethos is a social construct and is the result of the continual contestation of ideas and power relating. The current promotion of a cross-sector public service ethos reflects the eroding of a more complicated understanding of a public sector and voluntary sector ethos and the withering of local democratic forms of decision-making. This will be exacerbated by the pressures for regionalisation of local government, working in parallel with the growing development of private sector monopolies and alongside the promotion of a ‘neighbourhood/parish level ‘Localism’ strategy. Together, I suggest, they will erode local power and undermine redistributive mechanisms.

Emotions, ethics and politics: A more complicated story emerged in the accounts of lived experience in Parts Two and Four, which was not reflected by the mainstream public services literature of Part Three. The thesis underlines this ‘gap’. The stories are suffused with accounts of emotional labour, ethical dilemmas and moral choices. Yet, paradoxically, the stories also reveal how within the public services culture there is still a deep aversion to anything ‘touchy feely’, including amongst women managers. Psychosocial thinking has, thus, still only a very marginal foothold in the mainstream discourse on public services. My thesis is, therefore, a contribution towards connecting psychosocial thinking more closely to critical management thinking and social policy within a new discourse which it is seeking to progress this (du Gay, 2005). To this, I have brought an understanding of complex responsive processes of relating with its emphasis on power relating and ethics and its challenge to the systems thinking which

currently underpins the quantified, evidence- based, modernising agenda for public services.

Complexity

As the powerful role of systems thinking in public services begins to convey signs of exhaustion and collapse, it is apparent that complexity ideas are being co-opted into government strategy, particularly in the language around the 'New Localism'. This has real dangers for the emergence of complexity ideas as was pointed out in Part Five. But it *is* also an opportunity to enhance an alternative, more process-led, self-organising way of thinking about a public service ethos and change. This could register the central importance of emotional life, drawing on the insights of psychosocial thinking, an understanding of power relating and of seeing ethics as politics in a way which renews values of collective, democratic forms of decision making. My thesis charts both the contribution complexity ideas can bring and also the dangers around its linkages to protagonists of the 'Mutual State' (Mayo, 2002).

Glimpses

A last chapter is like a Monet painting. In the earlier chapters the patterns are not decipherable, but now in standing back it becomes possible to see some shapes come into focus and a bigger picture emerging (Kidd, 2005). What once seemed fragmented has moved into sharper focus. But it still means that each time it will be viewed in a slightly different way. Amidst the dismantling of the welfare state are clues to new patterns of meaning. This feels more like 'glimpsing' a truth (Nichols, 2005) which does not lead to any fixed grasp on reality as new patterns will continue to emerge.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Narrative use

Appendix 2. Social movements and local government

Appendix 3. The Private Finance Initiative

Appendix 4. What kind of state?

Appendix 1: Narrative use

This appendix concludes the discussion in Chapter 1 on the way narrative is used to express the politics of welfare. It touches on group autobiography, key films and dramas and the anticipatory awareness of art.

Group autobiography

Sebald (2003) reflects on the collective silence of German writers, including himself, about the mass destruction of their cities in the closing period of the Second World War. He is writing about people's ability to forget what they do not want to know, to overlook what is before their eyes and carry on as though nothing had happened. He remarks that it left 'scarcely a trace of pain', obliterated from retrospective understanding in a collective act. It never became capable of public decipherment. Only a few writers ventured to break the taboo over half a century. It provides an example of the 'extraordinary capacity for self anaesthesia' (ibid:11) and a struggle against 'the art of forgetting' (ibid:176).

Sebald's book sparked off a wide-ranging debate in his native Germany in 1999 when society was able at last to listen. (Spivak, (1990:59) suggests silences such as these pose the question, 'Who should speak is less crucial than who will listen?' An account of the systematic rape of German women in Berlin at the end of the war disappeared from view because of the same reaction. It was re-published only in 2005 and was still authored by Anonymous. Helen Bamber also recalled how it was only when Eric Lomax (1996) approached the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture and found someone to listen to him, that he was able to describe his experience as a prisoner of war in Japan; it had been impossible for him to speak to a resistant culture, which silenced him for 45 years. Passerini (1983, 1996), Portelli (1998) and Vivaldi (2005) have also brought to light the unspoken, silenced histories within Italy and Greece.

Film and drama

In the UK, the welfare state has only rarely been the direct subject of plays and films. But this all but disappeared from the mid 1980s in a kind of group silencing. The film *Brassed Off* (1996), set in Grimethorpe around a colliery band, represented a re-finding of a 'voice' about a world that had been lost in less than a decade. It describes and contrasts the logic of money and the world of consultants and auditors, with the daily life of the local community that relied on the coalmine for its security (Williamson 2001:32). This film filled cinemas for months in the north. It successfully recaptured the brutalising loss of an established world following the defeat of the year-long miners' strike in 1984, and the social brutality that followed for mining communities. It is also a moving reflection on the loss of 'masculinity' and identity and the changing gender roles for women.

In *Navigators*, Loach (2001) set out to capture how the rail workers 'knew' what was happening to their industry following privatisation and how their signals were ignored. He was told stories about how rail workers shunned opportunities for taking up their free travel passes because they 'knew'. But as Williamson correctly points out if you set out to show class as an issue and make your characters stand for something, you are less likely to be focusing on individual interiority and inner fantasies (2001:110). In successful political narratives, the characters remain more powerful than the 'agenda'. She illustrates how this is captured in the subtle, haunting, nature of Lynn Ramsey's *Ratcatcher* (1999), which is suffused with a vivid reliving of the social and sordid realities of the late 1970s 'dust' strike. She argues that for stories to work, the symbols need a depth and resonance with our own lives and that there is a subtle difference between allowing people space and speaking *for* people. Documentary is right for giving people a voice, whereas a fictional version like *Navigators* ended up seeming phoney.

In a ground breaking drama the playwright, David Hare, revealed the underlying story of the privatised railways in *The Permanent Way* (2003), which both captured and shaped a significant shift in the public perception of privatisation. His earlier play, *Via Dolorosa* (1998), about the Middle East conflict, marked the first sign of the coming rebirth of political theatre. He himself took to the stage and told stories, adopting multiple contested voices and roles. In *The Permanent Way*, having first visited the different conflicting interests, actors took on their voice and characters. In particular, the play

highlighted the change in power and ethos from the cult of the engineer to that of the accountant, with all its tragic implications.

I attended the pre-London tour of the play in St Ethelburgers, Hatfield. This church had been closely involved in the 1999 Hatfield rail crash – one of the four crashes that precipitated the collapse of Railtrack. The play was performed on a simple stage set in this ancient and beautiful church. The mainly local audience was deeply engaged and at the end people spoke movingly about the impact of the rail crash, including the sense of stigma that the town experienced. I was gripped by the play as it captured the contested rationales and singular perceptions of privatisation through the different roles and interests. Its success underlined how a narrative can articulate lived experience in a powerful way. *Playing with Fire*, by David Edgar (2005) is less successful drama, about the race riots which erupted in impoverished northern towns in 2001, explored through the conflict between ‘Whitehall and Town Hall’ and central government’s enforcement of its agenda over local government, by new Labour over old Labour.

Expressing complexity and psychosocial thinking

A drama in which both complexity and psychosocial thinking find expression is Denis Potter’s play, *The Singing Detective* (1986), in which he explores the question of ‘inside and outside’, the individual and the social, and non-linear time. Bell (1999) provides a powerful insight into why this play had such a gripping and popular appeal in the mid-1980s. It is a six-part drama using the conventions of autobiography and a detective story, in which Potter lays bare human character, the human condition and the struggle of creativity and destructiveness. Its structure is a non-linear weave of three threads or concurrent realities. They are: the current reality of the novelist, Philip Marlow, the central character, who is trying to rewrite his novel *The Singing Detective*; his memories of his childhood with a tyrannical teacher in his isolated village school (rather like my own); and the alternative reality of his imaginative fantasy life. Potter seeks to break down the barriers of ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ reality to explore their relationship in which, as Bell argues, Marlow’s devastating exacerbation of the skin illness psoriasis, may be taken as a metaphor for his ‘inner world’ in which he is facing a mid life crisis that arises from his attempt to emerge from a state of inner imprisonment and paralysis. As the narrative develops over the six episodes the disparate fragments become clearer and more coherent as the process of recovery takes shape. As his capacity to bear the mental pain

of loss and guilt develops he has less need to retreat into his fantasies and stories. He rewrites his old novel – symbolically a new way of looking at things; begins to walk, symbolising his psychic progress and eventually kills off the ‘mafia in the mind’ in a terrifying shoot out (Bell, 1999:64-65, 74-83). In a television interview just before his death in 1994, sipping away at a bottle of liquid morphine, with Potter unforgettably describing how the blossom that year was ‘very blossomy’, he talked about how the structure of the play conveys how past and present do not exist in sequence in your head although they may have a calendar order.

‘because they are not in your head in that sequence and neither are they in terms of the way you discover things about yourself where an event of 20 years ago can become more, it can follow yesterday instead of precede it ... out of this morass, if you like, of evidence, of clues and the searchings and strivings, which is the metaphor for the way we live, we can start to put up a structure called self. In that structure we can walk out of that structure and say at least we know better than before who we are.’ (Bell, 1999:71 quoting Denis Potter 1994).

About his character, Marlow, he says that illness was the starting point of extreme crisis, pain, hate and no belief, which gave rise to fantasies which became facts, which became fantasies and the fantasies became realities, ‘and all of them became him and all of them allowed him to walk’ (op. cit., 71-72). We know that Potter is also talking about himself. In this play I think he powerfully describes how we have ‘to come to know the self’ (Kidd, 2004) alongside the social self that we are inventing and creating with the stories we tell. If we can do this we transform ourselves in the process, emerging with a new voice and a different place in the world.

Art has also traditionally been the way shifts in our culture have been anticipated. In a review of the paintings of Francis Bacon, the critic John Berger (2004) describes how he had only recently grasped the meaning of this artist’s work, having previously interpreted it as setting out to shock, nourished by a bohemian circle in which nobody much cared about what was happening elsewhere. But, reflecting on an exhibition of his work in Paris, he identifies a profoundly different quality. He now considers that in his broken faces, Bacon paints a ‘*muteness*’ in a quite fearless way. He notes there are no other

figures in the paintings to receive the mute gestures of despair; calamities are presented as ‘mere collateral accident’. In Berger’s view, the pitiless world that Bacon conjured up and tried to exorcise has turned out to be *prophetic*. He goes on to question whether the world has not always been pitiless but concludes that:

‘today’s pitilessness is perhaps more unremitting, pervasive and continuous. It spares neither the planet itself, nor anyone living on it anywhere ... deriving from the sole logic of the pursuit of profit ... it threatens to make obsolete all other sets of belief, along with their traditions of facing the cruelty of life with dignity and some flashes of hope’. (Berger, 2004:17)

So Berger poses a question of how the personal drama of an artist half a century ago reflects the crisis of a whole civilisation today. He concludes that it is a mystery how an individual experience creatively expressed can reveal such collective insight. This echoes again the notion that perhaps ‘it is in individual pain rather than the social whole that we can find the truth of the wider society’ (Adorno, 1974: quoted in Craib, 1995). While I would want to qualify this statement, so as not to be read as quite the either or implied, I like the way it strongly asserts how the individual life matters and that the individual inter-subjective voice can potentially generate powerful insights.

Photocopies

We ultimately write about that which is important to ourselves whatever genre we adopt. But this overview suggests that a narrative approach in which the researcher is also ‘in the frame’ and working with oneself and with others, is still quite rare. In looking for a model of non-fiction writing in which the writer is also ‘in the frame’, I have been intrigued by John Berger’s book of short stories, *Photocopies* (1996), which record and investigate ‘moments’ of encounter which are not fiction. He imagines his stories are like a frieze of ‘photocopies’ arranged side by side, giving readers a panoramic view of what this moment of history was like when lived. As the book flap comments, each photocopy is about someone for whom he feels a kind of love but also becomes an unintentional portrait of himself. I like this idea of ‘photocopies’, with their subtle suggestion that they are not fixed but always slightly modified. It is an idea that resonates with the iteration of complex responsive processes where patterns are repeated but never exactly the same.

Appendix 2: Social movements and local government

Appendix 2, describes my experience of participation in three groups, which each in their different way, shaped the social movements of the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s. Together they unravel how I came to think about the role of public services in the two decades prior to 1987. They are:

1. The National Community Development Project
2. The New Architecture Movement
3. Haringey Women's Employment Project

1. The National Community Development Project (CDP: 1972-77)

After four years in local government working as a town planner in Coventry, I was frustrated and wanted to work in the more community-based way inspired by CDP and other community-based projects which had recently just been set up in part of the city where I lived. In 1972, I moved to London where I took up a temporary research post⁶⁹ with the Canning Town CDP project in east London. This was one of a dozen local projects recently set up as part of a national programme launched by the Home Office. Projects were each sponsored by a local authority and a university who were each responsible for a set number of posts. The history of CDPs has been described by Craig (1982) and others⁷⁰. What follows is a more personal story.

The local authority sponsor of Canning Town CDP in east London was Newham Council. But my temporary research post was only available because the project had already fallen out with Brunel University, its first academic sponsor. It had yet to link up with North East London Polytechnic (now UEL) with whom it was to engage in another turbulent

⁶⁹ Temporarily sponsored by the University of Southampton under Prof. John Grieve.

⁷⁰ <http://www.wcml.org.uk/group/cdp.htm>.

relationship. I stayed for five years, eventually becoming permanent and in the latter period its assistant director.

The National Community Development Project was set up in 1970 by the Home Office in the wake of Enoch Powell's 1969 anti-immigration, 'rivers of blood' speech. The CDPs had been given the remit to research the 'cycles of deprivation' in poor communities, which were seen as the underlying problem of poverty. Although all these local projects were funded by the Home Office, each was independently sponsored by its local authority and by a university who alone had oversight over what was published during the project's time-limited five-year life. Some projects insisted from the outset on an integrated action research team in the locality, bringing together theory and practice. Some also chose to work as quasi-collectives. A group of like-minded projects also chose to work in national inter-project collectives and a stream of national publications eventually flowed from this, supported by a central unit. This group of CDP projects sought to counter the 'cycles of deprivation' theory on which the projects had been set up, and chose to focus on a more Marxist-orientated analysis of the local economy. Unemployment was rising sharply as the oil crisis impacted on Britain's failing economy. The paternalism of local public services, like housing and education was also a contentious focus.

The neighbourhood of Canning Town is a key site in British labour history and in the development of the unskilled unions like the T&G and GMB. My first temporary office was in the meeting hall of the local Trades Council building. This was no poky back room but a large, impressive, if dilapidated monument to the past scale and organisational achievement of the tens of thousands of unskilled dock and gas workers union members. The toilet doors opened directly off the hall in a reminder of how everyone needed to keep tabs on who was talking to whom during trades council meetings. In the early 1970s the dock workers still remained a significant political force, and in an alliance with the miners had mounted a serious challenge to the then government led by Edward Heath, resulting in the release of trade unionists who had been imprisoned over industrial relations conflict. It had brought a whiff of revolution in the air. But by 1972, Canning Town was already in precipitous economic decline with the closing down of the Royal Docks as containerisation moved trade down river to Tilbury. Major companies, like Tate and Lyle and STC ITT, which had stretched for many miles along this Thames

waterfront, were also closing or relocating overseas. Who would benefit from the redevelopment of this huge docklands area would be fought over for the next decade.

My planning skills, combined with frequent visits to Companies House, provided a way of mapping the companies involved in this process of economic decline. I was able to interpret docklands redevelopment options leaked from the consultants⁷¹ and this enabled the local community and trade unions to seek to influence their outcome. The overall research about local economic decline was published as a key report '*Canning Town to North Woolwich: The Aims of Industry?*' (Canning Town CDP, 1975). Other pamphlets analysed the impact on the community income and tracked back the process of change putting it in the historical context of a nineteenth century movement of capital into the locality away from the north. This research in turn, contributed to a national inter-project report, *The Costs of Industrial Change* (NCDP, 1977), which mapped the emerging de-industrialisation of five UK localities and focussed attention on the then unacknowledged economic and social disintegration of post-industrial communities *within* UK cities. This was specifically key to demonstrating the growing impact in London, which until then had not been acknowledged as experiencing serious economic decline.

These and other reports fuelled the upsurge of community-based action and research initiatives up and down the country. It led to the growth of new local resource and advice and law centres to deal with housing and tenants' problems. This held up a provocative mirror to their local authority sponsors and challenged the prevalent authoritarian culture. But 'biting the hand that feeds you' inevitably brings its own reward. Several CDP projects were prematurely closed down before the end of their five-year term. This included Canning Town CDP, where Newham Council withdrew, following criticism of its housing service practices. As the project wound down, some staff left happily to participate in the aftermath of the recent Portuguese revolution and others opted for a final 'evaluation' year relocated under E.H. Halsey at Oxford – our fourth and final university sponsor over the five years.

In joining the CDP, I had unknowingly joined a group of people who were seasoned pioneers in radical community action. They were founder members of CND, had set up the law centre movement, and challenged housing, social work and race relations

⁷¹ Robert Mathew Johnson Marshall.

thinking in numerous previous campaigns. They had spotted the potential of CDP as a funded opportunity for radical action research constrained by only a loosely drafted Home Office contract. So my five years was an exhilarating exposure to radical social theory and political practice. A key philosophical debate at this time was between the top-down, rationalist theorising of Althusser's re-working of Marxist thinking, versus its formidable critique by EP Thompson, expressed in *The Poverty of Theory* (1978). The latter valued an empirical, self-critical method as part of an alternative socialist humanist tradition, which emphasised experience and allowed for emotional response. Influenced more by the latter, the CDP published an innovative flow of radical, provocative empirical research studies. Each amusingly included the following ironic disclaimer: 'the Home Office does not necessarily share the findings of this report'! None of the subsequent projects of this kind were ever again set up with the same degree of autonomy. The ideas pioneered by the CDPs were extremely influential, seeping out into a whole range of initiatives across the country throughout the following decade and eventually taking root in some local authorities. It has reappeared in elements of the Sure Start programme.

The internal group dynamics of these semi-collectives were often chaotic, rivalrous and egoistical, fuelled by intense political argument. They were never more coherent than when under attack from their sponsors. It was my first experience of such open conflict and the essentially male-dominated power struggles that dominated such team meetings. But it would coexist with a tradition of cooking and eating collective meals in which civil conversation returned. In the following period CDP-PEC (Political Economy Collective) continued to publish work including the influential *In and Against the State* by the London –Edinburgh Weekend Return Group (1979). This articulated the failures of the local state and public services to respond to changing needs. Wilson (1977) articulated how women were also seen as defined by repressive welfare policies and in particular by the ideology of the family and Cockburn (1977) how women were disadvantaged as a consequence in the workplace. In this more theory driven understanding of the local state, public services were seen as very much part of the problem.

2. The New Architecture Movement (NAM)

It was through the politics of architecture that I was to begin to work out my own rather different understanding of public services.

From 1956 onwards, Conservative governments had used financial incentives to exert intense pressure on local authorities to replace the then preferred style of low-rise council housing influenced by the garden city movement, with new system built tower blocks being developed by the construction industry (Murray, 2005). This era was epitomised by Newcastle's T. Dan Smith and the Poulson affair.⁷² In 1964 the newly elected Labour government promised to build 500,000 houses and established the National Building Agency to advise on industrialised systems. But within three years the new government set about changing this inherited policy and commissioned the *Deeplish Study* (1967) located in Bradford. This rapidly re-orientated the strategy of local authorities towards the rehabilitation of the traditional housing stock rather than the previous slum clearance. The collapse of Ronan Point in Canning Town, built in response to Conservative policies promoting a high rise construction industry, and so often taken as the turning point away from high-rise, in fact post-dated Labour's policy change.

Architecture may be the 'handwriting of society', but it is more frequently seen by Labour councillors and other officers as a handy scapegoat. In local government it taps into a deep-rooted lack of concern for beauty compared with the pursuit of social justice. Yet in 1978, a third of architects were in public service. This mirrored the rise of the welfare state's provision of housing and schools and the radical leanings of many in the profession. Almost every local authority would have its own architectural service, usually in some prickly relationship with engineers or town planning. The role of town planning was of course also intimately involved in the rise of property developers in the 1960s as local authorities became enmeshed with big business (Bennington / Coventry CDP, 1976).

By the mid 1970s, a group of socially committed architects based in the Greater London Council revolted against the GLC's intentions to redevelop Covent Garden. This group,

⁷² Portrayed in the television film series *Our Friends in the North* (2002) covering the years 1964-1979.

called themselves the ‘Architects’ Revolutionary Council’ or ARC. This subsequently evolved in 1976 into a much wider grouping called the New Architecture Movement (NAM). I was involved with NAM directly for a short period and then indirectly for several years. Its discussions fundamentally shaped my own perspective on the dilemma posed by public services: were they a part of the problem or part of the solution? NAM aimed to take forward an agenda for a more democratic basis to architectural design and the closer involvement of users. To achieve this it proposed a National Public Design Service, which would support local communities (Murray, 1978), although alongside this, it still left space for setting up co-operatively run practices. As local authorities already had such publicly funded infrastructure, developing a radical architectural service meant that it was these local government services that became the focus of effort to mobilise this agenda to radicalise working practices.

The ideas took particular hold in several local authorities in the late 1970s but particularly so in Haringey, a north London borough⁷³. The movement for change led to a hundred-strong service being restructured and managed through a collective management structure. The chief officer became a ‘co-ordinator’ elected by the management team, as a first amongst equals – perhaps the only example of an elected chief officer in the history of a local government service in the UK. Staff in area-based teams actively sought to decentralise and relocate themselves, becoming embedded in the communities like the high rise Broadwater Farm estate, and overseen by local management committees. This decentralised office structure was designed to enable staff to be more accountable to the community.

NAM was significant for me because my ongoing engagement with its debates about strategy forced me to think through why public services were important. I concluded it was not an adequate political position to merely criticise the local state as the source of oppression, as was the case in so many critiques at the time. It was necessary to also actively engage with the radicalisation of the local state. My own personal experience of dependence told me for many there was no other option. Such re-thinking was most possible at a local level where the ‘Left’ had won power in both the GLC and some local councils and was willing to experiment.

⁷³ Where my partner had taken up a post.

From the early 1980s, Equality Units and council committees, which focused on bringing about change in relation to women, race, sexuality and disability, were set up by the GLC and a small number of pioneering councils, such as Haringey. They were highly contentious and widely pilloried at the time with a particular focus on the emergence of gay and lesbian sexuality (Cooper, 1994). They represented the official face of a wider challenge to the established mores and distribution of power in society. Despite their limitations these played a key role in enabling an anti-sexist and anti-racist ethos to take root and stimulating a progressive process of change. For example, over the following decade Haringey Council's employment structure came to reflect that of the local population of whom nearly half were from black and minority groups who had previously been seriously under-represented. It was a change nearly two decades in advance of such change in other local authorities, the NHS, police and universities.

This political agenda played a key role in building a capacity to manage the heightened emotions that arose from the inner city riots of 1985 and in Haringey's case particularly the aftermath of the two deaths on Broadwater Farm estate. The relationships built up around the decentralised architectural service on Broadwater Farm were to prove central to the estate's rehabilitation and the community's recovery following these 'riots' of 1985, which in part also expressed the intensifying poverty gap in society. Architects played a key role in rebutting unfounded police claims about 'petrol bombs', demonstrating why this allegation could not have been feasible. This example underscores the 'collective intellectual capital', which is involved in *knowing* how a city 'works'. Such intimate knowledge of the history of an area's development requires a local, rooted and public design service.

This democratised public architectural service was a very accomplished and successful service. The positive energies released in Haringey's decision to support a NAM strategy and experiment with a collective management structure, were also accompanied by negatives. Following a critical involvement in negotiating such radical change, the trade union took up a privileged place inside the new management structure whilst continuing to maintain a direct and independent political relationship to councillors. The conflictual and destructive energies always present in groups were underestimated.

The financial crises of the later eighties and early nineties brought about retrenchment and political realignments, and finally required a return to a formal hierarchy and normal structures. A decade on, few public service architectural services even any longer survive in local government. Most have now been sold off or outsourced to private contractors by local authorities through PFI, in a process of 'asset stripping' local authorities of their historic role as architects, planners and publicly accountable asset-holders' (Elliott, 2005b quoting Worpole, 2005)

3. Haringey Women's Employment Project (1979-1987)

The parallel explosion of feminist thought and action from the early seventies meant that while working for the CDP, I was gradually being drawn into radical ideas of socialist feminism, attending conferences and joining the emerging campaigns. Yet gender and race never registered as a priority issue for CDP. This reflected the still largely secondary place women occupied in the power structure, the whiteness of the employment structure and the traditional focus of the 'left' thinking orientated towards the means of production, which largely ignored other aspects of life.

When the CDP finally ended, a colleague and I decided in 1978 to become involved in our own more local trades council and set up the Tottenham Employment Project.⁷⁴ This then led us to apply for and job share a series of one-year voluntary sector posts under the umbrella of the local Council of Voluntary Service. We set out to follow in the footsteps of CDP but with an increasing attention to gender issues. We were both new mothers, actively engaged in the women's movement and part of a generation of women who sought financial independence and to break the mould. It was an exhilarating personal and political challenge but also fraught with tension in a society still critical of working mothers. We were interdependent, part sharing the care of our babies and sharing benefits during periods without funding. As we sat beside sandpits, we would muse on the gendering of the skill structure or how cleaning in schools should be made visible, having been inspired by a reading of 'Red Bologna' (Jaggi et al, 1977), where women cleaning staff worked during school hours and were being provided with access to further education.

⁷⁴ Tottenham's Future Jobs: Who Decides? (1979) Haringey Trades Council. Tottenham Employment Project

The project expanded into a mixed gender Haringey Employment Project as we tapped the new Manpower Services Commission for funding. In recognition of this work we were the first project to receive direct funding from the newly elected GLC's Industry and Employment Committee in 1981⁷⁵. The latter aimed to promote a radical 'alternative' industrial strategy for London. Our project was duly re-named the Haringey *Women's* Employment Project and along with the support of a wider management committee, set out to challenge the social, employment and labour movement structures that discriminated against women. Alongside researching the local economy, we campaigned for community nurseries and for an equal role for fathers in childcare as part of the new local and National Childcare Campaign.

Whereas the CDP, typically for its time, had been strangely unconscious of gender, this new project started with an explicit socialist feminist orientation. To take account of gender then meant addressing the interrelationship of gender, with conflicts amongst women around sexuality, and its intersection with race and class. We were working out how to live all of this in our own lives. We became a mixed race project and drawn into cultural developments flourishing around us, and in particular the development of young black women's writing and art. During these years, several now well-known artists and writers lived in Tottenham. In a major exhibition of British and Commonwealth art at the Hayward Gallery at the South Bank in 1984, I unexpectedly came upon a large painting of a beautiful 'shiny black' young woman of West Indian background by Sonia Boyce, who was one such local artist. It was sub-titled '*An English Rose*'. I found the painting prophetic and was excited by the fact that such a creative work had emerged from our impoverished but culturally exciting part of London. New ideas were dynamically mutating as writers and poets⁷⁶ sought to establish themselves. This was at a time when 'black Britishness' was a vocabulary still painfully coming into being, when people had to make difficult choices in relation to the 1983 Nationality Act and when in 1986 Broadwater Farm exploded in anger and riots, as the impoverishment and repression under Thatcherism grew more intense.

The Women's Employment Project (HWEP) was part of a tremendously energetic movement of ideas, which linked local based projects like our own to intellectual debate

⁷⁵ That is, we were not funded by the Women's Committee.

⁷⁶ Like Jackie Kay and Maud Sulter.

in universities, policy initiatives in local government and the new equality units. Argument raged about the future patterns of women's unemployment, employment and training. Were women merely a reserve army of labour or were low-paid, part-time/women workers becoming a central and growing part of an evolving consumer capitalism? We researched the structure, ownership and patterns of education and training provision in the local economy and published many reports in association with local groups, and trade unions and campaigned around their findings to bring about material changes. These included campaigns for a working women's charter (HWEP, 1981), childcare, adult education, revaluing the skills and the employment in which women were concentrated and an overhaul of the apprenticeship courses in local further education colleges, which were still astonishingly a wholly unreconstructed male white preserve.

HWEP had successfully secured research funding from the GLC, the local council, the (then) EEC and other funders like War on Want. A different key initiative was securing a £1/2 million funding from the EEC and the GLC to set up a Women's Training and Education Centre. This was to provide training in non-traditional skills, such as the building trades and new technology skills. The local authority supported the project by providing a recently vacated boys' secondary school. This Centre joined a new network of such centres nationally whose legacy helped to reshape the landscape of further education.

The ethos of those who were motivated by feminist politics quickly clashed with the ethos of those who had taken up posts as 'just a job'. This became entangled in the complicated politics of sexuality and race. The collective authority structure faced difficulty in 'containing' the emotional affects that stemmed from this volatile mix. Unanticipated rivalry and conflicts would come to dominate relationships between women in a way we never expected. This experience added to the earlier ones shaped my subsequent need to try to understand how destructive energies are also unleashed in organisations launched around such creative endeavour.

In contrast, the Women's Employment Project itself managed to 'contain' such destructive tendencies and developed its own authoritative collective management style. Was it because it grew out of a longer history of trust, and fostered a generosity of spirit and emotional sensitivity? Recalling the complexity and subtlety of the projects we

tackled now seems startling. In relation to public services, this is particularly illustrated by its work around school meals in the mid 1980s. It was triggered by reflection on the development of childhood asthma and the place of diet in this and then by our awareness of how an ignored public service staffed was entirely by women. We set up the Haringey School Meals Campaign as an action research project with funding from the London Food Commission. It won local and national sponsorship from the then public sector manual workers trade union, NUPE (now incorporated into UNISON) and a school meals worker was seconded full-time by Haringey Council to work with the project.

Legislation by the Conservative government in the very early 1980s had already abolished nutritional standards for schools meals and the prospect of legislation to privatise school meals loomed. We set out to research school meals, working with parents' groups, trade unions and school meals workers and to jointly develop a radical food policy for Haringey Council. One that was more sensitive to its very ethnically diverse communities⁷⁷. We also wanted to revalue this most traditional of 'women's skills' by securing a training budget in recognition of this and enable them to explore providing new innovative menu ideas. This action research was published as *'Women, Privatisation and School Meals'* (HWEP/LFC, 1985). At a political level it aimed to build an alliance between women workers and users of services and move on from the 'winter of discontent' of 1979 and the lingering impact of the legacy of that public employees' strike, which had so polarised public service users and workers.

Change is always contested and food proved to be an explosive issue. Many staff at that time were mainly older Irish women. They had worked for many years in the service and took offence at the suggestion of 'training', taking it as an insult rather than as a recognition of the generally good standard of cooking. In conferences and school meetings parents would add to the problem by expressing their concern about nutritional standards or desire for change in insensitive language. The school meals staff at first were unable to listen to them. The trade unions were constantly critical as they were afraid 'take-up' would fall if more healthy menus replaced chips, putting their members' jobs at risk. Council officers were wearily concerned about just where any additional resources were to come from to translate all the talk into practice.

⁷⁷ Nearly half the population was from a minority ethnic background and there were waves of new refugees. By the early 1990s a quarter of all refugees were passing through this London borough.

The challenge lay in bringing these interest groups together in a way that they could begin to listen to each other rather than angrily shout at each other. When this happened, and parents were perceived not as critics but as the source of great support, a user-worker alliance was born. New, radical, healthy and ethnically aware menus were duly developed and nutritional standards established as part of a truly innovative Local Food Policy. The message was taken into the schools by a campaign and taster sessions of new menus were organised for parents' evenings. Nutrition was also seen as fundamentally linked to how children's brains grow and thus to wider social processes.⁷⁸ It was not just a 'service delivery' issue.

The school meals project brought about awareness the change towards cook chill being adopted by the private catering sector and I became very conscious of what would be at stake if school meals were to be compulsorily tendered under new legislation and its impact for an area with a high take up of free school meals. The move to such tendering (CCT) was then set in train following the outcome of the 1987 general election, which returned a Conservative government for the third time in a row. By that time, as Chapter 5 describes, I myself had just become a manager in local government with responsibility for responding to this legislation.

⁷⁸ Again anticipating much of the present debate 20 years on in 2005.

Appendix 3: The Private Finance Initiative

The policy of using private finance in public sector investment was introduced by the Conservative government in 1992, adopted and extended by Labour in 1997 and integrated into new forms such as the Public Private Partnerships. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) underlies 563 contracts signed up to April 2003, including 114 new hospitals being built between 2001–2010. It accounts for one-fifth of public investment and covers hospitals, schools, GP surgeries, IT systems, the London Tube and many other developments. It forms part of a wider strategy by government to restructure the public sector, described by Pollock (2002:1) as an ‘unopened oyster’ in terms of their potential commercialisation. Domestic legislation, EU and WTO trade treaties such as GATS will all have a role in this.

Under the PFI, a private consortium raises the money to build or refurbish a capital project and it is then leased back to the public authority complete with services such as routine maintenance cleaning and catering, typically over a 25-30 year period. It guarantees the private sector a steady income stream for 30 years paid from tax revenues. For the taxpayer it is an additional form of indirect taxation. PFI is widely accepted as an expensive way to fund capital programmes compared with traditional public sector borrowing mechanisms, but it has the political benefit of keeping increased public spending ‘off the books’ in the public accounts. For local politicians and public managers it has become the ‘only show in town’. Public authorities must use it if they want to renew their dilapidated public infrastructure otherwise they are denied funding.

There is growing pressure from business to remove the anti-market constraints arising from idea of universality in favour of segmentation and cherry picking (Pollock 2001: 2004) has also argued, that PFI gives the private sector the right to vary and reduce public services subject to the regulator’s authorisation. But as the regulator’s role is to operationalise the market at least cost to the government, this presents little protection. The NHS becomes just a tenant in a PFI hospital. For example the failure to specify the filling of water jugs on patient lockers in its contract cost the NHS an additional £40,000

per year at the Royal Edinburgh Infirmary. It is a lesson learnt in earlier rounds of tendering when, for example, street cleaning contractors refused to clear leaf fall if it had not been specified or clean a dirty wall if the specification itemised floors. Pollock (2003) has also demonstrated how the hidden costs of PFI lie in user charges. It now costs more to park at the new hospital in Edinburgh relocated to the outskirts of the city, than at the city's airport. Instead of an easily accessible central site where the majority of people could walk and use public transport, it now costs £20 per day to park. Along with charges for use of television and telephones, the pressure is for concessions so that the private sector consortium can generate streams of income from new user charges to patients and staff.

The cost of servicing the debt falls on the services themselves and the high cost of these contracts has in some cases led to the reduction of services, such as the 44 per cent reduction in beds to fund the new Worcester hospital, which led to the closure of Kidderminster hospital. The quality of early PFI schemes was also often poor, with the government's own Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Cabe) saying of the first 30 schools that had been built that many are 'like sheds with windows', with undersized classrooms which fail to comply with best practice (Mathiason, 2002). A serious problem predicted but brushed aside and now emerging is the rigidity of such long contracts. PFI schools in Merton are tied into 25-year contracts for school meals and were concerned that they would face financial penalties in responding to parent demand to terminate the contract with Scolarest, a subsidiary of Compass. The introduction of new statutory nutritional standards in schools with privatised services will be problematic as increased standards will potentially increase costs and may lead to the demise of school meals altogether in some schools. It serves to underline how the once democratic route to improve an in-house service, through debate and campaigning, and reaching a judgement of the best way forward has now been replaced by a rigid, top down and financially punitive system.

In course of this change, the PFI has transformed the original construction companies involved, such as Jarvis, Accord, McAlpine, Amey, W.S. Atkins, and Mouchel Parkman into 'Support Services Infrastructure Management Companies'. Together with IT companies like Capita, Vertex and Agressor, and waste management companies like Serco these companies now dominate the marketised public services sector. A few dozen

companies would probably dominate a fully commercialised system of service delivery, replacing the former diversity embodied in the hundreds of local councils as we now know them.

Haringey's PFI

In 1998, Jarvis was 'the preferred bidder' to undertake the Haringey Schools' PFI which covered nine schools in which maintenance and running of school buildings has been turned over to the consortium for a 25-year period. Not signing up to the deal was never an option, such was the state of disrepair of the schools and the need to accommodate a rising school population. There was a clear indication from the government that it was this or nothing. The story of the contentious process of negotiation with school governors is tracked in a pamphlet, *PFI Versus Democracy* (McFadyen & Rowland, 2002). The governors questioned the wisdom of using PFI over traditional refurbishment. It was a flagship scheme in which senior officials from the Treasury and education department were 'parachuted in' to work with council officers to ensure the PFI costings emerged as cheaper than the normal way of raising capital finance.

The council was told there would be no additional costs to the council. But thereafter it became rapidly apparent that the PFI credits would cover only part of the cost of the annual payment and the council had to find an extra £2million a year for the next 25 years of the contract. For example, on the advice of the Treasury, officials did not include furniture and equipment in the costs to make the costs 'affordable', which in due course has also had to be paid for by the council. Altogether this resulted in a further £6.25 million costs met by cuts to school budgets. It was a classic example of the way the comparison between private and public financing can be manipulated to legitimise PFI. But on the plus side there are nine newly refurbished schools.

But the financial status of Jarvis itself was for some time a cause for deep concern. It issued a profit warning at regular intervals in 2004, and breached bank covenants. Its share price plunged in 2004 from 150p to 37p by the September and fell below after as some local authorities withdrew from potential new contracts⁷⁹. It became closely identified as failing to repair the railways properly, which triggered its financial slide. Yet

⁷⁹ It has stabilised during 2005.

Jarvis nevertheless simultaneously secured a government contract to evaluate education services, indicating the nature of the present government's regard for the private sector. Rutherford (2003) has analysed how PFI is integrating public services into capital markets, with Monoline Insurers becoming significant actors in the process. For example, the University of Hertfordshire agreed a £190 million PFI deal with Carillion for accommodation for 1600 students and sports facilities. Funding the project is by £60 million Limited Price Index (LPI) bond issue wrapped by Monoline FSA. The LPI bonds reduce the risk to the private sector by capping payment liabilities at between 0-5 per cent. Increases above 5 per cent and decreases below 0 per cent must be met by the university, taking precedence over rents and staff costs, and exposing the university to potentially high levels of risk.

Rutherford describes how new education services are also being run by these companies. The arms manufacturer, Vosper Thorneycraft set up the company VT. This company now owns the Careers Management Group, which provides services to Connexion and has recently acquired the schools inspection services Westminster Education Consultants Ltd. The once independent Cambridge Education Consultants, set up by 'idealists' from within local education management is now owned by Mott McDonald. In 2004, five local education authorities in London and others in the north of England were managed by companies that were previously building contractors, like WS Atkins, or are rooted in waste management, like Serco.

American and Canadian schools are already much further down this path in which education has been colonised by companies like fast food chains. In the UK, 200 new City Academies are being built in run-down neighbourhoods. Introduced under the Education Act 2002, they are independent schools receiving government grants and allowed to select 10 per cent of students on aptitude. Some, like Mossbourne in Hackney and Bexley Academy, have been given high profile architects and a £25 million state of the art new building, at twice the level of investment for new state schools. Hackney has opted for an expensive uniform, with traditional old style blazers, for which clothing grants do not cover the cost. These high profile schools are now the focus of a great deal of government PR and articles in the education and architectural press. Alongside these are others like the Greig Academy in Haringey, which in contrast is an £11 million rehabilitation of a previous Church of England 'sink' school. An OFSTED report in 2003

showed the difficulties such a school has to address. In that year nearly 25 per cent of students did not join the school for the whole year, but left or arrived in the middle of term; one in three were on the special needs register; half were on free school meals; and half did not have English as a first language. Its technology specialism has meant a mere extra £ 123 per child to tackle these formidable problems.

The original prospectus for these schools said they were to be ‘owned and run’ by their sponsors. The Church of England has a long history of running schools. But for less than 20 per cent of the capital investment, a local businessman now has control of Mossbourne School and appointed its head teacher. The funding agreement for Capital City Academy in Brent has 12 governors appointed to run the school; eight are appointed by the sponsor, including that of the community governor. These schools were once community schools, so the process has involved a major transfer of public assets to these new governing structures. The sponsor of the Kings Academy in Middlesbrough, is the ‘creationist’, Sir Peter Vardy. This school employed his brother as a project director for which it pays £14,000 into the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the school’s marketing and advertising is handled by Sir Peter’s Vardy’s company (Yorkshire Post, 2005).

Such practices beg multiple questions about oversight and accountability for spending public money, and whether it is indeed value for money. But most crucially it poses the question as to why such massive amounts of money were never made available to LEAs to improve their schools *before* they got into special measures or were closed down. Finally, there are concerns about the impact of powerful magnets like Mossbourne and Bexley, hoovering up the better off and more able students, and impacting on the intake of the surrounding schools. Their success and justification for this huge additional expenditure may depend on the ‘residualisation’ of neighbouring schools (Crouch 2003). New legislation in the autumn of 2005 proposing to reduce the role of local education authorities to commissioning bodies and expand city academies. Is being vigorously opposed.

A key argument for PFI is that the private sector carries the risk. As described in Chapter 8, local authorities embarked on financial lease back schemes in the early 1980s, and were then caught up in the disastrous consequences created by spiralling interest rates, and for those who remember this period, the embrace of PFI has a chilling similarity. It

presumes the relative stability of the stock market markets and low interest rates. Yet 2003/04 saw the financial position of one company (WS Atkins, 2002) unravel like Jarvis above (Mathiason, 2004). Southwark Council having been pressured into privatising its education service had, at short notice, to find an alternative contractor to run its education services when WS Atkins pulled out of the contract because it was failing to make sufficient profit. When the construction company Balast, working on PFI schools in Tower Hamlets, went bankrupt in 2004, it meant half-built schools until Balfour Beatty stepped in. But it is also the case that companies like John Laing and Amec are examples of stock market successes and have successfully transformed themselves from construction companies into support services.

Although only ten per cent of public capital expenditure is PFI, it now involves schools, prisons, hospitals, the London Underground and housing. Jarvis (2004) alone controls ten per cent of this £35 billion PFI debt. Should a trickle of bankruptcies ever become a flood from which the private sector could not itself pick up, the government, would it is assumed, have to bail out such companies. As the Banker magazine put it in 2002 – ‘an Enron-style disaster will be rerun on a sovereign balance sheet’ (quoted by Monbiot, 2005). As Jarvis’s share price slid downwards in 2004, there was also talk of the potential for a ‘Jarvis levy’ added onto the bills of local councils, schools, and hospitals had the firm’s banks lost patience with it and forced it out of business. As Pollock (2004a) points out this would be added in complete contradiction to the assumed benefits of PFI – that the risks are being transferred to the private sector, when ultimately they are not transferred at all. They remain with the public.

Although PFI schemes have been running now for 12 years they still remain unevaluated financially and the cost to the public purse is unknown. It is one of the least transparent areas of public spending. What *is* known is that the government can borrow money more cheaply from the markets than the private sector, so PFI saddles public services in local communities with higher interest repayments than if the money was borrowed by the Treasury. The government does not dispute this but it believes that PFI encourages greater control of costs over the project’s lifetime since the consortia will be penalised if the building becomes unusable so encouraging higher quality construction. Research done by Unison (July 04) suggests that outside of the troubled companies, shareholder

profit is high – 61 per cent higher than agreed in the PFI contract, which bears no relation to investor risk. Firms reap enormous windfall profits from refinancing PFI deals.

Arguments that there is little evidence that PFI offers increased value for money is countered by the Department of Health that states that PFI deals have helped to deliver the biggest hospital building programme in living memory. But public sector unions see it as just another form of back door privatisation, which is undermining wages and conditions of employment for the workers transferred over as new staff recruited on lower conditions in a two tier system. Lawrence (2002) foresees that the government's embrace of 'new localism' reinforces the message that financial responsibility is shifted from the centre to the local. But the PFI fuelled financial pressures also led to the 'Kidderminster effect', which unseated a Labour MP. It is clear that political responsibility is widely seen to lie with Westminster. The Department of Health notified NHS Trusts that further closures would not be seen as acceptable in the run-up to the 2005 election. But since then a rising number of hospitals are operating in deficit faced by the annual cost of servicing PFI debt. The internal market in NHS is to begin in 2006 and revenues can no longer be guaranteed. The City may be growing nervous as new PFI projects in the £6 billion PFI programme in the NHS must now prove they are affordable (White, 2005). Hospital closures look all too probable and with it their full scale privatisations.

As well as parallels with the creative accounting/ lease back schemes engaged in by cash strapped local authorities in the early 1980s, the story of PFI also has similarities with how system built tower blocks in the 1950 and early 1960s were promoted. This policy was introduced by a Conservative government and then taken forward by a Labour government. The tower block policy was promoted by central government using financial incentives to encourage reluctant local authorities to adopt untried methods in the building. In both cases control over design and construction was vested in large private construction companies, with local authority architects having little influence (Murray, 2005). In the 1960s, blame for tower blocks was laid at the door of Labour local authorities rather than central government. If PFI were to go badly wrong central government might get the blame but local communities will still get the bill. At the close of 2005, suggestions of legislation to reorganise local government and locate budgets at

the neighbourhood level could weaken the voice of local authority opposition but may also stimulate new kinds of community activism.

Appendix 4: What kind of state?

In August 2004, the UK became once again a net importer of oil. After 30 years, the North Sea supply has started its terminal decline. This significant change sharply poses an issue underlying the drive to marketisation: how well will the UK economy sustain itself without indigenous oil and to what extent will we further withdraw from the founding ideas of a welfare state if the economy starts to struggle as the long boom years falter? In other words, to what lengths will the elite in our society be prepared to go to protect their way of life at whatever cost to the weak in society? This question will shape what kind of state will emerge over the next few decades. It underpins such issues as the debate around the introduction of a flat rate of income tax versus the redistributive model of the past 60 years.

As the welfare state gives way to a market based regulatory state, it has given rise to competing views as to the form of state that is emerging. This includes the 'market state', the 'mutual state' and the 'adaptive state'. This appendix briefly describes each of these.

The market state

Bobbitt in *The Shield of Achilles* (2002; 2003:29-31) put forward the thesis that the nation state is being replaced by various forms of 'Market State', which is indifferent to community and culture. He suggests that the 'the market state will not see itself as more than a minimal provider or re-distributor; it will simply try to maximise the choices available to individuals'. He sees it as taking one of three forms: 'entrepreneurial' (minimalist and least kind to the weak); 'market' (inducing non-territorial 'umbrellas'), and 'mercantile' (protectionist). He also warns that the 21st century could again see armed violence between the great powers. In his view strong states are necessary to secure civil rights. But as the nation state is replaced by the market state the necessary governing structures are, in his view, being weakened by increasing reliance on referenda, focus groups and polling. In his view, only states, even market states, can achieve the successful shift from retaliatory, threat-based strategies to defensive, vulnerability-based strategies. A market alone can never co-ordinate defensive strategies.

Within a year of the publication of Bobbitt's book and following the occupation of Iraq, the US Defence Secretary was pledging the US's determination to rebuild Iraq, declaring 'that means a market economy', and taking steps 'to privatise state owned enterprise' (*Wall Street Journal*, 2003). Kosovo has been the focus of similar 'economic reforms' with the introduction of a free market economy and privatisation of government assets. The repeal of privatisation laws now allows 70 per cent of companies to be foreign owned and bids have been received for the privatisation of the first 500 previously socially owned enterprises set up in the era of Tito (Clark, 2004). The prize of war for the international community appears to have been seizure of assets. In Kosovo's case this includes a wide range of some of the richest mineral deposits in Europe.

In commenting on the maelstrom of transatlantic relations that Iraq has aroused, the American political commentator, Robert Kagan, coined the phrase 'Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus' (2003). He argued that we have parted ways on the utility and morality of power. America considers rules are unreliable and that the promotion of the liberal order still depends on the use of military might, whereas Europeans in rejecting force have gone beyond power. Kagan was responding to the thesis advocated by the British civil servant and policy analyst, Robert Cooper (2000). He suggests that the world now has zones of pre-modernity, such as Afghanistan; modernity, such as China; and the post-modern, such as Europe. Cooper argues that the roots of security are transparency and interdependence and mutual routine inspection. It is a world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and co-operation, all of which implies a new form of statehood and the prospect of holding richer countries to their obligations through a 'moral consciousness'. In this scenario America is seen as still clinging to the defining logic of a modern nation state, protecting its national interest by any means (Bentley, 2003). But it can also be argued that for Europe economic dominance remains key; it is just better concealed.

The American historian, Fukuyama (1992), defined the triumph of capitalism over communism as 'the end of history'. Over the following decade this triumphalism fuelled the thesis that the market would take over the role of nations. Milton Friedmann's advice at that time was to 'privatise, privatise, privatise' (Fukuyama: 2004a). It was also reflected in what the economist Stiglitz (2003) has called the 'ruin of Russia', in which western economic advisers were closely involved in the comprehensive privatisation of

its state systems, enriching its elites and impoverishing the majority. In 2004, Fukuyama recanted his thesis about the pre-eminence of markets concluding that many recent frauds, like Enron, Worldcom and failure of the privatisation of rail in the UK and electricity in California, had arisen from the lack of state oversight, excessive zeal of neo-liberal ideas and the absence of institutional capacity. The end of the stateless world of techno-libertarians in which 'government got out of the way of wealth creators' came in 2001 with the exposure of America to terrorism. The nation state with its monopoly of force has been rehabilitated. Even Milton Friedman has acknowledged 'I was wrong' (Fukuyama: 2004a; 2005 b). The actions of 'Al Quaida' had reinstated the state for purposes of security.

Seattle and after

The first early sign of a challenge to the hegemony of neo-liberal ideas and of profound changes to come was the unexpected scale of the confrontation with the anti-globalisation movement at the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999. Since then 'September 11th' in 2001 and the 'war on terror', and the subsequent wars and occupation of Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003 have all followed. The global political economy has also shifted and this has become much more apparent in the last three years following the collapse of the stock market boom and slow recovery after and the debacle of a string of corporate frauds in 2001/2.

It includes the scramble for new and huge untapped markets in the Middle East and central Asia, reflecting the challenged posed by the very rapid growth of the economies of India and China and the threat of anti-western sentiment and instability in Middle East oil producing states. China's economy is now predicted to overtake America's by 2041 with potentially major geo-political consequences (Ramonet, 2004). But such predictions inevitably do not take account of the growing internal tensions in China, or the way capitalism fuels new alliances, leading as currently to China funding the current US economic deficit. But these developments all point to the potential intensification of trade wars and an echo of the UK's loss of global economic leadership with the First World War (Arrighi, 2005). It is a reminder that capitalism is in essence a social process and in the past struggles over resources have been resolved through violence and fascism.

One of the consequences of all these events since 2001, has been a re-invigorated appetite for political theatre and public debate about political issues, existing alongside the apathy for managerial party politics. For example, I went to hear Noam Chomsky speak in 2002 at the Institute of Education in London. The meeting had barely been publicised other than by word of mouth. Yet over a thousand people turned up and a large overflow hall had to be arranged. As a result of such debate there is a new recognition of the realities of a unipolar world power, and of an 'American Empire' (Wallerstein, 2002; Hobsbawm, 2005). The nature of economic and political power had been masked by the facade of the 'western alliance' during the pre-1989 bi-polar world.

Wallerstein (2002:37) argues that the modern world system is in structural crisis in which a state orientated strategy is irrelevant. He suggests there is an unspoken transition taking place in which the powerful are seeking to replicate the worst aspects of hierarchy, privilege and inequality. Faced by neo-liberal attempts to commodify what was seldom or never previously appropriated for private sale – the human body, water, hospitals – he suggests the need to think in terms of a strategy of de-commodification. In this argument the public sphere matters. But rather than talk of re-nationalisation, he sees a way forward in creating structures operating in the market whose object is performance and survival rather than profit. He notes that the transition going on involves deep uncertainty and the outcome is unknowable: 'each of us can affect the future, but we do not and cannot know how others will act to affect it too'.

'Weak' and 'failed states' in Retort's view are now a structural element of the international system left behind by a combination of the end of the Cold War, and IMF crash programmes that have failed (2004:18-21). In an echo of Raymond Williams *Country and the City* (1973), they point out how *weak states* in the world economy are intimately connected to *weak citizenship* at the centre. Or to the 'spectacular centre' in terms of Du Bord's 'society of the spectacle' (1970), which relies on a vacuousness of the public sphere necessary for a consumer society. The 'centre' now works endlessly to exploit such weak states, not least through the privatisation of basic services like water, electricity and now health. But there is always the ever-present potential contradiction: that such weak citizens grow tired of wars and occupation (Retort, 2004:9).

There is a new awareness of how national and global structures are controlled and being reshaped by the dominant interests of very large corporate organisations. Monbiot speaks of the captive state (2000). But pitched against this are vigorous arguments *for* the benefits of globalisation, which have also been forcefully made (Hutton, 2004). The arguments for an *alternative* globalisation are now also being made, with thinking turning towards questions of radical new forms of democratic control over structures like the World Bank (Monbiot, 2003; Archbugi, 2004). The growth of new social movements has also been tracked by Mayo (2005).

The mutual state

Between the dominant narrative in society is pro-market and a shadow narrative, which is opposed to privatisation, surfaces occasionally into the public eye and then disappears, there is a third way that has won the ear of government. The 'New Mutualism' occupies an ambiguous position describing itself as beyond the market and beyond the state. The powerhouse of its ideas is the New Economics Foundation (NEF), which articulates a new model of wealth creation to meet human needs in the context of ecological limits. The focus is on 'reproductivity' or understanding how the interplay of external and internal factors whether employment or time with children can sustain people's well-being (Mayo and Moore, 2000; Mayo and Moore 2002). They argue their community-based indicators was about giving people back a democratic sense that their judgement of what counts for local quality of life could be made to count. Creative indicators could just as easily encompass things like bird species. But equally, it argues, that conversations at a local level have to be reconciled with the well-being of society.

NEF has built its experience in the sphere of community enterprise, social entrepreneurial thinking, campaigning against third world debt and for alternative qualitative indicators of successful performance grounded in social auditing. It argues that it is taking up a position beyond the state. It seeks a new approach, which it argues is not privatisation or a bureaucratised public sector. The limits of both form the background of NEF's interest in social enterprise. These are business minded non-profit and voluntary organisations led by social entrepreneurs. They operate with a public ethos, but are entrepreneurial, self-governing and encourage participation of users. It has pushed strongly to explore how

mutuality could work in public services as a model of public service investment and civic renewal.

The liberal ideas of NEF and its 'Third Way' message has the ear of the present New Labour government which also wants to channel the powers of the market towards social harmony. Legislation in 2005 has seen the outcome of this philosophy in the new Community Interest Companies (CICs). This is described as a new form of company, 'designed to meet the needs of people seeking to pursue enterprise in the public interest dedicating their profits to the public good'. For traditional social enterprises it resolves some of the problems of charitable status and entrepreneurial status. It will, for example, put an 'asset lock' on the activities so that investors will know their money will be legally tied to the original social goals.

The NEF is a creative source of ideas particularly in engendering a participative approach to public services. Some of its work has been picked up by or resonates with many ideas already prevalent in more progressive local authorities and pre-existing social movements. But it is curiously simplistic about corporate power when it comes to translating its ideas into structural models. IPPR has criticised the proposal for community interest companies (Davies, 2004). It seems to assume that it is possible to design out the disruptive and turbulent effects of free enterprise and to have order and creativity without the chaos and destructiveness that come with any group dynamic. Davies point out that in the CIC Bill there is a regulator with only a light touch and it is entirely agnostic on what the 'community interest' is, as it hides behind the phrase what a 'reasonable person' thinks it is. This kind of thinking can be seen in other proposals which the government, drawing from on NEF thinking has prompted such as the unprecedented power of a business sponsor to shape the running of City Academies described in Appendix 3. In a speech to the think tank DEMOS, by the then cabinet minister Alan Milburn (Shrifin, 2004) it was reported that he suggested that public services which are 'failing' should be put out to tender to 'arms length community interest companies'.

Similarly, the NEF's idea of 'co-production' seems to have remerged as 'co-payment' in government policy-making. The term 'co-payment' has been widely trailed. It means universal provision on the basis of need, and not on the ability to pay would be preserved

for only 'core' services. But core is a flexible term, which could include what is politically important at any given time. The arguments for the 'fairness' of top-up fees in higher education January 2004, presages this new way of thinking.

In his speech to the Social Market Foundation in 2003, the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, argued 'Even when a market is inappropriate, old command and control systems of management are not the way forward, but instead, we are seeking and should seek – in the NHS and other public services – a decentralised, not centralised means of delivery compatible with equity and efficiency'. While for some Brown was on the one hand setting limits on the market, for others he was also giving the green light for funding to promote the role of the voluntary sector in the delivery of public services. In 2004, government funding was established in the form of a four-year £215 million funding stream 'Futurebuilders' and a £150 million 'Capacity Builders' fund to bring about this transformation (Brown 2005). This has translated into a very conflictual debate within the voluntary sector, in which Alridge (2004, 2005) has vigorously argued the case on behalf of ACEVO⁸⁰, aided by the former director of the New Economics Foundation now at the National Consumer Council, to speed up and extend the voluntary sector's role in delivering public services in a different way. This has resulted in a clash with the NCVO⁸¹, which see this as the end of a distinct voluntary sector ethos that has always encompassed campaigning. Similarly, the Association of Charitable Foundations see the independence of the sector being undermined (Third Sector, 2005b) by this transformation into a service delivery contractor. This debate has coincided with a proposal by the CBI director of public services that the voluntary sector should look beyond relationships with the government when delivering public services and partner with the private sector companies (Third Sector, 2005c).

All these developments are consistent with a 'New Localism' agenda first promulgated by the New Local Government Network (Cory & Stoker 2002). It is also consistent with Foundation Hospitals with their 'public benefit corporation' status that can be seen as a variant on the community interest company. It has a duty to involve the public through a right to become 'members' of the Trust and to elect people on to its governing body. In contrast when local and by-election results led to the government losing control in many

⁸⁰ Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations.

⁸¹ National Council of Voluntary Sector Organisations.

areas in June 2004, the implications drawn were that the government would now be much more reluctant to progress talks on re-enhanced powers for local government, despite the undoubted achievement of councils in performance audits. Walker (2004) considered that the government would prefer 'public interest companies, trust boards, and the various other forms in which a local electorate might influence services, outside the ambit of elected general purpose local government'. It is arms' length 'public interest companies' as modelled by Foundation Hospitals and universities, constitutionally independent, financially managed as a unit, able to borrow and innovate as they see fit, that New Labour's reformers in local government wish to see expand alongside public private partnerships.

Le Grand (2003), a former adviser to the government on health policy, is a strong advocate of quasi-markets and in his latest book he argues for 'contestability' between hospitals on service, convenience, and efficiency while the Conservatives want real markets and competition on price with the right to choose vouchers. Labour is desperate not to be outflanked on this and it has led to a scramble of ideas around the idea of choice or 'personalised public services' (Blair, 2004). The talk of more user choice appears to confuse and divert attention from the process of marketisation. Schwartz (2003) argues that too much choice can engender paralysis and there is scant evidence that people actually want that much choice. But in July 2005, the government announced proposals to rapidly widen 'choice' through increasing the number of academies in secondary education and by significantly extending the role of the private sector in speeding up waiting times for routine surgery in the NHS (Hewitt, 2005). It had proposed privatisation of 250,000 primary care staff employed in community nursing without any consultation and did a rapid U- turn in the face of opposition. But it has triggered talk of the 'end of the NHS in England' as NHS Trusts revealing £3/4billion overspends, face the consequences of the internal market and rising PFI indebtedness and potential hospital closures as the financially weak are deemed to have failed.

The adaptive state

In 2003, DEMOS a think tank for cultivating and popularising ideas, suggested that the quality of the public realm is now the central battleground of UK politics. It argues that governments will stand or fall on their effectiveness at renewing public goods. In the

Adaptive State (Bentley and Wilsden 2003:14) consider that a sharper moral and political vision of the role public services play in people's lives is needed and recommends a radically different model of service, organisation and value. Bentley suggests that Beveridge's five giants (want, disease, ignorance, idleness and squalor) should be replaced by five core dimensions of well-being (shelter, nurture, learning, health, work/livelihood). The emphasis should be on a conversation with the electorate about, for example, 'what health means, how it is secured and what to expect from others including the NHS ...' (Coote, 2003).

A central principle argued in the DEMOS papers by Chapman is one of *adaptation* defined as response to the environment without central direction or control while retaining and protecting some core structure or values. This definition by Chapman draws on his earlier work, *System Failure: why governments learn to think differently* (Chapman: 2002). He argues that if new styles of management are developed without abandoning existing notions of control then the new style will fail. He draws attention to the preponderance of machine metaphors in government (Mulgan 1997) as in 'driving through change' or 'policy levers' and the assumptions of control and ability to predict. Much of this fascination with systems and structures by politicians stems from the political embrace of managerial models by governments, and even more so by New Labour with its obsessive level of targeting and league tables and its coercive management style.

Chapman sets out the arguments for seeing public services as complex adaptive systems in response to increased individual autonomy and the number of communication technologies now available to us which invalidate the established ways of thinking. He also advocates a management style based on the concept of the 'learning organisation' (Senge, 1990) and learning from experience. Both Chapman and Mulgan's work are indicative of an effort to raise complexity ideas and engage government thinking on the need to reduce targetry. The recent relaxation of the testing regime for seven-year-olds in schools may be partly attributed to their efforts but by and large the Treasury retains its famously iron grip of control over spending departments, referred to informally by some as the 'colonies'. In the post-2005 election period New Labour have pressed forward with marketisation but also with the strategy of 'New Localism'. The new idea in Whitehall is 'to let systems become self-sustaining' (Kettle, 2005). This suggests that complexity

thinking has found a form of acceptance, but in a way that is to become deeply entangled with extending commercialisation of public services.

There is something quite apolitical about Chapman's systems thinking compared to the very different approach of complex responsive processes of relating (Stacey et al 2002), which emphasises the micro-interactions and power relations in social relationships. In this collection of papers Chapman (2003) does draw on the idea of 'public value' and the thinking of Moore (1995), which had evolved a decade ago in America. The idea of 'public value' promotes an entrepreneurial ethos, but Moore also attacks the idea of citizens as consumers. In his view, 'public value' explains why citizens may support goods produced by public bodies largely because of their 'public nature'. This opens up the possibility for rediscovery that it is alright for public services to be supported 'in themselves' (Reeves, 2004). But this is something that Kemp (1998) would argue most people have never lost sight of. He shows that people value public services and private goods in quite different ways with the former having a high 'altruism' element. As Denhardt & Denhardt (2003: xi) also suggest in their ironically titled *The New Public Service: Serving, Not Steering* 'Public servants do not deliver customer service, they deliver democracy'.

Open networking approach

A more radical perspective is represented by Wainwright (2003). She likens the era of the participatory municipal left of the early 1980s described in Chapter 7 and Appendix I, to an 'open networking approach', and that it anticipates more recent thinking. As a consequence, she argues, it is a resource to draw on rather than to disparage. Wainwright draws inspiration from events like the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2000 and the popular democracy movement represented in the participative budget process pioneered in this city. The subsequent European Social Forums in Paris and Florence came to north London in the autumn of 2004 and is the basis of as story in Chapter 12.

(End of Appendices 1- 4)

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