

**PRACTISING PLACE:**  
**Stories around inner city Sydney**  
**Neighbourhood Centres**

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## **Certificate of Authorship/Originality**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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## ABSTRACT

The Neighbourhood Centres (NCs) in Sydney, Australia, were established to encourage forms of local control and resident participation and to provide a range of activities to build, strengthen and support local communities and marginalised groups. This thesis is concerned with exploring the personal conceptions, passions and frameworks, as well as the political and professional identities, of activists and community workers in these NCs. It also explores stories of practice and of how these subjective experiences have been shaped through the discourses around the NCs, some of which include feminism, environmentalism, multiculturalism and social justice.

The following key research questions encouraged stories of community practice: What do the terms empowerment, participation, community service and citizenship mean for community organisation? What did community workers and organisers wish for when they became involved in these community organisations? What happened to the oppositional knowledges and dissent that are part of the organisational histories? Foucault's concept of governmentality is used to explore the possibility that these NCs are also sites of 'government through community'. This theoretical proposition questions taken-for-granted assumptions about community development and empowerment approaches. It draws on a willingness of the research participants to take up postmodern and poststructuralist theories.

'Practising place' emerges in the research as a description of a particular form of activism and community work associated with these inner city Sydney NCs. The central dimensions of 'practising place' include: a commitment to identity work; an openness to exploring diverse and fluid citizenship and identity formations; and the use of local knowledges to develop a critique of social processes. Another feature of 'practising place' is that it involves an analysis of the operation of power that extends beyond structuralist explanations of how to bring about social change and transform social relations.

The research has deconstructed assumptions about empowerment, community participation, community organisations and community development, consequently another way of talking about the work of small locally based community organisations emerges. This new way of talking builds upon research participants' understandings of power and demonstrates the utility of applying a poststructural analysis to activist and community work practices. Overall the research suggests that if activists and community workers are to work with new understandings of the operation of power, then the languages and social practices associated with activist and community work traditions need to be constantly and reflexively analysed and questioned.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## LOCATING THE RESEARCH

‘Set out, explore every coast, and seek this city,’ the Khan says to Marco, ‘then come back and tell me if my dream corresponds to reality.’

‘Forgive me, my lord, there is no doubt that sooner or later I shall set sail from that dock,’ Marco says, ‘but I shall not come back to tell you about it. The city exists and it has a simple secret: it knows only departures, not returns.’ (Calvino 1974:45)

The stories of practice in this research arise from a particular historical time and place. In this chapter I suggest that the history of the NCs can be located in the resident and community action movements in inner city Sydney in the last thirty years. In this chapter I refer to a number of social theorists who have an interest in the role of ‘the local’ in contemporary times. I suggest because of the organisational focus on ‘the local’ that a range of social practices developed around the NCs and these are also of interest in contemporary times.

To clarify my understanding of a reflexive research strategy I recount the aspects of my personal and professional journey that have led me to write this thesis. My journey positions me at a juncture where I see that structuralist explanations of community work practice and community education are being challenged and need re-working; through my research I want to explore what new understandings may be emerging. I suggest that a form of ‘cultural politics’ has played out around the NCs and that a poststructural analysis of this politics is useful for those who are interested in future community organisation practice.

In the second part of this chapter, research participant voices help to establish legitimacy for the direction of the research. These voices are represented through two constructed dialogues from which themes and departure points are drawn. The dialogues suggest there are other people involved in these community organisations who are interested in understanding the history of the NCs to help inform future community organisation practice. Introducing research participant voices at the beginning of the research is an attempt to resist the privileging of my voice as the author of this text, it is an attempt to resist privileging theory over practice, and it is an attempt to produce a text which layers theory, commentary and research participant input. The

constructed dialogues represent conversations held over many years and show how this research is an iterative and knowledge producing process.

The departure points drawn from the dialogues define what I mean by 'practising place'. Practising place is the practice of a set of social relationships defined within (but not limited to) a certain geographical place. Practising place involves an analysis of language, social institutions and power. To 'practise place' requires an understanding of social change processes and to 'practise place' requires practitioners to have hope, based on experience, in the possibility of transforming social relations.

This first chapter locates the sites of the research as well as the theoretical directions. I describe the use of discourse and deconstruction in the research and orient the reader to the structure of the thesis.

Each of the following chapters is titled as a kind of journey. The reason for writing and naming them this way is explained within each chapter. However it might be useful at this stage to say that I have used the metaphor of a journey throughout the thesis to trouble the notion of a settled place. In this chapter it will become clear that I am resistant to the images of a 'homecoming' or 'conquering' journey in research and practice and so the image of journeying that I draw upon is always one of 'setting out' or as Calvino (1974) implies, always one of 'departing'. In this chapter I describe how my own theoretical position has been one that has been at times unsettled and again the journeying image is useful. The purpose of this chapter is to locate the 'place' of the research, and describe the place from which I can depart and begin to tell stories of those other journeys.

## **DESCRIBING THE PLACE**

### **Inner city Sydney and Australia**

The importance of 'place' is a recurring theme in my research and I use a range of diverse theoretical resources that explore 'place'. The research participants, as will be seen in this and subsequent chapters, are also interested in how 'place' is shaped and defined. The emphasis on place is not just about geography but also about the specific historical conditions of place. So I begin describing 'the place' of the research by providing some history.



This overview of the historical conditions in which the NCs emerged could be approached from many directions. In this section the history is drawn firstly from written accounts of the resident and community action movements in inner Sydney and secondly from writings which analyse the development of community sector politics in Australia over the last thirty years. Other elements of those historical conditions are found in subsequent chapters where the research participants describe that history as they see it. In the histories provided by the research participants, NCs are seen as connected with urban social movements that were trying to bring about some form of social change. Urban social movements were a feature of the political landscape in Sydney from the 1960s, but as seen later in this chapter, those urban social movements have also been a feature of the political landscape in many large cities throughout the world.

In the following historical analysis I have used decades as a conventional marker. This has logic within this research because, as described later by the research participants the markers of 60s, 70s etc...are resonant as the markers of social change processes. The next section presented in decades, is not intended to reify that way of approaching history but to sit consistently, alongside the histories that the research participants recall.

### *1960s*

Barry, Clohesy and Smith (1985) provide a history of inner city Sydney community and neighbourhood work. In their account, the organisations around which this research is based emerged out of resident and community action in inner Sydney in the late 1960s. They describe the pre-conditions for the emergence of resident and community action groups. These included: technological changes to traditional employment of labour on the waterfront; threatened job losses (in the manufacturing sector); an increase in speculative land development; an expansion of tertiary institutions into residential areas of Darlington/Chippendale; expressways planned through Glebe, Ultimo/Pyrmont, Woolloomooloo/Darlinghurst; and actions by the state Department of Housing in Surry Hills/Redfern which were forcing changes to the working class residential base of pockets of inner city Sydney. Resident Action Groups brought together residents who felt threatened by these changes, planners who thought that there could be more effective ways of managing inner city environments as well as sections of the student movement, who at that time were looking for effective change strategies beyond the provision of welfare services.

### *1970s*

The organisations that developed were marginal to the extent that they concentrated on information, advocacy and social action for groups who had traditionally been locked out of government planning processes. For example, the Coalition of Inner Sydney Resident Action Groups was formed in 1972 with a brief to focus on housing; transport and energy; education and community services. The formal organisations that developed, such as the NCs, retained strong ties to inner city social movements (Jakubowicz 1974, 1984). Jakubowicz concentrates on the class based nature of urban environmentalism and the difficulties of defending 'urban' working class interests, and he noted the importance of cross-class alliances, as did Barry, Clohesy and Smith (1985). Burgmann and Burgmann (1998:56-58) document the connections between the inner city Resident Action Groups and the environmental activism of the NSW Builders Labourers' Federation. They also note the cross-class alliances, between residents and unions, and amongst resident groups, as well as drawing attention to the central role played by women in these actions.

The Australian Assistance Plan (AAP) instituted by the Whitlam government established a public policy and funding framework in which these organisations developed. The AAP provided seeding funding for many small community-based initiatives, including the NCs. Later, the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Youth and Community Services, which became the Department of Family and Community Services, funded the work of the NCs under the NSW Community Services Grants Program. The 1970s saw a growth in co-operatives and community associations usually taking on some form of local resident management structure and seeking to employ professional staff in the roles of co-ordinators and community development workers (Roberts and Pietsch 1996:144).

### *1980s*

Government funding of community organisations linked their activities to government planning processes and frameworks, and community organisations at all levels were encouraged to be the delivery point for a range of social services (Everingham 2001, Lane 1985). The NCs early links to the environment and feminist movement, as well as their role in supporting cultural diversity through multicultural project initiatives is described by Edwards (1996) in a report sponsored by the Inner Sydney Council for Regional and Social Development.

By the end of the 1980s discourses of environmentalism, feminism and multiculturalism were still evident in the community organisations, but other discourses connected with increasing

professionalisation, new managerialism and new funding regimes were beginning to circulate. They did not entirely erase those earlier discourses but introduced a new set of tensions. As noted by Barry, Clohesy and Smith (1985) 'efficiency' and 'management rhetoric' came to dominate community focused projects and development work. Yeatman (1990) characterised the preceding decade as a period of struggle between the managerial agenda of the state and grass roots efforts to democratise political processes in Australia. Yeatman argues that in the 1980s the micro techniques of scientific management were applied to social services and that welfare provision became market oriented and privatised. This accompanied increasing government monitoring of funding contracts and more detailed reporting procedures. A report produced in 1994, *We Just Grew like Topsy*, by the Local Community Services Association of NSW, a peak body for community and neighbourhood centres, suggested that in this decade small community based organisations were overwhelmed by a raft of new government directed programs, these programs had strict and generally unmanageable service delivery expectations and reporting requirements.

### *1990s*

Everingham (2001) provides a detailed account of the way in which economic rationalism impacted on the community sector throughout the 1980s and 1990s. She argues those organisations that had drawn '...their inspiration from the emancipatory objectives of the new social movements... in the 1960s...' were, after 'Two decades of public service reforms under economic rationalism', in the position where their autonomy and roles within community were severely 'eroded' (2001:108).

Increasingly centralised control of local services had become a feature through the 1990s and Kenny noted, 'the milieu of the 1990s does not foster participatory, co-operative, creative or caring organisations' (1994:40). A social policy, directed by a conservative Howard government, and impacting on all levels of government focused on the goals of social order and the control of community processes rather than a social justice and rights perspective. The language of 'mutual obligation' and 'contractualism' brought about a new politics where 'community' was charged with the responsibility of being an agent for implementing a government directed agenda. Further, through a contract state paradigm that became evident in the mid 1990s and continues through to the year 2000 and beyond, government (at local, state and federal levels) has linked community organisation activity to a series of contracted service arrangements with very specific, limited measurements and service outputs (Everingham 2001, Hoatson, Dixon and Stoman 1996).

This brief history highlights the changed focus of the organisations as political and economic changes occurred and as other discourses, for example economic rationalism, came to dominate social processes. A major theme explored throughout this research is: *What happened to that earlier counter-hegemonic intent evident in the early community action projects? Was that counter-hegemonic intent entirely erased? What happened to those discourses of environmentalism, feminism, multiculturalism and social justice? Were any of the goals of social equity and social change achieved? Were these goals changed or displaced? How did that happen?*

The thesis is an examination of only a small selection of inner city Sydney NCs, references in the following chapters to NCs are not claims about all NCs but are specifically related to those which have emerged from resident and community action movements in inner city Sydney. These include: South Sydney Community Aid, Redfern, the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre Co-operative and the Sydney University Settlement Neighbourhood Centre, Chippendale. The research was also relevant to two other organisations The Harris Centre, Ultimo and Wulla Mulla Family Services, Woolloomooloo (an organisation which previously had its base in Darlinghurst and was called D4 Darlinghurst).

### **Wider connections**

Whilst my research covers a limited geographical area there are theoretical and cultural connections that extend beyond inner city Sydney and Australia. Castells (1983, 2004), Dirlik (1996), Massey (1993, 1999) and Sandercock (1990, 1998) all suggest that 'local practices' should be a focus for research and study in contemporary times. There is a growing body of theory and empirical research that is trying to make sense of the use of 'the local'. To take a poststructural view, as some of these writers do, is to value and examine at an empirical level, what happens in the local, to examine how discourses play out in specific sites and to see the potential for local sites as the site of the emergence of modern political subjects (Clifford 2001).

These writers are asking questions that connect with my research: *What is the importance of locality and place in contemporary times? How does the focus on the local connect with the global? Does there remain any potential for the local to be a site of resistance? Are there any local sites available from which to develop a new political practice? Does an emphasis on the local lock out those who appear different from those who are identified as belonging to that local site? Does this emphasis on the local set up exclusive and reactionary 'communities'? Is there a myth of community and are there dangers in continuing to support that myth?*

Rose (1997) is interested in the way that community is imagined and performed, and is interested in the space of resistance that this may set up. In one study Rose explored the diverse interpretation of the 'local' and 'community' with a group of community arts workers in Edinburgh, Scotland. I see myself using similar frameworks and a similar method of investigation with people involved in NCs. For Rose there are no assumptions about 'community', the meanings only becoming apparent by the investigation of how community is performed in specific sites. In contrast to a lot of communitarian discourse, Rose does not assume that community formations are natural or necessarily 'moral'. Building on the work of Nancy (1991), she wonders how it is that 'community' can be redeemed as a radical political project when in fact there are often 'terrible exclusions' that come with the 'myth of community' (1997:202). Like Rose, I take the view that the local, the specific, the neighbourhood may be valued as a site of investigation, but a critical approach needs to be adopted to the stories and myths that are circulated about community.

The work of Rose (1997) and Nancy (1991) contain sophisticated and lengthy critiques of communitarian discourse. I draw upon these critiques in the research but at this stage I defer the details of that critique to Chapter Two, where I will also draw upon the work of Agamben (1993), Bauman (1998, 2001), Clifford (2001) and Rose (1999). In this introductory chapter it is enough to note that I take the view of Rose (1999) who, like Rose (1997), sees locality and community as situationally constructed:

In this different view, community is not fixed and given but locally and situationally constructed. From this perspective, communities can be imagined and enacted as mobile collectivities, as spaces of indeterminacy, of becoming. To community as essence, origin, fixity, one can thus counterpose community as a constructed form for the collective unworking of identities and moralities (Rose 1999:195).

I have described the NCs as emerging within the history of urban social movements. One of the most prolific writers on urban social movements has been Castells (1977, 1983, 2004). He has written extensively about the dissatisfaction with established planning processes and the resulting unsatisfactory built environment outcomes, evident from the 1960s onwards. He has monitored the activities of many groups trying to create more sensitive and democratic processes to produce liveable cities. Castells initially conceptualised urban social movements as manifestations of class conflict (1977:325). In a later study Castells (1983) proposed that there are some basic themes in urban movements and protests, regardless of whether they are tenant struggles, youth organising associations, urban uprisings, or resident and neighbourhood associations. He concluded that resistance takes place around structural issues; firstly, of

collective consumption, around housing, schools and welfare provision, or, secondly, the defence and expression of cultural identities, or, thirdly, the workings of the state institutions and sometimes, local government, or a combination of these. He saw all this as a form of resistance, a counter to the imposition of global economic and cultural forms of domination:

Urban movements do address the real issues of our time, although neither on the scale nor terms that are adequate to the task. And yet they do not have any choice since they are the last reaction to the domination and renewed exploitation that submerges our world...they do produce new historical meaning – in the twilight zone of pretending to build within the walls of a local community a new society they know unattainable. And they do so by nurturing the embryos of tomorrow's social movements within the local utopias that urban movements have constructed (Castells 1983:331).

Castells is less hopeful about the emancipatory potential of the urban movements as he follows their trajectories in the 1980s and 1990s. He notes the ways in which the movements themselves, their discourses, individuals involved and organisations had often been integrated into government arrangements through differing systems of citizen participation and community development activities (Castells 2004:65). This is not dissimilar to what is described above as having occurred in Australia and raises questions about the identity construction of social actors involved in urban social movements and why they tell the stories they tell. Those involved in social movements may tell stories of social change, their intentions might be to bring about social justice, but does this actually occur?

My research explores the notion that the production of communities and community practice is also closely linked with the production of identities of social actors who are involved. Castells notes that identities can often be 'defensive identities' and reactionary 'identities of retrenchment' but he remains open to the possibilities of other (not reactionary) identities emerging from conflict situations (Castells 2004:66). Castells calls these 'project identities' and sees these project identities as producing active subjects for whom the building of an identity is not the building of an individual identity, but, often based on an initial experience of some type of oppression, a project of engagement aimed towards transforming society or institutions (Castells 2004:70).

Sandercock (1990, 1998) is also focused on urban history and the struggles of citizens, communities and groups to shape cities and impact on planning processes. She has written about these struggles in the Australian context (1990), as well as presenting an extensive international review of attempts to plan for 'multicultural cities' (1998). Under the heading of 'insurgent

practices' she argues that there are individuals who she calls 'the mobilizers', these are individuals whose radical local practices are rarely recognised beyond their locality base. In a review of six major cities, Sandercock keeps asking questions of the group she identifies as the 'mobilizers' and these questions are similar to the ones I am asking: *What theories inform their community practice? What knowledges are being used in these practices? What are the definitions of community that are being used and are they inclusive or exclusive? What are the processes that groups are using in their struggles with power and what is achieved?* Sandercock identifies and seeks out 'the mobilizers' in particular struggles; similarly I have sought out activists and community workers who have played 'organising' or 'mobilising' roles around the NCs.

Massey's locality studies have also been extensive (1993, 1999). Massey has argued that there is never any one single view of a place, that places are not static, that places are real but need not be conceptualised as bounded. She argues that places do not have any unique identity to be discovered, but contain differences and conflicts; yet places are 'specific', places are layered and changing but nevertheless real. They are real in that any sense of place has a set of consequences – this is why Massey argues for a 'progressive sense of place'.

A progressive sense of place is needed, according to Massey; otherwise the development of communities in places constructs a distinction between members and non-members that is exclusionary and intolerant of any sense of 'other'. Massey argues that a progressive sense of place remains open to the possibility that those who are 'marginal' and those who are 'others' have a place within the place. Within places that are conceived as a set of social relations, places that contain 'a progressive sense of place' there may be openness to the possibility that others can be accommodated within that set of social relations (1993:66-68). Massey's conceptual framework is developed to resist exclusions and I have found it a useful framework to bring to this research.

Dirlik (1996) proposes a similar notion in his discussion of 'critical localism'. He notes that the impact of global capitalism has produced a range of local movements of resistance. In recent years both the women's and ecological movements have been prominent but within these local movements any number of identifications have arisen; including identifications around youth, class and sexual orientation. He argues that the affirmation of the 'local' comes with a danger of sliding into nostalgia and is amenable to exclusionary tendencies. He argues that 'critical localism' could be developed and from this critical position the local and place can be useful to negotiate the removal of oppressions or inequalities that are inherited from the past. Dirlik sees in this a useful and meaningful resistance to the excesses of global capital, 'The boundaries of

the local need to be kept open (or porous) if the local is to serve as a critical concept' (1992:42). Castells (2004) argues that formation of the 'retrenchment' and 'defensive' identities should be resisted and it seems to me that keeping in mind a 'progressive' way of approaching place, or a 'critical localism' would assist in that.

Castells draws attention to the way that different identities are practised in local, urban and community action work: *What kind of citizen is being produced? What identities are being mobilised? Are identities being fixed and essentialised or are they opened up and non-essentialised?* These are the kinds of questions I ask in my research, they are questions I ask of the research participants and which they address from their own practice experiences.

My research – focused on the stories around inner city Sydney NCs taps into the same type of questions, in similar contexts to those being asked by Sandercock, Massey, Dirlik and Castells. The research questions I ask are: *What do the terms empowerment, participation, community service and citizenship mean for community organisation practices? What did community workers and organisers wished for when they became involved in these community organisations? What has happened to the oppositional knowledges and dissent that are part of the organisational histories? What might this mean for current practice?*

In the first section of this chapter I have shown how my area of research links with other trends and issues in theory, research and practice. I have, through talking about the research interests of others shown that the research questions I have developed are part of a wider research project. This introductory chapter continues by turning to my own personal and professional story and why I have these research interests and questions. In one sense my own researcher story is also a story of identity, identity construction and my own struggle with 'place'. In telling my researcher story I also demonstrate how it links with a research trajectory that is beyond my own individual interests.

## **THE RESEARCHER'S STORY**

Why do we do our research? To use our privileges as academics to give voice to what Foucault terms "subjugated knowledges"? As another version of writing the self? (Lather 1991a:113).

...a research trajectory is a path along which individuals travel in order to meet their own requirements for understanding as well as attempting to satisfy the transpersonal goals of enquiry (Usher, Bryant and Johnson 1997:219).



The first part of this story is about the places I have worked and ideas that have influenced, challenged and sustained me. It is a story of how my knowledge base has been constructed and also a story of the social practices, or discourses in which I have been enmeshed. In the second part of this researcher story, my individual research trajectory links with others - the theoretical terrain in which I operate is one in which other researchers, educators, community practitioners and social theorists operate and I describe some of that terrain.

### **Places and influences**

My first piece of 'research', as part of my undergraduate studies in political economy at Sydney University was on the effects of freeway systems planned to cut a swathe through the residential areas of Surry Hills and Redfern in Sydney. I concluded that the NSW State Government proposal for the freeway system was of no benefit for the local communities who were going to be most affected by the imposition of this freeway system. It seemed to me at the time that consultation with residents had been ignored and that the inner city interests of a 'locality' were being sacrificed for the interests of a 'region'.

I was influenced by a political economy critique of cities and regions provided by Stilwell (1980). In "Political Economy, Space and Place: why where matters...", Stilwell (1992) highlights the spatial dimension of the movement of international capitalism. I read the construction of Redfern, Surry Hills, Darlinghurst and Woolloomooloo freeways in the 1980s, as part of that movement of international capital. In that study I also examined the effects on neighbouring suburbs of Chippendale, Ultimo and Pyrmont. Stilwell also suggested that space and place are the embodiment of economic, social, and political power relationships. This made sense to me - I understood the decision to build those freeways, despite significant opposition by resident groups and a well organised urban environmental lobby, as a playing out of power relationships. I saw that the interests of capital dominated.

Thoroughly grounded in a Marxist informed political economy critique, Stilwell (1992) suggested a program where, 'Politically, the task is to identify and realise those temporal-spatial forms which are liberating of humankind and conducive to social progress' (p. 24). I saw myself as taking up that program. I joined with 'socially progressive groups' keen to explore the possibility of shaping 'temporal-spatial forms' that might be more 'liberating' than the forms being imposed by the movement of international and trans-national capital. In the language of that time I saw myself involved in alternative left wing community based politics.

On completion of my political economy studies I was employed for two years by a community organisation called South Sydney Community Aid. The organisation had a broad brief of providing community information and support activities. These included the Migrant Project, the Aboriginal Project, auspice and support arrangements for the South Western and Inner Sydney Housing Co-operative and a recently funded Community Transport Project. I was employed by a local committee of management, as the first full time co-ordinator of the Community Transport Project. The committee was trying to secure affordable and accessible public transport systems for inner city residents. Also to lobby against the development of large freeway systems that would change the nature of, what were largely low cost residential areas, and there was also concern about the significant impact of freeways in terms of environmental damage.

The area in which I worked was, at that time, widely acknowledged as having a 'working class' history. The organisation I was working for valued that history and analysed situations in terms of class conflict. The community of practice in which I was involved was trying to assert the rights of people to a 'fair go' whatever their class status and was also concerned with providing support for the cultural identity of 'working class' in the South Sydney area.

What I was part of then was the kind of learning in social action that Newman (1993,1994) and Foley (1991) have described. There are many narrative accounts of the urban environment campaigns and concerns through the 1980s (see for example a publication called *Inner Voice* 2002). There is some literature describing the context of the inner city at this time, for example Burgmann and Burgmann (1998), but there is very little written specifically focusing on the social learning that occurred through participation in urban environment campaigns in the 1980s. My own personal story is one of being involved as a professional community worker in some of those campaigns in inner city Sydney in the mid to late 1980s.

1988 was the Australian Bicentennial year. Not only a year of nationalistic flurry but also a completion date towards which many of the large scale development activities of inner city Sydney was aimed. Inner Sydney suburbs were carved up by freeways, monorails, private marinas, casinos and large-scale commercial developments like Darling Harbour that were meant to position Sydney on the world stage as an international tourist destination. The interest of capital was once again shaping the city. My own silent protest against this and the nationalistic flurry of the Bicentennial was to leave Sydney.

In 1989 I returned to Sydney and again connected with a place and space, with a group of people running a Neighbourhood Centre Co-operative in Surry Hills. I was employed as the co-

ordinator of that Co-operative for five years until 1994 and during that time was given a thorough introduction to feminist theory in practice. I was also challenged at a personal level to find my own place and position within and around feminist discourse.

Soja and Hooper in their essay 'The Spaces that Make a Difference' say:

Remapping the city as a space of radical openness, a place where, like hooks' [1991] margin, ties are severed and subjection abounds but also, at the same time, a location for recovery and resistance, a meeting place where new and radical happenings can occur, has been a longstanding feminist project dating back at least to the fourteenth century (in Keith and Pile 1993:192).

These notions of 'the city', of 'resistance' and of a 'feminist project' were evident in the history of the Co-operative project. At a work-a-day level the Co-operative provided childcare services, a community market, an information service and a focus for community development activities. Consistent with and through the organisations' work, feminist and environmentalist discourses were highlighted. In 1993 I was commissioned to conduct a lengthy action research project and write a report for the Co-operative on the *Changing Needs of Surry Hills Residents*. At the urging of members of the management committee at that time, the report was framed with the quotation below by feminist writer Grosz. This was meant to signal the importance of feminist discourse in the organisation's activities.

It is only if the two sexes each have a place/space (and a time) of their own that paradoxically, they can encounter each as subjects and share the same space and time, a here and now. This cannot occur simply by positioning both sexes within a space-time framework which has been formulated according to male experience (both personal and scientific), for this is to deny women their space and time and to link them only to men's...Once again Irigaray asserts two sexual symmetries where tradition has posited only one (Grosz 1989:174).

Partly as a result of the action research project, but also partly because of the Co-operative's long-term commitment to working with migrant communities in the area, whilst I was the Co-ordinator the Co-operative also began a Multicultural Community Development Project. I was responsible for negotiating funding arrangements, describing the scope and philosophy of the project and employing staff to continue with that work. This forced me to come to some clarity about my understanding of multiculturalism as a discourse and practice.

Whilst working for the Co-operative I was also studying in a Graduate Program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology, Sydney. The Graduate Diploma course in Adult and Community Education introduced me to another body of knowledge on which I was able to draw. This radical and critical community education tradition included the work of Brookfield (1983), Friere (1972), Hall (1998), Head (1977), Horton and Freire (1990), Horton (1990), Lovett (1980), Mezirow (1991), Schon (1971, 1983), Shor (1998) and Thompson (1993), amongst others. Finding that body of work and being able to draw upon it to examine what was happening in my daily practice. It was an antidote for me to what often seemed the limited capacity of traditional welfare, social work or community development models to assist the social and community action required, at that time, to counter the force of economic rationalist philosophy that began impacting at all levels of community sector work. At that time those writers and practitioners provided a valuable framework from which I could analyse my own community organisation practice.

After seeing through a 'five year plan' with the Co-operative and having completed another round of studies, I headed towards the 'top end' of Australia. I was employed as a tutor at the University of Darwin in the Faculty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. At a professional level I found this to be a moment of intense struggle. What right had I to be 'tutoring' Aboriginal students who had come to Darwin from communities in the Territory and top end of Western Australia, studying to be community program officers? What did I have to tutor that was of any use? What use were my inner city experiences in this place? What community did I relate to? Where was I from?

The students were very clear about 'where they were from' but 'where was I from'? What was my place? Out of that struggle I have been able to identify a 'posture' that has informed educational contexts in which I have found myself since.

At a daily level I was providing tutorial support for Aboriginal students who were studying courses in community health, politics and community development. My role was to assist students to deal with the academic discourses and texts they were encountering. In the cool of Darwin University Library I devoured the writings of radical critical educational theorists - perhaps I ran to the library escaping the heat, in a climate I wasn't used to and perhaps I was also escaping the acute shame I was feeling in not being able, at times to find the connection I needed with those I was tutoring. I wondered to what extent I was complicit in the imposition of 'the master's language'? In the work of Giroux and other radical critical education theorists I found a framework I could use, starting with the premise that a critical and radical education program:

...doesn't refer to a discipline or a body of knowledge. It suggests a particular kind of practice and a particular posture of questioning received institutions and received assumptions (Giroux 1992:10).

Giroux goes on to suggest that the 'violence of master narratives' requires the attention of critical cultural workers and educators and that:

...educators must possess a theoretical grasp of the ways in which difference is constructed through various representations and practices that name, legitimate, marginalize, and exclude the voices of subordinant groups (Giroux 1992:10).

The way in which Giroux talked about 'border pedagogies' held resonance for me in the situation I found myself. Not only was I conscious of the fact that the students were in many ways confronted with 'borders' they had to cross but also, in my teaching and tutoring work I realised there were 'borders' over which I had to extend myself and reach across. At that time a friend referred to me recently published works of bell hooks (1991, 1994). Giroux refers quite a lot to the work of hooks, so the suggestion to read these was timely and supportive, as it provided me with another way of understanding my education practices. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) revisited the work of Friere, talking about education that could be for liberation, engaged pedagogies and extending a feminist analysis to the work of Friere. hooks also talks about the power of language, the oppressors' language and the possibility of teaching 'new words and new worlds' (hooks 1994:167-175). Reading these books in that time of intense professional struggle was most helpful.

I felt like I was getting hold of a new way of seeing the tutoring, teaching and cultural work in which I was involved. I felt like I was finding a new conceptual framework to assist me in what seemed like (at times) a set of contradictory and confusing pedagogical relationships. Giroux and hooks gathered together the imaginary work of many writers and proposed the importance of finding a place, of having 'a politics of location' and working from that point to engage in politics around identity, difference and crossing borders. I felt in some sense that I had found 'a place' from which I could practice. Later reading, reflection and discussion have raised for me questions about Giroux's approach. In his view of the role of cultural workers, are there echoes of paternalism, the arrogance of the professional and the trained educator? Has Giroux also put up a master narrative? Has he forgotten Friere's cautioning about the way in which the so-called empowering educator can impose their own cultural views those who they are setting out to educate?

These questions sat with me in my next role in education. On returning to Sydney I was asked to teach in a community welfare course at the Eora Centre, the Sydney Institute of Technology Aboriginal Education Unit, and also to work for twelve months with an organisation called, The Settlement in Redfern. Again I found the work of Giroux and hooks, and their proposition that education and cultural workers are involved in 'border crossings' a useful reference point.

The Settlement Neighbourhood and Community Centre had a staff of twelve and ran various children and youth projects for Aboriginal people in the Redfern and Chippendale area. The organisations also had a community development project focused on supporting local families. My specific tasks in a twelve month contract were to help project staff define areas of responsibility, structure a program of activities and work with the management committee of local residents to maintain the organisation in a complex environment where the rights of Koori people to be living in that place were being heavily contested. This time I had some of the language and concepts for the 'border crossings' required; I had a posture in which to stand and some useful conceptual frameworks to bring to my practice.

Culture and race were spoken of strongly in this community. In my role I needed to understand what was being spoken of when people talked about the importance of culture. The programs run by The Settlement were an attempt to address and combat racism and to help maintain cultural traditions. I kept turning to the work of Giroux that emphasised the development of 'voice' and of the importance of sustaining and working with 'identity'. In speaking of the importance of adult educators working outside of mainstream education systems Giroux suggests this possibility, and it had resonance for me in my work with The Settlement.

With their insider understanding of cultural diversity, identity and different subjectivities, their commitment to promoting the 'voice' of different minority groups and their concern for social and cultural empowerment, they are interested in a more broadly based citizenship which challenges the prevailing cultural hegemony of Western liberal democracies (Giroux 1992:45).

After twelve months work in Redfern I looked back thinking how privileged I was to have had that experience! Yet I came to that situation from a privileged position! How did I manage that privilege? The situation challenged me to develop my own understanding of culture and the realities of cross cultural work. I could not 'be' in that situation without having my own cultural (privileged?) positioning challenged.

In the late 1990s I was employed to teach part time at the Sydney Institute of Technology – teaching in welfare in community work courses, co-ordinating the English for Vocational Purposes (Welfare) Course, providing tutorial support for students with special needs in the welfare course and writing modules for the new curriculum being introduced into the TAFE welfare and community work courses. That experience made me aware that there is a great gap in the literature and research about local community work practices. Students were often asking for examples and case studies of radical community work practices and that was when I realised that very little had been written in the recent Australian context. My own direct experience told me there were plenty of examples but material had not been prepared in a form that could be used in curriculum development. Wanting to remedy that in some way has also been part of my research trajectory.

This was a turning point for me; I became interested not just in practice and teaching but also in research and documenting practice. I also became aware, whilst teaching over this period, that there was very little Australian community work literature, case studies or reference material, with the exception of Kenny (1994) and later Lane (1998) and Healy (2000) that addressed questions raised for community work practice from postmodern and poststructural theoretical propositions. Most studies remained within a liberal, social democratic or structuralist analysis of community work activity. Some tried to include a radical community education critique (Nabben 1995) but very few studies were available that included poststructuralist or postmodern critique. I decided to pursue a research direction hoping to fill some of those gaps.

In this section I have talked about place. I have talked about environmentalism, class, feminism and culture. I have talked about how my interest in these was awoken. I have talked about bodies of knowledge that I have worked with in practice – including political economy, critical sociology, radical adult and community education. I have talked about how it was that I became interested in the possibilities offered by postmodern and poststructural theorising. To respond directly to the questions asked by Lather, quoted at the beginning of this section: ‘Yes, my research is partly motivated by a desire to give voice to subjugated knowledges because I do not think that the voices around these inner city NCs have been given their due space’, and, ‘yes, my research interests are partly a writing of the self, of my own interests, desires and my own requirements for understanding’.

What I have written here does not include all the parts of my research trajectory that have led me to be inherently interested in community, culture, power, how exclusion and inclusion operate and how ‘subjugated voices’ get heard. However, I think I have provided enough of a

story to provide legitimacy for the exploration of a series of questions that arise out of my personal and professional experiences.

The task now is to see how this research trajectory connects with other research trajectories. How can I shift the focus from I and link, as suggested by Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) with ‘transpersonal goals of enquiry’?

### **The theoretical terrain**

In the previous section I outlined my personal and professional encounters where class, gender and race were recognised as important elements in a cultural landscape. In these sites a form of cultural politics, similar to that described by Jordan and Weedon (1995) was being played out. In one sense I read my experiences in these cultural spaces as a personal narrative or journey. In another sense, following Weedon (1997), I recognise the way that discourses speak through individual experiences, and in drawing out my own individual experiences, as I have done here above, I have also been drawing attention to some of the discourses found in these community organisation sites. In my researcher story I also talked about the way in which theory sometimes enabled my work practices and I also talked about the way in which social practices around the organisations seemed to have embedded within them certain theories of social change. Certainly those to do with class and feminism included structural theories of social change but there is now a tension between structural and poststructural explanations of community work practice and theories of social change. This turns my researcher story, which is one also of dealing with this tension into the ‘transpersonal’, in the sense that many others are dealing with this theoretical tension.

The early resident action groups demanded access to decision making processes and argued for government accountability in a way that had not been seen before in the Australian political landscape, there was ‘theory’ present in the work of these early groups, even if it was not explicitly stated. Barry, Clohesy and Smith (1985) suggest the resident groups had a very clear picture of the role of the state and they analysed the alliance of state bureaucratic institutions and property developers. Then, as activists and community workers, they attempted to reform both the ways that those bureaucracies were working and to mitigate the effect of capitalist interests represented by developers. They also suggested that state governments had aligned with land speculator and developer interests to change the nature of the Central Business District at the expense of inner city residents. In this discourse, there was a critique of social processes, a critique of the function of capital and a critique of the role of the state.



For many people involved, their involvement enables them to link their actions to what is happening generally in society (on an economic, political and social level) and, therefore, begin and deepen their social analysis (Barry, Clohesy and Smith 1985:86).

In addition feminist analysis had been brought to this early community organisation work in Australia (Lane 1985) so it could be argued that there existed around these NCs a discourse that included a structuralist feminist analysis of how society operated. The dialogues in the next section, as well as the interview data reported in later chapters, indicate that some of the activists and community workers involved with these organisations held structuralist perspectives about society and social change. Working through these organisations was seen as a way of bringing about the desired structural change and the strategies of empowerment, community education and community development were seen as ways to effect this change. This is similar to the argument put forward by Rothman and Tropman (1987) who argue that developing different forms of community organisation 'is the strategy' to bring about social and structural change.

However, those approaches drawn from a structuralist analysis, are now subject to scrutiny from poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives. In the area of community organisation and community development work the challenges of the 'post' perspectives have been addressed by Kenny (1994), Lane (1998) and in a review of social work practices, which includes the tradition of radical community work, Healy (2000). In the area of adult education a comprehensive summary of those challenges is provided, amongst others, by Lather (1991a), Usher and Edwards (1994) and, Usher, Bryant and Johnson (1997). Another body of work relevant to the NCs is urban geography and planning, in this discipline, theoretical propositions of poststructuralism and postmodernism have been addressed by Gibson and Watson (1994), Keith and Pile (1993) and Sandercock (1998).

Poststructuralism provides an analysis of power that suggests that it (power) is not a set of structured relations currently in existence to be overturned into a better set of relations. In terms of exploring the operation of power, an analysis of power which allows for understanding of a state institutions as only one form of power and that recognises power as being embedded in a multiplicity of power relations (as argued by Foucault 1980) seems to be of some use. This view of power would challenge the assumed linear trajectory of, for example community development projects (Lane 1998) and draws attention to the way in which professional community workers are part of the governing arrangements they wish to challenge. Healy

(2000) also uses a Foucauldian<sup>1</sup> approach to power which directs attention to the ways in which power is exercised through local practices. Healy's approach is to provide a detailed examination of the professional power and identity of those engaged in community development and social work practices. A poststructural analysis of power would be useful to bring to the sites of this research as it implies that there needs to be an examination of conditions under which the activists and community workers have been able to work with power to effect change.

Weedon proposes that:

Post-structuralism also provides useful ways of analyzing language, social institutions and individual consciousness. The focus is on how power is exercised and the possibilities of change. As a theory it still allows questions to be addressed of how the social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed – it suspends programmatic recommendations of how that might be done (1997:13,14).

Whereas structuralism inherits confidently a scientific outlook, and within this outlook method, system, reason and truth are the ideals sought, poststructuralism distrusts reason and as an 'attitude' or 'strategy', deconstruction is introduced to seek contradictions, paradox, shifts, breaks, conflicts, absences. Structuralism regards identities as 'essential' whereas a poststructural view sees identities as constructed, multiple and shifting (Bauman 1998, Jordan and Weedon 1995, Lather 1991, MacLure 2003, Usher and Edwards 1994). It seems that the notion of multiple and shifting identities that comes with poststructural analysis is a useful one. Take for example the use of the word 'empowerment' – a poststructural view would generate from that word a series of questions rather than assuming it to be a fact, known and quantifiable. What if there is no agreement about what the word means? Does the use of the word empowerment assume that there is some essential identity that will be 'empowered' – working class, women, youth, resident? What if there is no essential identity? What if the identities are conflicting? Poststructural analysis generates questions but I think the questions generated will be useful because these questions open areas for discussion and encourage many different perspectives. For example: How has the term empowerment evolved? How has it been interpreted? How has it been practised discursively?

Within postmodern and poststructural perspectives local sites are acceptable and valued as points of investigation. Local knowledges and the ways in which they develop are given as

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<sup>1</sup> I recognise that poststructural writers take up Foucault in different ways and that Foucault never described himself as poststructuralist. In this paragraph I have not attempted to conflate, describe or untangle this relationship or provide a 'summary' of a sprawling body of work, rather, I have tried, albeit briefly to describe a way of understanding power that is different to that often associated with structuralist Marxist, socialist, and, anarchist political and social theory.

much attention as the ways in which 'grand narratives' or universally accepted knowledges are developed. General and overarching theories do not necessarily have to be established, and some writers argue that this is not possible or desirable (Featherstone 1996, Keith and Pile 1993, Pile 1997, Soja 1996). As argued by Rose (1999:4-6) it is not necessary to counter-pose studies of the 'micro' as opposed to the 'macro', nor to ignore the question of state power, but poststructural investigations of the operation of power provide instead a 'certain ethos of enquiry'.

When looking at the history of community organisations some writers have attempted to provide general theories. They have concluded either that organisations like the NCs have been coopted as an extension of state management (Mowbray 1985a, 1985b), or that the activists and community workers, once they had accessed some power within the bureaucracies, effectively betrayed the grass-roots organisations whose interests they were meant to support (Sharpe and Inwald 1986). Their structuralist analysis seemed to imply that nothing more could be said, that the answer about 'community organisation' had been found and they were not effective in redressing social, economic and political power imbalances. A poststructural analysis seeks, rather, to explore how power relations change and keep changing and how different identities are mobilised and shaped in the process. Exploring the tension between structural and poststructural accounts of community work practice is a move that is forced upon me because in my community work and teaching experience not only was I stretching for some meaning that structuralism has not been able to provide, but I have encountered other people, also stretching for meanings beyond structuralist explanations. To the extent that I am grappling with these theoretical questions I suggest that I am, with others, in an area of transpersonal enquiry, in a space of enquiry where poststructural analysis has challenged contemporary social analysis.

Poststructuralism also presents challenges in research methodologies and in this thesis I attempt to respond to that challenge by presenting a thesis which deliberately places the researcher and the research participants as actors in the construction of the argument and text (Lather 1991a,1991b). My thesis does not accord to a generic 'social science' thesis shape because the thesis deliberately weaves in, at different points, and in different ways, a variety of positions with regard to the research questions. Research participant voices are fore-grounded, so there is an un/conventionality in this thesis, this un/conventionality is seen in the textual weaving of the voices of the research participants. The thesis contains dialogues, many different voices and is structured so that those voices appear throughout each chapter, this is opposed to more conventional texts which usually present information about the research participants as data, only after introductory chapters.

## **DIALOGUES AND DEPARTURE POINTS**

### **The construction and purpose of the dialogues**

While studying in the graduate program in Adult and Community Education I undertook a project where I surveyed the possibilities for future research in inner city Sydney NCs. I kept field notes from several interviews carried out at the time. Two of the people interviewed in the early 90s became involved in this current research project. Those two people, who define themselves in the research as activists, have had a presence in inner city Sydney community work for over thirty years. Their varied roles and depth of experience in this field place them in a different position to the other five people who have been part of the research project. There is an 'authority' that comes with the material provided by these two research participants, firstly, because of their long-term organisational attachments, and, secondly because of the piercing social analysis that they bring to these sites. As the research is reported, especially in Chapters Three, Four and Five, the depth and quality of that analysis becomes obvious.

The way I have worked as a researcher with these two people more closely resembles an ongoing conversation or dialogue rather than structured interviews (although there have been, at times, structured, recorded and transcribed interviews conducted). Aspland (2003) provides some terminology for this in qualitative educational research a 'dialogical conversation'. During the research these two people sent me handwritten and typed material, which were their responses to questions raised about the NCs. For example, one provided lengthy handwritten notes on what they saw as the value of using postmodern, poststructural and feminist theories to understand the history of the inner city and community organisation work. At times there was an exchange of reading material and this has brought forward responses, again written responses, about some of the conceptual frameworks, such as governmentality, that I had been using whilst developing this thesis. So my work with these self-defined activists has not just been in the form of structured or semi-structured interviews. The way that they have chosen to work with me, as a researcher, could be more accurately described as a form of conversation which has dialogic qualities. The constructed dialogues also serve, at a textual level, to represent a more open and reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the researched. Lather (1991a:56-63) talks about the importance of reciprocity in research relationships, and encouraging a form of dialectical theory building where theory comes as an expression of self-reflection, critical enquiry and collaboration with others 'rather than abstract frameworks imposed by intellectuals on the messy complexity of lived experience'.

The appearance (still in a very obvious way) of my own voice and experience is an ethical move, in that genuine collaboration and dialogue in research requires the exposure of frameworks and value systems – on the part of the researcher as much as the researched. This ethical position of disclosing my own positions and contributions to the knowledge building in the research is adopting a position of ‘reflexivity’, described by Lather (1991a, 1991b), Sanguinetti (2000) and Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997). Along with the personal journey that I reported in the previous section my presence in the dialogues demonstrates my willingness to recognise how my ‘personal preconceptions and passions’ (Sanguinetti 2000:235) fed into the development of the research project.

These activists, (and I will argue also those research participants introduced in later chapters), are people who talk and analyse power, ideologies and theory, this talk comes from an empirical base – from the base of their work, their desires and lived experience. There is no attempt in this thesis to seek ‘representative views’ of experience. Rather the thesis as a whole recognises the way in which research calls forward and constructs stories and the presentation of these dialogues is a way of representing the way in which researchers ‘call forward’ and generate stories. In the thesis I have been more interested in allowing those stories to develop rather than quantifying or qualifying stories told.

In the dialogues presented there is analysis of social institutions; there is talk of the possibility of transforming the social relations of gender and class, as well as the problematising of language and language practices. In that sense there already is poststructural analysis (as defined by Weedon 1997) present in the research. The constructed dialogues capture my conversations with two people and provide some account of the history of inner city Sydney community work. After a series of conversations about the NCs and possible research directions I went away and wrote up these dialogues. From what I had heard in conversations I constructed a written text. I took that text back to those people with whom I had the conversations and asked them to amend it as they thought appropriate. I asked them to change the words if they did not reflect what we had talked about, in this way additional accounts of the history of inner city Sydney activist and community work have been constructed. The thesis does not seek a ‘representative’ account of that history but rather generates some accounts, which can be explored further in the thesis.

The following dialogues resonate with, and corroborate other material presented in this chapter. The dialogues sit alongside the history of inner city Sydney resident and community action provided by Barry, Clohesy and Smith (1985), and Jakubowicz (1974, 1984). The dialogues sit alongside my own researcher story presented earlier (a story which also writes a history of the organisations).

## Dialogue 1

John: What is a good starting place for research around these community organisations?

Enid<sup>2</sup>: *It all has to be seen as a reaction to the centralised government way of doing things that emerged from the social upheaval of the second-world war. There was a reaction to the dominance of government, you see it's historical, when you get to my age you realise the importance of history. In particular there was a generation of people who emerged in the sixties and seventies – the product of a public education system. This group of people was articulate and well travelled – a group searching for new ideas and ways of doing things. They were willing to try out new ideas; there was a confidence that things could be different. These people were involved in architecture, planning, the arts, politics, teaching, health and social work. Professionals of all types, interested in community and in developing a new social structure. This group, largely the product of a new public education system had never before been present in Australian society.*

John: So you want to focus on history?

Enid: *You have to understand - it's all history. It has to be located in the context of post World War Two welfare system that was the big thing in the fifties, sixties and up till the seventies. Nowadays we see the current determination of economic policy to let market forces determine the provision of all goods and services. It's a result of economic rationalism that's the big issue nowadays. That's what people are reacting to.*

John: I came into it at a point in the early eighties when a lot of the community energy and focus seemed to me to be on city infrastructure like transport and housing. In the sense of stopping the city environment from being overwhelmed by traffic, and getting some good public transport. Housing services were also a focus, particularly maintaining affordable housing stock and providing support for those living on the public housing estates.

Enid: *Well the public housing thing is interesting because it is instructive. Because, we must face up to the reality of poor planning that has occurred. These projects, and the services and structures set up around them should be looked at – to see what was tried, what failed, what*

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<sup>2</sup> I asked research participants what name they wanted to have appear in the PhD when I quoted them. Enid, the first research participant whose words start appearing here did not want any other name used. The data remains de-identified to the extent that only a first name is used. Other research participants chose the first names of old school friends, their grandmother's name, a name they always wanted to be called or something other than their name.

*were the good things and what is the future. We made connections in the seventies that hadn't been made before.*

*Language is a problem here – how to describe what happened, because talking about it, the language we use now doesn't reflect the actual reality. But in some sense the connection was made between the 'educated' and the 'uneducated' – although that sounds demeaning and I don't mean it to be – see language is a problem. It's not always possible to describe the reality - it's all very subtle. Anyway there were the initiators, the organisers, the pioneers really, and I guess I was one of those, and there were a number of us and we connected with other women who were living on the housing estates – they were doing other activities – family and community focused activities in the way that they wanted to, sometimes in what we might call old fashioned ways - there were always lamingtons being made and coat hanger covers - and a few men connected of course - but largely it was the women who connected. What was most significant was that the educated and the uneducated were from the same class. They could talk to and understand each other.*

John: I think I know what you mean – about the difficulties of language anyway. I come from a working class background myself but of course I can get a reaction from people I have worked with, that because I've been to university I'm different, I've had more opportunities. And there are other differences. Like in my community work, when I think it is necessary, I let people know that I'm gay and then they say 'but how do you understand things for children and families, why do you work in this area?' I always think 'well I understand very well - it's because I'm outside of the situation that I understand', but of course there's more to it than that. Language and taking up particular identities often becomes a barrier. You're quite right when you said earlier that language is a problem it doesn't really describe reality. I like what Audre Lorde, says 'words be-devil me'.

Enid: *Yes it's about language and it's about history. What we've seen over the last ten years is that the connection that was made in the seventies and early eighties is impossible to reproduce. In fact it is the breaking down of that connection over the last ten years that has led to the current situation where social isolation and violence prevail - not just on the housing estates, there's a fortress mentality even in new expensive housing developments. This has also related to the changed policy at a government level that has seen the shift from public housing to welfare housing. You see public housing was linked to the Australian post war need to settle the labour force and you would see this operating in country areas where railway workers, postal workers, teachers etc...all lived in forms of government housing. Years ago having access to government housing was not something to be embarrassed about. It seemed like a*

*sensible system. Now we have welfare housing mainly to cater for the second wave of migrants who couldn't afford to buy houses and for the generation of women who were now 'going it alone'. Both became state responsibilities. This has led to pockets of housing where there is a clash of race, colour and value systems. The current situation in inner Sydney housing estates is that clash being lived out. Add the problem of space and the result is social breakdown.*

John: Do you mind talking about the role of professional community workers, I'm interested in that, partly because that's my background but I'm also interested because you mentioned earlier the role that 'professionals of all types' played in developing new social structures in the inner city.

Enid: *Well whatever role people play the worst thing in terms of all the community business is imposition. Some workers I've dealt with at the neighbourhood centre came along and imposed their own particular ideology on community situations. That's no different to the paternalism of the large charity organisations that has been so evident in Surry Hills; there have been so many fights over that 'charity' mentality. I reject the paternalism that comes with it and so do communities.*

*There have been different celebrations recently for the community organisations – ten years history, fifteen years, twenty, some of the individual efforts can go back twenty five or thirty years. I've been in this game for a long time now. Some have retired, some moved on. But what can be said is that systems have been tried in this community thing; some systems have been put into place and worked and some not worked. Personalities might initiate it but the point is to get those systems going. Good professional community workers have understood that and made their effective contributions.*

John: You mentioned it all going back to the sixties and seventies and things that people were learning then. What was it about those times?

Enid: *There were two sparks; you have to understand the effects of these to begin with.*

John: I was born at the beginning of the sixties in a small New South Wales country town. There wasn't much sparking there except the occasional bush fire! Although, I do remember great concern, about the possibility of my brother being conscripted into the Vietnam War. I do remember in my teenage years that there was always a debate about balancing inflation and unemployment, the oil crisis happened and there were debates about using up non-renewable resources - I tuned into the idea of economics because of that I think. And I do remember there



were arguments in our school about things like uranium mining and whether the forestry commission should continue to log in areas near where we grew up - and I always stuck up for the Friends of the Earth, the greenies I suppose. But I was in a minority, most kids I grew up with and their families saw themselves as dependent on diary farming and their best interests promoted by National and Country Parties. I recall being on a bus coming back from a school excursion when we heard Gough Whitlam was sacked. Some of us argued about that. I defended Whitlam because that's a politics I had inherited from my parents.

Anyway they were the things sparking for me in the seventies - what were the important sparks that you were talking about, here in Surry Hills?

*Enid: Women and feminism, that's my starting point, that's the first spark. You must have some understanding of this from your study of economics - the welfare state can't afford itself. Anyway politicians have never understood that the unpaid work of women is now what the welfare state is supposed to deliver. But nobody, including politicians has ever understood in economic terms, the contribution of women's work through childcare and aged care, to the economy. In our experiences children's services and aged care work became the service arm of the neighbourhood centre. It was an attempt to get governments to realise that women's work is a financial contribution. Sadly, they still don't understand.*

*I recall that in the 1970s and early 80s various residents, particularly women took an active part in pressing for the upgrading of child-care services in Surry Hills. At that time there were large numbers of children, there were migrant families who had arrived in large numbers in the 70s, literally they had walked up to Surry Hills and settled after coming into to the wharves like at Woolloomooloo. The migrants needed a variety of child-care services in Surry Hills, and to be introduced to a new country. There was another group of newcomers, educated but economically poor Anglo-Australians who were attempting to renovate old terrace housing (do-it-yourself manuals were the main reading!) have children and work full time all at the same time. It was a long way from the silly yuppie image pedalled by some and still used indiscriminately. Much of Surry Hills renovation was and is done by women who need the particular ambience of the Inner City.*

*And the other starting point, the other spark, was the environment movement. Which you were also aware of really - even as a young person in the seventies - you heard all the debates. It's not about the trees and the forest; it's about where you live and for most people in Australia that's in an urban, city environment. The neighbourhood centre has taken up these urban environment issues through lobbying about traffic, transport and urban amenity. This followed*

*on directly from engagement with the green bans movement, which linked unions and class issues and the environment. The feminist view and environment view go together. The focus on urban amenity or whatever you want to call it became the community development arm of the neighbourhood centre here in Surry Hills.*

John: It seems like hard work. Getting your head around the histories, the role of government, how that all effects the way people act. I know there's heaps of reading and study to fill in the gaps. You have to be talking with people all the time.

Enid: *Well in some ways it is complicated but you have to use what you've got. Work with whoever is around. Work with what you've got! Start where people are at! Some wouldn't work with the rough and tumble Irish Catholic Labor Party crowd but you can't run over them or ignore them. Now the Irish Catholic crowd is giving away to the influence of the Chinese/Asians and that causes nervousness among some. And there are Greek neighbours still, second generation ones now but the ageing ones are still there and they need different forms of support. So it's all very complicated....*

## **Dialogue 2**

John: What is a good starting point for research around these inner city Sydney community and neighbourhood centres?

Trevor: *There is a big ideological difference about these organisations and what has gone on in them. One view needs refutation because it offers an absolute view over the last ten years of the role of workers, of the role of the management committees and of the role of the communities in which the organisations are located. This needs refutation because it offers an absolute view and there are alternative experiences and ideologies, someone has to give witness to the alternative experience and ideologies. What is written and recorded is important. They become authorised histories and so it is important to have the alternatives also recorded and circulated.*

*As far as adult education is concerned more needs to be written. There are some accounts where I think the authors are advocating a disempowering or deskilling of local communities. What ought to be explored are genuine empowering experiences that people have had. The point is not about having community workers as crash hot managers of services. Management is not the issue but understanding how people have become more 'able' is, and there are many people who have certainly become more 'able' following on from a lot of the interventions of these organisations.*

John: Perhaps you could offer some concrete example. Community work on the inner city housing estates is something that others have talked about, what about that?

Trevor: *Yes that is a good example of the contrast between the way in which professionals practice and the way in which people seem to operate and how the practice of workers seems to be ineffectual. I've often heard community workers, community educators, whoever, say things like 'people are offered these services and alternatives but they don't take them up' or 'we set up things for people to take community action on but nothing happens, they don't take any action, they just stay doing the same old thing'.*

*So it's a question of the workers' practice needing examination. Because the alternative is that people are constructed as dull, dim-witted, stupid, cranky and obstructive which I have often heard teachers, social workers, community workers - lots of people say when they try to do this 'empowering' work. But I don't accept that view. Workers get burnt, because this is hard work, and, then the workers go away, quite pissed off and blame the people they were supposed to empower! Recording needs to be done of the other ways of working rather than accusing those whom we work with of being lazy etc...*

John: O.K. I know what you're saying. I have also felt exhausted at times. And people act out their frustrations in all types of ways. And quite often the professional community worker is the closest person who seems to have a bit of power who might be a good target to 'have a go at'. People have had a go at me. Sometimes it has been quite violent. After all, I see that people have had a lot of violence done to them and that might be the only language they know. Violence, or getting at people might be the only way they know how to communicate. But I remain hopeful and also I don't think people are born stupid.

Trevor: *If there is a collision between professional workers and the community then underneath is a collision of world-views. This is interesting because if you look at the point of collision then the world-views and ideologies are revealed. I think the ideologies and world-views of this group of professional workers might need to be revealed to get any true picture of what has gone on in these organisations.*

John: That makes me a bit nervous because I am part of this professional group and you are saying that my world-view ought to be revealed. And then so should yours?

Trevor: *Well I don't mind that. All should be revealed. The way I see the inner city is as a cluster of tribes. Look around the inner city, it's tribal there's no doubt about that. And what has developed is a separate tribe of people, especially in the post war social welfare scene; it is a tribe of professionals who have a notion of how to work with other tribes and their special tribe. That professional tribe reflects a particular worldview. The common view of its members is different to the worldview of other tribes whom they purport to work with. In fact that tribe of professional community workers are perhaps in collusion with the ruling class against the others. The reality is that workers now form their own tribes.*

John: I think I follow what you're saying. What tribe are you from again?

Trevor: *We can talk about that later, but let's just stay with this imagery. Because sometimes that's all we have – imagery – which in itself is a statement in itself about my tribal affiliations!*

*So historically these tribes have emerged and these groupings have found their own niche, like the development of mammals, who develop characteristics to inhabit their niche and these characteristics become worlds apart. It is assumed they are similar but that is not true because they are evolutionarily different – with their own symbols, language and identity that can't be divested.*

*See this is very important because when outsiders look at the history of the inner city, for example, they don't understand the tribal nature, the niches to be occupied, and the subtlety of it all. Oh and eventually we will witness the death of some tribal groupings. I wonder about the survival of this professional community work tribe.*

John: So do I, I also think what you are talking about is fascinating...so I have a question. Who do you think this awareness needs to be communicated to?

Trevor: *If it is to members of the tribe who are in collusion with ruling classes then there is some skepticism that they would hear what is said. Anyway that is not a homogenous group and there are rebels and outcasts who might receive it. What I have in my mind is how can the research, understandings, what has to be said, be communicated to other tribal groupings – especially the people in the community? Who is going to carry the message to them? In what language is it going to be said? These are some of the questions that need to be considered...*

### **Departure points from the dialogues**

Just as the dialogues could have been written in many different ways, with different emphasis, and different ‘takes’ highlighting different narratives, so also there could be many different themes drawn from them; different departure points. After providing some background to the NCs, explaining my research trajectory and introducing material from the research participants the idea of ‘departure points’ sits with the metaphor of a research journey and provides a structure for the way in which the research data can be reported and reviewed. My interest is in the uses of poststructural analysis and I have borrowed from Weedon (1997:19) to develop these departure points. They are also be used in Chapters Five and Six as a way of structuring research participant input.

#### **Departure Point - An analysis of language**

Language is problematised in the dialogues, in the sense that the dialogues raise the difficulties of finding a language with which to communicate ideas. (Enid says, *‘language doesn’t reflect reality.’*) Also the language used by one group, for example the professional community workers, does not necessarily mean the same thing to another group, for example the communities they are working with. There is a recognition in the dialogues of the shaping and limiting effects of language. Both Enid and Trevor problematise and talk about the struggle with language and how language shapes ideas and realities. (Trevor talks about *‘language(s)’* not just language... *‘In what language is it going to be said?’*)

#### **Departure Point - An analysis of social institutions**

In the dialogues there is emphasis on the importance of understanding the historical processes and economic forces that have shaped inner city NCs. (Enid says, *‘It’s all history.’*). This view of history includes the recognition that the state and bureaucratic apparatus are not benign and that community activity has often been a response to the impositions of centralised government and bureaucracies. Enid talks about the impact of economic rationalism and Trevor talks about the shaping influence of *‘the post war social welfare scene’*.

#### **Departure Point - A focus on power and possibilities of social change**

In the dialogues there is talk of social change, there is a suggestion that ‘genuine’ empowerment does occur and that collective action is essential to achieve this. (Trevor said, *‘There are many people who have certainly become more ‘able’ following on from a lot of the interventions of*

*these organisations.*’) There is an acknowledgement that power is often exerted in repressive ways but is also available for use by those who have been disempowered or disenfranchised. The role of the professional community worker is described as being conflicted and it is suggested that the role of so called ‘community empowerers’ in bringing about change needs to be examined. There is also the suggestion that practices, which purport to be enabling, must be subject to honest and thorough scrutiny. (Trevor said, ‘...*the ideologies and world views of this group of professional workers might need to be revealed to get any true picture of what has gone on in these organisations.*’) The social situation is described as one where there are clashes of ideologies, world views, value systems, classes and tribes – there is a suggestion that these clashes need to be recognised and examined if any social change is to come about. (Trevor said, ‘*See this is very important because when outsiders look at the history of the inner city, for example, they don’t understand the tribal nature, the niches to be occupied, the subtlety of it all.*’) Enid also talked about untangling the ‘*complicated*’ nature of inner city life and the importance of understanding the power dynamics in which politicians and private economic interests have power, and which communities need to access or subvert.

### **Departure Point - The hope of transforming social relations**

In the dialogues Enid posited the centrality of feminism in any analysis of community activity. There was also a lot of reference to ‘class’ and ‘culture’ by Enid and Trevor and the suggestion that these need to be examined in community practices. The presence of the discourse of environmentalism in the NCs is highlighted and ‘the environment’ is also described as a set of social relations that requires transformation. In the dialogues there seems always present a hope that the current social structures and social relations can be transformed.

The research arose, initially, out of my own professional involvement with these neighbourhood and community centres and through that involvement I saw the need for ongoing research. I would argue, having presented material from the dialogues that others see the same need for ongoing research in particular directions. The dialogues also show that others think that it is important to make visible the invisible history of community work in these neighbourhood centres. As Trevor said – ‘*What is written and recorded is important...they become authorised histories and so it is important to have the alternatives also recorded and circulated.*’

## **RESEARCH ORIENTATION AND OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS**

This section describes the poststructural orientation of the research project; the way in which I am using the word discourse and how I understand and use deconstruction as a strategy. I expand on the central research questions and provide an outline of the chapters that follow. A description of the concept of governmentality is provided and will be discussed further in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three the poststructural orientation of the research is explored in depth and in Chapter Four my use of identity within a poststructural framework is made explicit.

### **How discourse is used in this research**

I take the view that a range of social and political discourses were brought to the NCs by activists and community workers and that these have been changed, challenged and extended as the organisations developed (Rule 2005). Described by MacLure (2003) ‘discourses ... can be thought of, rather, as practices for producing meaning, forming subjects and regulating conduct within particular societies and institutions, at particular historical times’ (p. 175).

In my research, discourses of empowerment, community development, community services and participation were examined for contradictions, ambiguities and different readings. The research did not set out to provide empirical evidence that empowerment, community participation or social justice occurred; rather, a deconstructive method teased out how these terms evolved, how they have been applied, how they have been interpreted, and, how they have been understood and practiced discursively. This engaged the participants in exploring their own stories of practice, and also how their stories, wishes, desires and practices had been constructed. A reflective space, not previously available to activists and community workers, was opened up through this research.

Foucault (1991:101) described discourse as both shaping social processes and as something that may be a point of resistance: ‘...discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy’. In the dialogues with the activists they locate themselves within discourses, for example economic rationalism and social welfare but describe also how they activate certain discourses in practice, and use them as a point of resistance, as evidenced in their comments on feminism and urban environmentalism.

I am not interested in examining linguistic details of texts produced at these sites, or linguistic details of texts that have been produced in the research, but interested in examining the social

and political discourses, or rather, ‘sets of practices’ (Olssen 1999:45) that exist around the NCs. I will not be carrying out a microanalysis of language; I am more interested in the contextualised analysis of the operation of discourses at specific sites and a consideration of this within larger discursive frameworks, in the manner described by Sanguinetti (2000). I have already described some of those discourses taking the view proposed by Lather that discourses are always situated within social practices (1991a:89). The research, through a focus on discourse, continues to examine the situated practice of activists and critical community workers.

The poststructural orientation of this research also sets up for examination any claims to absolute knowledge or truth (for why this needs to be done in educational contexts see Ball 1990, Lather 1991, Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997, and, Weedon 1997, all following on from Foucault). Claims by those who say they are ‘activists’, who adopt ‘critical’ postures and who claim they are involved in practices of ‘liberation’ or ‘empowerment’, need similarly to be examined. As Healy says, ‘...no voice is innocent of the operations of power’ (2000:54). In other words there is within the poststructural framework a questioning of the ‘truth claims’ of social actors who are theorising or claim to practise social change, liberation or empowerment. Adopting this research orientation allows the truth claims of contributors to the research to be subject to examination – not to disprove these claims but to examine the conditions under which those claims have been produced.

### **Deconstruction in this research**

Deconstruction emerging in poststructuralism as a way of ‘undoing’ truth claims has been described by writers as ‘a method’ (Healy 2000), ‘a strategy’ (MacLure 2003) and ‘a practice’ (Davies 1994). MacLure notes in trying to present her own understanding of deconstruction that:

If definitions are problematic across the whole terrain of poststructuralism, they are notoriously so in connect with deconstruction. The problem stems from deconstruction’s critique of the binary oppositions underpinning the local and value systems that are the continuing legacy of the Enlightenment. Definitions are tricky because they imply just such a binary distinction – between words and meaning, language and reality (MacLure 2003:179).

Because definitions are so problematic here MacLure opts for, what she describes as an ‘oblique grasp’ (2003:180) of what deconstruction might involve. Rather than trying to describe some



essentials she argues that it is clear that deconstruction is aimed at uncovering binary oppositions, examining how language constructs social practices and understanding how language is shaped by social practice. In terms of the research around NCs such an aim would include examining discourses such as ‘empowerment’, ‘participation’, ‘community development’ and even the words ‘community’ and ‘organisation’, not to provide some ‘final’ definition of what these might mean but to see how those words (and practises) set up privileges, exclusions and binaries and to examine the effects of these discourses. To not ‘take for granted’ claims made about empowerment or participation. Taking a deconstructive ‘posture’ would lead to a focus on these types of questions: *Does the practise of empowerment always mean those who haven’t had the experience of empowerment remain, always, disempowered? What assumptions come with the notion that participation is good? If communities need to be ‘developed’ is there something inherently amiss with those communities that have not been developed? What does the use of the word ‘development’ imply? Does speaking of community set up a ‘non-community’? Does ‘organisation’ suggest that there is a state of ‘non-organisation’ that needs to be remedied?*

Deconstruction in my research is an approach taken to destabilising, questioning and reworking taken-for-granted assumptions around community organisation practice. The dialogues already presented contain some evidence of this deconstructive approach at work. In Chapter Two the activists also contribute their ideas about the use of deconstruction. In Chapters Four, Five and Six, in the sense that the research participants are examining and undoing their own, and others’ ‘constructions’ of community work and community organisation practice, they are also involved in deconstructive work. Another way that deconstruction is described by MacLure is that it is, ‘...a project of resistance to the institutionalised forgetting that takes place when matters attain the status of common sense...’(2003:179). The NCs, with a history of over thirty years have become, in one sense ‘institutions’, and as suggested in the dialogues by Enid and Trevor there has been some ‘forgetting’ of the reasons they were established. There is also a suggestion in the dialogues that a professionally trained group of community, welfare workers and community education workers have taken as ‘common sense’ practises that are far more complex. As Trevor describes it the ‘tribe’ of professional community workers have deliberately and for their own purposes, ‘forgotten’ the histories of the organisations.

Using poststructural theory and deconstruction in this research leads to a more complex understanding of community practice. It also destabilises the ‘language practices’ so that new ways of talking can emerge. In this research ‘practising place’ emerges as a new way of talking and may be productive in developing new ways of engaging in the field of community work practice in inner city community organisations.

## **The central research questions**

By asking one of the central research questions: *What do the terms empowerment, participation, community services and citizenship mean for community organisation practises?* I am attempting to set up particular discourses, in this case the discourses of empowerment and participation, and to examine those discourses for contradictions, ambiguities and different readings. I am not trying to prove, for example whether empowerment occurred or not. Rather the deconstructive method will tease out how these terms evolved, how they have been applied, how they have been interpreted, how they have been understood and how they have been practised discursively. The research process, which drew out stories about empowerment and participation, provides the material for doing this.

By asking the other central research question: *What did community workers and organisers wish for when they became involved in these community organisations?* I continue to burrow into the formation of particular discursive categories and positions. This question opens up another area that Weedon thinks is important – individual consciousness (1991:13) and how it is constructed. This central research question, from which flowed a lot of the ‘identity work’ in this research, recognises the agency of social actors but also sets up a space in which these particular identity formations, that is, ‘activist’ and ‘critical community worker’ (and also later the identity ‘researcher’) can be subject to critical analysis. The positions of activist and critical community worker are also held up for deconstruction. This does not invalidate the stories of practice, wishes, hopes and desires of workers and organisers but engages the participants in exploring these stories and reviewing how those stories, wishes and desires have been constructed.

The other central research question is: *If these organisations were once sites of dissent or oppositional knowledges and there is evidence that these sites are now governmentalised then what is the future shape of community organisation practice?* This question incorporates the concept of governmentality, developed in poststructural theorising.

Briefly, because more space is devoted to this in the next chapter, governmentality provides a counter reading of the story of complete control, or co-option by government of community and community organisation. Governmentality draws attention to the way in which communities take on responsibility for governing and managing themselves and their own affairs (Dean and Hindess 1998, Rose 1999). The terms of this governance and management are still often established by the state through a range of mechanisms, not the least of which is funding, but

also many forms of legal and moral control are introduced. Self-surveillance and monitoring is encouraged and what emerges is the creation of community as a mechanism of control. Rose describes it this way;

Within a rather short period, what began as a language of resistance and critique was transformed, no doubt for the best of motives, into an expert discourse and professional vocation – community is now something to be programmed... (Rose 1999:175).

In other words communities are constructed and rendered knowable. They are investigated, mapped, classified, documented and interpreted, opened for colonisation by agents, institutions and practises of control. Different identities are constructed, mobilised and deployed. There are new relations between ‘community, identity and political subjectivity’ and there are many ‘educators, activists, manipulators of symbols, narratives and identifications’ who are involved in this re-working (Rose 1999:167-176). This is a way of governing through community, and these governing arrangements require different technologies.

The concept of governmentality provides a way of investigating the re-working of social relations in these community sites. This is explored further in following chapters.

### **Outline of Chapters**

Chapter One has described the context, through historical material and by situating the NCs in wider studies of community and urban social movements. In this chapter I have also located my own interests as a researcher and linked that to the interests of other researchers’ and other people who have been involved in these community organisations. I established the orientation of the research as being poststructural and one that uses deconstructive strategies to work through the stories provided by the research participants. I expanded on the central research questions and explained some of the central conceptual frameworks used for the research. I have introduced voices from two key research participants and located the central research questions as of interest to others and of interest in terms of the history of inner city Sydney NCs.

Chapter Two delves into the literature that I am drawing upon to support the study directions. I refer to literature from community work, community organisation studies, as well as from the field of adult and community education. Chapter Two draws also upon literature from an area that could be summarised as critical human geography, since this literature is supportive of themes in the study about the politics of identity and place. Chapter Two adds to this by considering debates directly relevant to community organisation practice. I summarise a range

of literature including that emerging from communitarian traditions to a poststructural analysis that develops governmentality as a useful way to understand how the concept of community is deployed in western liberal and social democratic traditions. The concept of designing social futures is introduced to enable discussion about future scenarios and possible forms of community organisation practice with the research participants. The literature is systematically introduced through recalling the central research questions about empowerment and citizenship.

In Chapter Three the research methodology is clarified by my recounting of four different stories of the research journey. This provides description of the research procedures and process and I continue to reflect on the way in which poststructural theorising has shaped the research as well as describing problems that arise in working with this methodological approach.

In Chapter Four describes the way the research participants see themselves working with power in the context of governmentality and what identifications they take up in this process. The activists and critical community workers were a new kind of political actor emerging out of the inner city politics of the 60s and 70s. This chapter explores how that subject formation occurred and the ways in which the research participants have 'worked with' identity. This chapter also includes direct responses by the research participants to the central research questions about empowerment, participation, community services, citizenship and the intentions of activists and community workers operating in the inner city Sydney NCs.

In Chapter Five I report on other material brought by the participants to the research. As a way of structuring this I use the themes that came from the dialogues of analysing language, analysing social institutions, focusing on power and the possibilities of change and addressing the transformation of social relations. This chapter uses heading drawn from poststructural theory but the structure of the chapter is referenced back to the three central research questions. This chapter provides more depth on understanding the problems and possibilities of community work and how they are framed in discourse.

When I embarked on this research journey I started with a sense that I did not know what might emerge. The research was designed in a way which I had hoped would generate knowledges which were not present, or explicit before the research began. Many things emerged, not all of which can be taken up in this text, but one unexpected outcome that I report in Chapter Six, was the expressed pleasure of one participant in taking part in the research. This research participant also confronted me, during the research, about the meanings of ethnocentrism and the difficulties of creating spaces for 'the other'. Chapter Six is not a case study that provides illumination of the research direction but is central to the research in that it 'troubles' the

assumptions about identity, community and the way in which consensus is said to be achieved in a multicultural society. This chapter is in the form of an extended dialogue and provides yet another position and reflexive story about the inner city Sydney NCs and community work practice.

In Chapter Seven I review the research process and return to the central research questions to see how they were answered. I describe the central dimensions of ‘practising place’ as including: a commitment to identity work; an openness to exploring citizenship and identity formations that are emergent and non-essentialised; and the use of local knowledges to develop a critique of social structures and institutions. Another dimension of practising place emerging from the research is that it involves developing an analysis of the operation of power with a view to working ‘with power’ to bring about social change and transform social relations within local community structures. Practising place also involves a suspicion of utopian thinking but embraces ‘becoming communities’ as a response to current governmentalised community arrangements and social structures. In Chapter Seven I also talk about the contribution of my research to the field of adult and community education as well as community work practice and community organisation. I identify areas that I think could do with further exploration.

This chapter has located the place of the research in a geographical and theoretical sense. The following chapters are described as journeys and my intention is to use the metaphor of journey to trouble the notion of a settled place or position in the thesis. Further, I am using the metaphor of journeying to provide a sign of resistance to seeing ‘place’ as being settled or static. In the following chapters by using the image of a journey I am also implying that ‘practising place’ also requires the ability to journey. The ‘identity journeys’ of Chapter Four, the ‘journeying together’ of the activists and community workers in Chapter Five and the difficult but wonderfully complex ‘singular journey’ described in Chapter Six all suggest that to practise place one must also be prepared to journey.

The unconventional methodological approach of this thesis has deliberately placed the researcher and the research participants as actors within the construction of argument and as working together to explore the central research questions. As a consequence there is a significant amount of analysis and argument embedded within those sections of the text, which are replete with the voices of the activists and community workers. The thesis is structured so that the rich and powerful voices of the research participants are given substantial textual space and this is consistent with the methodological approach, which has positioned the research participants as constructing knowledges through telling stories about inner city Sydney NCs.

# CHAPTER TWO

## LITERATURE JOURNEY

When one writes about the road, one attends to its form and function. Maybe there will be no 'final form', maybe we will always be halfway...Let's not forget that the Romans invented a kind of road, the *via*, the straight, permanent paved imperial highway. What kind of story do you tell on the road if you don't want to write like an imperial highway, on the road to further colonial expansion, where you engage in trade, slow down, get boring, lay out the plan for a town, create rectangles and climb into a coffin? (Muecke 1997:192).

In the previous chapter, I provided background to the sites of the research and the development of the central research questions. This chapter draws on writing from a range of disciplines that help define the scope, boundaries, possibilities and limitations of this thesis and I also link this literature to the development of the central research questions. I use the image of a 'journey' in this chapter because, at different times during the research, different parts of the literature come into focus; just as on a journey different parts of the landscape come into focus at different times. The journey image also allows me to say that what follows is not all that I have read. Just as one might select particular images to describe a journey to another, so I select particular parts of a range of material that I have read. These selections help me tell a story about the direction of this research project.

Community organisations (and NCs) have received some limited attention in adult and community education literature in Australia. I report on this literature and find that studies so far have remained, generally, within liberal adult education and critical theory traditions, I describe some of the problems with this approach and provide a rationale for a line of inquiry that has a poststructural orientation. I also refer to studies that have a management focus and some that have a narrowly defined community development perspective and explain why I want to provide a different perspective to those. I draw on literature from disciplinary areas outside of education to see what investigations of community organisation in a postmodern context might reveal.

I am not researching learning in formalised settings, nor wanting to 'search' the NCs looking for examples of incidental or informal learning. Nor is my research intent on providing a definition for neighbourhood centres, or defining empowerment, participation or citizenship; rather my

research, following poststructuralism aims to un-work definitions that have been provided. However the concept of adult learning for citizenship which recognises the importance of 'localized knowledge, skills, attitudes and values' (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997:50) seemed appropriate to bring to these sites because it shifts the focus away from what 'educators' might want to do to 'learners' and focuses instead on the way that 'knowledges' are generated in local sites. Adult learning for citizenship draws attention to the ways that identity is shaped and the contrasting ways that 'empowerment' is understood. This literature that I talk about under the heading of 'adult learning for citizenship' provided some key concepts for the development of the first key research question: ***What do the terms empowerment, participation, community service and citizenship mean for community organisation practices?***

In the dialogues in Chapter One, research participants used the 'inner city' as a context in which to situate their stories. There is a body of literature, which I summarise as 'social geography', drawing on radical and critical human geography and urban political economy; it includes a focus on cities, politics, place and identity. It is an approach in which the concept of agency is highlighted and, as argued by de Certeau (1984) suggests that an examination of the everyday practices in cities helps to understand how individuals inscribe meaning in modern urban environments. This is linked to the second key research question: ***What did community workers and organisers wish for when they became involved in these community organisations?*** The activists and critical community workers have been active agents in shaping 'places' and in trying to shape particular social geographies. In the literature journey I talk about other writers who are interested in the city, a sense of place and 'agency' of those who move in city spaces.

Following on from the emphasis on city, place, identity, agency and creation of 'community' I refer to literature that provides a critique of communitarian discourse. I refer to the work of Rose (1999) and other writers who provide an analysis of the way that community and community organisations have become part of state governing arrangements. Governmentality is not a straightforward story of co-option or control. It is an examination of the varied ways in which political power operates and how political subjectivities are shaped in ways that are, often times contradictory. This literature has assisted in the framing of the third research question: ***If these organisations were once sites of dissent or oppositional knowledges and there is evidence that these sites are now governmentalised then what is the future shape of community organisation practice?*** I also suggest that governmentality does not provide the whole story and introduce literature that signals some future possibilities in 'becoming communities' (Agamben 1993) and 'seeking social futures' (The New London Group 1996).

## ADULT LEARNING THEORY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

It appears ...that the adult education which is currently most useful to the marginalised is associated with the work of community organisations ... such organisations include neighbourhood centres ... (Foley 1991:67).

... some of the most interesting research questions in adult education and training are about the informal learning in workplaces, community organisations and other settings (McIntyre 2000:104).

Throughout Australia there are places variously called neighbourhood houses, learning centres and community houses. Like the inner city Sydney NCs these places also emerged in the early 70s, some with a particular focus on meeting the needs of women and children in specific localities (Knights 2000) and others running adult education classes or community development projects sponsored by local and state governments (Neville 1996). In the state of New South Wales (NSW), NCs have received very little focus from the field of adult education, despite the NCs being 'useful' sites of adult education and practice (Foley 1991) and community organisations as being 'interesting' areas for research about informal learning (McIntyre 2000). This is an argument also put forward by Rooney (2004) who describes a 'gap' in what is known about the contribution of NCs in NSW to the 'adult learning landscape'. Rooney notes that the contextual realities in NSW do not match a 'universal picture' and I would also add that there is no universal picture of the history and role of NCs within NSW. My focus is on NCs within a specific geographical site and as argued in Chapter One these organisations are distinct in their specific historical links to local urban social movements and community action campaigns.

Despite the lack of empirical research on the NCs, publications by Newman (1994, 1999) and Foley (1991, 1999, 2000) look at adult and community education outside of formalised educational institutions and of learning through social action in a number of local community sites in Australia. Their studies ranged from neighbourhood houses to resident environment campaigns and helped establish community organisations as part of a field of empirical research and study within adult education and community education.

Newman helped, in Australia, to establish the field of community and social action as an important adult learning site and also argued, '... a thoroughly 'modernist' criticism of the post-modern discourse on adult education'. Newman saw no value in the uses of postmodern and poststructural theory, describing much of the associated discourse as lacking 'substance' and



being a series of 'language games' quite removed from the practises of most adult educators (Newman 1999:194-202). Foley (1991, 1999, 2000) and McIntyre (2000), also in the Australian context, examine the nature of community organisations from an instrumentalist and critical theory perspective. They are intent on naming and quantifying the kind of learning that goes on in these community organisations, and describing how that assists in social action for change or for continuing of 'radical' adult education traditions. But Newman, Foley and McIntyre do not ask any of the questions that can emerge from poststructural theorising of language and power relationships.

From a poststructural viewpoint, questions such as these can be developed: How are those places of learning shaped? Who does the naming of learning within those places? Who is it that constitutes others as adult learners? Whose interest is this serving? What identities are being shaped in these places by that naming? Newman, Foley and McIntyre do not bring the 'new conceptual resources' (which are described by Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997:1) of poststructuralism and postmodernism to these sites. From a poststructural perspective Plumb (1985:188) questions the way in which critical adult education, the tradition which Newman and Foley represent, may be substituting or 'reinscribing itself' as a dominating institution whilst apparently seeking social change. Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997:35-37) recognise the efforts of community adult education 'to move away from grand narratives and universal truths' but see this effort as being unaware of its attachment to liberal adult education and mainstream education programs.

Newman describes community organisations and neighbourhood centres as places where,

Incidental learning occurs...People in community organizations and community development projects learn to write submission, run an office...Informal education is organised, but not in a recognisably educational context...Women in a neighbourhood centre may form a consciousness raising group... A management committee may decide they need training in group work and financial management (Newman 1995:268).

Newman, Foley and McIntyre have been searching for examples of informal, incidental and sometimes formal adult learning but they have not looked at these community organisations as places in which knowledges are already present and continuously generated (more often than not without the intervention of any professional class). McIntyre (1995:181) argues that community workers in these community organisation environments find it difficult to analyse the nature of their relationship with the state, or are unable to understand the way that

community sector activities are part of a corporate state exerting control. McIntyre positions those connected with the organisations as not having analytical skills, or as unaware of the political circumstances in which they operate.

I take a different view based on the research I have carried out. The dialogues in Chapter One show that the activists have a complex and critical analysis of the role of the state and the operation of political power. This is where I again diverge from Newman, Foley and McIntyre – I do not see community workers and activists as being inherently *naive* in their analysis or subject to hegemonic arrangements they cannot see through. I am interested in what the lived experience of those activists and workers may have been and how they have worked with power. I am interested in the sense that they make of the discourses in which they are embedded. I am interested in the discourses that they identify as shaping their practice and how they have also shaped those discourses.

Newman and Foley attempt to find learning that is incidental or informal within these types of organisations<sup>3</sup> or social movements<sup>4</sup>. I take a different approach, namely that people are not in organisations to get an education or even that the education is gained incidentally by being connected to these organisations. Rather, people come to these organisations already prepared; their coming to organisations, either as activists or workers or participants within some kind of organisational framework, signals that they are already ‘educated’, that they already have ‘knowledges’.

These knowledges take them to that point of connection with particular organisations; they might go to these organisations, or indeed shape the organisations in ways that are consistent with knowledges they already possess<sup>5</sup>. To then make these people targets of some other further education process, or to name those activities which persons do as either ‘informal learning’, ‘incidental learning’ or ‘learning for social action’ is to be applying some other imposed, ‘education’ framework on those actions.<sup>6</sup>

Newman and Foley have marked out within those organisational activities an area that can usefully and pragmatically be defined as adult education. But in a sense it is an imposition of one particular, educational, framework on what ‘people do’, almost repeating the process of

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<sup>3</sup> Foley’s work included research in the Brunswick Neighbourhood House, Melbourne, Victoria. This is a similar type of organisation to the Neighbourhood Centres in NSW around which my research is based.

<sup>4</sup> Newman’s body of work, like Foley’s also includes research on environment and local community organisations and action groups, some similar to the types of organisations that I am interested in.

<sup>5</sup> This is the argument I developed in Chapter One that those connected with the inner-city green bans moved into work with the neighbourhood centres bringing with them knowledges’ developed through involvement in urban social movements.

<sup>6</sup> This line of argument is consistent with the research participants who in the constructed dialogues in Chapter One talked about the way in which different professional frameworks are applied in community work practices.

‘domestication’ against which Friere (1972) cautions. To take a view of these organisations that they only represent examples of informal, incidental or semi-formal learning is to tame or ‘domesticate’ the energy and knowledges of those social actors, the organisers, the activists, the community workers and the participants who are involved in them.

Foley (1999:47-65) suggested that the neighbourhood houses could be seen as ‘liberated spaces’ and as ‘sites of struggle’, ‘sites of learning through social action’ and ‘sites of critical learning’. Foley’s research in these places in the early 1990s requires updating. It requires updating in terms of what has happened at the level of community organisations through the last decade where ‘community’ is now enmeshed in contract state arrangements (Yeatman 1994, Everingham 2001). Foley’s work also requires updating in terms of the conceptual tools that can be used in these sites. For example a poststructural analysis would suggest another line of questioning not explored by Foley, questions arising from a poststructural analysis could include: Who is being liberated in these spaces and who decides? Whose definition of liberation is being used? Does talking of liberation set up an unhelpful duality of those who are liberated and those who are not liberated? Whose definition of learning has been used? Who has defined the terms of the learning?

Deconstructive questions about the acts of naming and setting up of binary positions by the use of language like ‘liberation’ need to be explored. This is the kind of deconstructive work suggested by Cherryholmes who cautions against the acceptance of categorical distinctions in educational research (1988:123) and also of Lather (1991a, 1991b) who suggests that assumptions about liberation and emancipation practises need to be examined.

I see my research as updating some of the work that has been carried out in looking at these community organisations but specifically updating it by using a deconstructive approach which does not accept as unproblematic concepts such as ‘informal learning’, ‘incidental learning’, ‘learning in social action’, ‘learning through liberation’, ‘lifelong learning’ or ‘critical learning’. I am not interested in conceptualising community organisations as an alternative to ‘institutionalised course taking activities’ (McIntyre 1993). This sets up a dualistic notion of courses provided in institutions, or, the alternative that courses are best set up ‘in the community’, either way they are still ‘courses’ and the courses themselves are not given any critical attention. The focus of my research is not on the development of courses or curriculum in community settings but rather I am interested in tracing the knowledges and discourses that are present in community settings.

Rooney (2004) has pointed out that Neighbourhood Centres in NSW have been neglected in terms of an examination of their role as adult education providers. They have been in the 'shadow' of discourses of Adult and Community Education in NSW. Rooney calls for 'research that specifically explores the contribution Neighbourhood Centres are making to the adult learning landscape in NSW' (2004:154). If such research were to be carried out I think it would be a useful contrast to the type of research provided by Newman, Foley and McIntyre. Rooney accepts as already present the 'learning' of those connected with the community organisations, the problem as Rooney argues is that the contribution to the learning landscape has not been mapped. My research adds to that mapping, albeit within a specific geographical area.

My starting point is that learning is already present, more specifically knowledges are already present in these places. I intend to add something more to what others (above) have identified as important educational contexts. But I would like to add not just additional places of research for adult and community education; I am interested in what those places might look like through the lens of poststructuralism. I do this by attending to the discourses that surround those organisations and places and by tracing the knowledges that were brought to these places; that have developed in these places; and that might be emergent, as a result of the participation of a range of social actors in these places. Another distinction in my research is that I am not looking for any of this in a generalisable context; it is a specific examination of the organisations in inner city Sydney, bringing with it a particular set of geographically impelled discourses, and hence asserting again, the focus on place.

Radical community and emancipatory adult education traditions, the traditions that Newman and Foley identify with, have been critiqued from postmodern and poststructural perspectives. Whilst these radical education traditions have aimed at bringing about more socially just systems and have provided critical engagement with current operations of capitalism and repressive social structures they are still operating within a liberal humanistic discourse, as argued by Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997:34-36).

McIntyre (1995:181) describes those working in the community sector as unaware of the real functioning of state apparatus or the effects of communitarian discourse. Newman and Foley see the educational task as assisting learners connected to these organisations (and that might include at times community organisers, activists, community work professionals, management committee members or participants in organisational activities) to engage in a critique of the functioning of capitalist arrangements in contemporary times. I do not agree that the social actors around these organisations have a 'false consciousness' that needs to be made less false through the intervention of educators or other professionals.

Given the material that has already been presented from research participants Enid and Trevor in the dialogues of Chapter One, I would argue that they already have a sophisticated analysis of the role of the state, and, an understanding of how communitarian discourses can be suppressive of differences. There is already present an analysis of power and a recognition of the way in which languages and language use shapes and effects social realities. In the constructed dialogues research participants talked about the centrality of feminism in an analysis of community, they provide a critique of current social planning practice and they critique the role of bureaucracy and government in modern society. They spoke of social change and the importance of collective action, they used discourses of environmentalism, they provided an analysis of the class based nature of oppressions, they talked about the impact of the discourse of economic rationalism and the way that language has shaped political and cultural process. These are not people mystified by the operations of hegemony and power as some of the literature in adult education and community education that I have reviewed has suggested.

Welton (1995:5) describes adult education as a 'discipline in crisis'. In part that crisis is represented through postmodern critiques that question radical and critical emancipatory education projects. As I pointed out Newman eschews the value of the postmodern and poststructural theorising when looking at the history of radical community education and Foley (1993), similarly, has remained circumspect about the contribution of these theoretical perspectives to adult education and radical community education projects. In contrast, the analysis by Donovan Plumb (1995:157-193) suggests that postmodernity sets up an environment where the counter-hegemonic potential of critical adult education is limited and if there is any future in this educational project then it needs to confront these limitations, it needs to confront the condition of postmodernity. Plumb argues that this crisis is because radical adult and community education is having difficulty finding a space within postmodern constructions of culture. Plumb argues, using the works of Baudrillard and Lyotard that culture has become 'commodified', 'delinguistified' and 'de-politicised'; so that the concept of culture, constructed as a site for hegemonic and counter hegemonic struggle, which has been a focus for critical adult education, is challenged.

This is the difference between the approach of Newman and Plumb on critical adult and community education; Newman sees postmodernity as one amongst any number of frameworks that could be chosen for analysis and understanding within capitalism or late capitalism, as perhaps even an 'idea that diverts' (Newman 1999:70-75). Plumb, however takes the view that postmodernity is not simply the 'fantasy of a few cultural visionaries' but that it is a term, which 'powerfully designates the world in which we live'. Further, within this world,

..many of critical adult education's most deeply held assumptions can no longer be taken for granted – including its conceptions of culture, time and space, identity, power, and politics. If critical adult education is going to continue to exist as a meaningful enterprise, it needs to begin paying a great deal more specific attention to the variegates of post modern times (Plumb 1995:212).

Plumb places the critical project of adult and community education in dialogue with postmodern theories. This step also opens up questions from poststructuralism about the emancipatory agenda of critical adult education, also found in Lather (1991a, 1991b) and, Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997). The question arises as to how meaningful emancipatory practises, aimed at changing hegemonic conditions, can avoid reinscribing different forms of hegemony? Plumb argues that attempts at emancipation can unwittingly reinscribe themselves in ways that 'suppress heterogeneity and difference' (Plumb 1995: 188).

The paragraphs above represent a debate in the academic arena of adult and community education about the uses of postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives<sup>7</sup>. Foley (1993) has argued that these debates only serve to remove the theoretical foundations of adult education from those who it is supposed to serve. Foley argues that the 'post' theories tend towards too much abstractionism and are at the expense of 'connecting adult education with social justice' (1999:133). I do not think this is the case.

I do not agree with Newman (1999:196-199) and Foley (1993:76) that the theoretical language associated with postmodern and poststructural theorising is necessarily obsufucating for practitioners. Writing about radical education and community work traditions Ledwith also argues that 'Unfortunately, it [postmodernism] leaves community workers with a lack of theoretical coherence with which to develop a praxis of collective action' (1997:51). Again, based on my research I do not agree, I have not found evidence, that activists or community workers are left with a 'fragmented theory' as Ledwith argues (p. 119), or that practitioners are immobilised by encountering postmodern analysis and theories of deconstruction.

Rather, in my research I have found that there is a willingness to take up postmodern and poststructural theorising for what it can add to community work and how it might be supportive of the work of community practitioners and organisations. I am interested in seeing what the

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<sup>7</sup> I recognise the issue of 'postmodernism' is debated in all the human sciences and the differences I am pointing out between the positions taken by Newman compared to Plumb are echoed in similar debates in a broad range of disciplines.

language of postmodernism and poststructuralism allows and what analysis of community organisations it might support.

In framing and justifying my research directions I have tried to remain mindful of Lather's caution about what is chosen as the object of research and then how that object is talked about. In Chapter One, recounting my own research trajectory I talked about my concerns that research on community organisation may in fact colonise community organisation structures, or render their work visible and therefore manageable by the social processes the organisations may be trying to counter-act. Lather talks about this kind of research dilemma and suggests self-reflexivity as a strategy:

What postmodernism adds to this long-running debate is its focus on how power works via exhibition, observation and classification. To make something available for discussion is to make of it an object [Huag 1987]. This suspicion of the intellectual who both objectifies and speaks for other inveighs us to develop a kind of self-reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominance in spite of our liberatory intentions (Lather 1991a:15).

In the previous section of the literature journey I described some the ways in which the NCs and those connected with them have been 'objectified' in the field of adult and community education. This is the 'professional colonisation' referred to earlier. I have described some of the flaws that I see in that approach and have suggested that by using some of the analytical tools from poststructuralism a different set of questions, perhaps showing greater awareness of this colonising tendency can emerge.

### **Community organisations – management and social capital frameworks**

In the literature on community organisations and NCs I find there is another line of research that tends to bind, classify and offer for exhibition, organisations within an instrumentalist framework. Baum (1997), Bradfield and Nyland (1997), Bullen (1997, 1998) Nyland (1994), Onyx (1996), Sharp and Inwald (1986) have all written texts on community organisations, including NCs.

In these texts, the work of organisations is framed in the context of community development, community management and the way that organisations contribute to the development of social capital. This approach allows for judgement about the success or failure of these organisations to be made within a community management and community development framework, or

alternatively the organisations are valued according to the measurement of their contribution to the accumulation of social capital. This approach is instrumentalist, partly because the motivation for it seems closely aligned with the needs of government to find organisations through which to deliver a range of community services. It also seems instrumentalist in the way that a search for 'the best management model' seems to be unquestioned. As if a 'management' solution is the best response to what might in fact be political processes. Much of the content of this research direction is focused on a search for the 'best working model', or the 'model' that will produce the most economically productive results.

Fixation on 'the model' for management or the accumulation of social capital positions the intentions and agency of those involved in the organisations as secondary to social change outcomes. Following the logic of the argument presented by Sharpe and Inwald (1986) where their review of the effectiveness of community management was based on two of the NCs which are the focus of my research, they concluded that community management was a defunct model, which had become, 'counter-productive when it comes to achieving social change'. Their conclusion, not dissimilar to that of McIntyre (1993) was that workers, committee members and involved resident activists did not have the skills to negotiate complicated political engagement and dealings with state bureaucracy. Sharpe and Inwald have argued that community workers; management committee members and community organisers have 'false expectations' about the 'level of power that people can obtain'. This line of inquiry locks people into being subjects of a false consciousness; which I think closes down the story, and denies possibilities, rather to providing an opening up.

In contradiction to the conclusion of Sharpe and Inwald (1986), Nyland describes the advantage of community management as a good 'organising option' in that it,

...has the capacity to operate as a highly effective form of citizen participation, enabling the ownership of organizations and services to be located within communities, and within their direct control. Because it enables more direct involvement than does public ownership through government agencies...it is ideally suited for a range of community oriented ventures (1994:3).

Baum (1997) concludes after championing social capital that:

I look forward to the day when we hear regular reports about the progress of the community and Neighbourhood Houses and Centres association in building our stock of social capital on the Channel 7 news each evening! (1997:10).



As with the construction of the NCs as targets for ‘colonisation’ by adult education practitioners in search of examples of informal learning to support social change, in this other tradition of research, the NCs and the activities of those associated with them are constructed and ‘colonised’ by those seeking the delivery of community oriented services through the most effective management arrangements. In the ‘management’ line of research the organisations are described as being effective (Nyland 1994) or ineffective (Sharpe and Inwald 1986), creating an unnecessary duality and never really raising a question such as ‘effective in whose terms?’ In research that constructs the work and functions of the organisations as producing social capital (Baum 1997, Bullen 1998, Onyx 1996) community organisation activities are brought into direct alignment with the interests of governments and never raising a question such as ‘who defines what it is that contributes to social capital?’ I argue that the line of research that imposes frameworks from a management perspective or from a social capital perspective on what these organisations do is a researcher imposition. Research in this direction may well serve, as in the case of the measurement of social capital, a pragmatic function in convincing government of the value of NCs but it is not one that I am following in this research. It carries the same instrumentalist (and perhaps colonising) purposes that I explained as being problematic with the formal, informal and incidental learning approaches imposed from adult education traditions.

### **Community organisation and research based on lived experience**

There is however, another tradition of research amongst local community based organisations. This tradition is represented in research texts such as *‘Once Upon a Time...Stories About Community Work’* (Henry and Lane 1993), *‘Proof’s in the Pudding - Possibilities for Local community Work’* (Fairfield Community Workers 1984), and *‘In This Place - Stories of Villawood’* (Christley and Lane 1996). These writers are interested in exploring a ‘process oriented’ and ‘contextually specific’ community development approach. Other literature that I have drawn on in this chapter has come from adult education and management and these writers are located in the social work discipline. I am not jettisoning the area of education for social work rather I am prepared to borrow whatever is useful from whatever disciplinary area. The research direction of Henry (1993), Christley (1996) and Lane (1993, 1996,) is sympathetic to the directions that I have signalled as important in Chapter One. This research direction recognises that meanings generated are specific to the localities in which practice occurs, and in addition this research direction resists developing generalised foundations or explanations for practice. This research direction resists ‘final conclusions’ and ‘master narratives’; developing instead a tradition of research that encourages multiple, diverse and (at times) conflicting narratives based on stories of practice.

In these works, operating largely at the level of story and lived experience of community workers and resident activists, there is a line of inquiry, which seems to fit with Lather's notion of 'dialectical theory building' (1991a:61-65). These texts pay attention to the agency and intent of actors within and around the community organisations. By engagement with practitioners in the research and by accepting, at least in the initial phases of inquiry, the practitioner's own stories and meaning making, a completely different focus emerges. What emerge are stories not of neighbourhood community work as a technical tool, nor as something that will necessarily redress all structural social and economic inequalities. But what emerges from these stories of lived experience, (in the way they are recounted by Henry, Lane and Christley), are clues to what it might mean to be involved in 'a place' and to take on, a conscious role, as a social actor in practising being in that place.

The work of Lane (1985, 1998) is supportive of the description of place that I proposed in Chapter One; that is of place being developed through the negotiation of a set of social relations, and a recognition that these negotiations are a politicised and contested. A similar notion of place and politics with a focus on location and identity is also found in Edwards and Usher (2000:119- 122).

My research is connected with but divergent to some of the literature on community organisation in adult and community education. My research fills in, at an empirical level, some of the gaps in research about NCs and community organisations. Using 'new conceptual tools' from poststructuralism my research 'looks anew' at some sites of adult and community education. My research is different from other research on community organisations that has an instrumentalist approach, and, adds instead to an existing body of work about community organisations from the point of view of the intentions of community workers and activists who have been involved in those places.

## **ADULT LEARNING FOR CITIZENSHIP**

An important further principle to inform any future adult learning for citizenship is that it is open-ended. It should not be a tool for social engineering...However, it should also acknowledge localized and particular knowledge, skills, attitudes and values...(Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997:50).

Citizenship described by Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) focuses on the promotion of 'voice' of a variety of non-mainstream groups. It is similar to citizenship as described by Giroux, who

stresses the need for pedagogical strategies that enable the development and 'reconstruction of democratic public life' (1992:81). The New London Group (1996), also outline the role of critical and liberatory pedagogy in re-enlivening a 'civic pluralism' and developing new citizen identities. Coare and Johnston (2003) join in what they call a 'conversation' on citizenship and argue that local community organisation sites provide unique opportunities to encourage and model multicultural citizenship practices that are inclusive, pluralistic, reflexive and active.

These writers all look towards a definition of citizen beyond the modernist concept of citizenship. Rather than assuming citizenship is a given form or way of being, these writers asks the following questions: What are the different ways that citizenship is enacted? How has it changed? How can citizenship be understood so that it acts to include rather than exclude? How can the notion of citizenship be read in postmodernity?

I was interested in using the concept of citizenship in this research because of the complexities and ambiguities of meaning that can be attached to it: What constitutes citizen behaviour in Australian society, communities and neighbourhoods? What kind of practices and behaviour confer the title of citizen or citizen-like? What does one have to do, or be, to be claimed or acclaimed as a citizen? What acts or behaviours allow the title of citizen to be taken away? Can citizen behaviour be diverse and ambiguous? Can citizens be anti-community or counter-hegemonic? Can citizens be 'legitimately' disruptive? What meaning can the word 'citizen' have when it has so often been used as a basis for exclusion?

In Australia Indigenous peoples were granted citizenship status and only as recently as 1967 and so it appears that 'citizenship' status can be absolutely arbitrary. In regards to the history of citizenship status of women, migrants and refugees in Australia it is seen through government policies that citizen status has been inconsistently granted.

In other words the concept of citizenship varies radically over time and place and using the concept of citizenship actually reveals a series of contradictions. It is these contradictions that suggest conceptions of citizenship operating along classical, liberal or established social democratic traditions need to be questioned (as argued by Stokes 1997:19). I am interested in a 'deconstructed' citizenship and interested in how productive that might be in talking about the work of inner city NCs. The picture that I had formed at the beginning of this research was that the NCs were mobilising particular citizen identities and I was interested in exploring this with the research participants.

Mouffe (2000) and Clifford (2001) argue that citizenship is principally a practice. Citizen activity may be one of contesting the meaning of what might be considered ‘normal behaviour’<sup>8</sup> and struggling to define collective and individual identity in a way that is oppositional. In this line of thinking to be a citizen is also to be one whose identity is not yet defined but one who is in a process of defining that identity (Gherardi 1995:169). Lister (1997) also describes the contested nature of citizenship arrangements arguing that most definitions contain within them a gendered view of citizenship roles and activities. However, Lister argues that there is potential in a feminist citizenship project that aims towards inclusionary definitions and understandings of citizenship. Lister suggests that citizenship discourse can be activated in a way that meets the interests of those who might be traditionally excluded. Viewed this way, citizenship is a process of becoming and indeed a contested process. Rose (1999) provides a useful summary, and a way of conceptualising citizenship as being open ended:

The uniform social citizenship that was the objective of the citizen-forming and nation-building strategies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is challenged by a diversity of forms of identity and allegiance no longer deferential to such an image of national and territorialized civic culture.....individuals no longer inhabit a single ‘public sphere’, nor is their citizenship conferred upon them through a singular relationship with the state. Rather, citizenship is multiplied and non-cumulative: it appears to inhere in and derive from active engagement with each of a number of specific zones of identity – lifestyle sectors, neighbourhood, ethnic groups – some private, some corporate, some quasi-public (p.178).

When I began this research I was conscious of activating a discourse on citizenship with the research participants. With the research participants I used ‘adult learning for citizenship’ as a way to try to define the kinds of learning that were part of the history of the NCs. I include in this section some responses, which were written responses prepared by the two people introduced in the dialogues<sup>9</sup>. In Chapter One their voices, in dialogue with mine, helped to establish departure points and themes for the research. In this chapter, their voices are again present, this time working, with me, through some of the literature used in the research<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Weeks (1998) describes the ‘new stories’ that can be told about sexual citizenships but also sees new citizenship identities as being actively created in an oppositional way to traditions patterns of attachment and citizen identity.

<sup>9</sup> Again at a textual level I am trying to show how the research participants have been part constructing theoretical directions in the research.

<sup>10</sup> More time will be spent in Chapter Three describing the research process and method but at this stage it might be useful to point out that these research participants, Enid and Trevor read the chapter from Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) on ‘adult learning for citizenship’, the chapter from Nikolas Rose (1999) dealing with governmentality, community and citizenship, and, also my PhD research proposal. As part of their response they provided written feedback, some of which is reproduced here.

In personal correspondence, Enid wrote about an adult learning for citizenship in this way. I have reproduced what was handwritten text as accurately as I can and used spelling, punctuation, emphasis and abbreviations of the original correspondence.

*The years since the late 60s and 70s have been the most transforming for Australia and Australians. In the 'revolutionary' years (60s – 70s) with the urban environment movement, sown with voices, social values of marriage being challenged, gay movement etc... underlying it all was the late C20th Western universal emphasis on individualism. Space for community? Surely a contradictory situation but it did happen!*

*Like other experiences it didn't drop out of the sky. The War (No2) experience had seen WOMEN emerging from the limitations of home, family, children and here in the inner city factory life as well. Child care had been in Surry Hills for decades, the Nursery Schools Association, Kindergarten Union had provided long day care for infants and preschool children but they were organized by Committees from largely 'well heeled' suburbs. The Committees worked not in the 'charity' model of the Salvation Army – in the way that they cared for the homeless and derelict – but in the English liberal model of the late C19th and early C20th – especially the Great Depression times. They did things for the community but the community i.e. Surry Hills were not part of the organizational structure. They (the committees) raised money, lobbied governments and expected to be rewarded with State/Empire honours. Other organizations included Mother and child Support and the Creative Leisure Movement (who worked from the Quakers Hall in Devonshire St.) one could say that they were 'Community organizations as sites of an adult learning for citizenship'.*

*However, Neighbourhood Centres have the opportunity to do things that are more difficult to achieve than in more tightly controlled organizations. They can experiment, adapt quickly, be an excellent learning place for workers and committees, helpers and much more. That is what structured organizations e.g. councils and governments are wary of when they are also the funding bodies. They fail to see that 'adult learning for citizenship' is a learning process e.g. where a woman, Mary, moves from her home duties to learning about taking a child into a social life i.e. playing and play as a learning process, that the cost of facilities etc. are shared responsibilities, that workers should be adequately paid etc. etc.*

*A lot more needs to be done but the Centres have now at least 20 years experience behind them. They are much more than another welfare operation with a patronising*

*and universal formula to appease women's demands. This is just one example of the multitude of avenues that 'adult learning for citizenship' takes.*

*The thing that emerges is that adult learning for citizenship needs a base from which the learning commences. The Neighbourhood Centre was created by a learning process i.e. by collectively demanding certain services and being prepared to accept responsibility for it (difficult though it be) at a community level (as defined by the people concerned).*

In the above lengthy quote it can be seen that 'adult learning for citizenship' was operationalised in a way that usefully described the work of the NCs. The terminology seemed to be productive in that it allowed for the location of the work of the NCs in a historical context; and for the positioning of the NCs as one amongst a number of community organisations structures that are all part of constructing citizen identities. Adult learning and the construction of citizen identities was seen to be an active and process oriented venture, which according to Enid, requires a local base.

For the other research participant, Trevor, 'adult learning for citizenship' raised a series of questions. In personal correspondence Trevor listed the following questions:

*The notion of "citizen", "citizenship", and "emergent identities" - if words like "the new citizen", "emergent identities" are to have any genuine meaning, then what can we do? - we, the educators, the older generation, the youth workers, community workers, researchers?*

*About the "educational sites" - are they not also centrally involved in the reproduction (perpetuation) of discourses? - especially where the "citizen" is itself a discourse? - and, if a particular educational site is more concerned with reproducing rather than with the new creation so to speak, then what hope is there of the "new citizen"?*

*Being a citizen is to be one who associates with emerging collectivities whose emergence is a contesting of and a re-shaping of identities. So that to be a citizen is to be one who contests the social and legal norms of the historical context out of which the citizen emerges?*

*Does "citizen" mean "a social being", "a product of culture", a "non-wild being"?*

*Your research John, does come across to me as an exploration of community organisations as sites of adult learning for citizenship, but there's much that's not said, not explored and maybe at least needs acknowledging – such as: all those other community organisation and community-based organisations which you haven't chosen to focus on; those other forms of citizenship which are learnt or produced at other sites of learning. And what is it saying about the new citizenship that is learnt? What does that new non-essentialised citizen look like?*

In response to my introduction of the discourse of citizenship to these community organisation sites Trevor responded with a range of questions. Again 'adult learning for citizenship' was productive in the way that it raised ideas of the 'new' or 'non-essentialised citizen'. Trevor sees the discourse of citizenship as being of value in areas of education, community work and research because it raises the question of 'practice' of 'what to do', of how to invest meaning into the work done. In the second set of questions Trevor links the discourse of citizenship to educational sites and uses this to raise a further question about NCs and citizenship - if it is accepted that the NCs are educational sites then there is a further question to explore as to whether those sites are involved in reproducing traditional notions of citizenship or whether 'new' citizen formations can be activated. The third statement from Trevor leading on to another question draws attention to the role of a citizen who is a contestant in a range of social processes. It suggests that citizens should not be punished or excluded because they are in disagreement with current power arrangements. The fourth question Trevor asks continues in a deconstructive mode, asking whether this citizen shaping activity is a way of asserting a particular set of cultural formations. The fifth question raised by Trevor continues to open up another area of discussion by recognising, as in the earlier lengthy quote, the shaping nature of community organisation and asks the question of what identities are being produced in certain types of organisation? This resonates with Enid's argument that the NCs developed as organisations which were an alternative to more '*structured organizations e.g. councils and governments*' who failed to see that '*adult learning for citizenship*' is a learning process'.

Trevor used the literature I had circulated and arrived at these following statements. This is reproduced here with the emphasis and underlining of the original text.

*I suggest that a characteristic of every collectivity (as a social/cultural phenomenon) is to reproduce the desired social shape (the "new" citizen) - that is, the learning is always intended, but may take place informally - isn't that how we learn all of our ignorances, our prejudices, our biases, our bigotries? - there's nothing accidental about it*

*I think it is exactly because collectivities have this intent that they have been seized upon by government as a strategy of governance - and the vulnerability of collectivities to this takeover is their pretence that they don't have this intent to produce the "new" citizen.*

*I'm not sure how to explain the emergence of collectivities, their taking form - there is some kind of constructive or shaping energy - their emergence is their first construction, they arise as the new creation, the new citizen - then they are re-constructed and rendered not only knowable but palatable.*

*I think this is the method of government through community: the forms of community must themselves become changed, otherwise they will continue to produce and support "new" citizens*

*I hear what Rose says about community being a form of being which pre-exists - perhaps, as I've said above, in a karmic sense I'd agree with Rose - I would certainly say that community, as it is re-constructed to make it knowable and palatable, as it is controlled, pre-exists in the existing construct of those doing the re-construction - and it is exactly that pre-existing construct of the reconstructors which then alienates the "new" citizens, the indigenous members of the newly emerged collectivity, so that they very often fade away, because the reconstruction is the putting in place of the reproduction of the "old" citizen.*

From these statements it can be seen, as with Enid, that the introduction of the discourse of citizenship has provoked some further analysis of the role of the NCs, or, as Trevor describes them, 'collectivities'. In the first statement there is a reminder about the shaping nature of these community organisations. According to Trevor, failing to recognise the way that organisations are shaping citizen identities means that they are 'vulnerable' to forms of governance, which were not originally envisaged, they can become part of 'government through community'. In the last statement the vulnerability of community and community organisations is again referred to. That vulnerability emerges because the communities or community organisations are reconstructed (and 'made palatable') in ways that are alien to the intentions of the original shapers of the communities or organisations.

The literature on citizenship, which I have used; as well as drawing out an interest in how different identities are constructed, draws attention to a concept that is of interest in



contemporary social processes - that is empowerment. The word '*empowerment*' is part of the discourse of community organisations and is recognised as being a contested, problematic and also an increasingly vital component in understanding how community organisations are operating in the current era of global capitalism (Craig and Mayo 1995, Kenny 1994:19-22, 114-125, Ledwith 1997).

The use and construction of the discourse of empowerment is problematised by many writers including Cruickshank (1994), Rose (1999) and, Hindess (1999:67-72). Whilst the word empowerment often comes with positive moral connotations (Hindess 1999:67) both Cruickshank and Rose link the activation of the discourse of empowerment to a range of political technologies which are used to govern or manage populations.

Rose (1999) writes that within this discourse of empowerment:

New modes of neighbourhood participation, local empowerment and engagement of residents in decisions over their own lives will, it is thought, re-activate self-motivation, self-responsibility and self-reliance in the form of active citizenship within a self-governing community (p.249).

This assists in creating exclusionary and self-policing zones. These zones may not be spaces of liberation, but may in fact be zones based on fear and insecurity where communities (and individuals) are forced to take on responsibilities for managing their own risks in environments where there is clearly no ability to control the risks that have to be managed. Viewed this way the discourse of empowerment becomes a series of contradictions.

Lather (1991a) has summarised many of the dilemmas of empowerment perspectives in various education and research traditions. Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997:47-49) have situated a discussion of empowerment within adult learning for citizenship and note that the conceptualisation of empowerment, like that of citizenship is contested. Writers such as Giroux (1992) and hooks (1994) talk about the relevance of empowerment models within 'a postmodernism of resistance' but caution against assuming that empowerment does what 'empowerers' say they are doing. Lane (1998) and Kenny (1994:256) claim that modernist empowerment projects have sown the seeds for the continuation of empowerment projects within community development approaches. Both concede the limitation of empowerment approaches but argue they may still be of use within a 'resistant' postmodernism.

What is most useful from this group of writers is the view that any discussion of empowerment needs to be located within specific contexts:

Empowerment clearly needs to have situated meaning in direct relation to the living and working contexts of adult learner/citizens (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997:48).

In chapters Four, Five and Six the discussion of empowerment is situated in the context of the inner city Sydney NCs. The issue of empowerment (and of citizenship and identity construction) will be given a great deal more attention and is placed within the context of the activist's and community worker's experiences. As the above writers suggest there needs to be an empirical examination of citizenship and empowerment. I believe this literature provides support for the development of one the central research questions, which is; *What do the terms empowerment, participation, community service and citizenship mean for community organisation practices?* I am asking how do practitioners understand these social practices and discourses? How have discourses of empowerment and citizenship been mobilised and practised? What reflections do practitioners now offer after working within these empowerment approaches? Are these still relevant to current community organisation contexts?

To summarise this section, adult learning for citizenship has been a useful concept to assist participants to try and name the many kind of learnings that are part of the history of the NCs. Adult learning for citizenship foregrounds identity and as well directs attention to the roles that community organisations play in shaping different citizen identities.

In the next section I return to 'place' and describe some of the literature that has helped me form a workable definition of place. I describe the inner city as a 'place' variously imagined but of importance in this research because the 'inner city' forms part of the imaginary of the activists and community workers.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE**

...a 'place' is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location. And the singularity of any individual place is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location.... and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location...will in turn produce new social affects (Massey quoted in Edwards and Usher 2000:119).

The city consists of ...relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past: the height of a lamppost and the distance from the ground of a hanged usurper's swaying feet; the line strung from the lamppost to the railing opposite and the festoon that decorates the course of the queen's nuptial procession; the height of that railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn; the tilt of a guttering and a cat's progress along it as he slips into the same window (Calvino 1972).

How does one tell a story of a place, of location, of the social relations, of the singularity of place?

In the first part of Chapter One I attempted to describe, the place, inner city Sydney using social histories written by Barry, Clohesy and Smith (1985), Jakubowicz (1974, 1984) and Burgmann and Burgmann (1998). I constructed a linear history containing a storyline of urban social and resident action movements, emerging community organisations (including the NCs), community activists, developers, government bureaucracies and migrating populations. The silences, gaps, absences and writing over in such histories are profound. Why use decades as a marker of time? Why use published articles and not other material available through archives? Why choose the history of that 'place' from any number of starting points? Who else might contribute to this history?

These questions draw attention to the complications of telling a story of place and in the next few pages I explore some of those complications.

Read (2000) argues that the confusion and doubt faced by any non-Aboriginal who starts to speak of 'a place' in Australia, is how to speak, let alone write, of that place without speaking and signalling the acts of dispossession of Indigenous people on which any 'settler' notion of place is overwritten. A story of any place in Australia must begin with the recognition that a number of other stories are displaced. Read negotiates his own way through this impasse by turning to the stories created by artists, musicians and poets about place. Muecke (1997) explores the contradictory position of any non-Indigenous person who speaks about place in modern Australian society. Rather than falling into silence Muecke also builds the imagination of place through negotiation and through embracing other ways of seeing.

So, for the moment, I will use the strategy suggested by Read and Muecke I will also start with another way of seeing – I will use an artist/poet who presents another way of seeing 'a place'. In his poem about Surry Hills, Wally Campbell talks about the Neighbourhood Centre. Wally spends time, through poetry trying to get to what Massey (1993) refers to as the 'singularity' of

the place. In the economical language of poetry he talks about the social geography of Surry Hills. I quote here a section of his poetry written in 1993:

There are ghosts in Surry Hills  
from the rural sand hills  
to what's left of the protestant churches  
now used as drop-in centres for the  
remaining poor  
..monuments to the massive catholic immigration

Here was a Sunday School  
where British and Irish names  
live on in honour rolls  
of those who have died and others who have moved away

And everywhere are terraces  
with worn steps  
of the thousands who have used them  
and used now for rooming houses  
for the pensioners and unemployed  
and the young people with tattered jeans  
and red and green and yellow hair

A silent protest  
paying rent to others who are now owners  
with cats and cars and dogs

And a lonely library sends kids along  
to the photocopier at the  
Neighbourhood Centre  
quietly busy organising activities  
and advertisements for someone to share a flat

And another for a strumming band  
with a tenor sax and a big bass drum  
to a directory and instructions to  
stall holders at the monthly Saturday market,  
of myriad dogs barking and a Fiesta of inflatables for the kids

The street poetry of Wally Campbell, (distributed freely on photocopied sheets of A4 paper) tells a story of an inner city place and the social relations found there. Wally attempts to distil the singularity of this place. His poetry tries to access that place - ghosts, migrations, Imperialism, poverty, unemployment, rooming houses, protest, dogs, markets, schools, libraries, Neighbourhood Centres and kids. Pubs, music, births and death also come through in his storylines as he shifts around the streets, recalling the history of an inner city suburb that once housed sly grog shops, funerary parlours for which the suburb was notorious and the Crown Street Women's Hospital, where for a number of decades many Sydney children were born.

I am a researcher creating storylines about 'place' and in creating these storylines I am recognising that there are acts of privileging. The storylines of Indigenous people and place in Australia often suffers in that privileging. The storylines of homeless people is regularly neglected in any story of cities and places. These are the 'terrible exclusions' (Massey 1993) that can occur in talking about place; Massey argues that talking and thinking about place uncritically can set up many kinds of exclusions. Rose (1997) argues there must be a move away from a search from some pure concept of community based on 'territorialized and terrorizing boundaries' because 'different others' may be placed dangerously (from their own safety point of view) within those boundaries or completely excluded from them (p.185).

I see how there are exclusions that operate through the telling of stories and talking about place. But I cannot find my way around this. There are storylines that I am following in this research and there are some that I am aware of privileging over others. In Chapter One I presented my own storyline of involvement in these places. Through presenting the constructed dialogues the storylines of Enid and Trevor were introduced. In the following chapters of this thesis others tell their storylines about place and practising place. In Chapter Three, the Research Journey, I explore in more detail the consequences of privileging stories in this way and try to find my way through what seems like a methodological impasse, by continuing to draw on reflexivity as research resource.

I signalled at the beginning of this chapter that the third part of this literature journey drew on inter-disciplinary work in the field that I call 'critical human and social geography'. Within this field of study, and represented in the writings of Harvey (1993), Massey (1993, 1999), Pile and Keith (1997), Sandercock (1998), Soja (1996), Wilson (1991), Zukin (1992) and, Watson and Gibson (1995); there is a focus on power relationships and political identities. Also on 'spaces', 'places', 'difference', a 'politics of location', 'techniques of government' and as well as 'oppositional and resistant political practices'. This language and the concepts used by these writers resonate with the research I am conducting.

These writers also trace storylines about place. Beginning with a critical history of the way that 'planning' and particularly 'town planning' has carved out a role for itself in modern bureaucratic and state power arrangements, Sandercock (1998), dreams of her 'cosmopolis' and searches for her 'postmodern utopia'. This utopia, she argues must always be present but never actually presented. She does not want to impose her utopian vision on others. Sandercock 'scours cities' looking for 'insurgent practices' and evidence of 'one thousand tiny empowerments'. Pile and Keith (1997) try to map 'spaces of resistance'; much of their work concentrates on turbulent inner city environments in England during and after years of rule of

the conservative Thatcher government. They seek to show how ‘...fragmentation, ruptures and discontinuities can be politically transformed from liability and weakness to opportunity and strength...’ (Keith and Pile 1993:193). Soja (1996), concentrating on Los Angeles as the best exemplar of the modern metropolis uses the concept of a ‘thirdspace’. The third space is a metaphorical space in which ‘difference’ is marked for its potential rather than its limitations. By paying attention to the possibilities of this thirdspace, which is not unreal but an imagined place, new social patterns could be formed, patterns which are supportive of difference rather than social patterns that are based on a fear of difference. Harvey goes, from ‘place to space and back again’ but always with the starting point that ‘...place in whatever guise is...a social construct’ (Harvey 1993:7). Massey provides a critique of Soja and Harvey’s ‘time-space compression’ pointing out that is probably Western (male) academics who feel they have some control over this but that the more interesting stories will come from groups who may do a lot of physical moving but do not have the same sense of being in charge of this process. This would include, amongst others who are regularly excluded, migrant groups (Massey 1993:61).

As indicated in Chapter One that I am interested in Massey’s notion of a ‘progressive’ sense of place because her writing is grounded in exploring the places in which she can confidently say she also inhabits. This makes for me, her approach slightly more manageable than the flying leaps of Harvey and Soja, and I think is consistent with my own research which is focused on places which I can confidently say I have inhabited.

Watson and Gibson (1994), Wilson (1991) and Zukin (1992) search the streets of postmodern cities, often, and particularly in the case of Wilson, the streets of inner cities or city centres tracing a feminist storyline. Watson and Gibson (1994) study Australian cities and the way in which the urban and place is ‘thought’ and try to overlay that thinking with a social justice framework. Wilson emerges from her tours of the ‘labyrinth’ with ‘...a new, ‘feminine’ voice in praise of cities’ (Wilson 1991:11). Zukin calls for a professional commitment to ‘liminality’, to supporting by whatever means, those who are not given a place within highly territorialised city spaces (1992:242).

In this radical and critical social geography literature, citizenship and emergent identity projects are deeply connected to place. This literature on place provides a rich area in which I can situate some understanding of the stories from the NCs. This literature has helped me to build up the concept that I have called ‘practising place’.

Through the research I have been interested in exploring the storylines of the activists and community workers who have also been in this place, that is inner city Sydney, I am interested

in how the activists and community workers imagine their place. Like Sandercock and the other authors who I have referred to as radical and critical human geographers, I adopt the epistemological stance that how we know what we know is, to a large extent, known through being in a place. Sandercock calls hers an 'epistemology for planning practice' (1998:76) I call my approach an epistemology for 'practising place'.

The second key research question I have developed is a way of exploring this epistemological stance further. It is a way of asking about place and practising place that recognises the research participants as active agents in shaping these inner city places: *What have workers and organisers wished for when they become involved in these community organisations?* Chapters Four, Five and Six explore the responses provided by research participants to this question. The body of literature on 'social geography' has helped to frame this question.

So far in this chapter I have dealt with literature from the area of adult and community education, I have journeyed across disciplinary areas of social work and social geography to find an emphasis on place. I have found some supportive ideas for the research in adult learning for citizenship, which with its focus of citizen identities and empowerment has helped establish directions for further work with the other research participants. And in the last section I have teased out a stance from which I can go on to explore, with the other research participants, the knowledges bought to, and built up in those place focused community organisations.

## **WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT COMMUNITY**

Nancy (1991) and Rose (1997) ask questions about the search for and 'performance' of community, their questions are about the exclusions and violence that can come when identifications are based on homogeneity and sameness. Frazer and Lacey (1993) provide a feminist critique and focus on the exclusion of women in romanticised and conservative views of community. In contrast to warm and fuzzy notions of belonging and caring, community can be seen as something that is constructed out of necessity and, Bauman (2001) argues, in postmodern times sometimes constructed by fear. This literature has helped define an approach that is questioning of claims that community formations are organic, natural and innocent. In later chapters of this thesis where the activists and critical community workers reflect on their work histories, communitarian discourse is also placed under scrutiny.

In this section I explore further the concept of governmentality and how it can be used in an analysis of community organisation. Initially developed by Foucault but now evident in a range of studies including Dean (1999), Dean and Hindess (1998) and Rose (1999), the various ways

in which government is carried out through community is explored. 'Governmentality' formed the basis of some discussions with the research participants and provided a formulation with which to critically examine claims that community work is empowering and immune to the machinations of state apparatus. In this chapter I talk about technologies of community and technologies of citizenship (Cruikshank 1994). Also, following the theoretical line proposed by Foucault, I suggest that community and community organisations can be seen as effecting a whole range of disciplinary mechanisms. These poststructural formulations of community work are explored with the research participants and reported in later chapters.

In the last part of this section I return to some of the writers referred to in Chapter One who are asking: What are the possible, new and emergent community formations? What are the identities that will be activated to get to these new formations? As The New London Group (1996) ask: what are the new social futures?

Agamben (1993) has provided a language of 'the becoming community' and a 'search for non-essentialised identities' as a way to approach the possibility of these new social formations. This approach sees practising community and practising identity as a productive activity in contemporary times but never an activity completely achieved. Again themes from these writers are explored with the research participants when I ask the research participants about the social futures they envisage.

### **Communities and critiques of communitarianism**

I have said earlier in Chapter One that I take the view that community is 'constructed'. Conservative and liberal arguments suggest that there are natural linkages and community formations that simply need to be developed, improved upon or recovered. Some strands of communitarian discourse would say that current social processes have obscured the 'real' community formations and the task is to work with the social processes to undo the damage that has been done by a range of economic, social and political forces. I favour the analysis of Rose (1997) who refutes any notion that community formations are natural or organic. She does not believe that there are communities 'there' and they simply need to be 'discovered', 'understood' or 'uncovered'. She focuses rather on the 'myth' and the 'hegemony' of community. Indeed Rose, along with other writers<sup>11</sup> asks whether 'community' can any longer be usefully employed, in alternative and radical political projects.

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<sup>11</sup> See also Harvey (1993), Massey (1993, 1997) and Nancy (1991)



It seems that the mere conceptualisation of community has within it such heavy contradictions in terms of inscribing and structuring power arrangements that the chances for re-working 'community' in non-oppressive ways are limited. Nevertheless, Rose (1997) and also seen with Bauman (2001) still find uses for the word, or rather the discourse of community.

Drawing on interviews with community arts project workers in Edinburgh, Rose (1997) holds on to the possibility that the dominant cultural view of community, which brings with it the 'terrible exclusions', can be subverted in ways that do not necessarily situate those who have less power within the discourse of the powerful. However, in the research presented by Rose, this has relied partly on the way in which the community arts workers have been aware of the 'reproduction of power through language', and have not 'performed community' in the ways that have been expected by dominant groups. Rose argues that the community arts workers kept in mind (even if they did not speak it) a form of community that was fluid, multidimensional and 'vague'. Rose suggests by doing this they managed to avoid constructing a myth of community and, rather, used the discourse of community to enact a radical politics. Partly the community arts workers succeed in this by avoiding coming to some oppressive definition of what 'it', that is, community, meant. Their definition of community was always in a state of flux and deferral, and therefore never achieved and closed but always in a state of always 'becoming'.

Frazer and Lacey (1993) are also suspicious of communitarian writers who evoke homogeneous and bounded conceptions of community. Their argument is not just that there are overlapping and multiple attachments to different community formations, nor that there are simply multiple 'communities within communities' but that communitarian discourse falls down on the assumption that there is any 'essential unity of subjectivity' (pp.198-214). Frazer and Lacey prefer instead to celebrate the fractured identities of contemporary lives and see some possibility for future dialogic work as subjects reflect on, and try to make some sense of their multiple and conflicting experiences. They argue that 'meaning generating communities' are possible and this provides 'the groundwork for the development of dissent, struggle and change' (p.202). For Frazer and Lacey, despite much of the game of community making being mired in conservatism and unlikely to shift, playing at community and practising a politics of community, still has some radical political potential.

Bauman argues that nowadays notions of community mean sameness (2001:115). It is not just about the dangers of communitarian discourse being used to establish safe communities from within which all strangers, deviants, wayfarers, or any other body signalling 'difference' can be attacked or from which they can be expelled or excluded. But it is also about the fact that those

who think they have found ‘safety-in-community’ have sacrificed many freedoms in the process (Bauman:1998). The freedom to recognise and live with the humanity of ‘the other’ is the price paid for entry into these gated communities. Bauman believes that any search for common humanity and any control over ‘the human condition’, becomes lost in these arrangements and in his analysis there are elites and groups with powerful vested interests who benefit from this. That is, they benefit from the circumstances of large sections of the population who have found some comfort (illusory though it may be) in community (2001:143) and the elites benefit from the discomfort of those who are excluded. Furthermore modernity’s promises of equality and multiculturalism (which are ideals which have never really been met) have left populations with a cynical memory of what can be achieved (2001:90–108). Bauman paints a bleak picture and communitarian discourse he argues has been a major part of the problem. He dismisses the kind of community in which ‘life politics [is] wrapped around the struggle for identity, self-creation and self-assertion’, and the other strand of communalism which he sees as equally flawed is the way in which new technologies have allowed the formation of fleeting ‘aesthetic communities’ which lack any sense of long term commitment and more importantly for Bauman any sense of ‘ethical responsibility’ (2001:71).

In his earlier work Bauman talked about ‘the postmodern habitat’. This habitat is chaotic, indeterminant, rootless, inconclusive and unpredictable (Smith 1999:150). Bauman suggested that one response to managing life in these circumstances is to pick up the pieces and ‘play’. To form aesthetic communities and play with identities, even buy them at the shopping mall. But Smith drawing out Bauman’s vision says,

The postmodern habitat is not quite what it seems. It conveys the image of being a pleasure park, a consumer’s playground, a place where you can pick-and-mix life-styles and beliefs according to taste. However, it as a pleasure park laid out on a demolition site that is still ‘alive’. Beneath the surface lie the smouldering remains of modernity’s attempt to plan a purposeful society...modernity played around with some very dangerous materials (Smith 1999:159).

The critiques of communitarian discourse provided by these writers still keep alive the discourse of ‘community’. Rose (1997) explored with the community arts workers in Edinburgh how they used communitarian discourse and how they worked their way around its limiting vision. In my research I explore this with the activists and community workers who have stories to tell around inner city Sydney NCs. I am interested in how they have made use of the discourse of community.

## Governmentality and government through community

To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated, regulated, docketed, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, weighed, censored, ordered about...noted, registered, taxed, stamped, measured, valued, patented, licensed, authorized, endorsed, admonished, hampered, reformed, rebuked, arrested. It is to be (on the pretext of the general interest) drilled, held to ransom, exploited, monopolized, extorted, hoaxed, squeezed, robbed; then at the least resistance, at the first word of complaint, repressed, fined, abused, annoyed, followed, bullied, beaten, disarmed, garroted, imprisoned, machine-gunned, judged, condemned, deported, flogged, sold, betrayed, and finally mocked, ridiculed, insulted, dishonored. That's government, that's its justice, that's its morality! (P.J. Proudhon)

Perhaps that was the best and most lasting thing that can be said on government! Indeed the writers who I refer to here seem to have taken on board some understandings from the tradition of anarchism, which Proudhon represents. But in recent work Clifford (2001), Cruickshank (1994), Dean (1999), Dean and Hindess (1998), Foucault (1972, 1977, 1991) and Rose (1999) all draw attention to less obvious technologies of governance. One of these is 'governing through community'. Rose (in a similar way to Bauman earlier) describes governing through community this way:

Community...is itself a *means* of government: its ties, bonds, forces and affiliations are to be celebrated, encouraged, nurtured, shaped and instrumentalized in the hope of enhancing the security of each and of all (Rose 1999:250).

Foucault (1977) has argued that disciplinary mechanisms are now spread beyond institutional enclosures and permeate the whole of society. Clifford (2001) makes it very clear where these disciplinary practices have spread:

Religious groups, moral factions, charity and service organizations such as the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, social organisations ranging from the Boy Scouts to the PTA, counselling and peer groups...have spread disciplinary practices directly into the family, the home, the church the marketplace, to the most scattered areas of social life (2001:107).

Both Rose and Clifford suggest that communities are not 'innocent' alternatives to government and bureaucracy. Community arrangements also inscribe power relations and community organisations are also enmeshed in a set of power relations; meaning they also have the ability to act in coercive ways within those sets of relations.

Rose (1999) argues that 'community' or as some would say the 'the third sector' is an area incorrectly defined as that which is not government, it is mistakenly seen as an area of activity outside of or 'morally better' than bureaucratic management in modern societies. However, particularly in social democratic societies this area of community still needs control and management because the huge economic, social and political entity that community or the third sector represents could not be allowed to run its own course. No government could govern without bringing this area of activity under control. The expression Non Government Organisation (NGO) signals an alternative arrangement to government but in reality many NGO's are simply an extension of governing processes. That which is 'not government' requires control in a way that is not obvious. Whilst some of the methods of governing that Proudhon describes do occur in modern social democratic societies no government would want to be seen using these methods, and the state, for many reasons cannot be seen to be interfering in the 'natural' formations of community and social life.

Rose (1999) argues that the myth of community is supported by the manufacture of a civil sphere or 'civil zone' on society. To create this zone of civil society and economic activity requires a number of conditions. First of all citizens have to be constructed, shaped and even created to participate in this zone; and schooling is one of the first obvious ways that individuals are prepared to engage in 'civil society'. Economists have to create value around social capital and civic society. Community developers have to go about their business of developing communities and this function may be carried out by a number of professional groupings ranging from social workers, welfare workers, and university academics, to church ministries and police. The discourses of empowerment and community development need to be activated to bring people into this zone of activity. There is support from both the right and the left in liberal-democratic societies to create this zone, because both are enamoured of the idea of distance from government. In the countries, which Rose refers to, broadly referred to as Western liberal democracies, 'distance from government' is supported by any number of groups in society ranging from moral right Christian movements to eco-feminist-warriors. The point is that both ends of the political spectrum have a tendency (following on from the powerful communitarian traditions described in the previous section) to define community and community activity as a reaction to and 'better than' the state.

Areas defined as community activity become areas of 'virtue', unchallengeable because community is held out to represent a place of 'courage, ethics, honesty, moral goodness and power', a place beyond state or bureaucratic apparatus. Rose argues that community and empowerment programs have been transformed so that:

Within a rather short period, what began as a language of resistance and critique was transformed, no doubt for the best of motives, into an expert discourse and professional vocation – community is now something to be programmed...’(1999:175).

In other words ‘the community organisation’ developed as part of these technologies of community. Linking this to the analysis of Clifford and Rose, it can be argued that community organisations are no less disciplinary institutions, (in the Foucauldian sense), than any other part of the state apparatus. Clifford (2001) writes that:

The emergence of community as a political category in the latter half of the twentieth Century thus becomes a focus for “management” and all kinds of disciplinary practices (p.111).

In their introduction to a range of ‘Studies in Contemporary Rationalities of Government’ Dean and Hindess (1998) trace the implications of Foucault’s notion of governmentality. They suggest that particular sets of governing relationships need to be problematised. There is no hard and fast rule for government or governing, rather there are ‘assemblages’ of practices and techniques that require close attention if one is to understand how any authority, and state authority in particular, is exercised. In studying government and the operations of the state as the ‘conduct of conduct’ in the sphere of community, they suggest that in Australia carrying out more empirical studies in particular areas is necessary.

In Australia there are no studies particularly focused on community sector activities and locally based community organisations. My research contributes to a body of empirical work that is examining the mechanisms of government through community.

### **Becoming communities and seeking social futures**

In a piece of written correspondence from one of the research participants I was encouraged not to end my own research direction with the story of ‘government through community’. This research participant suggested that to do so would have created another meta-narrative about the history of the NCs. I took this encouragement seriously; it fits a poststructural research approach of opening up rather than closing down a story.

I am not the only one who wants to remain open to what might be emergent. Massey (1993) quotes Adrienne Rich who declared at some stage that she could do nothing more than write

‘notes’ towards a ‘politics of location’, because any other form would seem to have the effect of coming to some conclusion when really the point of the exercise was to keep moving, to keep it all in play, to resist the temptation of saying ‘it is all done’ or ‘this is the conclusion’.

Rose (1997), struggling with what Nancy (1991) meant by Inoperative Community finally decides, ‘It is a space the dimensions of which cannot completely be described, defined, discoursed.’ A quotation from Gertrude Stein appears in the work of Harvey (1993), Massey (1993), Nancy (1991) and is also used by Rose (1997:202) in their attempts to provide some description of ‘place’ – they quote Stein as saying ‘there is no there there!’ Meaning that descriptions of place are in a constant condition of being deferred, unable to be described because the ‘place’ changes as description is added. A similar point also made by Calvino (1972) in his work on *Invisible Cities*. Sandercock (1999) is always looking ‘towards cosmopolis’, and argues that her postmodern utopia is never intended to ‘be’ but she visions that it will contain within it ‘new concepts of social justice, citizenship, community, and the public interest’ (1998:164)

These are all futures where the writers resist filling in the details, yet they all look towards futures.

At the conclusion of his analysis of ‘community’, Rose (1999) turns to the work of Agamben and others who see some radical potential of ‘becoming communities’. These are communities that are ‘becoming’, or to use another phrase they may be found in the ‘whatever’. The ‘whatever’ referring ‘precisely to that which is neither particular nor general, neither individual nor generic’ but whose forms are ‘practically enacted in all those hybridized, queer, subaltern and non-essentialised communities’ whose emphasis is on an ‘ethic of creativity’ (1999:196).

According to Agamben there is not only a becoming community but also a ‘coming politics’ in which community and belonging is still present:

*The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between what-ever singularity and the State organisation. This has nothing to do with the simple affirmation of the social in opposition to the State that has often found expression in the protest movements of recent years...What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong*

without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition) (Agamben 1993:80).

I am not going to attempt any summary of all these images of what might 'become'. But what I am interested in is that Agamben and many others including; Bauman (1998, 2001), Massey (1999) and Sandercock (1998) place some concept of 'community' at a central point in their imagery and their work. I think it is enough that such literature concludes my literature journey. It provides an opening. It is enough also to note, for the moment, that this body of literature provided a language with which I could talk with research participants about the social futures they were imagining. Indeed this is a question I put to all the participants in the last round of semi-structured interviews: I asked what views they had of the social futures? I asked what they thought might be features of the 'becoming communities'? I asked what social futures they imagined might develop out of their community work?

Their varied responses are reported in later chapters. Some of their responses I have written in the chapter called 'identity journeys'; some of the responses to the possible future shape of community work in the chapter 'journeying together', and the 'singular journey' of Chapter Six includes one participants commentary on imagined social futures in a multicultural society.

# CHAPTER THREE

## RESEARCH JOURNEY

Poststructuralists view research as an enactment of power relations; the focus is on the development of a mutual, dialogic production of a multi-voice, multi-centred discourse (Lather 1991b:14).

Carol Lake employs both the place in which she lives and the people who live there as part of the development and articulation of her projected personal identity.... But what most impressed me was Lake's ability to articulate the conditions in which people live in this district without making them the objects of social investigation; to inscribe personal identity in a most public forum without rendering either herself or the community she describes transparent or readily appropriable by the gaze of authority. This appeared to be founded not on an overt theoretical correctness but on a power of geographical imagination... (Revill (1996:118) reflecting on a book of short stories written by Carol Lake "Rosehill: Portraits from a Midlands City", published 1989).

By telling four different stories, as I do in this chapter – a realist story, a critical story, a deconstructive story and a reflexive story (borrowing from Lather 1991a), about my research I am not aiming to get to any single truth or summary statement. Rather, I am adopting the stance described by Usher and Edwards (1994) where reflexivity is seen as a practice and a resource in educational research. This stance enables researchers to 'subject ourselves to critical self-scrutiny' but it also extends beyond the purely personal, by thoroughly inspecting the identity of the researcher and the identity of the research. It is a way of asking, 'what is going on in this research?' (Usher and Edwards 1994:148). MacLure (2003:80) suggests that research narratives and texts can be viewed as 'fabrications', researchers must be prepared to accept that they are imposing their own order and perceptions when 'writing research'. To an extent each of the stories in this chapter are fabricated, not in the sense of the events not being true, but, in the sense that, as the researcher I need to impose some order, to tell some kind of narrative or story which will make sense to those who have not been part of this research.

MacLure, drawing on Derrida's approach to text, also proposes that words 'such as entanglement, knots, weaves and tissues' (2003:127) might more appropriately describe the relationship between researchers' and research subjects or participants. The stories in this chapter acknowledge the entanglements and complexities of research relationships.



Usher and Edwards argue, ‘a piece of research always carries within itself an epistemology’ and, ‘there is always a politics of research’ (Usher and Edwards 1994:149). By the conclusion of this chapter I hope that more of my research politics are apparent.

Using a quote about the work of Carol Lake at the beginning of this chapter signifies something of my own personal ethics or intentions in regard to writing and ‘writing research’. There is recognition of the way in which ‘social investigation’ can create persons as objects rather than active subjects in a range of social process. There is also the recognition that ‘writing’ can be done in a way that subverts the inscription of personal and community identity, that avoids negatively impacting on those persons or communities. The quote points towards the care which needs to be taken not to appropriate the stories of others, and suggests that this care will come not from a ‘theoretical correctness’ but from some other powerful point of reference – the ‘geographical imagination’. I hope that the imagination that I bring to this research as one of ‘journey’ and of ‘journeying with others’ assists in connecting with an ethics, similar to that attributed to Carol Lake.

In terms of this chapter dealing with methodological and epistemological underpinning of the research I think that the question asked by Usher and Edwards remains central; ‘What kind of world or ‘reality’ is being constructed by the questions asked and the methods used?’(1994:148). I have highlighted in earlier chapters that I support the view that there is no pre-existing, objective, knowable social reality to be discovered. Rather, social reality is continually being constructed and re-constructed; further, research and writing research has a part to play in that construction.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The realist story will sound, to a certain extent uncritical and unexamined and perhaps lack the quality of ‘reflexivity’, while the stories following in other sections of the chapter engage critically and reflexively with aspects of the research intervention. This first section attends closely to details of the research intervention, recounting the various stages of the intervention, describing the iterative loops set up in the research as a way of working with the participants in a mutual, reciprocal and dialogical manner. The detailed description of the stages of the research is also mingled with some discussion of methodological tensions and dilemmas – although this perhaps is more in the domain of the critical, deconstructive and reflexive stories about the research that make up the other parts of this chapter.

The first story, the realist story, is then extended, troubled and complicated by the following stories. In this chapter no story stands alone, the reflexive story makes sense only in the context of the details provided in the realist story. The deconstructive story of the research journey challenges assumptions contained in the critical story.

The point of the different stories is to describe the research journey as a complex and layered process but also to provide some 'form' through which the methodology can be discussed. Each story told about the research enables me to make explicit the processes used in the research as well as to develop my story about the methodological underpinnings of the research.

### **A REALIST STORY OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY**

By "realist," I mean those stories which assume a found world, an empirical world knowable through adequate method and theory – (Lather 1991a:128).

The sense of 'real' here is one of logic, sequence and order; movement from one point to another in a pattern that can be justified through reason and repeated if necessary. The sense of the 'real' implies that it is bounded, controlled and manageable. The headings of authorising, broadening and negotiating imply a linear process and support the telling of a realist story as one that is straightforward and unproblematic.

Lather (1991a, 1991b) argues that positivist traditions provide the intellectual framework which demands that stories be told as realist stories. I try to write a realist story about my research, but, inevitably, and consistent with my post-positivist research approach I describe a process that steps out of the positivist traditions; it is as if my intention to step outside of positivist approaches keeps asserting itself even though I try to tell a realist story. Even though I can say that the events in my research happened at certain points in time the research approach I have used complicates a notion of research being a linear process.

## Authorising

In the early stages of the research I met with community workers and co-ordinators from the Inner City Neighbourhood Centres Forum and presented a copy of the draft research proposal lodged with the University Human Research Ethics Committee. I discussed with the current community workers whether the research I was envisaging would be of interest to the organisations they worked for. The community workers involved in that discussion were supportive of the research directions; particularly of the way in which the research might expose the way in which a ‘different game’ is now being played between government and community organisations and the ‘power of language’ in this game. The community workers also wanted a research product that would be of immediate use in their lobbying efforts.

This demonstrates some of the tensions between the institutional requirements for the production of academic research and the requirements of what the meeting participants said would be ‘really useful research’ for the community organisations. Sanguinetti (2000) and Aspland (2003) describe similar tensions in their research. The community workers were seeking some form of advocacy research; something they could use, for example, in immediate negotiations with funding bodies to advocate for particular community needs to be met. Both Aspland (2003) and Sanguinetti (1993, 1997 and 2000) describe the way in which they also had to manage a tension between the immediate needs of those involved in research and a longer-term research trajectory. Sanguinetti points out that the teachers involved in her research were confronted with ‘imperatives’ of ‘self defence’ and ‘survival’. The community workers had similar survival imperatives and presented a long list of immediate threats to their work, their organisations and the communities they worked with.

There is ample documentation of the survival imperatives faced by small community organisations in the current economic and political climate and they include: inadequate funding, increasing pressure on voluntary management committees, increasing costs associated with compliance of new statutory regulations and insurance provisions, and a changed funding environment favouring large organisations<sup>12</sup>

Sanguinetti (2000) described a desire to meet the needs of those participating in her research and I felt a similar response, wondering how I could help meet the needs that this group of community workers expressed. Sanguinetti describes how, to a certain extent, that had the effect of ‘crowding the theoretical focus’ of the research (2000:245). I felt that I had encountered a similar dilemma – I could not respond to all the directions recommended by the

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<sup>12</sup> See Local Community Services Association Incorporated. (2002)

current community workers. I was not in a position to respond to their requests by providing a product or tool for use in lobbying within the short timeframe or the contexts they were suggesting. However, I took up their suggestion that I approach people who had been involved in the organisations for a long time; to hear from them what they think has been going on over the years in the NCs.

### **Broadening**

I was encouraged to circulate my research proposal further to see if there were people involved in the organisations in the past that might be interested in the research questions that I was raising. These key research questions were about empowerment, participation, citizenship, community practices, oppositional knowledges, governmentality and the future shape of community organisation practice.

Historically, these community organisations have been sites of struggle over the nature of ‘community organisation’ - how best to structure community based activity. Rothman and Tropman (1987) argue that community organisations are actually ‘strategies’ that attempt to set up models of alternative social processes. Kenny follows this line of thinking and says that these community-based organisations have consciously gone about establishing ‘organic’ or ‘alternative’ organisational processes as a reaction to centralised and bureaucratic planning (1994:137–146). Kenny notes that this has not always been successful, partly because of the overwhelming power of dominant models of social organisation, and because of the difficulties in replacing hierarchical forms of organisation. The organisations themselves have been sites of struggle within a range of social processes and they are also sites where there has been internal struggle over community organisation practice. The question of who speaks for whom arises in respect to these community organisations. So whom should I speak to about the organisations? Whose story am I going to hear? Whose story will I seek out?

I then contacted a number of people whom the community workers recognised as having valuable and insightful ‘institutional memory’. They were recognised because of the length of their involvement with these NCs, and their commitment to the communities with whom the organisations worked. Initially five people were interested, however, only two were able to continue in an engagement with the research. During the research these two people defined themselves as activists and as seen from Chapter One and Two, and will be evident in following chapters, they took up a very engaged position with the research directions and were in a unique position because of their historical connections to the organisations, to offer a broad view of the history of the organisations based on experience and reflection.

I also contacted people who had worked for these community organisations in the past. I referred to this group initially as ‘past organisational workers’ because they had all been employed in different capacities by these organisations in the past ten or fifteen years. When it came to gaining consent from the organisations for the continuation of the research these past workers were acknowledged as having a valuable contribution in talking about the history of the organisations. This group also has a valuable institutional memory and an ongoing interest in community political processes, but their engagement was seen to be more of a ‘paid community worker’. They had come to work in the organisations after the organisations had been established rather than having the lengthy history of the ‘organisational elders’ who had helped establish the organisations.

In total, seven people indicated their willingness to participate in the research project and signed consent forms, in the terms outlined by the research proposal. In those consent forms they agreed this would be a collaborative investigation, which through conversations and informal interviews would map the discourses that had been circulating around inner city NCs. The Inner City Neighbourhood Centres Forum and community workers endorsed the research directions and three organisations had indicated their willingness to allow me access to their historical records (South Sydney Community Aid, Redfern, the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre Co-operative and the Sydney University Settlement Neighbourhood Centre, Chippendale). Later another two organisations signalled their interest in the research, and provided letters of support (The Harris Centre, Ultimo and Wulla Mulla Family Services, Woolloomooloo). As well the Inner Sydney Regional Council for and Social Development, a regional body providing support for small local community services, provided a letter of support and endorsement for the research directions.

### **Negotiating**

Having secured a research relationship with a number of research participants and organisations and completed the phases that Reason and Rowan (1988) describes in co-operative inquiry as initiation, finding a group and contracting, I began to negotiate how we would operate within the research relationship. The notion of working in a conversational way, concentrating on ‘lived experience’ and exploring stories of practice was accepted but the detailed procedures for doing this required negotiation. I took the view that because of their personal histories these participants were experienced in participating in and shaping research, and probably had their own preferred ways of working.

One group (the organisational elders who renamed themselves activists) asked for a fluid, open-ended approach to their involvement, saying initially that their way of telling stories was ‘anecdotal’ and ‘dialogic’ and that their preferred way of working was to ‘tell stories’. The two activists preferred to work in a form of dialogue that, despite the request for fluidity, took on some very formal dimensions. Some of that formality appeared as a written correspondence. I agreed to provide whatever writing I was doing on the subject for their scrutiny and in turn they provided, often at times, lengthy written response to my material, or key reading material which I also circulated. Where appropriate conversations were taped and transcribed. (I did not use and formal transcription conventions as my intention was not to conduct any form of micro-textual analysis.)

During initial rounds of interviews all the research participants had said they were interested in reading any of the material that I was using in the research as key references. I circulated chapters from the work of Lather (1991a) (because Lather’s work provided some key conceptual resources I was using in the research methodology), Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) (because I was using the concept of ‘adult learning for citizenship’ and wanted participants’ reactions to that framework) and Rose (1999) (because of his poststructural analysis of ‘community’ and use of the concept of ‘governmentality’). Not all the research participants responded directly to this but the two people who feature in the dialogues of Chapter One engaged thoroughly with this material – often sending me pages of handwritten and typed notes which were their reflections and analysis of the ideas contained in the readings. In this way the dialogic conversations were built up. Van Maanen (1997:97-100) suggests that ‘hermeneutic conversations’ are a useful way of uncovering themes and building interpretation in a co-operative way.

The other group (the ‘past organisational workers’ who renamed themselves ‘critical community workers’) were more interested in me presenting a series of questions to which they could respond. This group, however was interested in what others were saying and agreed to the circulation of transcripts from interviews as a way of building up the research and their own understanding of the research directions and materials. Any transcripts were checked by the participants and de-identified before circulation. (Again my method did not require any formal transcription conventions be used.)

The term semi-structured interview does not really convey the manner in which I worked with this group, or the negotiation that preceded and followed the transcribed interviews and meetings. There was an agreement with this group to conduct a series of conversational interviews with focus questions that I prepared, to circulate transcripts amongst the participants

and to possibly meet as a group to discuss the research. This was a lengthy process and included two sets of five conversational interviews and a third interview or final group meeting.

The research process I used here included cycles of data collection, feedback, researcher summaries, interviews, reflection and group-work which were used to build up a picture of organisational cultures, or as Lather describes it I had set up ‘systematic cycles of reflection and critique’ (Lather 1991a:56).

### **A CRITICAL STORY OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY**

By “critical,” I mean those stories which assume underlying determining structures for how power shapes the social world. Such structures are posited as largely invisible to common sense ways of making meaning but visible to those who probe below hegemonic meaning systems to produce counter-hegemonic knowledge (Lather 1991a:128-129).

The dialogues found in Chapter One are replete with clues that these research participants are familiar with critical theory. One of the participant’s talks about structures in terms of the dominance of centralised government in planning process, and talks about the importance of understanding class and feminism to appreciate the dynamics surrounding these community organisations. Another participant, vigorously adopting a counter-hegemonic reading of the history of these community organisations, suggests that alternative ideologies and experiences are embedded in the activities of the organisations, and then proposes a counter-counter-reading that activists and community workers may have in fact been *‘in collusion with ruling classes’* in the way they have operated within these organisations.

In Chapter One I spoke of my immersion in critical theory literature and in Chapter Two explored the relevance of radical and critical adult education traditions to the directions of the research. The other participants at some stage identified themselves as also being part of those critical theory traditions that see power as structural and a shaping force either through a Marxist or feminist analysis of the research material. The desire to produce counter-hegemonic knowledge is an important feature of the research, as well as an intention of the research participants. But how is this counter-hegemonic work done? How can the research act and the research relationships also be read as gesture towards some counter-hegemonic intent? And how achievable is that intent?

One way I thought this could be done would be to use research approaches which would draw on participants own experiences and analysis of the social structures in which they operate. I thought a collaborative research design would assist this and I was influenced by a number of research approaches. One of these was an attachment to the action research approach, which I had used in previous community work projects (Rule 1993). Carr and Kemmis (1986), Kemmis and Taggart (1988) Wadsworth (1991) and Kemmis (1999) describe the importance of initial collaboration being embedded in the research process in action research. Sanguinetti (1993, 1997) worked with this action research model and acknowledges some of the contradictory aims and methodological problems that are encountered in attempts at combining academic research with participatory and action research approaches. Positioning participants as co-researchers and constructors of the research and knowledges that emerge, sits incongruously when research participants are positioned, as Sanguinetti says, 'on the other hand as objects of my study and reporting' (2000:246). I have never viewed this research about inner city NCs as action research but I have borrowed elements of the research design, and especially that of collaboration, from those found in action research approaches.

My previous work history, described in Chapter One, had also sparked my interest in participatory research design. Within the context of post-graduate studies and community work projects, I have been exploring the ways in which participatory research might, an 'ally in opposition' (Mulenga 1994:258) and that participatory research projects are something which might 'speak back' to dominant institutional knowledges and power. With the awareness that participatory research design was in tune with community development and feminist approaches to research (Kenny 1994:206-220, Maguire 1987:10-25), I saw the relevance of this in research around NCs where community development was a stated aim of the organisations and where discourses of feminism circulated. Further, my interest in participatory research design is that it offers some way of working with power in situations where researchers are '...acutely conscious of the inequities, marginalities, and the abuses of power that characterize the world of human beings' (Joyappa and Martin 1996:12).

I carried with me into this research an interest in participatory research. From experience, I had some recognition of the limitations of participatory research; the major one being that these research designs did not always problematise the role of the researcher as someone who is also enacting power in the research processes. Nevertheless as Maguire (1987) argues, participatory research approaches developed as a response to positivist social science research that was promoted as the only form of valid knowing. I remain interested in participatory approaches because of the way in which they can provide a counterpoint to ways of knowing that posit an objective, knowable and consensus driven social reality.



Researchers, who are attempting to work in ways that challenge positivist assumptions, are in an act of ‘stretching away from positivism’ (Lather 1991a,1991b). Post-positivist researchers aim to draw away from a rationalistic and positivist approach, aiming to avoid the pitfalls of an approach which Van Maanen describes in this way:

Much of social science produces forms of knowledge which fixate life by riveting it to the terms and grammar of forms of scientific theorizing that congeal the living meaning out of human living – until life itself has become unrecognisable to itself (1997:17).

Sometimes these other approaches, those that are not positivist, have been labelled alternative research epistemologies (Joyappa and Martin, 1996) or anti-positivist, as in education research methodology manuals compiled by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) or Keeves and Lakomski (1999). However, this implies some overall ‘unity’ in educational research design and method, as argued by Keeves (1998) where the researcher is left to choose from a menu of approaches within that unity. In contemporary times, those assumptions of unity are challenged.

I prefer the image used by Luke who describes research and education practices, not as characterised by a unity but by ‘...pragmatic and contingent decisions’ and that researchers need to be ‘...getting our hands dirty...’ and accepting, at times, the ‘arbitrary’ nature of those decisions (1995:96). Stretching away from positivism, (an expression borrowed from Lather), is not about arriving at some alternative or anti-position. Rather, it is a critical posture – it is a posture that I have adopted as a researcher, rather than a position at which I have arrived.

During the research, participants engaged in a ‘dialectical cycle of research’ (Reason and Hawkins 1988). Participants reflected on their community work, the discourses circulating around the NCs and possible future directions of community organisation practice. The research directions were discussed with the research participants, and this included, at times, a discussion of my own researcher role. As indicated in Chapter One, I remained open to the possibility of changed research directions and I described in Chapter Two, how, at the encouragement of research participants the research interests were extended from governmentality to becoming communities. I did not surrender my researcher ‘power’. Rather, I used whatever power I bought as a researcher to open up a series of ‘dialogic conversations’ (Aspland 2003).

In the research I wanted to act in ways that were supportive of the organisations and in ways that acknowledged the histories of the organisations. From Chapter One it can be seen that

those histories include attempts at setting up co-operative and participatory organisational structures (Kenny 1994). I took the view that it would be supportive of the organisations that are the focus of the research to operate, in ways that were respectful of the traditions of co-operation that are part of the histories of these organisations. This is a statement of an ethical position and it is partly about the methods that are most appropriate to the ‘situational’ (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997:221) dimensions of the research. In other words, my methods have to resonate with those whom I engaged in the research as well as being in sympathy with the organisations that are the focus of the research.

In negotiating with those who agreed to take part in the research, I was mindful of the sentiments represented in the following quote and that research participants entered into the project with an interest in collaboration and co-operative inquiry.

For persons, as autonomous beings, have a moral right to participate in decisions that claim to generate knowledge about them. Such a right...protects them...from being managed and manipulated...the moral principle of respect for persons is most fully honored when power is shared not only in the application...but also in the generation of knowledge...doing research on persons involves an important educational commitment: to provide conditions under which subjects can enhance their capacity for self-determination in acquiring knowledge about the human conditions (Heron, 1981 quoted in Lather 1991a).

The extent to which these interests were met is discussed in the Chapter Seven and I entered this ‘collaborative’ process with recognition of some of the limits and dilemmas of collaborative research practice (see Scheeres and Solomon 2000). MacLure (2003:80-104) raises questions about the ‘othering’ that occurs within qualitative research texts and suggests that all forms of research represents some form of ‘fabrication’ where the extent to which genuine collaboration occurs needs careful consideration.

The activists and critical community workers were interested in the idea of reflection and taking ‘a long hard look at the work they had done and the work of the organisations. The commitment made to the research project both in time and level of input suggested to me that the participants had some sense of ‘getting something back’ and that there was some sense of mutual exploration of a particular topic. The many pages of handwritten notes that had been provided by the activists, the enthusiastic responses to the reading material that I introduced into the research, the fact that participants were interested in and responded to each other’s

ideas, was evidence for me that participants were engaged in research which they felt was reciprocal.

This way of talking about the researcher and research participant relationship is distinct from rationalist and positivist approaches that place emphasis on researcher objectivity and distance from research participants and the focus of inquiry. Cherryholmes (1988) notes that the rules of research validity vary over time and those scientific methods, while still influential no longer prevail in educational and social research. It is accepted now that researchers develop relationships with participants in research, and that there is dialogue around research directions and outcomes. 'Distance' from that which is being researched is no longer considered always a valid approach; in the case of my research it is the 'entanglements' and researched/researcher connections that make the research valid (Smith 1999).

I have described my research as acknowledging from very early stages that accounts of the world are inter-subjective and discursively constructed. In the next section I describe how I continued to work with the research participants using poststructuralism as a theoretical resource which drew participants' attention not only to questions of positioning and political subjectivity, but also allowed the introduction of a different set of questions about these community organisations.

## **A DECONSTRUCTIVE STORY OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY**

My focus in this deconstructive tale is on the ways an intended liberatory pedagogy might function as part of the technology of surveillance and normalization (Lather 1991a:139).

Stronach and MacLure (1997:129), drawing on the work of Lather note that, '...the narratives of educational research...are usually victory narratives'. However, rather than any sense of victory, my research felt like a struggle to create a space for others to tell their own stories. In this section I talk about my own struggle in working with those stories in ways that sit with my ethical stance of valuing the lived experience of the activists and community workers. At the beginning of the research one of the participants said, *'You see 'language' is a problem. It's not always possible to describe the reality...'* another struggle in the research was to remain aware of what language was doing and to trouble the notion that language (and stories, memories and conversations) represent reality.

The use of stories, conversation and giving attention to the 'lived experiences' in research draws upon some of the dimensions of naturalistic inquiry and phenomenological inquiry (Van

Maanen 1997). However poststructuralism does question assumptions within those traditions. In my research something of a ‘methodological pastiche’ (Aspland 2003) emerges but I argue that this is a creative resolution of the dilemmas encountered in any move away from positivist research traditions.

Deconstruction, as I have been using it in my research is more than a ‘game of words’, it is a ‘...project of resistance to the institutionalised forgetting that takes place when matters attain the status of common sense’ (MacLure 2003:179). In this section I tell a deconstructive story of the research and use headings that are reminders that there is no ‘common sense’ when it comes to research methodology. I use headings in this section such as ‘The researcher as a potential coloniser’, and, ‘Exclusions in the research’ as a way of drawing attention to common sense perceptions. Research may claim to be collaborative in design, but to what extent is research colonising of subjects? Research may claim to be inclusive and involve participants, but to what extent does research set up, or reinforce exclusions?

Any research can make truth claims and I want to remain aware of the possible truth claims that I make and the following headings allow me to do that. Am I a potential coloniser of others’ stories? Have I remained aware of the exclusions that operate in my research? Do I genuinely recognise the limits of language and dialogue? Do I focus on practice and discourse? Do I examine how subject positions are created through research? Am I really prepared to accept and admit doubt and ambiguity in my research?

### **The researcher as a potential coloniser**

Like Sanguinetti (2000) and (Aspland 2003), I wanted to shape a piece of research that allowed itself to be transformed as the dialogue amongst the participants, and between me and the research participants evolved. Because of my own personal and professional experiences (see Chapter One) I am interested in the stories and lived experience of these activists and community workers. However working with stories of others, presents many political and philosophical questions that a self-reflexive educational researcher must come to terms with; not the least being, ‘the potential danger that the researcher becomes a colonizer of the subjects through re-telling their stories’ (Garrick 1999:152). Lather (1991a, 1991b) and Smith (1999) also write about the dilemmas in using the stories of ‘others’, the problems of description and interpretation and the ways in which the social relations of the research can, despite all attempts at establishing reciprocal relationships, remain infused with dominating power arrangements.

Lather proposes that the most effective way to ‘interrupt’ these social relations of dominance is by ‘paying full attention to the research process itself’ (1991a:92) and notes that there are no ‘cookbook’ approaches for doing this.

### **Exclusions in the research**

My research begins with the recognition that the organisations that are the focus of this study are contested sites. Some of that contest is alluded to in the Dialogues in Chapter One, where Trevor talks about the ‘*different accounts*’ of the histories of the NCs. They are contested in the sense that different groups of people would describe the organisations differently. A few of these groups could be listed: founding members, management committee members, funding bodies, workers, those who have used the services provided by the organisations, those living in the neighbourhoods and communities who the organisations purport to serve, and, those who have found themselves excluded or disenfranchised from the organisations.

Usher and Edwards (1996:32) and Weedon (1997:12-42) discuss the way that exclusions are set up in research design. I excluded funding bodies, I excluded those who used the services of the organisations and excluded those who might be disenfranchised from the directions of the organisations and might have had an alternative view of the history of the organisations based on this. How do I justify these exclusions?

I accepted that there would not be an objective or overall view of the history or current conditions of these organisations. Workers, managers, community members, funding bodies or service users could tell the story of the organisation from their own subjective view and could tell the story using their own constructed frameworks. I was not interested in getting a range of accounts or constructs about the organisations, what I was needed from a post-positivist research approach were ‘some’ accounts with which to work. Once some accounts of the organisations were provided, then, as the researcher I could begin some deconstructive work with a focus on language, discourse and power. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) refer to the ‘emerging radical view’ which accepts, that in dealing with any social experience, there will never be an ‘objective’ view of that experience. The implication for educational research is that it is possible to work with a limited range of accounts of any social experience or process, but it is the work that is done with these limited accounts that points towards the underlying methodology.

## **The limits of language and dialogue**

Seeking out a small, limited account of organisations is described as a legitimate methodological approach by Garrick (1998:81–100) and Boje (1991, 1995). Garrick and Rhodes (1998), and Rhodes (2000, 2001) describe the ‘heteroglossic organisation’ as one that is told through stories. The heteroglossic organisation is not a social reality but a social construct that is build through storytelling. They argue it is not necessary (or possible) for researchers to engage with all accounts (of an organisation) but in terms of a research method shaped by poststructuralism it is enough to get some accounts or stories about discourses which are circulating within and around organisations (Garrick 1998:162). In relation to research in or about organisations, Rhodes argues that ‘Dialogue is then employed both through formal and informal research to inquire into organizations and human interaction’ (2000:217).

Rhodes says that while there are limits, using dialogue as a research tool has some value:

The notion of dialogue draws our attention to how people construct their knowledge of organizations...It suggests that this construction is based on the interaction of different people and the subjectivities they draw on in defining themselves and the collectives to which they belong...A Bakhtinian approach to dialogue provides a way of understanding the process through which these discursive understandings are constructed (2000:228).

This approach, embedded in a poststructural framework, led me to consider the possibility of setting up ‘dialogic conversations’ as a way in which to proceed with the research. The dialogues presented in Chapter One have, I would argue, dialogic qualities as do some sections found in Chapter Six.

## **Focusing on practice and discourse**

Lather (1991a), Stronach and MacLure (1997), and Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) talk about educational research as being about the construction of narratives. Evers describes it this way:

Research ceases to be a quest for truth, or an attempt to build up a warranted representation of the work, but becomes rather an exercise in story-telling, in producing a narrative, and in giving voice to different viewpoints (1999:270).

Van Maanen (1997) acknowledges that poststructuralism has introduced a new dimension to the way in which personal experience is researched and narrated. I explore the 'lived experience' of those connected with the NCs but not to explicate or uncover (Van Maanen 1997:10-11) the 'meaning' of those lived experiences. I was not searching for any 'essence' in those experiences and did not start from any belief that empirical generalisations could be made from interpreting those experiences. Rather I was aware that I was inviting others into;

...a 'space' for collaborative reflection on the discourses that constitute...subjectivity in particular institutions (Sanguinetti 2000:235).

In this space I was interested in personal conceptions, passions, frameworks, and political and professional identities, but I was also interested in how these subjective experiences were shaped through the discourses around the NCs. My intention was to continue to focus on discourse and stories of practice, to work with the research participants to explore these. Cherryholmes describes discourse and everyday practices in these ways:

... subjects inherit discourses (only by becoming socialized into pre-existing discourses of everyday life does one become a member of a society, culture, or linguistic community). There is little choice about which discourses and practices we inherit; it is much like the choice we have in inheriting parents (1988:115).

Our constructs and discourses are inherited social constructions. Often, however, constructs and discourses of professional and everyday life are accepted with little analysis or criticism (1988:119).

In the research I was in a position to critically examine with the activists and community workers the discourses and everyday practices around the NCs, and also to examine the ways in which these discourses and practices helped shape the various subject positions taken up by the research participants.

### **The research uses discourse but is not a discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis has become accepted as a research tool, although there continues to be some debate as to what exactly should be the focus. Pennycook (2001) identifies the use of discourse in three different forms. He suggests that discourse analysis, following applied linguistics, often extends beyond sentence level or utterances; however, in this approach the analysis remains decontextualised and isolated from important understandings of power. Critical discourse

analysis, the second approach, is an emergent tradition and locates language as a social process. Understandings of social, cultural and political differences are drawn upon but in some parts of this tradition ideology is still seen as that which determines discourse construction. The third approach draws on postmodernism and poststructuralism and privileges discourse over ideology. In this approach interest is focused on the ways in which knowledge, power and practices are constituted.

My research is not a micro-analysis of language. My research recognises that language cannot be separated from the social processes in which it emerges and indeed that language shapes those social processes. But I am more interested in the third approach which gives priority to language as constituting the social reality and recognises that discourses shape what can be written, said and thought within a particular context (McHoul and Grace 1991:13). If I understand that discourse shapes experience and the understandings and actions towards those experiences, then, through my research I am interested in exploring those discourses in which the activists and community workers are located and, also I am interested in the discourses that they actively shape.

MacLure (2003:174-191) explores the 'multiple' meanings of discourse and even though MacLure resists doing so, she makes a distinction between two broad discourse traditions; one being the 'linguistically oriented discourse analysis' and the other being 'poststructuralist notions of discourse'. My research sits within the latter tradition.

### **Subjectivity in the research**

In the initial stages of the research there were a number of methods that could have been used. Biographical research methods (Denzin 1999:92-102) could have been used, a form of narrative inquiry that drew out the individual and social processes of meaning making (see Connelly and Clandinin:1999) could have been pursued, another method using narrative and memory work (Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997:222-227) could have been selected and another emphasis could have been 'storytelling as inquiry' (Reason and Hawkins 1988:79-101). But the overall orientation of my research towards poststructural analysis provides a caution about the transparency of language and calls into question any assumptions about 'truth'. As Usher and Edwards point out, 'Research, in other words, is more than just 'finding out' about a pre-existing world' (1994:153).

Whether stories are constructed through biography, narrative accounts of practice or constructed by memory work and through group work, it is the structuring power of language



which requires investigation from poststructuralism which posits, ‘...a radical suspicion of reason, order and certainty...’ and suggests that ‘Language is never innocent’ (MacLure 2003:180).

Positioning the subject-as-author, from a poststructuralist view introduces a methodological dilemma because subjects themselves are positioned within discourses (see Weedon 1997 and Cherryholmes 1988). Subjects are not necessarily the ‘controlling speaker’ of language (Grosz 1989:18-19). Ball (1990:3) also describes the way in which discourses are ‘structured by assumptions within which any speaker must operate in order to be heard as meaningful’, and from this point of view acceptance of biography, narratives and stories as ‘fact’ is problematic. It suggests rather that biography (and stories) need some critical qualifications within a poststructural framework. ‘Language is not innocent’ nor should biographies and stories of practice be assumed to be transparent.

For these reasons, the research has focused particularly on notions of political subjectivity. In the chapters that follow the narratives and stories of the activists and community workers are reported but they are reported within an exploration of the subject position from which the research participants are speaking. The research participants themselves engage in ‘deconstructing’ their own speaking positions. The research is an exploration of how those subject positions have emerged and also explores how individuals have shaped those subject positions.

### **Continuing doubt as a research stance**

Deconstruction makes the methodological point that there are foundational places neither to start nor to terminate a search for meanings...Deconstruction demonstrates an ever-present instability in meanings of constructs and measurements that structural interpretations obfuscate (Cherryholmes 1988:123).

Some of the research participants were prepared to take up this ‘ever-present instability in meanings’ and use some of the language and concepts associated with poststructuralism and to adopt a posture or strategy of deconstruction in the research process. In later chapters, I trace where this led both the research participants and myself as the researcher.

Garrick describes the ‘paradoxes inherent in interpretive approaches’ (1999:152). One paradox is that subjective accounts of experience are ‘inscribed’ through mapping of discourses and the writing of research. The second paradox is that researchers who are trying to remain aware of

the insights from postmodernism and poststructuralism about power/knowledge often reclaim or continue to claim authority by telling back stories told to them. When I reached the latter stages of the research where in my researcher role I began to inscribe, position and analyse some of the stories told in ‘my thesis’ I found it difficult to keep hold of those deconstructive strategies of ‘dispersion’ and ‘deferral’ of meaning (Cherryhomes 1988:120, following Derrida). Handling the ‘ever-present instability of meanings’ is a difficult task!

Deconstruction rejects the possibility that there is a simple objective knowledge or understanding that can be unearthed in texts. Describing deconstruction as a theory and practice, Norris (1991) begins with the problems that have become evident in structuralism as a method for working with texts and meaning. He draws attention to Derrida’s essays that set out to dismantle the notion that texts are the bearers of truth, able to be perceived because there are underlying stable meanings. Norris refers to Saussure who had exposed this instability of meaning by insisting that the meanings attached to signs are arbitrary and that language will not always reflect the reality it is trying to describe. This bought the awareness that the network of significations and meanings attached to signs are dependent on habitual conditioning and experience. According to Norris, Barthes’ semiology helped to establish the understanding that structuralist method was no longer satisfactory as it could no longer explain all the varieties of language and culture required for the study of signs.

If structuralism supported the notion that there is a truth in texts then:

Deconstruction is avowedly ‘post-structuralist’ in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given or objectively ‘there’ in a text. Above all, it questions the assumptions – that structures of meaning correspond to some deep-laid mental ‘set’ or pattern of mind which determines the limits of ‘intelligibility’...” and further “Deconstruction, on the contrary, starts out by rigorously suspending this assumed correspondence between mind, meaning and the concept of method which claims to unite them (Norris 1991:3).

This understanding is helpful in terms of working with the texts that were produced as part of my research. With the understanding that all texts are an attempt to ascribe a fixed meaning, I can, as many others have, speak of ‘working against’ those texts. So rather than seeking to immobilise meaning, to seek the underlying patterns or come through with some unquestionable ordering of data I tried to follow the philosophic tradition, that Norris argues is best represented through the work of Derrida, which supports examining texts for ‘manifold’ explanations and layers of contradictions. Lather explains the ‘textual staging of knowledge’ is

an attempt to do this and suggests turning ‘...the text into a display and interaction among perspectives’ (1991a:90-92). Lather provides some ‘exemplars’ of how this might be done but they only point the way to what might be possible.

In this chapter I have used one of Lather’s exemplars – the realist, critical, deconstructive and reflexive stories to create a display of different perspectives. The constructed dialogues in Chapter One was also an attempt to shape the thesis ‘text’ in a way that showed an interaction of perspectives. The way that Chapter Five is set out is also an attempt to create, in a spirit of deconstruction, an unusual text (for a thesis): where participant input, my research commentary and the words of theorists would sit on the page in a way that encouraged complex readings, textual relations and an interaction of perspectives.

### **A REFLEXIVE STORY OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY**

In the ‘reflexive tale,’ I use a narrative versus an argumentative rationality...(Lather 1991a:150).

Reflexivity therefore involves ‘finding out about (or researching) ourselves’ but in the sense of recognising our immersion in the historical and the social, the inscription or ‘writing’ of self in the practices, language, discourses and interpretive culture which constitute the practice of research (Usher and Edwards 1994:149).

Input into the final round of conversations with the activists and critical community workers included the circulation of transcripts from the previous eighteen months of interviews and conversations. I also circulated a section of writing from Clifford (2001) on political subjectivity and the construction of ‘activist’ and other ‘resistant’ identities. The work of Clifford, especially pp.122-125, was used to raise questions about the way in which the position of ‘critical’ or radical community worker or local ‘activist’ had been mobilised as part of technologies of community and governing processes in a governmentalised state. Clifford suggests that;

...political subjects emerge in the governmentalised state through a political technology of individuals that is involved in the fabrication of their political identities and that integrates them in the social body (2001:122-123).

Clifford asks also of those who say they are coming from an activist tradition:

Do the movements they put into play end up repeating the same gestures or following the same dictates of the existing rationality? (2001:123).

These ideas challenged the activists and critical community workers to discuss their own identity formations and positions. The research participants found this ‘identity work’ and these ‘identity questions’ engaging. The responses to these form a significant part of the following chapters where I report on this identity work and reflect on how the organisations have shaped particular subject positions and identities. In a sense I was engaging with the research participants in reflexive work and I had another set of questions prepared for them. The set of questions, developed for use in this ‘closure’ stage was not used in a formal way but guided the conversations. I draw attention to the word closure for both the participants and for myself, not because it was the end of the process of engagement, but because it certainly represented an end point in terms of gathering material, which would be written up in this thesis. These were not direct questions that needed an answer; they were questions that provided a basis the participants and myself to continue and ‘conclude’ our dialogue. The questions had clear themes, which the participants addressed – the uses of theory, how language works and how knowledges are generated. The prompt sheet questions were:

- What are the theoretical resources that have been used in your community practice and in the research?
- How has language/s been used and mobilised in your community practices? What have been the shaping effects of language? How has language been shaped in community practices? To encourage discussion about language I used a quotation from Lather ‘The recent linguistic turn in social theory focuses on the power of language to organize our thought and experience’ (1991b:13).
- What knowledges are being produced? Either through the community practices in which you have been involved or in the course of this research?
- How would you position yourself in both your community practices and this research? How do you wish to name yourself?
- What are the comments you want to make on designing social futures and be-coming communities?

In the same way that my questioning encouraged a quality that could be labelled reflexive amongst the research participants, the research participants encouraged me to extend myself in terms of researcher reflexivity. For example at one stage in the research I was confronted with this question...

*But John, whence comes your authority to do the interviews? Isn't that one of the questions any community worker/research/educator wrestles with? – your attempting to validate your authority on what comes out of the interviews – but you are the one who has posed the questions – how are you going to own that?*

In the following chapters I take up this challenge by presenting an interplay of the stories told during the research. I try to create a layered or 'manifold' text that interrupts the authorial position that I take up through the writing of these stories within 'my thesis'. As pointed out by Hodge (1999:113-117) the Phd sits within a system of disciplinarity where at some stage the 'authorial' position is claimed. What I try to do in the chapters that follow is at least to draw attention to the ways in which I use the stories that have been told by the research participants. I try to make transparent how I worked with the research participants, so that I can say I have played a part in the stories they are telling and as a researcher with my own sense of agency I can say that the research process itself has to a certain extent assisting in generating these stories. This is the productive nature of research but I cannot claim these stories are mine and as a researcher I need to take care of the way in which I 'write' these stories. Trying to make transparent my role in that is part of the reflexive story.

To conclude this chapter, I have presented four stories, which are different, yet co-existing contributions that help to explain my research journey and in the process make clear the methodology used in the research. These stories may have jostled against each other, sometimes overlapping, and at times they may not have been absolutely congruent as the stories presented different angles and perspectives on the events in my research journey. Some may seem more powerful, convincing or for whatever reasons simply more interesting. As suggested at the beginning of the chapter I was not aiming to present a journey of 'overt theoretical correctness', rather, through the telling of the four different stories I was aiming to expose some of the entanglements, knots, weaves and tissues that make up my research.

In the next chapter of identity journeys, Chapter Four, there may be a similar sense of stories and narratives overlapping and colliding. As some of the activists and community workers talk about their wishes, desires and their 'everyday practices' that are part of their identity journeys, a sense emerges of a group of people who have travelled together. I work with this in Chapter Five under the heading of 'Journeying Together' where at a textual level I try to make the overlapping and colliding nature of the stories more apparent. In that chapter I hope that the reader can see the stories on the page jostling with and illuminating each other.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## IDENTITY JOURNEYS

The 'I' becomes an 'I' only among a 'we'...(Benhabib 1992:71).

Just now everybody wants to talk about 'identity'. As a keyword in contemporary politics it has taken on so many different connotations... One thing at least is clear - identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. From this angle, the eagerness to talk about identity is symptomatic of the post-modern predicament of contemporary politics (Mercer 1990:43).

The constitution of a political identity for ourselves involves the appropriation of values and beliefs that commit us to certain practices (Clifford 2001:145).

As I suggested in Chapter One the activists and critical community workers were a new kind of political actor emerging out of the inner city politics of the 1960s and 1970s. This chapter explores how that subject formation occurred. What were some of the strategies and techniques the activists and community workers used to invent themselves as new and emergent political actors? Do they still occupy this position? This current chapter is a way of continuing the examination of identities of the activists and community workers that have been constructed through participation in inner city Sydney NC and community politics.

At the last round of meetings and conversations the question of positioning was given explicit focus. One of the questions asked was; how would you position yourself in both your community practices and this research? This was a question about subjectivity and identification, which encouraged critical reflection on the way in which identities and discourses shape what is possible. As argued in previous chapters some of the language and concepts from poststructuralism were productive in the research because it allowed the research participants to examine their own practice from differing viewpoints. The poststructural orientation of the research was productive in that it also encouraged this 'identity work'. This chapter is a record of the discussions and identity work that came through in the research. In Chapter Six a particularly in-depth account provided by one of the research participants about identity is recounted. The last chapter returns to the question of the effects of this identity work – what are the opportunities for reinventing activism and community work, and, activist and community worker identities?

During the research the activists and critical community workers talked about the forces that shaped their identities and their practices. One of the participants saw identity in this way: *'...So you get a bureaucratised community sector. There is no identity of community worker anymore'*. Another participant saw identity this way: *'In a sense we lost it all because.... In the mid eighties we all started focussing on being professional community and welfare workers rather than political activists'*. This chapter explores those identity journeys, not just to explore identities in crisis (Mercer 1990) or to 'concretise' identities claimed, but to explore how identity has been constructed and deployed in activist and community work practice.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides a link between theorists who are interested in identity work and some of the comments of the activists and community workers showing their interest in this 'identity work'. The next section deals specifically with the research participants who described themselves as activists. Enid and Trevor talk about how this identity position 'works' for them, and to the extent that they spend time untangling how the language of activism positions them in a place they do not always want to occupy, they engage in deconstructive work within the research. Carla, Michael, Monica, Sarah and Tevi adopt the position of 'critical community worker'. In the third section they talk about what that 'critical' position involves and talk also about the dilemmas of being positioned as oppositional in their community work practices when that is not how they have wished to be identified. The fourth section, which I have called, 'A complex range of identities for practising place' draws together threads of the identity journeys and suggests that a feature of 'practising place' is the ability to work with changing identities and manage the complexities that involves.

## **WORKING WITH IDENTITY**

In this section I drawn upon a number of theorists who are interested in the ways in which identity work can be activated as part of an education practice and program. Most of the theorists I draw upon are not interested in identity work that is suggestive of essential and immutable subject positions. Rather these theorists are interested in how particular identities can be mobilised in a political project, which questions any notion of essentialised identities.

The NCs have been sites where particular identity formations have been made possible. The identity of 'local community worker' for example, is an identity position made possible because of the emergence of these local community organisations. Clifford (2001) describes local sites

as ‘enunciative modalities’, and, following on from the work of Foucault he is interested in seeing what forms of political subjectivity are activated in different local sites. Enunciative modalities, according to Clifford, ‘...can help us to define and delineate those spaces, or sites, in which individuals fashion their own identity as political subjects’ (Clifford 2001:11).

The community workers quoted above described the importance of being able to occupy a particular site and particular subject positions. Not all the research participants thought those identities had been completely ‘lost’. Some argued that it is possible to re-claim, re-work and re-invent activist and community worker identities.

The subject positions of activist and critical community worker are recent, modern, emergent political identities. The identities of ‘resident activist’, ‘urban activist’, ‘social activist’ and ‘community worker’ have only been constructed (and available) in the last thirty years. Based on my research I suggest these identities have been occupied, or taken up, in the inner city NCs in ways that are distinctive of those sites and certainly shaped by the urban social movements I discussed in Chapter One. The participants in this research have adopted those positions and have mobilised particular discourses from those positions, to do what I have labelled ‘practising place’. Further, being able to mobilise those identities has been an essential part of that practice where place is not just a statement about geographical location but takes on the dimensions of ‘standpoint’, ‘perspective’ and ‘position’. This is similar to the way bell hooks describes ‘the politics of location’:

As a radical standpoint, perspective, position, ‘the politics of location’ necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision (hooks 1991: 145).

In the case of the activists and critical community workers these ‘spaces’ have a specific geographical and locality focus. They are the NCs, the neighbourhoods, the particular suburbs or, the inner city, for the activists and community workers who participated in this research they have definite, if variously defined, geographical dimensions. Zukin (1992:240) argues that some forms of localism and neighbourhood urbanism in modern cities have the effect of creating liminal and ambiguous spaces where, even though there may be significant erosion of the ‘archetypal place-based community’ the loosening of stable identities allows the possibility of the emergence of new identity formations.



I suggest the activists and community workers have been involved in a 'politics of place', in which identity work is a central feature. For a more thorough account of the notion of the 'politics of place' in post-modern times and the usefulness of identity mapping projects see Keith and Pile (1993:1-38). A 'politics of place' and 'politics of location' is also found in the work of Giroux (1992), Rich (1995) and Edwards and Usher (2000). Especially see Rich (1995:23-24, 56-71) who, drawing on the work of feminist poets and writers Audre Lorde and June Jordan, rejects the reduction of politics to a focus only 'government' and parliamentary process. Rich places identity struggles at the centre of politics which she argues must speak from an alternative 'place' and through this challenge current, dominating hegemonic social structures.

In a study referred to in previous chapters Rose (1997) talks about community arts workers in Edinburgh, who were fluent in 'left liberal discourses of community development and empowerment'. They were also critical of those discourses, although interested in how they were activated. They saw their community project work and activities as a place to which their own identities and political positions were bought, and within which they were shaped. Further, Rose reports that those community arts workers were aware (even if this awareness was more apparent through silence rather than what was spoken) that their projects were shaping and effecting the constructions of 'the selves' of those with whom they worked. In my research around the NCs participants indicated a similar awareness, both in terms of the discourses in which they are enmeshed and the way in which identities are shaped by and shape those discourses.

Chapter One recounted a history of the NCs. In that story, there were a number of players in the game of inner city politics and these included developers, bureaucrats and professional planners. Two other subject positions, which had a distinct place within this politics, emerged over that period; these were 'the resident activist' and 'the community development worker'. In Chapter One that story was linked to the story of urban social movements that took various forms in large cities of industrialised countries in the 1960s and 1970s.

Castells (2004), Dirlik (1996), Massey (1993, 1999) and Sandercock (1998) place some form of identity story at the centre of the story of those urban social movements. Sandercock describes these social movements, most visible in inner city environments and politics, as not just promoting a form of 'identity politics' but as moving 'towards a progressive politics of difference'. Sandercock argues that this identity work is really the most important aspect of planning that is sensitive to community, environment and cultural diversity. She develops the

argument that the task is not one of just concentrating on the positives of difference, but of unmasking ‘the social construction of identities’ (1998:123).

The way in which ‘activist’ and ‘community worker’ identities are socially constructed is taken up and explored in this chapter, while the potential for the re-construction of these identities is discussed in the last chapter<sup>13</sup>.

An interest in the construction of identities was also signalled in the dialogues of Chapter One. The identity of a group who were ‘*largely the product of a new public education system [that] had never before been present in Australian society*’ was raised. The identity of ‘*the professional community worker*’ was described as something that required investigation for what it had produced. The role of ‘the activist’ was raised. The possibility of different identities and practices that the discourses of ‘feminism’ and ‘environmentalism’ had made possible was raised. The dialogues contained a description of groups of people who were acting in ‘*opposition to the status quo*’ and this suggested some possibility for exploring the construction of ‘oppositional identities’. In the dialogues there was also reference to a new ‘*tribe of professionals*’ who had emerged in the inner city politics, consisting of teachers, social workers and community workers whose ‘*collusions, ideologies and worldviews*’ required critical examination.

In Chapter Two some of the literature in radical and adult community education was seen to eschew any interest in identity, seeing it as a distraction from the ‘main game’ of structural and social change, for example, Foley (2000), Ledwith (1997) and Newman (1995, 1999). Whereas other education theorists and practitioners place an interest in ‘identity’ at the very centre of adult learning projects, for example Giroux (1992, 1993) hooks (1994), Lather (1991a, 1991b), Luke (1995), Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) and Welton (1995). Clearly my methods, interests and research directions are more aligned with the latter group.

Chapter Two also included some of the debates about communitarianism, governmentality and the way in which ‘community’ has been activated in governing arrangements in social democratic and liberal traditions. These debates summarised by Rose (1999) and described by Clifford (2001) place the process of ‘subjectivization’ and the construction of different political identities at the core of poststructural analysis. An interest in the rationalities of power and government, according to Rose and Clifford leads to an interest in how ‘technologies of

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<sup>13</sup> Chapter One also contained another kind of identity story - I recounted my own personal researcher trajectory. That was story of my own location, of how I identify myself. My identity as a ‘researcher’ was problematised in the previous chapter and I return to that in the last chapter. I mention it here because I think that it supports a reflexive approach within the research – why should I, as a researcher feel that I have the right to turn researcher participant stories into identity stories if I am not prepared, as a researcher, to explore my own subject position/s and identity journey?.

citizenship' and 'technologies of community' shape particular citizen identities. As described in Chapter Three, these were debates explored by the activists and critical community workers. There was discussion about political subjectivity and the question was raised as to whether community work practices may be engaged in 'fixing' identities or 'unworking' identities<sup>14</sup>.

Rose (1999) recognises that there are 'spaces of territorial competition and ethical dispute' that exist outside of conventional power arrangements. In Chapter One in the dialogues the activists claimed that the NCs were set up in an attempt to provide a space that was apart from bureaucracy and state governing arrangements and in a way these new spaces may have encouraged the formation of new subject positions and 'new kinds of political actors'. Rose describes some of these spaces and I argue that the NCs could be included as a space where new kinds of political actors could 'invent themselves':

Within these spaces, it is possible for subjects to distance themselves from the cohesive discourses and strategies of the social state – schooling, public service broadcasting, municipal architecture and the like. They can now access a whole range of resources and techniques of subject formation in order to invent themselves, individually and collectively, as new kinds of political actors (Rose 1999:179).

However, in some ways the activists and critical community workers have been caught in a bind because the social power of those subject positions has changed in recent years and those identities do not exist with the same status and social arrangements as they used to. This was the point being made when the participants talked about the loss that they felt about the identities of community worker and political activist as a result of the power of bureaucracy over community and professionalisation of the community sector. To help understand that 'bind' or tension Bauman is worth quoting because he describes the focus on identity as problematic but also to a certain extent inescapable. Perhaps, any identity construction and construction of community is really an imposition of culture?<sup>15</sup> Bauman describes this interest in identity as 'a paradox':

'Identity', today's talk of the town and the most commonly played game in town, owes the attention it attracts and the passions it begets to being a *surrogate of community*: of that allegedly 'natural home' or that circle that stays warm however cold the winds outside. Neither of the two is available in our rapidly privatised and individualized, fast globalizing world, and for that reason each of the two can be safely, with no fear of

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<sup>14</sup> In Chapter Six there is a particularly rich exploration of identity by one of the research participants.

<sup>15</sup> I raise this question of 'culture' now because it is a line of inquiry that one of the research participants wished to pursue in the research with some vigour. I follow this up in Chapter Five where this participant argues that 'community' and the ways of being that are constructed in community organisation practice are a way of 'taming the wild side'. That community organisations are cultural spaces often set up to accommodate a 'wildness' that is not accommodated anywhere else in modern societies.

practical test, imagined as a cosy shelter of security and confidence and for that reason hotly desired. The paradox, though, is that in order to offer even a modicum of security and so to perform any kind of healing or pain-soothing role, identity must belie its origin...Identity sprouts on the graveyard of community...(Bauman 2001:15).

During the research, participants acknowledged the paradoxical nature of claiming identities and positioning themselves. In the meeting held with the critical community workers towards the end of the research the exchange below occurred. This exchange demonstrates an ambiguous attitude towards claiming positions or identities and also recognises that those acts of positioning occur in a social context that can powerfully dictate, through culture and language the ways that are available to describe the 'self'. This exchange demonstrates an awareness, articulated during the research, that the ability to name oneself is important but also limited by language and social constructs. Identity is not 'free floating' and choices made in defining oneself are not 'unencumbered' (Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant and Yates 2003:53).

Monica: *...I don't know whether I resist being positioned or not. The other day someone described me as an old lefty feminist, and said they liked the fact that I never shift. Now that's probably true because that's where the culture and language probably puts me. That's how the language describes my views on my world and my values.*

Sarah: *It's a labelling thing because in the past I would have labelled myself that way too [left wing, feminist] but I think I have shifted. It's just that the label hasn't changed. The way I think though has changed very much.*

Monica: *The world gives us that same label even though we may have changed.*

Sarah: [agreeing] *Absolutely.*

Chappell *et al.* (2003) see identity work as being an important pedagogical strategy. In their work, identity is understood as a 'narrative' and by attending to narratives and the discursive production of identities there is an opportunity to explore and understand 'the cultural and political contestations over identity' (2003:47). For Chappell *et al.* there is an interest in how these identity narratives can be used as a pedagogical practice in organisational and social change. In the case of my research, with its focus on the stories of those around the NCs, and, interest in notions of empowerment, participation and community practices, the identity narratives of the activists and critical community workers are explored for clues of the future of place oriented activism and community work.

The activists (Enid and Trevor) provided very detailed accounts (some of this was written material), about their life history as activists. They described in detail what they thought it meant to be an activist; they described how it came to be that they took up this subject position and how their own personal histories were a part of that. The issue of identity became part of the conversation with the activists, they explained what they meant by the activist identity and critically examined its effects.

The critical community workers, (Carla, Michael, Monica, Sarah and Tevi<sup>16</sup>) also talked about their own subject positions and identities. Quite often in the transcript data these kinds of statements were found: *'when I was a community worker I operated in this way...'* and *'As a feminist I think...'* and *'...From a structuralist position I see it like this...'*. Other statements included: *'Because I grew up in a working class background...'* and *'My migrant experience leads me to take this view...'*. These identities of community worker, feminist, structuralist and migrant were often put forward as a way of explaining positions and became part of the conversations. It was clear that the community workers saw that their ways of working and their practices were deeply enmeshed with 'who they were' and with their 'identities'.

## **THE 'ACTIVIST' POSITION**

The Dialogues in Chapter One were written after lengthy conversations with two people (Enid and Trevor) who described themselves as activists. The exchange of written material was a feature of the research relationship. Some of this written material was included in chapters Two and Three, and, some of the written material provided by these participants is included in this chapter. As indicated earlier, during the last round of conversations each of the participants was asked how they would position themselves and how they wished to be named in the research. The responses were more specific than just 'activist'. They described themselves in different ways – a 'social activist' (Trevor) and 'urban activist' (Enid). Having adopted those positions Trevor and Enid described, in detail, what they meant by those terms.

Healy (2000) points out that the 'heroic activist'; from a radical feminist poststructural perspective is a deeply gendered construction, which needs to be opened up to multiple identifications. In a way the activist research participants did this 'opening up'. In the sections that follow it becomes clear that the social activist and urban activist do not assume that the

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<sup>16</sup> These were names chosen by the research participants so that I could present them, de-identified in the thesis. They wanted to chose other names because they felt that at times, in the research, they were commenting on the work of organisations with whom they were previously involved and felt more comfortable if their words were to be de-identified. In this and subsequent chapters I use the names they have chosen so the stories presented remain personal and so that links between what participants may have been saying can be made through the chapters.

activist label situates them as, ‘...heroic actors who stand outside the systems of power and speak the truth to them’ (Healy 2000:135 following on from Foucault).

Rather, the activists in this research describe what they have done in the course of their ‘daily practices’ and find that the activist label is applied to them, often because in these daily practices they are positioned as challenging power relationships and the label of ‘activist’ is a way of discrediting their ‘daily practices’ and actions. The labelling often came from those who ‘speak with power’, as a deliberate strategy to position their (the activists) actions in a marginal place. Moreover, the social activist and urban activist do not describe their actions as ‘heroic’. As one of them explains, the only thing that they did, was to ‘*contest authority*’ and this placed them in a contrary position to ‘authority’ and led them to be constructed in negative and pejorative ways by those who are positioned with institutional authority. They acknowledge they are not completely in control of their own naming, or the identity positions, quite often that identity position is forced upon them by the social structures in which they operate.

### **Trevor’s story of the ‘social activist’ position**

Trevor described what he means by social activism. The set of notes was provided at one time and he clearly intended it to be read as a ‘whole’; the story is cohesive in a way that I do not want to disrupt or lessen the power of the story by breaking the text into smaller parts. The text that follows is the way that Trevor described what it means to be a social activist. The typed notes are re-presented below with minimal editing.

Quite contrary to any notion of ‘heroic activism’, Trevor, the social activist, suggests that the subject position of the activist is an inevitable place to be situated if one is to engage with ‘authority’ in particular forms. It is a place where people are often positioned when they make an attempt to shift systems of power. Because ‘difference’ and ‘authenticity’ are often denied in social processes, this forces those who are different, or who act with authenticity, into a contest with those who try to deny differences and ‘struggles for freedom’. Trevor tells his story of the experience of being positioned as an activist and dissenter. But he also explains that simply acting in a non-conforming way in the public arena is often enough to be positioned as an activist and dissenter (a ‘*no-sayer*’, ‘*non-respecter*’, ‘*terrorist*’ etc...). Trevor recognises that these positions are constructed in a particular discursive field. However, he argues that it is by recognising the way that that construction occurs, that is by deconstruction that leads to the possibility of continual re-construction and re-enlivening of the social activist position. Trevor remains hopeful that acting with ‘*authenticity*’ can continue even though, as described below, social activists may be threatened by violence.

Trevor wrote -

*The way I want to do this [say what it means to be a social activist] is by telling a story, or at least beginning with a story.*

*It's a story of the .....City Council moving to suppress/control dissent. When I go to Council meeting these days, I see security guards outside the building, access is tightly controlled via a lift that gives access only to the meeting room area, if I want to speak to a matter before the council I must sign a register in which I must declare whether I support or am against the matter, I am limited to 3 minutes speaking, that time being controlled by a timed clock with alarms. There is little evidence of spontaneous speech, little evidence of participation from the public that is not rigorously controlled. About 6 years ago there was a bombing of the front doors and vestibule of the council building, while a council meeting was on. About two years after the bombing two detectives came to my home to ask me questions about the bombing, about things I'd said in the local paper, about whether I knew certain people. I denied the bombing, I had no knowledge of it other than it happened...*

*What had I done? What had we done? We had disrupted council meetings We had caused Council meetings to be adjourned by having a sit-in. We had protest meetings outside the council headquarters building. We had called public meetings. We had boycotted events organised the council. We had taken the council to the Land and environment court. We had not respected their authority. We had openly contested their authority.*

*My being interviewed by the detectives situated me/placed me where terror, interrogation and surveillance are used against a citizen who actively contests authority.*

*In this story can be seen how I have been constructed as a dissenter, as a no-sayer. Also constructed as a person of violence. Constructed as a non-respecter of the ways things are done. Constructed as a non-respecter of titles. Constructed as a savage, wild, a terrorist.*

*Those images constructed about me would surprise many people who know me. Where is the truth?*

*Another image constructs me as an environmental activist. Which might suggest any number of visions, including one of me sitting in front of bulldozers. That group of people with whom I have been most active for the last 12 years is called/constructed as an environmental group. That is misleading. It is a site of resistance, of liberation, of dissent an alternative structure to the dominant structures, a new paradigm, prefiguring ways by which people can live and can act collectively.*

*For me to talk about being an activist, about community work or community action means to say these things:*

- 1) having an intent to act collectively in the midst of and focussing on the collectivities that do arise and which might arise within our society, these being the sites where society/social beings are shaped*
- 2) deconstructing the social shaping/the social conditioning or identity making which takes place – particularly exposing the apparentness of that social shaping i.e. it is not natural, not essential, and passes away – which embraces calling into question all assumed authorities and titles, including my own – particularly calling into question the corruptness of the social shaping*
- 3) saying “yes” to alternative social identities – this is the act of dissent – it is made out to be “no-saying” but that is the language of the Master – it is actually “yes saying” for those with the ears to hear – it is about maintaining the alternative identities – a process of continual coming out, a continual affirmation*
- 4) doing some work together – a project – preferably some work which is sweaty, requiring great effort and attention, and demanding that we work together.*

*I’ll speak briefly about what this means in being an activist. It’s to do with the collective work I’ve mentioned above. I suppose we can talk about being a dissenter in private, although I really think to talk in that way is to talk nonsense. What I’m saying is that to be a dissenter is to also be a contesteer i.e. to be public, to be out. What brings me into being a dissenter also brings me into being a contesteer – what we call an activist. What brings about or triggers me into being a social activist is not my desire to colonise those I’m said to dissent from, not my desire to impose on those people a compliance for themselves with my alternative – no, what brings me into the arena of contest is when I experience the acts/utterances of these other people as not respecting me as I am, and desiring to conform me and my world from as it is, to what they want it to be. It is when my difference, my authenticity, is denied.*



*I can live with authenticity, either mine or others. To do so is to live with real dissent i.e. the sort of dissent, which necessarily emerges from the struggle to live with the reality as it is. This I can respect. This is a privilege to stand at the place of dissent because in so doing I am permitted to witness and take part in the struggle for freedom.*

*What I have great difficulty in living with is what I call pseudo-dissent – that which emerges from not living with the reality as it is. Pseudo-dissent means other words such as humbug, pretending. Pseudo-dissent is really about control and power. It isn't about letting difference be as it is but is about having things under control. It comes out of a posture of not listening. When I truly listen and speak my truth in the midst of others who also struggle like me to truly listen and speak their truth, then there is no contest. There is letting be as it is. But as soon as the listening and the uttering of the words is for the purpose of not letting be as it is, then I must contest what is happening, because what is happening is the stopping of the difference from being visible and heard.*

*So the community work I'm involved in has arisen to contest those acts which aren't authentic utterances, but are uttered for the purpose of not respecting the difference and conforming the difference to the desire of the utterer.*

*How do I know what are those things to be contested, dissented from? How can I be sure? Might I not be grossly arrogant in claiming this knowledge? Mightn't I be deluded? Certainly I may be arrogant and deluded. What I lay claim to is the certain knowledge of violence being done to me. And when others give witness to experiencing the same violence, then I am doubly sure. I'm talking of those acts, which deny my personhood – they are acts of violence. I know them in my body.*

Trevor suggested that one of the roles of activism is that of 'deconstructing' the social shaping, conditioning and identity making that takes place, and, of seeking out and saying 'yes' to emergent social identities which often means acting in non-compliant ways in the social arena. According to Trevor, in assuming the social activist stance, as an authentic expression in struggling with power, social activists are made vulnerable because the authentic difference of those who dissent is denied. This authentic difference cannot be tolerated and attempts to eliminate this authentic difference are often backed by the threat of physical violence that is endorsed, or at least sanctioned, by powerful institutions. Trevor says that the awareness of these social processes is understood through the 'body'. In a way that calls to mind Foucault's explanation of the ways in which the materiality of power operates on the bodies of individuals,

(see also Clifford 2001) Trevor says of these experiences and knowledges; *'I know them in my body'*.

### **Enid's story of the 'urban activist' position**

Enid, called herself the 'urban activist'. Transcript material is drawn upon in this section to show what Enid meant by that expression or position.

In considering the ways that political subjectivities emerge in 'the governmentalized state' Clifford (2001) draws attention to the political subject of 'the activist'. He is interested in the figure of the activist, because of the potential of this subject position. As he describes it, the subject position of the activist, which exists within the 'interplay of discourse, power and subjectivation', has radical potential because '...we cannot...underestimate the effect of even a single political subject on the experience of the social body as a whole' (Clifford 2001:123). However, Clifford cautions that these individuals must not be seen as an expression of 'will' or 'spirit', and that, '...we must resist the romance of resistance we all too easily attach to certain dynamic and charismatic individuals' (p.124).

(This is similar to the way in which Healey (2000) makes problematic the position of 'the heroic activist'. It is also similar to the way in which MacLure (2003:119-132) cautions against unqualified acceptance of 'life-history methods' in research because of the assumptions that are built in about 'true self' and 'authentic voice'.)

Clifford proposes a series of question that could be asked of the political subject 'activist' which would trouble the subject position that is either adopted or given to that individual. I raised these questions with Enid as part of our dialogical conversations. The questions were not raised with Enid as a way of challenging her story but of further exploring her story through exploring the identity of 'urban activist'. The story that follows is partly a response to the questions raised by Clifford which I brought to Enid's attention. Clifford's question is:

... through what process of integration are political subjects bound to their projects? We have to ask with the activist...does their resistance end up being reintegrated into the basic social structure without upsetting the balance? Do the movements they put into play [the activists] end up following the same dictates of the existing rationality? (2001:123-124).

Enid considered the question (from Clifford) about activism, resistance identities, the reintegration of resistant acts into the social structure and what effects 'existing rationalities' might have on activist work. She gave this reply -

*There was a lot of activity going on in the seventies and there were a lot of people who might not have called themselves an activist although it [activism] was certainly there. There was another expression - urban guerrilla - I liked that one. That idea of the urban guerrilla...how can I say... it so shocked a lot of people including the bureaucracy, but not all of the bureaucrats because after all, these 'guerrillas' often became part of the establishment. So that it [the activist position] may well be a mythic position but it was certainly there.*

*I have great faith in that that word [activism] does come up. I've experienced it myself. It really represents the change that occurred in Australian society from people who were prepared to go out and have a go - the public demonstrations. The demanding baby boomer group who were busy fighting about the Vietnam War, they were extremely aggressive people and rightly so. Many of us were part of that, perhaps not so violent as some, and also the environmental movement. They were the two most important [activist] movements.*

*And at that time in our inner city the big thing was that the older suburbs were part of a town planning process that was about the demolition and slum clearance... that policy had been around for many years. And Northcott [a housing department site in Surry Hills] was created as part of that policy. When asking the building labourers to come in [reference to the Green Bans of the 1970s], everything there was aggression. Aggression against outmoded ideas, but that was the only way in which we could get through.*

*They [state government and developers] were hell bound on the demolition and slum clearance. The other thing about Sydney was that there was a terrible shortage of housing. The idea was that as the terraces were pulled down, high-rise could be put up and everyone would have a lovely nice clean place and would be glad and very grateful. But when it came to the actual rehousing the thing is it had to house over a thousand families. A tiny fraction of the locals were rehoused and others were encouraged to move out.*

*The whole idea of integration of shopping, childcare, sporting facilities came in and that was a new concept on town planning for Australia as a whole...we were able to get some ideas around housing and communities and to try and get government to listen.*

*As much as anything it was about keeping some of the best things that the old slums had to offer. And they did have some good things but it had disintegrated. There were very few of the old timer Surry Hills people left. All these things were happening and of course it came back to new technologies because of course we were looking at high-rise and so on. It's only of course since, through experience, that we've learnt that it's not always the best way to go.*

*In the rehabilitation of the inner city, Surry Hills was an excellent example. The question was: Was there anything of that social body that was left that was worth working on? That caused a lot of down to earth talks between people!*

*I used to say, "Look Surry Hills has more child facilities than anywhere else in Sydney but somehow it's not integrated enough and specifically the migrants are not using the services". So that's what I took an interest in.*

*If I can add this...from my experience...there's a feeling, an idea, both with migrant people, (remembering that Surry Hills was 70 percent migrant), and because of language and other reasons with the older citizens...there was the idea that I heard repeated so often - 'this is the way it's always been', 'it's always been like that' or 'it's been good enough for us'. And I would say; 'But it could be better you know; it could be better!' And the problem was people didn't really know how you got to that point where it could be better. The question was; where was the energy going to come from, the know-all required to get a better deal?*

*The example we used all the time was the trucks trundling through here. And the trucks were a real menace, because the streets were still be used by all the children we had here, the streets were used as playgrounds. 'No' we said, 'we can get rid of the trucks, not all of them' but we said, 'we could get rid of the dangerous ones' and so we set out to do that. And that's the way, which I worked personally, together with other activists.*

*You know, you have to explain to people 'you don't have to put up with it', that's the first thing. And I can give lots of examples. 'It's always been like that', is the existing rationality that the activists have had to approach. I think it is one of the most difficult*

*things working at local level, you hear people say - 'It's been like that and that's the way we like it'. It takes a skilled person or a lot of activists and guerrillas to come in and say; 'look this is a way of doing it' ... and they still get howled down often. We were often howled down, especially about transport but we had to stay and convince them that this would be an improvement.*

This story, like that of Trevor's, is about contesting authority. The position of activist is not just seen to be one position, within it there are different roles being played. In the story above Enid plays one role negotiating with government and bureaucracies and another when working with members of the local community.

Enid describes the shaping of the activist identity as arising out of engagement in social processes and political discourses. This is similar to what is argued by Mouffe (2000:95) that conceptions of the subject and citizens cannot be 'abstracted from social power relations, language, culture and the whole set of practices that make agency possible.'

To conclude this section on the activist identity it is possible to say that for both Trevor, the social activist, and Enid, the urban activist their identification with those positions has happened through positions adopted in a variety of political contests. Clearly both Trevor and Enid see themselves as contesting authority, both describe how they were positioned as aggressive, or, to gain attention they had to adopt an aggressive or oppositional posture. Rutherford (1990) describes identity construction as a search for some kind of personal coherence. Rutherford uses the image of identity as a 'home'; that is place where people 'speak from'. The identity work above does not support this way of understanding identity - the activists have not suggested that the activist identity provides any support or the kind of comfort that the image of a home sets up. Perhaps the stories above have more in common with the kind of ethical citizenship and identity practices described by Watney (1990) which have at their core a '... refusal of both the values of capitalism and the institutions of parliamentarianism as it is currently practiced and understood' (p.159).

For the activists, those identity positions of social activist and urban activist have been more closely aligned with a 'practice of freedom' (Watney:1990) than an interest in shaping identity for identity's sake, (which was the criticism that Bauman (2004) makes of identity games). My aim in this section has not been to interpret what the activists have said about their identities but to show that they think this 'identity work' is an important part of their practice. This is an argument I have developed in the thesis that a feature of practising place, is the ability to work

with different identities but to work in such a way that opens up different and varied identity formations rather than having the effect of ‘fixing’, ‘stabilising’ or ‘concretising’ identities.

## THE ‘CRITICAL COMMUNITY WORKER’ POSITION

Subjectification is a process of self-formation in which individuals construct an identity for themselves through an appropriation of certain values, practices, regimens and modes of comportment. This “technology of the self” is a matter of establishing a relation of self with self that involves defining a realm of (moral) concern and determining how one ought to relate to the objects of this concern (Clifford 2001:99-100).

In the conversations and semi structured interviews the community workers often said that the motivation for their actions came from a desire to bring about some form of social change. The community workers had a clear sense of agency. They described their attempts to intervene and try to shape social arrangements in a way that re-arranged power structures. If it was not to bring about something as structural as social change then, at least, to work in ways that would see some ‘justice’ and ‘equity’ introduced into social arrangements where structural inequalities and various forms of discrimination were apparent, or at least described by these community worker as being apparent to them<sup>17</sup>. These desires to bring about change are an important part of the identity of the community workers. In talking with them, recognising their powerful sense of agency, and hearing their descriptions of what they set out to do, and what they hoped to achieve, I was reminded of the description that used by Weedon about, ‘conscious thinking subjects’ who are attempting to give some ‘meaning to the material social relations’ (Weedon, 1997:26) in which they find themselves. Weedon goes on to say, that the ability to live like this depends on the ability to access ‘social power’ and discourses that have some political strength. The community workers talked often about trying to achieve that political strength.

The community workers talked about what they set out to do, what they intended in their community work practices. They describe their work as existing within a mesh of political discourses and power relationships. They analyse the operation of power and how it manifests at a local level. Quotes demonstrating this are set out below. They talk about different levels of government, the communities, developers, funding processes and their own interventions to balance or rebalance power. The community workers are suspicious of power used by bureaucracies or the private economic interests of developers. They describe political and personal decisions they made along the way. They talked in detail about the forms of community practices they wanted to enact. They talk about using ‘institutional power’ and the

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<sup>17</sup> These attempts at redressing inequalities are dealt with in more detail in Chapter Five.

possibilities of 'direct action' when other forms of intervention are failing. They talk about their desires for 'social justice' and 'equality' and their understandings of the methods by which this might be achieved. There is a focus on political strength and how that is best achieved.

As with the community arts workers interviewed by Rose (1997) the community workers involved in this research have a 'left liberal literacy' and a suspicion of the hegemonic practices that they see as present in contemporary Australian society.

Below is material from the transcripts where the community workers talk about what they were doing and through this a picture develops of how the community workers understand their various identities.

Carla: *I think it's more about what we were really doing was trying to predict the future... You know I think what really goes on is looking at what the funding bodies want to fund and assessing what you really need funding for and trying to match that need to what's available and try to satisfy both sides. And so I think that what we were really doing was about trying to predict the future in a way.*

Sarah: *Well I guess we thought we were about opposition. But I suspect we were probably partly about social control. That's my take on it now looking back at that time. At the time I thought that what we were doing was empowering people on the estate by informing them about what was really happening ...*

Michael: *I was certainly attracted to the community sector ten or twenty years ago, because of the range of activities, the nature of the strategies they were using, those commitments to inclusive processes...it was personally empowering and politically empowering. Those social movements at the time, whether you look at issues around gender or race or environmentalism and the questioning of social order in the early and mid seventies, I then found the community sector in the period that I first saw it in the eighties as being a field where those policies came into practice, ...yeah that's why I was first drawn to that because of some of those values. And also just seeing it as a particularly interesting area from a sort of social cultural perspective, as a particularly creative and interesting area.*

*...And I always took that to mean that, yes, use institutional knowledge and practices and authority where you can, but when given the objectives, your activities, then using*

*powers operating outside existing systems, may be necessary. And I took that as meaning forms of more direct action.*

Sarah: *Well we were trying to change things. I mean we were trying to make things better for those people. We thought we knew what would be better for those people. And we wanted there to be more justice. You know we wanted there to be more equality, that's what it was all about. We started off by talking about equality for women and that then made us realise, or certainly made me realise that it wasn't just women who weren't equal but there were a whole lot of people who weren't equal.*

Tevi: *Being the meat in the sandwich. That's what it felt like...I was trying to get the best outcome I could for the communities, sometimes I don't think that was actually right. But it was the best possible outcome. So trying to mediate between community expectations and what developers, governments, organisations wanted to do. Your personal political views quite often need to be set aside and so that's why the meat in the sandwich sort of thing.*

The community workers, like the activists were also narrating their identities. They were describing how their sense of 'self' both shaped the work in which they were involved and how they were in turn shaped by those experiences and practices<sup>18</sup>. While there were doubts expressed<sup>19</sup> (in the quotes above anyway) about what was actually achieved through these practices there is a clear sense of how these community workers saw themselves – they saw themselves as 'oppositional', 'committed to inclusive processes' 'questioning of the social order', 'trying to change things politically' and 'mediating' between communities, developers, government and other organisations.

### **The community workers call themselves 'critical'**

The last round of conversations set up a space for the past community workers to talk about positioning and identities. They were asked: *How would you position yourself in both your community practices and this research? How do you wish to name yourself?* This question emerged partly out the material that had been circulated in the chapter from Rose (1999:167-196) that talks about the shaping of communities and political subjectivities. But the question

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<sup>18</sup> This is similar to the social constructivist view of identity described by Stokes (1997), Archer (1997) and also similar to the way in which Benhabib (1972:73) talks about the 'constitutive attachments' which help individuals construct and define their identities.

<sup>19</sup> In the next chapter some of these doubts appear in discussions about the professionalisation of community workers and discussions about whether community work practices were empowering or were effectively some form of social control.



emerged also, because of my realisation that the ‘identity stories’ had become an interesting feature of the research and a way of exploring discourses around the inner city NCs. There seemed to be a unique opportunity to engage in some reflection on the social construction of identities and their effects.

These were some of the responses from the community workers that have led to the labelling of them within this research as ‘critical community workers’.

Carla: *What I do is I try to publish critical material.*

Carla, whose interest was largely in the area of editing, publishing and producing community print and radio, describes critical practice not just as a theoretical perspective but something that is useful only if there is some kind of outcome or product that challenges the status quo. This statement was made with some sense of pride suggesting that ‘critical’ material is some kind of antidote to mainstream media. Carla argued that theory often confused practice but Carla also maintained throughout the conversations a feminist and structural analysis of inequality and society throughout the conversations.

Sarah: *What I would name myself as - is a critical thinker. That's where I would position myself. I'm constantly aware that other people don't read between the lines. Other teachers I meet now don't read between the lines...that's why I go back to the radical feminist lesbian label...I think that's where I learnt a large part and I still hold that very much to myself. But the bottom line is being able to be critical, whatever the theory - economic rationalism or socialism - being able to look through it and question it. You know, wonder about it.*

In this instance Sarah, who moved from community work into teaching, appears to be claiming the importance of identities such as ‘radical’, ‘feminist’ and ‘lesbian’ because of an attachment to those labels. The attachment is to the experiences of learning that took place, as those identities were foregrounded, mobilised and explored. But the ability to ‘think critically’ and ‘be critical’ seems to surround the statement about the labels. For Sarah maintaining identity as a critical thinker seems to be the important identity. And Sarah also describes that critical facility as meaning the ability to ‘look through’, ‘question’ and ‘wonder about’ any theory or ideology which is presented as truthful or self-evident.

Monica: *These days I would consider myself to be much more a globalist. I've become much more interested in how things impact at a local level influenced by the*

*powers that be. And I think the current globalisation process which is probably much more about postmodern theory is in the end that which actually affects our ability to achieve things at a whole lot of levels and I'm aware of that more and more.*

Whilst Monica did not use the word 'critical' as part of her identity story, the critical perspective is certainly shown through the way in which discourses of globalisation and postmodernism are deployed. The position of 'globalist' is taken up and this is directly linked with an analysis of power and the effects of power at a local level; this is in fact a critical analysis of the operation of power. It has within it an implied critique of capitalism and accommodates a critical perspective. Monica also talked about feminism as being a significant part of her theoretical framework.

Michael: *I think my considerations about my practice they have been given some additional tools – postmodernist and poststructuralist considerations. To go back to previous comments: What does it mean to be a community worker? What does it mean to work in the community sector?*

*In the later 1980s and early 1990s what I saw was the Marxist/feminist analysis being applied to practice at that time. But the concept of positioning, as I understand it gives me much greater freedom to describe how I am and who I am in the situations in which I find myself. And how I can look at other issues and how I can look at those other constraining structures.*

*It works at personal work perspective because I don't simply place myself at one spot in that power structure and don't simply see myself as having this amount of power to use. I think those different positions provide me with different ways of putting those building blocks together.*

Michael uses the concepts of 'positioning' and 'identity' in an affirming way. Perhaps not in a comforting way, but affirming in the sense that identity work and positioning might be 'useful tools' to examine practice within what continue to be 'constraining structures'. Michael recognises some kinds of 'limits to freedom' but describes identity work and the ability to examine different subject positions as helping to come to answer the question – what does it mean to be a community worker? Power is described by Michael in the sense that Foucault has described it as 'capillary' in form. He is also clear about the provisional nature of placing himself – it is not just about being 'at one spot'. Again Michael does not use the word critical to describe himself but the critical traditions of Marxism and feminism, as well as the reference to

structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism indicate that he has adopted as part of his practice and identity a critical approach or method.

Tevi: *I'm actually a critical observer. The experiences in community work made me a critical observer and sceptical. That scepticism is born from being a past worker with experiences. You know, it has to be, a certain level of scepticism will be there as a result of those past experiences.*

*Yeah there are different stages in how you position yourself. You know community activists – their life cycle. Because, I guess in terms of how I'd position myself now, I use the word sceptical. A few years ago I might have said burnt out, but now it's more sceptical... But, and, it's also a grateful position. That I've had all those experiences and have a little hindsight and a level of understanding how those processes worked within community and government. Which makes me sceptical. So, that's a wonderful circle. So it's not some place, it's like a full circle.*

*In the first set of discussions, we talked to the past. But you've also engaged us in discussions about what happens today and our understandings today. So the past doesn't seem quite right because current practice is linked. In a sense it was appropriate for you to call us past organisational actors but thinking about where I'm placed now it's not. It's not past for any of us, it's still with us.*

Again Tevi also takes up a position that engages with critical perspectives and describes herself as a 'critical observer'. There is a slight shift in substituting the word 'sceptical' for critical but the use of the word seems similar in that it is a position adopted when engaging in oppositional ways in community and government political processes. Tevi seems to celebrate the knowledges developed from those experiences – even though it is not an easy or comfortable knowledge – it makes one sceptical. Like Carla, Sarah, Monica and Michael, Tevi also resists being positioned in one particular place. Tevi uses the image of a 'circle' or 'cycle' to explain the different positions taken up at different times. This encompassing, circular imagery is also used to narrate the sense of past work and past experiences as still being present and informing current practice – 'it's still with us'.

This group of people see themselves as having a 'critical awareness' in the sense of having critical theory orientation in their analysis of society and social structures. As a group they are familiar and identify strongly with feminist and socialist traditions. They see themselves as active (although not always 'successful') in engaging in political processes and working with

power. And some are curious about the ways in which poststructural and postmodern analysis might assist in reflecting on practice and practice directions. Whilst, for some, they no longer operate in the field of local community work they were interested in using the research space as a chance to reflect on that experience.

### **A COMPLEX RANGE OF IDENTITIES FOR PRACTISING PLACE**

The social activist Trevor talked about the '*apparentness*' of identity making and social shaping; and also challenged the notion that social identities, as are 'natural, essential or fixed'. Trevor argued that '*titles*', and whatever authority may come with titles, are in some sense '*corrupt*' because they imply something solid and real, when in fact they are not. Both the title and assumed authority are '*corrupted*' because they are not a truth. They are a language construct used at a particular moment in time that comes out of the social shaping process of that particular moment. Because they apply for one moment in time (or one place), does not mean that they necessarily apply for all other moments in time (or all other places). In fact Trevor describes identities and titles as all, inevitably, '*passing away*'. This is a clear statement from one of the research participants about the provisional and complex nature of identities.

Trevor describes the way in which alternative social identities (*'the shaping of which is an act of dissent'*) are in '*a process of continual coming out, a continual affirmation*'. Again identity is not seen as something essential or natural, it is something that is 'performed'. There is a dearth of writing from poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives that talk about the performance of identity and the provisional and multiple natures of identities. What interested me was the way in which the research participants also recognised and worked actively with the provisional and 'performative' nature of identity.

The story from the urban activist, Enid who talks about the way in which the image/identity of '*the urban guerrilla*' was mobilised as a shock tactic also recognises the fluid nature of taking up identities. One moment a person has the identity of an '*urban guerrilla*' fighting with developers and the next moment that very same person becomes '*part of the establishment*', a member of the bureaucracy, perhaps trying to achieve the same outcomes in those contexts. Enid also talks about the way in which '*aggressive*' positions had to be adopted in negotiations with bureaucracies or developers but the people taking that stance were not inherently or 'essentially' aggressive. It was a position, an identity, or way of being adopted at a particular moment, and jettisoned when it no longer served any purpose. The story from the Enid also recognises that contradictory positions and identities can be, and necessarily need to be, taken up in activist work. The critical community workers also describe a certain kind of flexibility in

how they position themselves. On the one hand *'globalist'*, on the other hand interested in *'the local'*. On the one hand using a *'structural perspective'*, on the other hand taking up some of the *'insights from poststructuralism'*. On the one hand claiming the title of *'lefty feminist'*, on the other hand saying that is how they are labelled and not necessarily who they are. On the one hand saying they are in a particular *'place'* but on the other hand saying that this is not a stationary position and is *'a position within a full circle'*.

The expression *'multiple and shifting identities'* is found with regularity in writing from postmodern and poststructural perspectives and it is precisely this *'shopping mall'* approach to identity construction that Bauman finds so troubling. Almost to the point that he wonders whether there is any possibility of finding some ethical framework underlying *'A life dedicated to the search for identity'* which is also a life *'full of sound and fury'* (Bauman 2001:15-16, 78). I suggest that a framework of *'practising place'* is a way around the nihilistic relativism that Bauman, quite rightly, fears. *'Identity work'* is part of what the activists and community must do. To *'practise place'* means not accepting identity constructions as fixed or immutable.

In her work on identity politics Bondi (1993) draws attention to the spatial metaphors that underlie concepts such as *'identity'*, *'position'*, *'subject-position'* or *'where I stand'*. The result is that there is a covert appeal to fixed and stable essences. Bondi suggests that these geographical metaphors need examination and argues for the encouragement of a new sense of place, position and location as something that is created, produced and flexible. This is consistent with the theme I have been developing through previous chapters that *'place'* is not something essential, assumed, fixed or natural but something that is shaped through engagement in social processes. In talking about *'practising place'* I have been suggesting that place is constructed through a set of constantly changing social relations and patterns. So that, paradoxically *'practising place'* is also about the ability to journey, at least to journey through different identity positions, and to remain unsettled. Identities are not fixed but as argued by Bondi are *'deployed imaginatively and creatively'* (1993:99). This chapter of identity journeys has shown the activists and critical community workers have been *'imaginatively'* and *'creatively'* deploying identities as they go about practising place.

To an extent the identities claimed by the research participants may be *'fabricated'* in the as described by MacLure (2003, 119-132) and Clifford (2001). And they certainly are provisional, as is made clear by the activists and critical community workers themselves. However, the range of identities constructed from the stories might be a useful arte-fact – suggestive of the range of identities out of which practising place has been made possible. This is not to suggest that these are the only identities which set up the conditions for practising place but indicates that

‘practising place’ is possible only if there is a rich variety of differing identities and subject positions in circulation.

This completes the chapter on identity journeys and in the following chapter that shows the ways in which the activists and community workers have journeyed together the importance of being able to mobilise different identity positions underpins elements of practising place. The next chapter focuses on the ways in which the activists and community workers practise place by analysing language and social institutions, by developing their understandings of power and social change and by maintaining some hope in the possibility of transforming social relations.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## JOURNEYING TOGETHER

What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging ... (Agamben 1993: 80).

Garrick (2000), Garrick and Rhodes (1998), Lather (1991a,1991b), MacLure (2003) and Usher (1996) draw attention to the methodological dilemmas of research that uses as its starting point subjective experience of the individual or 'the lived experience'. Some of the dilemmas are about the untroubled assumptions of what is reported as authentic experience. Through retelling the stories of 'others' the researcher situates and contextually frames the accounts of individual subjective experiences that have been told to them, within the frameworks of the researcher and within the demands of various research and disciplinary traditions.

Lather argues that in writing, and writing research, reductionism is inescapable (1991a:xix) and her 'exemplar' (which I used in Chapter Three) of retelling stories is suggested as a way to return complexity to research stories and narratives and problematising what is meant by lived experience. Garrick suggests (2000:207) that some of the problems faced by researchers in interpreting lived experience can be acknowledged through the 'deconstruction of the text of the story-teller'. MacLure (2003:23) proposes that at a methodological level discourse analysis can be used to do two 'virtually incompatible things'. On the one hand a great deal of attention should be given to the details of particular texts, while on the other hand 'analysis' is also a matter of 'moving *away* from the details of the specific text'. These authors do not suggest any one particular strategy to overcome these difficulties. However they all suggest one can address the problematic nature of reporting of 'lived experience' through the development of research texts that make 'intertextual associations' (MacLure 2003) and through creating 'multi-voiced and multi-centred texts' (Lather 1991a, 1991b) displaying differing perspectives.

In this chapter I take up this challenge by creating a manifold text. I do this by placing transcript and written material from the research participants; theories on language, discourse, power and subjectivity; and my researcher commentary, in a format that provides the space for textual juxtapositions. This is a way of avoiding author 'commentarial dominance' or an approach by which commentary disappears and the 'object-text', in this case transcript or written material from the research participants, is given dominance. Lee (2000:194-196) sees the 'disappearance' or 'dominance' of commentary as a problematic binary and suggests that neither form should be adopted uncritically in discourse analysis (a similar point is made by MacLure 2003). The way in which text is presented in this chapter is my way of resolving, at a textual level a desire for the research participants to 'speak for themselves', (as problematic as that notion is), and my need as a researcher to display some form of analytical authority, or perhaps more accurately, analytical capability. This form of this chapter resists positioning any account as 'more authentic', 'more genuine' or 'more truthful', and, whilst this chapter, like previous ones contains many 'biographies and stories of practice', as the researcher I have resisted dissecting these stories through some interpretive research framework. In this chapter, the researcher commentary, where it exists, sits beside and serves a purpose as juxtaposition to other stories.

The way in which this text is constructed points to more of the dimensions of 'practising place'. Practising place not only involves working with identities (as in the previous chapter) but it also involves reflexively working with language and social institutions, working with power, working for social change and working with hope of the possibility of social transformations.

I have used the departure points from Chapter One as a way of structuring this chapter. Weedon argues that poststructuralism is useful because it provides a way of analysing language, social institutions and individual consciousness with a focus on how power is exercised and the possibilities for change (1997:19). This seems appropriate to bring to the research around NCs because the themes of power and transforming social relations (albeit at a local level) were a focus in many of the conversations with the activists and critical community workers. I have drawn on Weedon's categories or 'principles' of poststructuralism and now use them to connect what has emerged in the research conversations:

- An analysis of language and social institutions
- A focus on power and the possibilities of social change
- The hope of transforming social relations



Presenting the text as two columns is not intended to present a binary relationship between the words of the research participants and the analysis of the researcher. Quite the contrary, the way in which the pages are set up is intended to allow a reader some access to seeing linkages between what various participants are saying, quotations from theorists, and, the commentary of the researcher. Lather (1991a), Denzin (1994), MacLure (2003) and many other researchers acknowledge writing is inescapably reductive and researchers fashion meaning through interpretation and textual construction. The way I have shaped this text is only one of many ways that could have been chosen. The current shape is more experimental than conventional.

The left hand columns in this chapter are drawn from transcript material and sometimes from the written material provided by research participants (*in italic*). The right hand columns in this chapter include my researcher commentary (in plain text) and quotations from theorists (**in bold**). There are parts of the text where there is no commentary beside what the research participant has said.

This chapter includes an introduction to each part, a summary of each part and a summary for the whole chapter. Chapter Six returns to a more traditional format, signalling, at a textual level, a change between having research participants' input resonating with each other and myself as the writer and researcher (journeying together), to a less complex arrangement, where, as the writer and researcher I am focusing on one of the research participants (a singular journey).

## LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

In Part One of this chapter an analysis of language and social institutions by the research participants is presented. The research participants are working with (and quite often against) language practices that constitute the discursive space of community work practice. The research participants delve into the language and discourses surrounding ‘community services’, ‘social justice’, ‘empowerment’, ‘participation’ and ‘community development’. (Providing some response to the first research question - ‘*What do the terms empowerment, participation, community service and citizenship mean for community organisation practices?*’) Community organisations as part of the social welfare provision in a governmentalised state are also subject to critical analysis. One participant proposes that these community organisations can be viewed as ‘proprietary’ and also describes how poststructuralism provides a view of community organisations which could be ‘enlivening’ and useful for activists and community work practitioners.

The subheadings used here were part of a thematic structure that I developed during the research to feedback to the participants their research input. In an iterative process the research participants kept building on this structure:

- Language and community work
- The discourses of empowerment, participation and community development
- A poststructural analysis of community organisations

## Language and community work

Trevor: *I just become more aware of how language is part of that shaping process, you know that conditioning process. So language isn't just of course an inert or neutral tool for communicating. It's a very dangerous thing, it's dangerous but it also has the capacity to be very liberating. But the danger is in the way in which words are given a spin or twist and are then applied to, or are used in talking about a situation. In this case what has traditionally been called community work and community welfare work. And so there are words there, language within that whole area that have become, I could use the word, I suppose I could say they've become corrupted...and that would be putting value statement on it...or I could say that the words have become changed in the way that they are used, to the point now where they are having a strong conditioning role, actually shaping what's happening in the community, in the community work field. And I keep on quite openly confronting that because I...well because the shaping effect of those words is... I see it as being pernicious ...what it does is it kind of blinds people capacity to be able to see alternatives.*

*.....And so language is actually, it's like a...it's placing a kind of... it's like an embalming. A kind of embalming fluid over the sector so that people are using that language with that new meaning that's been given to it. But that new meaning now has the capacity to rub out, or to shut off those previous meanings that those words have, And those new meanings, which are given to it, are meanings which... I call them embalming because what they are doing is producing obedience, they are producing ummm likeness. People are conforming to the meaning of that word and they are not thinking outside of that.*

Trevor: *So for instance, just to give an example, the use of the word service, in an uncritical way, in my mind anyway, suggests that it's a commodity. So I don't see that what comes out of community work is a commodity or product that is delivered in that kind of way. I see it as something that's born out of pain, and struggle and desire by people who are finding themselves in a situation, which they want to change. And it's not something that you get delivered to you on a plate like in a restaurant that you pay for.*

*And the other part of the meaning of the word services or community services, which annoys me, is that.... is that it suggests, it has within it this suggestion of obedience. And I think, my experience in community work, the path that I'd like to walk down is one that actually celebrates community work at times as not obedient. As disorderly, rebellious, challenging, questioning and all of those sorts of things...groups of people will emerge who by their very emergence are dissidents, they are standing in a position of heresy in relation to what else is going on in society and they own that. And they don't apologise for it, or disown it and they seek then to celebrate that state of disobedience, or that state of dissent, and try to enable that by what it is they do.*

*The fairly widespread and agreed meaning of social justice is picked up in the most common way in which social welfare and community welfare is spoken about and practiced today – that is, in the language and practice of 'services'. In all the forms of practice, whether with individual, or with groups, or with communities, 'services' has become dominantly (cont...)*

In Chapter One an argument was made that linked the development of the inner city Sydney NCs to political, economic and social shifts that began in the 1960s. The organisations emerged at the same time as the urban environment movement, resident action movements and the participation of women through the feminist movement in new areas of public life and especially in the inner city. In the 1970s as organisations were funded under the social policy agenda of the Whitlam Federal Government and the Australian Assistance Plan the organisations began to play a part in the delivery of community services as part of the welfare state.

**[With] The New Right hijacking of a language of liberation ('empowerment', 'participation' and active citizenship')...the critical edge of community action became dislodged (Ledwith 2001: 1971).**

**...the possibilities for meaning and for definition are pre-empted through the social and institutional position of those who use them. Meaning thus arises not from language but from institutional practices, from power relations. Words and concepts change their meaning and their effects as they are deployed within different discourses. Discourses constrain the possibilities of thought. They order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations (Ball 1990:2).**

(...cont) *what is talked about. It's even called now community services industry! Community work, especially, and community development in particular, is conceived of as the setting up and operation of 'services', through the instrument of communities. So, putting it crudely, social justice means getting the services, and setting up community-based organisations is the way of delivering the services. Is that what social justice is? That is what we are asked to believe and accept, but is that social justice?*

*Another word which kind of gets up my nose is the word empowerment, which is used so much in the field of community development and community work. And I think that is another word that is used very glibly and I think again it is very presumptive. It assumes there are some people who have some kind of authority to do whatever that [empowerment] means to others.*

*I just want to challenge those things. But I think that the point I'm trying to make is that, if someone is growing up in a language place where that word is being used, as a lot of community workers are. They hear that word is being used, that word empowerment and that community workers are empowerers then I think they're in a state of delusion. They're coming to believe something about themselves, which I think is...it's gross. It's not at all respectful of the persons that they're working with because it supposes that those people are somehow or other, people who experience no sense of being able to do things in their life and change things. As if they're kind of nobodies, really, it's not respectful.*

**Social meanings are produced within social institutions and practices in which individuals, who are shaped by these institutions, are agents of change, rather than its authors, change which may either service hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations (Weedon 1997:25).**

Trevor also describes the ways in which the words social justice and empowerment have had the effect of covering up power differentials that exist in relationships that purport to be empowering. Under the next subheading the critical community workers also talk about the contradictions they see in using the language of empowerment.

**Each different community and social group masters a home-based discourse that integrates words, actions, interactions, values, feeling, attitudes and thinking in specific and distinctive ways. Each such home-based discourse is connected to a particular social group's way of being in the world, their 'form of life', their very identity, who they take themselves to be (Gee 1991: xvii).**

## **Discourses of empowerment, participation and community development**

Carla: *And I think that was the way that the Centre helped empower people. Was by giving them a space and letting people who were already empowered and motivated provide a forum that encouraged other people to participate*

Tevi: *I felt after a certain level of community development and if you're successful with your work on empowerment and participation the community does and can go on its own.*

Monica: *The service was quite different in that sense, it was about building communities but building them through engagement around arts and other things rather than you know, welfare dependency.*

Carla: *The highest aspiration in the eighties was to work somewhere that...considered community participation and empowerment important. That didn't have a welfare mentality. Like I wasn't working there coming from a social welfare background, I didn't have any kind of social welfare direction very much*

Sarah: *In the seventies we all understood that the word 'welfare' was a very unpleasant, bad word that no-one... would use –*

The critical community workers talked about the discourses of empowerment and participation. An examination of these liberal discourses in practice suggests that they do not always serve the interests of the marginalised as often claimed.

**It is possible for liberal discourses of equality to work against women's interests and it is only by looking at a discourse *in operation*, in a specific historical context, that it is possible to see whose interests it serves at a particular moment (Weedon 1997: 108).**

From the commentary and experiences of the critical community workers it appears that the discourses of empowerment and participation have often been re-written (re-enacted?) in western liberal democracies in ways that do not serve the interests of those whose interests are supposed to be met; especially when those discourses are linked to the provision of institutional welfare.

The critical community workers talked at length about 'welfare'. It is clear that welfare is seen as a shaping institution and an institution that these workers wish to contest or change.

Monica: *I was predominantly working with young people to try and, you know, help them to sort out their lives in the sense of getting on to live more productive lives and plugging them into support services and giving them outlets for stemming anti-social behaviour.*

Michael: *I also saw my responsibility as an information provider....I saw my role as a community worker to try and make the organisation more relevant to the people that it said it would be providing services to.*

Michael: *...plenty of people were bewildered about social security, many people still are bewildered.... so I saw my job then as a major responsibility...to assist people to go through the bloody maze*

Sarah: *Initially we were still talking more just about the community and about empowering the community and raising people's consciousness so that they would themselves become more active.*

Monica, Michael and Sarah describe the community organisations as providing some form of 'empowering' alternative to the welfare system, a chance for 'participation' rather than 'dependency'. In the conversations the community workers describe their intention to challenge power relationships set up through the social institution of welfare. Whether there can be any genuine distinction between the 'empowering' work of the organisations and the 'disempowering' operation of the welfare state is challenged by the earlier analysis of Trevor about the conflicted understandings surrounding 'community services' and notions of 'social justice' he sees within the 'community services industry.

Tevi: *For me community development was about engaging in the community to resolve issues that they had through either projects, or workshops or you know, whatever strategies were appropriate to be used. But the word development really had no meaning for the community. As a migrant worker, in a migrant resource setting, in a neighbourhood setting, I actually did not like the term community development. And also as a bilingual worker, translating that shit, that term is a nightmare....community development was actually really difficult to translate as a concept as well.*

*I actually hated that term. I actually hated being called a community development worker. It was basically meaningless to the majority of people even people who have a level of tertiary education, it was a term that was nebulous. Yeah and quite meaningless for the majority of people I came across.*

Michael: *Community development, okay, I mean I can look at an organisation like Community Aid which always had a commitment to being inclusive in its organisational planning and decision. Making space for people within the organisation, whether it be through the more formal structure of the management committee of the organisation or attempts to increase involvement of people in particular projects that were based there, or indeed in the selection of projects which it was supporting.*

**Language, in the form of a historically specific range of ways of giving meaning to social reality, offers us various discursive positions... (Weedon 1997:25).**

The community workers talk here about community development as being a 'social practice'. Even when the discourse of 'community development' is rejected the discursive position of community worker is still available and taken up.



Sarah: *So I think that we thought the more people knew, the better they would be able to act. So we wanted to sit together to inform ourselves and through our own information inform other people so that there'd be this ground swell of people who would then be saying 'no that's not right, it needs to go this way not that way'. That was how I think it worked and then we decided that we needed to go out into the community itself to develop that sort of thing outside the community centres and that's I think where the community development came in.*

*So then we said, 'yeah that's a good idea' and so we applied for funding to set up this pilot scheme and so I mean it is community development in a sense.... but its not, its not coming directly from the community in a sense. I mean in another way I guess it is because the clients are of course part of the community...*

Carla: *Well I think there were a lot of... well not a lot, but people were accessing the NC who wanted to find a bed for the night, to get emergency cash relief, they wanted clothes and that sort of thing. It was a formulated policy of the NC at that time that the funding would be better used on community development and peak advocacy work in terms of housing and child-care and other affordability issues. Rather than directing the resources towards – you know handing out twenty dollar bills and spending two hours on the phone finding someone a bed for the night –*

From these comments it does seem that community development is merely a technical tool used for resolving what the welfare state could not resolve. The community worker comes in as another level of expert who makes decisions for the community. Through the agency of community workers it seems that there is a form of government through community.

Sarah does seem to be suggesting that community development is something that is imposed. So that community development can be seen as a technology of community with community workers being the experts.

Carla raises doubts about whether community development and advocacy programs were what people really wanted, when all they really wanted was 'a bed for the night'. Tevi suggested that community development is a cultural imposition and that community development is a concept that doesn't translate to all communities. It also seems that Sarah is ambivalent about whether the impetus for programming is 'really' coming from the clients and community, in fact she suggests that programming is often not driven by expressed community or client needs.

## **A poststructural analysis of community organisations**

Trevor: *This is where government through community is seen...I hesitate to call them community organisations actually. I've got a lot of discomfort about using that word. Because the word community organisation tends to convey the idea that we're talking about groups of people that emerged and are operating as a kind of, fairly close collective, who are owning everything that is being done by the group. Whereas, I think that's not the case with a lot of community organisations operating in my time in the inner city, and operating there now.*

*They are what I call proprietorial organisations. By proprietorial, I mean that the community organisations are not owned by people who are the members of the groups that are supposed to benefit from what the organisations are doing. They are owned by some small group of people often comprising mostly of professional social welfare/community welfare practitioners employed by other services in the area, and are effectually run by the employed professional practitioners. What they're doing is risky and with that it's also entirely open to a kind of dominating role with those people that they're working with. You know kind of hegemonic role with those people they're working with and my own opinion is that a lot of so-called community workers are blind to that. They don't see that risk. They don't see the way they're being manipulated by government. Or if they do they simply say oh well that's the way it is and kind of get on with it. They're getting paid for it...people are trapped, they're caught into it, conditioned into it. But how do you get out of that? It's like snare. But they're kind of locked into it, into now a political process that either they can't get out of, or, they don't wish to get out of and they can't even see it.*

Trevor: *Well I haven't myself felt a great deal of uncomfortableness about what's called poststructuralism. In fact if I look back forty or fifty years - fifty years to my first involvement in youth work. Then perhaps I was as a young person myself wanting to bring about change, maybe there were times when I was aflame with a particular, what I would call a particular structure... a solution you know to respond to a situation, something, which would have some kind of permanence about it. But even as I say that, I have to say that even at the same time as I might have desired that, I was still struggling with some awareness, and I don't know where this comes from, that that was delusional - the notion that there was some kind of right structure."*

*As I say what I was confronted with was the realisation that, that I too was in a sense, could be falling into that sterile view that I was thinking I had found the answer in terms of structures. So what I'm trying to say is that I was struggling with that in youth work in the early days.*

*I was confronted with that again later on in community work when I became very aware that there were different organisations who were responding quite differently to the now situation that they saw around them. And, that, these organisations were not only different in the way that they saw those things but were actually structurally different. They were set up in different ways - they actually operated in different ways. And what I noticed, however, is that there was some kind of relationship between if you like, their theoretical viewpoint, if you like the way they kind of saw things, and what they did.*

In the professional area of community work and community activism, a structural analysis of social change, drawing upon various strands Marxism, feminism, socialist and anarchist thinking has been developed (see for example Meekosha and Mowbray: 1994, Thorpe and Petruchenia:1985). These structuralist notions of social change have been addressed in the last decade by writers in the field who recognise that poststructural theory, provides a different conception of the operation of power and a rejection of generalising or totalising concepts. This is particularly in regard to the role of the state and leads to a different set challenges for radical community work and activist practitioners. One aspect of this research project has been to see how poststructuralism might 'enable' a different way of looking at current practice. To a certain extent Trevor has been most explicit in exploring a poststructural analysis, however some of the other research participants do 'take up' some aspects of poststructural theory and are prepared to see how it may fit with their own analysis. (See for example the way in which Enid describes the operation of power later in Chapter Five, and also how Tevi uses the notion of government through community in Chapter Six.)

*And so when I came across Thorpe and Petruchenia's book, Community Work or Social Change, where they talked about social change. How they talked about the reality that they saw about these different organisations working in different ways. But particularly that they made the connection between their theory or their ideology and the way in which they were working. I kind of thought, shit, that's what I've been seeing. And was so enlivened by the realisation that there were also other people seeing those kind of connections.*

*So that was actually liberating for me because that enabled me again, I suppose, to accept the plurality of these umm.... of the emergence of structures. But also to see that the structures are always emerging, they're always coming out. And that none of them are in a sense, eternal. Not eternal in the sense that they don't last a long time, but not eternal in the sense that they have the perfect answer to whatever is the situation. They're just responses that emerge out of the torture of the situation in which we're placed.*

*And later that sat comfortably with my Buddhist beliefs that I can talk about structure, but the word structure in that sense is a convention. It's a word we use to describe a temporary phenomenon. That things emerge, they have shape, they have solidity, they have an orderliness about them, you know there's a pattern that can be discerned, we think we can discern a pattern, maybe we impose it upon it.*

*And the other thing we see is that whatever it is that emerges has been made by the people that are that structure. So they've actually made that themselves, so that's why we call it a structure, because they themselves had a hand in. So when I hear the word structure I hear of a group of people who have made something, done something. They are now pushing something out into history.*

The contributions of Trevor, on the shaping effect of language and the impermanent (and always emergent) nature of social structures and institutions, were used to frame some of the critical community workers responses to questions about empowerment, participation and community development.

The critical community workers' analysis of the social institution of 'welfare' and the position of their work and the work of the community organisations is critiqued and extended by the analysis of Trevor. That analysis was made possible by drawing upon poststructuralist views of language and through a critique of structuralism as a theory or viewpoint.

In a deconstructive move the analysis developed by Trevor that community organisations can be 'proprietary' and an extension of state governing arrangements opens up questions about the subject position of 'community worker'. It suggests that community worker identities and positionings within a governmentalised community sector create problematic relationships in terms of the potential for genuinely empowering community work practices.

This supports the proposition that poststructural analysis and deconstruction have been useful tools in the research and have enabled a number of different readings of the key research question about empowerment, participation, community service, citizenship and community organisations.

## POWER AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

In Chapter Four the activists and critical community workers described themselves as contesting power arrangements. In Part Two of this chapter other stories are told about attempts to bring about some form of change in the way that power operates at local levels. For a number of participants focusing on power also meant focusing on the productivity of feminism and attending to the way that class operates in power relationships. The input of participants here provides a response to the second key research question. *‘What have workers and organisers wished for when they become involved in these community organisations? What might this mean for current practice?’*

Again the subheadings I am using here were part of a thematic structure that I developed during the research. It should be evident by now that the research participants were closely aligned with structural theory and analysis. Since one aspect of the research project was to examine the productivity of a poststructural analysis, these subheadings were useful to gather together different ways in which power is conceptualised by the activists and critical community workers.

- Contesting Power
- Feminist and Class Issues
- Stories of Social Change

## Contesting Power

Sarah: *The physical re-shaping of the inner city. That was happening at the same time. In Woolloomooloo all those campaigns we were fighting – the freeways, the redevelopment of the finger wharf...it was all to do with the way that Sydney City was developing. Before we were lobbying about things like domestic violence, housing and homelessness and suddenly we had no time to think about anything other than freeways, marina's, you know, whatever, more bloody high-rise and a pro-development council in the City of Sydney.*

Tevi: *The community often had quite unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved and then as a worker you have to have insight into what structures and the framework of the government and understanding where they are coming from and where the community is coming from. So quite often try to bring the community expectations down. And also lowering the developers or councils expectation of what the community can tolerate.*

Tevi: *I suppose from a government point of view they [the Neighbourhood Centres] were places of dissent. Target able places of dissent. What the Lord Mayor did the year after I left...was to pull funding for the festival. So that was a very direct hit. Or what he did later on... was to put an email out to all council staff that they were not to talk with anyone at the Centre.*

Tevi: *So certainly all of those places that I've worked at have been seen as sites of dissent by government bodies. And they will tolerate the dissent up to a certain level. Once it becomes intolerable they'll just pull funding, bag you, you know, whatever, it's really easy for them to do that.*

The community workers describe themselves as contestants, or brokers of power, in the inner city. They speak of themselves 'as particular kinds of subjects' and adopt any number of subject positions as seen in Chapter Four. In many parts of the conversations the critical community workers 'speak themselves into being' as 'fighters', 'dissidents', 'agitators' and 'politicised community workers'.

**A Foucauldian conception of the interrelations between institution, discourse and subject is what we have in mind, such that individuals come to speak as particular kinds of subject – to speak themselves into being- through speaking the discourse that enables the particular institution. (Poynton and Lee 2000:5)**

**Foucauldian concepts of discourse and power suggest that there are always disruptive possibilities through engagement as 'speaking subjects within discourses'... (MacLure 2003:180).**

The critical community workers describe the networks of power relations within which they are embedded. They identify a number of institutional power bases, for example, local government, and they also examine the network of power relations in seemingly informal community arrangements. They talk about their own interventions as attempts to bring about some form of social change. They describe the ways in which their desires, intentions, aims, dreams and hopes of social change are deflected, challenged, encumbered and sometimes achieved.

Carla: *And traffic, traffic was the big sort of dominating feature of many people's lives and most people in a neighbourhood with traffic they focus on noise or how many cars are going past their street or how long it takes them to cross the road and all those things are all really important, especially for mothers with little kids. But the really the big impact with road developments was the prospective loss of housing that that period put in place. Surry Hills, Redfern, Camperdown... I think that the links that various workers made and the work that was going on put in place a lot of the social or a lot of the urban revision that's now going on - like the warehouse developments and the rezoning of factories land to residential.*

Sarah: *You know the work now appeals to people who just want to help. So the people who now go into community work might just as well be working at St Vinnies. You know and that's fine, I'm not saying they're bad people who work at St Vinnies they're just not the people I want working in the community sector. Because I just don't think the people who work at St Vinnies sense that things should change. They think things should be more equal and they're right in that of course, but they think things should be even more equal but things should still stay the same. You know the rich should still be rich and the poor should still be poor, they just don't have to be quite so poor.*

*Well I just don't think the rich should be so rich and you know I don't think there should be poor people and you know I think lots of things should change. I think everything should change.*

The critical community workers describe 'the links that they have made' which have brought about changes that they could not have predicted. In this example the community worker is suggesting their work may have been focused on specific issues such as transport, childcare or housing, but in the long term their actions had significant impact in shaping the inner city urban environment.

The community workers see themselves as disrupting power and bringing about change. They see this as an important part of their 'social practice'. But they also make a distinction between their practices as community workers aiming to bring about changes and disrupt power and the practices of others who might also be involved in 'the community sector'. Sarah makes that distinction on the basis of her analysis of social and economic conditions and the possibility of changing those conditions.

**...meaning is rooted in choices and guesses people make, based on their memberships in various groups and the 'cultural models' they develop as part of their apprenticeships to various social practices (Gee 1991:10).**



Michael: *The real focus was on doing casework but anyone involved in family support services or community organisations who were trying to undertake any other types of actions were de-funded. I also saw changes in the eighties...new managerialism got its first birth, if you like, in some of the changed practices or relationships between funding bodies and community based organisations.*

Tevi: *I was at that stage working with the Inner City Migrant Interagency. There was pressure from DIMIA [the Department of Immigration, Migrant and Indigenous Affairs], the funding body, to constrain the activities of that worker because she was essentially involved in political processes, community development activities. And yes, she was putting people on buses so they could go down to the Department of Immigration and chuck rocks at the door. Perhaps not that explicit, but I think that was the perception from DIMIA and DIMIA tried to nobble the position. They tried to lower its status, lower it a category and turn it into a casework job and then they just completely defunded it...and my feeling at the time was that particular activities that that work had got up to which you might describe as community development activities at the time, was nobbled”*

*When DIMIA decided to pull the funding – DIMIA actually funded quite a lot of community development workers in the eighties and then when the liberal government came in the first thing they did was pull funding from the community development side. Community development was also quite politicised and the liberal government, that was not what they wanted – they wanted case workers. They pulled all the funding so there was no policy work....*

The critical community workers talk about their struggles with power to help shape the inner city in ways that they think are more equitable. They may change some power arrangements but they are also ‘disciplined bodies’ subjected to various forms of control and self-control. The actions of funding bodies seem to be the easiest to identify as those that ‘discipline’ and ‘control’ their actions.

**The difference is that discourse here [referring to the work of Foucault in ‘Orders of Discourse’] is not just language, but practices, behaviours, objects, technologies and concepts, all of which shape and form the disciplined body (Threadgold 2000:50).**

The community workers tell stories where they see practices of control and where they identify dividing practices. Funding arrangements are one example but they also talk about new managerialism, case-work and the arbitrary separation of program areas as limiting their practices. When they described themselves as limited by the actions of funding bodies or government, they are taking up a particular subject position in relation to the power ascribed to government. In other parts they have recognised themselves as having power because of their positions within communities and in doing so recognise another quite different subject position. And yet within the same space, sometimes even at the same moment other forms of subjectivity are described where the workers are not seeing themselves as subject to power but rather in a position of contesting power, of having power and disrupting power.

Sarah: *I guess for me, I used to be really unhappy about the way in which funding seemed to impact. But talking about it to you now I realise that in fact that isn't new, that's always been the fact....the funding has been a part of that, but the funding was always just a part of it. Now the funding is all of it. It seems to me.....I think it's completely skewed because...So that means we're totally dependent on the people who fund us. So we're too frightened now to speak against those people, because they're the people who give us the money. So we're not able to be effective in the same way that we were.*

Michael: *The new managerialism, from government was a change in focus from looking at organisations as being some type of institutional player trying to ameliorate the inadequacies of capitalism in the market and the disadvantage that's created within those processes; to being more arms of government, sort of instrumentalities who were providing particular services at the time. Went from organisations being relevant, accountable, inclusive, to being organisations which were effective in meeting economic bench-marks.*

Monica: *...everyone was very separated based on, well you know, after school was here and you know family support was run by someone and that was sort of you know went to people's homes. Do you know what I mean? It was actually much more... I think more of a control model in the way that it separated the services up and how it provided services to particular target groups.*

Carla: *My memory of the community sector was that you got funding but not a dot point compliance plan. You had to have results but not in the tightly controlled way as now.*

**The concept of a discursive field was produced by the French theorist, Michel Foucault, as part of an attempt to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power. Discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes. They offer the individuals a range of modes of subjectivity... (Weedon 1997:34).**

The critical community workers have been operating within the discursive field of community work and have analysed how different discourses, for example 'new managerialism' have come to have power within that field. One of the major debates that the community workers addressed was that of the community sector becoming an arm of government; carrying out government policy because they had been steered in that direction through funding arrangements. Again the subject position of the community worker as a dissenter or agitator is troubled as the suggestion is that they have identified heavily with their role in implementing conservative government policy.

Sarah: *I could only feel comfortable if I could justify it when I felt I was acting politically. Even the idea of being a political agitator seems middle class white wanky. But it is important that there are some people who can jump up and down and agitate. And now those of us who are agitating are seen as problems. Now that is being constructed as just complaining.*

Monica: *And at that time a whole lot of people were being evicted from the houses in Palmer and Bourke Street and there were whole lots of houses that had been left vacant for a long period of time and were really being semi-vandalised. So I suppose they were, I mean in a sense they were also the days of activism around development issues which you don't see any more as well, you know, communities used to come together around concerns over development issues.*

Monica - *And I think that arts generally have become fairly removed from our communities in a sense of being used as a way to express political statements or whatever. You know, the whole poster era has gone. You just don't see it any more. Posters are now used by large corporations to advertise....But there was, I mean during those years, posters were used by everyone from every different group and everyone obviously come together around an arts focus to do that.*

Carla: *For a lot of people in the inner city it was really the cusp of, you know, the period that the inner city started to move from what it was like in the sixties and seventies to what it is like now. And that was a transitional period that was very difficult for a lot of people. Another difficult period was in the Bicentennial year where a lot of public funds were redirected away from local community interests.*

The critical community workers locate their interests in specific local concerns and within a particular historical time. This calls to mind Foucault's emphasis on the historical specificity of discourse and action. The conversations indicate an awareness of particular historical conditions and changes, especially of the social and political processes of the inner city. The community workers describe a personal experience of being 'limited' or 'uncertain' about whether their intentions have been individually or collectively realised. They are also locating those limitations and uncertainties within a range of social processes, not all of which they feel they can change or challenge. They describe their understanding and the broader political economy; albeit, they focus on how that manifests in local conditions and sites.

Michael: *I also saw changes in the eighties, most organisations are funded by the New South Wales government of course, new managerialism got its first birth, if you like, in some of the changed practices or relationships between funding bodies and community based organisation...*

*...to me it was really the ending...the ending period of what I call sort of community organisational activism. Where people, where individual workers and community organisations were working in an inclusive and collective way. There were people with a clear political framework for practice who were putting ideological perspectives into practice on a day-to-day basis. I think that work to me now is ether less accessible or there isn't such certainty or clarity or those workers just don't exist anymore.*

Sarah: *You know we've lost too much of the change that we wanted to bring about so that now that we all are paid workers...and because we're so dependent on the funding, we're not anymore able to agitate and therefore the work doesn't appeal to people who want to change things.*

Carla: *Maybe there is not community anymore. I don't really think there is that same notion of community. Maybe there never was. Maybe it was a figment of our imagination. Maybe it was that there was potential. It was an era where there was potential. But now there's not the same political knowledge. There's a belief that the way to get things done is not to upset them, the government. Maybe all that stuff I've been reading about the generational difference is true. We're in a situation now where the young people have no housing options, education is doubtful and the whole thing is a mess...*

The possibilities of social change were often a feature of the conversations with the critical community workers. The collection of quotes on this page and the previous page reflects some sense of loss about the 'knowledges' that had sustained a belief in the possibility of change. One person describes it as a 'lack of clarity' and another describes the 'limited space' now available for 'agitation'. In a comment that seems to contain a great sense of loss about political knowledges another one of the critical community workers talks about the concept of community as having had 'potential', but in reviewing the outcomes of their period of community work in the inner city, they say the potential was never quite realised.

**...power is not just repressive, in the sense of endowing some subjects with agency and potential at the expense of others; it is also enabling – it is a productive set of relations from which, for good and ill, subjectivity, agency, knowledge and action issue (MacLure 2003:177).**

## **Feminist and Class Issues**

Sarah: *Well I first got involved because I was a feminist. That's the simple answer ... So basically what happened was, I was involved then in the refuge movement....and suddenly I was surrounded by people who said that things could be different and the we in fact could change things. We on the ground from the bottom up, that's what the discussion was about....so I just happened to work in one section of the women's movement which happened to be around refuges. But then I moved from that then into neighbourhood centres but my focus was still always women and children basically.*

Carla: *I came ...from a community publishing venture – a girls magazine, an alternative girls magazine that was based at South Sydney Women's Centre...It was a magazine for young women and the focus of the funding was training for unemployed young women in writing, research and graphic design skills...*

Tevi: *Before coming to the Centre I remember having management committee meetings at Immigrant Women's Speakout that went from six o'clock in the afternoon to one o'clock in the morning. Because we couldn't make a decision about what to do, which strategy. We'd agonise, when it hit a certain level of intensity we'd feel really responsible for trying to make the best decisions without upsetting everyone.*

Michael: *Another example of that was a practice that I thought was coherent in terms of linking a clear political perspective was the workers from the ..... who to me were very clearly an organisation which was informed by feminist views, feminist ideology and feminist practice models....*

These statements support claims made from Chapter One onwards that these organisations were sites where the discourses of feminism were present and feminist political practice were often at the fore. The material from conversations presented here shows that the critical community workers are reflexive about their own gender (and class status) and the way that impacts on practice.

Monica: *I worked doing after-school work and then I worked for.....it had a very strong feminist perspective. It was a group set up based on supporting women after a couple of kids had been killed by their mother down on the Woolloomooloo estate and people were pretty freaked out about it. And so there were a whole lot of women who came together and applied for funding and got funding, got money for a worker and then Woolloomooloo Community Development Project was sort of born....it was actually originally called Woolloomooloo Women's Group and then as they wanted to get more funding they broadened the name out. But for a long time it just ran as a straight feminist model on supporting women.....run groups to teach women a whole lot of personal development skills.*

Monica: *And I think when I look back now, the organisation had a really significant level of ownership by its surrounding community, from all age groups and all class groups. Although I have to say that probably the biggest conflict was in fact, was around class issues particularly to do with families and the artists. And the artists found the working class kids a bit difficult to cope with...*

*....there was a very strong cross-class lines over the Eastern distributor.....the community became actively involved and these were homeowners...They've all gone now but the community became actively involved and these were homeowners as well as semi-hippies....and it was the poorer members of the community that actually led the fight but it was definitely facilitated by the homeowners and middle-class community who were really concerned (cont...)*

The critical community workers talk about feminism as a motivation and a productive discourse that assists social change interventions. They also see class as something that impacts upon their own identities and are conscious of the way in which class is a focus of their community practices.

(...cont) about what was happening with the houses and the loss of heritage and the eventual building of the road....So yeah, that was sort of, that was the beginning and there were some very strong alliances. So I don't sort of see that any more.

Sarah: ...we just basically threw open the doors and expected that everybody would feel comfortable coming into our centre to do this sort of sitting around and talking, but it was really clear fairly quickly that just wasn't going to work and there was very much excluding lots of groups in the community who didn't speak English or you know came from a different social background and therefore didn't feel comfortable sitting in that sort of environment or were intimidated by all us academic, middle class white women who all thought that we knew what empowerment was about.....because we were all very middle class, and certainly very white, and of Celtic background....you know certainly we were not, women of colour or working class or, we were all of a certain group of women mostly university education ....it was all about personal, political in those days...

**At the level of the individual this theory [post-structuralism] is able to offer an explanation of where our experience comes from, why it is contradictory or incoherent and why and how it can change...It can also account for the political limitations of change at the level of subjective consciousness...It is for these reasons that this particular form of post-structuralism is a productive theory for feminism (Weedon 1997:40).**

## Stories of Social Change

Enid: *The 1970s was a turning point in the history of Surry Hills. From an old run down inner city working class suburb, often referred to as a slum, it had become an area where recently arrived migrants bought into, and worked in surrounding factories, on the wharves etc.. With the threat of unplanned development including further high-rise public housing similar to Northcott Place, green bans were placed on the area until the Action Plans by the Sydney City Council were implemented. For the first time local residents were consulted and both strategic and social planning began to play a part in the Inner City. The Inner City had long been home to various articulate professional and creative people. It also attracted others who had lived overseas in cities and were not attracted to suburban life that was expanding rapidly. These people became a Voice for the changing need of the Inner City. There was the large Migrant population – Greek, Yugoslav, Turkish, Portuguese, Latin American and others. Many teachers and others living and working in the area were aware of the disadvantage experienced by first generation Migrant Australians. From the need to be able to speak and understand English, for parents (many illiterate in their own languages) to understanding what schooling was about in a modern westernised society. Some residents went to Canberra to the Education Ministry to present a case for a homework Centre and to help bureaucrats understand the need for cultural differences to be understood.*

Enid: *I was determined to do it and that's where the guerrilla bit came out. I couldn't have done it without the people who were around who I could go and talk with. It's got a very nice (cont...)*

Enid talks about power as something that is to be activated and this story suggests a powerful sense of personal political agency. But the story also seems to suggest that to working with power is provisional and unpredictable. Power is described as something that is available (but not always).

Enid's stories bring to mind Foucault's conception of power as being diffuse and circulating in a capillary fashion around and through institutions and individuals. This provides a different conception of power, (not too different from that expressed by some of the critical community workers), that power is not that which one group always has over another, but that power is available to be accessed, activated and shifted in myriad ways.

**But in thinking of the mechanism of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives (Foucault 1980:39).**



*(...cont) name where everything seems to fit together, synchronicity I think, but it's not easy. This is where I feel sorry for young people, who are battered down, with all due respects John, about the theory. And then don't have the power. It's really to do with power isn't it?*

*Enid: How does one go about having all this knowledge, seeing it, seeing if it will fit and that is what is really going on. The whole idea of coming in at the right time, having all these skills, or at least some of them, then having enough people around you that you can get them talking, thinking. See if there's some power with you. Meaning somebody in the political scene, it doesn't always have to be an elected person. I really do believe that's the way a so-called democracy can work and that's very important to cultivate.*

*Firstly, I saw I could apply something I believed in and had a tiny bit of expertise on. Because you know I'm not a trained planner or anything like that but from there on we proceeded. Gathered different people to come in with us and so on... When we asked Jack Munday and the BLF [Builders Labourers' Federation] if they would include us in the green ban thing that was huge on it's own, and I'll write a book about that later on. Of course one of the things, which I thought was very professional of them, was before you had the green ban you had to have enough names on a petition before they would come and all the banners could go up and that kind of thing. And of course being such an earnest, young, ardent woman I chose to do West Surry Hills because I knew it would probably be the most difficult. From more or less Commonwealth Street coming up to Riley Street and the line dividing everything was the middle of Riley Street, you won't believe it but that's what it was.*

*So up and down the hills I went.*

The critical community workers and activists have talked about their attempts to bring about some form of social change. This has involved them in engaging with existing power arrangements and attempting to shift some of those arrangements. They are ambivalent about degrees of success and 'who holds power' or how 'power is activated' has been an important part of the conversations. Subject positions such as 'fighter', 'dissident' and 'agitator' have been adopted and the community workers and activists provided some critical reflection on the consequences of taking up those positions. Feminist theory has been talked about, and in fact, exemplifies the ways in which particular discourses can be activated and used in a strategy to bring about desired changes. The words of the critical community workers have been placed alongside quotations from theorists about discourse and power to suggest a connection between Foucauldian concepts of power and the ways in which the critical community workers talked about power. They do not talk about power *per se* as being bad; in fact they talk about trying to attain power for themselves and for the communities in which they are involved.

The story of how Enid went about engaging with power is distinctive in that she does not talk of a 'political program' or set of theories she was trying to enact. Rather Enid talks about how she was able to operate with power, and looking back, with hindsight on how she was able to use knowledges and skills to effect some change.

The second key research question about the desires, wishes and intentions of the community workers and activists have been explored. There is no linear trajectory for their diverse desires but the desire to bring about some form of social change is common to all their stories.

## THE HOPE OF TRANSFORMING SOCIAL RELATIONS

The research participants responded to the theme of ‘governmentality’ but also took up the notions of ‘becoming communities’ and ‘exploring social futures’. Part Three of this chapter draws on material from the conversations about technologies of community. There are hopes expressed by the research participants about the transformation of social relations. Hope in the possibility of social transformation seems to be a critical element in ‘practising place’. Some response is provided here to third key research question, *‘If these organisations were once sites of dissent or oppositional knowledges and there is evidence that these sites are now governmentalised then what is the future shape of community organisation practice?’*

Studies in governmentality have explored a range of mechanisms of control and some of these ‘technologies of community’ are referred to by the research participants, including the possibility that community organisations have also become part of systems of surveillance and control in a governmentalised state. After some the aspects of governmentality have been explored I include a section in which two of the research participants debate a familiar area in community work; is community work about social change or social control? This debate was prompted by the proposition that community organisations had become part of a system of governance and control as argued by Rose (1999:188-193). With an eye to the future, and having considered some of the propositions of Agamben (1993) and The New London Group (1996) among others, the critical community workers and activists explore the social futures and describe their hope in the possibility of transforming social relations.

The headings in this section are drawn mostly from the work of Rose (1999:167-196) whose chapter on ‘community’ was read by all the research participants so it is not surprising that some of the research conversations followed themes and ideas suggested by Rose. The headings are:

- Government through community
- Community organisations – surveillance and control
- Social change or social control
- Exploring social futures

## Government through community

Sarah: *There was a real turn in the government's attitude at some stage. This was the mid 80s. We had several meetings at the Inner Sydney Council for Regional and Social Development because the Department of Community Services introduced funding agreements we had to sign. I remember J.H., the manager in the Department, was very much against political community workers. We were told government would not fund projects that lobbied against government. We were told that services we worked in were there only to target the needy. That's what they said the services were there for, that's what the funds were for, nothing else! We were told to do casework. We wanted to do development work, community work and group work. To ask the community what they wanted. J.H. - he came and told us that we had to have outcomes and be specific about who we were targeting. There was no room for going and asking the community what the problem was. We had to work that out and then go and fix it. We protested but were told we would be de-funded and some were.*

*In a sense we lost it all because a lot of things were happening. Also at that time we saw the professionalisation of community workers. In the mid eighties we all started focussing on being professional community and welfare workers rather than political activists. In the 70s we became involved because we were political and wanted to change things. In the 80s we became focused on being professional welfare workers. Also then, in the mid 80s you could get money to teach English classes but not to teach migrant groups about their rights in the law – that was a big shift. Some forms of education were allowed but political education wasn't.*

The themes of 'government through community' and 'technologies of community' were taken up and examined by the critical community workers.

Rose begins his description of government through community by pointing out **'...whilst the term 'community' has long been salient in political thought, it becomes governmental when it is made technical'** (Rose 1999:175).

Sarah talks about some of the consequences of community development workers seeing themselves as being employed simply to carry out the technical professional role of an 'empowerer'. Earlier Trevor described the result as a 'form of colonisation'.

The critical community workers also describe how their own personal and professional allegiances were forced to shift by changed reporting conditions and as a consequence of 'professionalisation'. Rose says that government through community relies on the changeable nature of **'...self-management and identity-construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances'** (Rose 1999:176).

Sarah: *Those still working in the community who had a political agenda had become a minority. The professional welfare worker had no choices about employment, they had to stay and keep their jobs, and because of their training they often didn't have an employment option. The political activist could always go somewhere else. Government dictated who management committees and organisations should employ.*

*All that stuff happened at the same time. Pressure of funding agreements led to pressure to see outcomes. So everything became so focused and became either domestic violence support groups or parenting support groups. Where you got see-able outcomes and numbers. You don't get to consider the issues behind the problems.*

*In a sense it was inevitable because of a changed political focus. Inevitable that post-Whitlam would see a changed focus. We had come through a comfortable, (for some), period in the 50s and early 60s. Then Vietnam, civil rights, women's issues were highlighted. We even talked about leisure time, and having three or four day working weeks! People were talking about involvement in community. It seemed to be heading to a peak and then backtracking. I don't know why. Was it a reaction to all that overspending that seemed to be happening? I don't know why we bought the whole Chicago School, economic rationalist bullshit thing. I mean instead of heading off in the direction which was about working less, more leisure time and government actually paying for more things, then suddenly we got this user pays mentality...no more free publicly provided goods available.*

This lengthy story from one of the community workers describes a number of dimensions of technologies of community. In the conversation reported here there is some tension as to whether government through community was the whole picture. This particular community worker prevaricates, sometimes saying that these technologies were successful in shaping community activity, and later on saying that community had remained quite separate from government.

However, in Rose's analysis, government through community is not just an extension of government activity into a separate community sector. It is about the mobilisation of that sector and those sector workers in a governing process. This is recognised in the conversation that follows where the effects of the 'professionalisation of community workers' is described. In other words the community workers themselves have been active in practices of control and government through community. This has happened through the mobilisation of different identities, changing ethics and re-ordering of allegiances.

Sarah: *All sections of government were being told to tighten their belts. And they started telling us, the community based organisations that we had to cut down expenditures. They definitely saw that what was happening in Neighbourhood Centres as being anti-government, and community sector generally was anti-government. Which came at the same time as professionalisation of community work. In the end I doubt if we would have made a difference - we couldn't change the economic direction.*

*Thinking about it again...well that might be true to a large extent but I think the difference is we had other information. So I don't think we were an extension of government. You know government had certain types of information they were willing to share, to a certain extent we were trying to change things.in the end I don't know. Actually I think in the 80s and 90s we were an extension of government...we became the government...and I think the government was clear that was what they wanted. When they said they wanted us to target more clearly. They said target this group not that group.*

*For example they would say; 'target this group, families, this is the information you will give them and that's the need we want you to be dealing with'. We couldn't then run groups talking about 'ways of playing with children' we had to target parents who were problems, had problems. You know children the school had problems with – you know kids who had been behaving badly, problem kids. It was all about targeting particular groups and the government decided that.*

*We had become part of government and that's why some of us left community work. I had become really frustrated and unhappy and it seemed to me that was part of the focus of being less political and less critical.*

On the one hand Sarah argues that the organisations were not an extension of government, while on the other hand they return to the way government effectively operated 'through community'. She also argues that there were people within the bureaucracy who were supportive of independent community organisations but that separation was not possible because it was the bureaucracy who controlled the funding cycles. The funding emphasis was on crisis work and very little opportunity for development or prevention activities. In this way the state was able to effectively dictate what community work practice would entail.

Carla: *Where I'm working now we are being provided funds to produce a magazine that is supposed to be a voice of the people. The content of that magazine, I'd assumed would be those voices, the consumer voices, not the Department of Health, who is the funding body. But in fact the Department of Health demands an editing role before distribution. People don't want to get into criticising the funding body. I do try to publish critical material but really I'm stuck now with the same kinds of difficulties that I used to have when I worked in the NSW public service. I didn't expect to get anywhere there [in the Department] with different views, but in the community sector you do think you can.*

*These days we have government interfering and editing community publications. Consultation and strategic planning are all the rage, encouraged by government, but you don't see any major results.*

*Back then I didn't have to drum up enthusiasm, just had to provide a space a facilitate some things. There was a wildness in the 70s, now in the community sector there are expectations that are more appropriate to the public services. NGO's [non government organizations] are expected to implement government policy. Being fascinated with policy these days is a form of control. In the past we just did things. There is increased monitoring now.*

*Another major problem is that more people are on the move through the community sector to the public service. It's complicated because there is a dwindling public service structure for employment. This has meant that those who would be better suited there have stayed in the community sector.*

*So you get a bureaucratized community sector. There is no identity of community worker anymore.*

Carla talked about other ways that government had drawn community organisations into being a voice for government. This story points to another 'technology of community'.

In these few paragraphs the worker is explaining a completely new set of relationships between identity, political subjectivity and the spheres of what were once seen separately as 'community' and 'government' or 'bureaucracy'.

These paragraphs describe how mechanisms of self-monitoring and evaluation are set up within what was once (possibly), or more likely momentarily, the separate sphere of community activity. The comments from this worker are also a reminder of the way in which language is deployed and used in reconfiguring these relationships. Seemingly benign processes of 'consultation' and 'strategic planning' are described also as technologies used in governing through community. And being 'fascinated with policy' is another way in which the community organisations have been bought into current governing and power arrangements.

**...what is happening here is not the colonization of a previous space of freedom by control practices; community is actually instituted in its contemporary form as a sector for government (Rose 1999:176).**

The stories on this and the previous page seem to describe, with some sense of loss, the community sector as a base for the development of political knowledges.

## **Community organisations – surveillance and control**

Monica: *Community organisations have been seconded as part of the surveillance process. In the police targeting of particular areas and 'zero tolerance' approaches community organisations are linked into that process. It seems a contradiction because how can community organisations be really community based if they are linked with zero tolerance? It has been happening for quite a long time now where community organisations are working with police at large public meetings to identify problems and responses. Well then the result is community organisations then aren't trusted by all sections of the community. The community organisations have been captured by certain interests and groups who don't speak on behalf of, or even care about the communities they work with. These people don't even want to tolerate other interests.*

*Board members of community organisations these days are accountable only to self-motivation. There is no direct link to community. This suits those board members because they are not interested in that link. Their interests lie elsewhere. In the end government doesn't really monitor this or even care that these organisations don't meet community needs. It suits those board members, it suits their own career paths and aspirations, it suits government.*

Monica: *There is an inability of organisations now to affect the kinds of changes required. For example the funding of HIV and Hepatitis C service organisations alone cannot bring about reduction rates in these diseases. Throwing money at community organisations thinking they alone can do something about these huge problems is ridiculous.*

In another part of the conversations Monica talks of the effects of new 'funding regimes' and the intrusion of government activity into community sector work. Monica is not just talking about the NCs but the community sector in the Inner City. Monica describes funding arrangements as a problem saying that the organisations are forced to shift their focus and argues that organisations have become an illegitimate arm of government. In their desire to become an arm of government focused on community control rather than community building.

Monica, in way that resonates with Trevor's earlier argument about 'proprietary organisations' describes the ways in which identity construction and collective allegiances shift so that those who are acting in the community organisations are also constituted as part of the process governing through community.



Monica: *The focus these days is on monitoring and remedying serious health issues. There is no sense of importance of community development or community building that existed back then.*

*The concept of working through the community has been lost. Complicated health issues, including dealing with mental health means a level of professional expertise way beyond that notion of peer or community support is required.*

Monica: *The impact of zero tolerance approaches cannot be underestimated. There is feeling of victimisation and being targeted. This happens for the young people of Woolloomooloo all the time. And the community begins to feel as if it is being targeted. This only adds to and escalates the problems of drug use and violence. For a young person in Woolloomooloo there is this expectation built into their daily lives that they will be searched by police. The systems of surveillance are getting more profound and add to problems of unemployment and anger, especially for the young men.*

Michael: *Yes the recent riots in Redfern... While speaking on the one hand of commitment will anything be done? Because of the nature of the market and the nature of cities it's thought the economy will solve the problem as the CBD marches into Redfern. In short....government does not have a commitment to recognising those local communities. And the state plays no real role in supporting, or at least supporting that inner city community to maintain it's integrity. And no recognitions of the differences and difficulties that community faces. The sense is that the state stands by while the market rolls over top of the local communities.*

In these stories there are echoes of Foucault's account of surveillance and the panopticon. As in the previous story there is also an account given of the way in which professional identities and community work practice have been drawn into governing arrangements. There is also evidence for what Rose was describing when he said...

**Community is now something to be programmed by Community Development Programmes, developed by community Development Officers, policed by Community Police, Guarded by community Safety Programs...communities became zones to be investigated, mapped, classified, documented, interpreted (Rose 1999:175).**

Monica: *Take for an example street closures, which were put in Woolloomooloo years ago and look at the effect. Street closures create problems and have benefits. But it is impossible to predict the effects. For example you might get the outcome of neighbours sitting on the street, socialising... a sense of street ownership. But it is also creating a sense of surveillance, not police surveillance, but a sense of neighbours being able to monitor each other....On the other hand closures can develop into trouble spots, drug dealing and violence and gang behaviour and local people just don't engage or avoid those spots. Police come in to crack down on the young people and it all goes wrong.*

*Other things like the Eastern Distributor have stopped community cohesion and linked part of Woolloomooloo to the city and the CBD rather than to other residential areas. What was residential has become commercial. In some cases the sex industry has moved in is now positioned next to the CBD. Similar to what happened in Pyrmont around the Casino. These are no longer residential places but fulfil a commercial function as an attachment to the Central Business District and this overrides local residents interests.*

*Further disintegration of housing estates has occurred because they have become welfare housing or emergency accommodation. This is in stark contrast to the role that they played in the 70s when migrant and working class families were a significant feature of the estates and there was a great level of community cohesion that came with that. What happened in the 80s was they became dumping grounds for the de-institutionalised and this never fitted in to the community development equation. What has been happening ever since is that those people with mental illness who really need support and community service arrangements have been managed, often, through heavy handed policing.*

There is further evidence that these technologies employed to manage communities are diverse and are a direct outcome of the physical reshaping of the inner city. The decisions that different levels of government and planning authorities make may not be intended to directly shape or manage communities – but they form myriad technologies, which have the material affect of changing governing relationships and patterns of community control.

This is a pattern of change also found in inner city urban environments throughout the United States and Great Britain (see Castells 2004). Whilst much of the dynamic is set up under the rubric of reforming welfare and health delivery, Rose (1999:270-272) argues that it is being linked with changes to the criminal justice system and is creating **'a new archipelago of confinement'**.

Welfare agencies, community organisations, police and health services are all drawn into managing these changes and they must also then arm themselves with, **'...all the moralizing techniques of ethical reconstruction in the attempt to instil the capacity for self-management'** (Rose *ibid.*)

The critical community workers kept asking what is that level of capacity for self-management of communities already experiencing stresses of communities who are vulnerable due to poverty, homelessness or illness?

Monica: *The Americanisation of Australian culture has continued, unabated. There is the 'me' culture it's all based on individualism now. The prime example here is the new Horizon Tower...now with every 'would be' you can imagine living in it. You can't imagine how expensive it is to buy one of those units. I know that some of those people in the Tower describe us in Woolloomooloo as feral. They look down, literally, on Woolloomooloo and see it as a place that is out of control. They would rather we weren't here.*

*There is a big division now of social concepts. Who we are, and our place in the world. Right here we have absolute wealth up against absolute poverty. This distances both groups and creates different resentments and desires. If you're poor and many are around this housing estate. No one can live on \$320 per fortnight [unemployment and social security payment] in inner Sydney. And pay rent, even in the Department of Housing of 25% of that amount. What's left? Enough to buy a pair of shoes and the shoes that you can buy will signal a certain (lesser) social status than those in the Horizon. Why wouldn't you go down the drug path here if you were a young kid?*

Monica: *Originally it was made, a few years ago, as an expression of grief by the community when the police shot a young fellow from the community. The painting of the mural, the things that lay behind that act of painting were connected to daily life and the meaning of community for young people in Woolloomooloo. Now the mural has been appearing on Pepsi coke commercial – Pepsi have purchased the rights to its future use as an image. It has been commercialised and commodified and the reason why it was originally made are completely ignored or it's meaning has been transformed. This is about culture and the rapidity of change in the inner city.*

This is like the 'fortress city' that Bauman (2001), Castells (2001), Sandercock (1998), Soja (1996) and Zukin (1992) and others have written about. The community workers described the increasing presence of 'gated communities' and the effects of obviously stark differences in access to economic, social and political power. Rose describes the ways in which those within the gates have been able to secure their identities and habitats.

**Within the guarded and gated territory of the community, residents may enact their dreams for lifestyle maximization, their children may roam freely, their dogs may be exercised, their cars parked in safety. Outside the walls, danger lurks, epitomized in the image of the madman (Rose 1999: 249).**

The citizenship practices available to those who are excluded become limited almost in reverse proportion to the extent that those who are included come to enjoy multiple citizenship practices.

**Safe neighbourhood visualized as armed gatekeepers controlling the entry...a paring down of public areas to 'defensible' enclaves with selective access; separation in lieu of the negotiation of life in common; the criminalization of residual difference – these are the principle dimensions of the current evolution of urban life (Bauman 2001:115).**

Monica's story of the grief mural in Woolloomooloo is salient. It is a story that contains within it many stories of social exclusions, community formations, as well as struggles over identity, culture and place.

Carla: *I guess it's just the materialism of the late 80s and 90s – expectations around all of that. The focus on property and property prices. People have moved to other areas...The emphasis now is on \$15 cocktails and designer jeans.*

*It's more about self-interest in housing or whatever... and besides it just seems to be all singing and dancing anyway as a way of avoiding things. There is a complete disintegration of motivation and impetus.*

*There are lots of things – it's the designer age now. The drug culture has a lot to do with it. It used to be grunge in the inner city and grunge was the rejection of a whole lot of values about how you should look and how you should appear and how much you should spend on things. Now it's just the opposite. It is about what the market indicates about people. Consumerism is setting higher and higher standards. Now it's about how the market shapes people. The consumer identity is so important now.*

Two of the community workers talked about 'living in a commercialised and commodified culture' and 'the consumer identity'. The story of the grief mural on the previous page was also a story of the 'commodification of culture' and the way in which community experience can be structured as 'consumption'.

In these 'consumer communities' community comes to be seen not in the sense of being a place of inclusion, ethical practice or commitment. The critical community workers are suggesting that community had been re-constituted as a place to be, but only a place to be for the purposes of some form of 'conspicuous' consumption.

Because the consumer identity is privileged individuals are open to manipulation through their attachment to that identity. So governing through community also takes the form of manipulating and activating consumer identities. Bauman (2001) talks about this at length and proposes the definitions 'aesthetic communities', 'idol communities' or 'peg communities' as a way to describe the focus on consumption rather than ethical responsibilities and long-term commitments.

**These are communities which do not require a long history of slow and painstaking construction, do not need laborious effort to secure their future. For so long as they are being festively and joyfully consumed...are difficult to distinguish from the real stuff...Whatever their focal point...the common feature is...the superficial and perfunctory, as well as transient, nature of the bonds emerging between their participants (Bauman 2001:70-71).**

## Social Change or Social Control

Sarah: *Yes exactly. I now can see looking back to the seventies and eighties all too clear.....We can look at what went on before and think about, what did change? Did we actually you know empower people? Or did we control them, forcing them to engage with us in the ways that we thought they should engage. And surely that is what's coming out of all our transcripts as well.*

Monica: *What it's saying though is perhaps we haven't really changed our attitudes towards things like ethnicity, for example, all we've done is changed the language but haven't actually changed things structurally.*

Sarah: *I think we were coopted. I think that's really clear with my recollection and I do think we were participants in control. I mean you've said several times in yours [referring to Monica's transcripts] that now it's only serious health issues. That's all there is now..... I wouldn't want to suggest that was actually planned because I don't think anyone in government actually, no conspiracy, but it was a very clear movement and we participated in that and I think a lot of us ended up being incorporated and becoming part of that structure more and more.*

*And I feel a bit uncomfortable about that but we tried to do it. You tried to be broad about that so you could be as inclusive as possible but there were groups we didn't target and didn't inform and we did control. But I do believe that the more information you give to people you give them more opportunities to change their lives and I think we did do that.*

Two of the research participants revisited the question of empowerment and debated whether the organisations and their own practices had been about social control or social change. They discussed language, power and talked about the development of knowledges.

In this section the critical community workers 'pick apart' what they had said before, they examine their own use of language, they critique their own practices and orientations. They try to 'untangle' the ways in which their own ways of seeing social processes are set up. They are adopting what might be labelled a deconstructive stance, exploring the connections between language and social practices.

Although many doubts are expressed as the research participants move through these reflexive moments, what also begins to emerge is a strong sense that the research participants continue to hold some hope of transforming social relations. This is a hope that emerges from their experience and from taking time to review that experience. It is not a naive hope, as it is to a certain extent grounded in theory, practice and reflection.

Monica: *I just think it was a period in history where internationally there was high employment and economic stability. We had opportunities to think more about the sort of world we wanted to live in. I'm not sure that I agree with us having been part of a system of governance in a passive sense. I just think that there were opportunities in that period that were available, and that they were slowly shut off more and more. And so I don't think it's so much that we were co-opted into the system but I think it was a time in history where there were opportunities to do things, that as the opportunities shut down, some of us, some of the protesters were co-opted and that was the only way to survive.*

*Maybe I'm talking in a different context and it's about where I work at the moment. That the knowledges we produce are targeted much more at the system than at groups of people, to try and bring equity into the system. To make it more equitable whether that's about social housing, social planning, whatever...*

*But when I look at the work that I've done it seem that much of it was about working with individuals and communities to target the system and it's been about empowering individuals to take on a system whereas now it's about being directed at the system and trying to break through those levels of control.*

Sarah: *I think all of us thought if we worked hard at changing government that we could bring about change but I think I now understand that as part of governmentality, really it's about big government as being all pervasive, it's not just about those in the bureaucracy.*

In this discussion, Monica and Sarah talk about their role in social change processes and acknowledge the extent to which they may have been involved in the social control of populations in the sense discussed earlier using the notion of governmentality. But the question as to whether in their community worker roles they were agents of social change or social control is never completely settled. It is as if the community workers themselves see that as an unnecessary binary. Rather than saying it is one or the other - control or change - they describe their work as being part of a continuum which tries to 'bring equity' to a system, a system in which social structures still determine a the range of choices available.

Monica: In terms of it just being governmentality, I don't know, I think the theoretical frameworks I operate with are complex, and depend on particular situations and that I can use theories about economic pragmatism if that suits, or that are more socialist based at the other end. And it depends on who the group is and what you're trying to achieve. So I don't think the theoretical frameworks that we operate with are so clearly defined any more. And that's probably a product of the fact that the system is not so clearly defined any more. So I think the theoretical frameworks are much more layered these days, they're not so clear-cut. There's the subtext of how government has to work at the most basic level, which probably overrides any of the other theories that are trying to be put into place...

Sarah: I certainly couldn't name any specific theory apart from the feminist and socialist ones which I'm reluctant to give up. Although, I have certainly changed in my perspectives about it and whereas once I would have said, that's the only way I understand very clearly now that that's not the case. I agree with Monica, it's very layered now and very complex. I mean that's all part of postmodernism that there isn't any one, any grand narrative, or saying I'm just this - sometimes it's a bit of this or a bit of that or they cross over.

**There is no privileged social agent to attain the ends; merely the multiplicity of local struggles against the burden of history and the various forms of domination and subordination. Contingency, not determination, underlies our complex present (Weekes, J. 1993 'Rediscovering values' quoted in Bauman 2001:140).**

## Exploring social futures

Michael: *The word design, which you have suggested, I find very engaging because it gives us a reference that we need. That our social structures are not organic, they arise from the relationships between people and between institutions and people. And we can seek to have some influence and seek to have choices about who is involved and how they are involved.*

*In the context in which I currently work I don't see many examples or processes that are assisting people to be involved in designing futures. I see it as a much greater separation between the institution I work with and communities.*

Monica: *For me I think the work that we did was about designing futures and I think less and less we are able to do that because of the reality of current economics and what's going on in communities. And more particularly those communities that are a disempowered or disenfranchised are left having a big impact on each other. So it's become all about protecting the middle classes. In the course of that there's less opportunity to design futures because the futures are harder to change in terms of the economic powers that be.*

*We did say, 'well we want to build community cohesion' and there were certain outcomes about the way we worked. There's other things now which impact on the communities which we have absolutely no control over. So the spaces aren't there to have the kind of impact you may have had before. I must say I have a very clear idea about what I mean when I say community, it's about areas where people live in but there's less of an opportunity to design their future than there were ten years ago. I think the communities themselves, are dealing with survival at a most innate level that doesn't allow things to happen.*

In the conversations the critical community workers discussed the design of social futures, they seem prepared to enter the boundary between the 'not yet' and the 'no longer' (quoted in Lather, 1991, p 87 also used by Rose 1999). The conversations contain evidence that the critical workers had been working through realities as they saw them and consciously thinking about their possible roles in shaping or transforming those futures. As reported in the previous Chapter One of the workers had said 'we were actually trying to predict the future.'

The New London Group (1996) called for an international multiliteracies project that would be a social resource **'in the formation of new civic spaces and new notions of citizenship'**. 'Design' was suggested as a central principle referring both to structure and to agency. The notion of 'designing social futures' seemed to fit with the way that the critical community workers talked about aspects of their practice. Cope and Kalantzis (2000 pp 203-234 following on from Kress) suggest that this kind of meaning-making is both **'interest-laden and future-oriented'**. The designing process seems a useful way to capture the way that the critical community workers, and the activists also, talk about their experiences.

**Every designing re-creates the world afresh. Every designing picks and chooses from all the bits in the world of Available Designs and puts it back together in a way it has never quite been before (Cope and Kalantzis 2000:205).**



Sarah: *Well I think that something else will occur but it's so fractured. It's not that I don't understand community but for me it's a question of whether these fractured groups actually want to talk to one another. And I don't know if those fractured groups are sustainable. Do they want to meet and talk with each other? You know that's changed now, just because it's become so small and fractured and pressured.*

*Maybe in the future we will learn to listen to those smaller sub groups and understand what they are saying, make some connections, maybe....Because I don't think we can go back to the time and see that big umbrella that covers all those groups so I think maybe we just have to learn to listen to all those differences. I hope we are able to, maybe... I'm not sure I don't know...what are we becoming?*

Monica: *I don't think it's so much about listening I think it's about building a world where social planning is a component of the way we build communities.*

Sarah: *That's certainly one way. Because to get to that we have to start listening. To what those other groups are saying and I'm not convinced that we've gotten there.*

Michael: *Compared to the theoretical and disciplinary practice that I was introduced to [in my training as a community worker] I think these questions about social futures and becoming communities are a set of more interesting questions because it poses a challenge and creates a dialogue across us. That something can 'become', but we're not sure what it is, and we can be involved in collectively looking at those questions.*

**Instead of a core culture and national standards, the realm of the civic is a space for the negotiation of a different sort of social order: where differences are actively recognized, where these differences are negotiated in such a way that they complement each other, and where people have the chance to expand their cultural and linguistic repertoires so that they can access a broader range of cultural and institutional resources (The New London Group 1996: 69).**

Trevor: *What I have loved about working in the community field always has been the emergence of these unexpected things. Groups that emerge, contradictions that emerge, the confrontations, that sometimes come as a demand on me that I should quickly position myself today about how I might ethically respond to a situation. And that may be different from how I responded yesterday and that might be different from how I respond tomorrow....*

*...perhaps it is as if the existence of governmentality (or control) invokes the emergence of dissenting collectivities...*

*...then the dissenting collectivities become tamed, controlled, legitimized through economic means, through political means, and through being made virtuous...*

*...I'm not sure how to explain the emergence of collectivities, their taking form – there is some kind of constructive or shaping energy – their emergence is their first construction, they arise as the new creation, the new citizen – then they are re-constructed and rendered not only knowable but palatable.*

*...I agree with Agamben that it is not inevitable that the reconstruction [of communities] takes place – there do emerge and remain those “non-essentialised communities...”*

*...is not your research the search, if not for the “non-essentialised communities”, then at least the evidence for how emergent communities may resist the reconstruction and remain...somewhat of the “non-essentialised” communities*

In the conversations, and in pieces of written correspondence the social activist, Trevor responded directly to the propositions about ‘becoming communities’ and ideas about ‘emergence’ proposed by Rose (1999) and Agamben (1993). The responses here link together many of the themes of the research – the uses of governmentality as a theory, the role of dissent and possible directions for future community organisation.

Trevor: *What I thought post-modernism and post-structuralism was offering was a glimpse of the possibility of recognising that there were, a number of truths and that we have the capacity as human beings to be able to rejoice in those differences and to be able to explore them.*

Enid: *A lot of theory here and the vocabulary on which it is based is based on the European idea and filtered into Australia...The only theories underlying a lot of community, town planning and anything else in Australia is the fact that we are a pragmatic people...So I think you've got to be very careful about putting in abstract theories, which I think are a good basis...There does need to be some readable theory on the idea of 'theories are useful', or that 'theories give you some kind of ground on which to work'.*

*You need a context in which to work and I believe strongly in that, as I've indicated. You could just keep on trying to repeat history but we know that's not possible or desirable. But on the other hand, the idea of knowledge is important. I like the idea of knowledges, well it's pearls really. You see certain things in context. What was seen, observed carefully and then you ask how do we go? Does this need changing? Does that need changing?*

The critical community workers and activists engaged directly with a key theoretical construct introduced through the research, that is, governmentality. This section has shown that viewing community organisations as sites of ‘government through community’ complicates simplistic dichotomies of social control or social change. This opened up another series of questions, exemplified by those raised by Trevor about ‘non-essentialised communities’ and the possibility of ‘emergent collectivities’. These concepts may be useful in thinking of future community practices.

After a thorough analysis of the outcomes of their community practice the critical community workers and activists remain hopeful about the possibility of transforming social relations. This is based on a assessment of the economic, political and social forces in which they are operating. The statements about ‘fortress city’ and ‘consumer communities’ show that the research participants are aware of the problems of realising the multicultural ‘cosmopolis’ which is (as for Sandercock 1998) at the core of many of the dreams of the community workers and activists.

The activists reflected on the uses of theory and its relation to their work. The critical community workers have been prepared to examine their theoretical frameworks and engage in the discussion of developing knowledges to assist in future practice. These developing knowledges are based on experience, critical reflection and assisted by some of the perspectives on power, language and political subjectivity drawn from poststructuralism.

In Chapter Four, an argument was constructed that working with identity was an important dimension of ‘practising place. Other dimensions of practising place have emerged in Chapter Five and have included; the ability to analyse language and social institutions; and the ability to analyse the operation of power with the intention of effecting social change. Practising place also, necessarily, includes some hope about the transformation of social relations. For research participants this hope is based on experience and practice informed by theory and also from applying a ‘critical gaze’ to that experience and practice.

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The following chapter I have described as a ‘singular journey’. While the research participant Tevi also responded to the same questions and materials as the other participants Tevi’s responses disrupt the assumption that it is a ‘journey together’. Tevi almost stepped outside of the responses and presents herself as ‘the other’. She challenges assumptions about the methods to achieve social change and deconstructs any assumptions about empowerment and participation through drawing attention to the effects and consequences of dominant cultural practices. In the following chapter Tevi complicates accepted notions of identity and community. Tevi is reluctant to be drawn into imagining the social futures and her reasons for doing so stand as a counter-point to what appears to be a consensus future that the other critical community envisage. Additionally, Tevi troubles the research process and draws attention to the difficulty of creating space for ‘the other’.

Chapter Six returns to a more conventional textual style and the reason for this is that there is a changed register. Chapter Five used an image of all the research participants ‘journeying together’, certainly with different views but in a sense heading in a similar direction; a group of seven activists and community workers exchanging ideas with some hope of transforming social relations. Chapter Six, a singular journey does not have the ‘clamour’ of a group of people contributing ideas, debating and discussing and accordingly I am using a different textual style which resembles the dialogues of Chapter One. In Chapter Six there is more a sense of myself as the researcher in dialogue with one another of the research participants.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A SINGULAR JOURNEY

Where there is an 'I', there is also a 'we' and a 'they'...(Stokes 1997:5).

Whatever is the figure of pure singularity. Whatever singularity has no identity, is not determinate with respect to a concept, but neither is it simply indeterminate; rather it is determined only through its relation to an *idea*, that is, to the totality of its possibilities. Through this relation...singularity borders all possibility...and thus receives its *omnimoda determinatio* not from its participation in a determinate concept or some actual property (being red, Italian, communist) but *only by means of this bordering*. (Agamben 1993:66)

Lather suggests that deconstructive practices in educational research will eventually bring out the question - Who are my others? (Lather, 1991a:84). In this research I have tried to remain aware of the ways in which research can set up human subjects as objects of the research - as fascinating 'others'. As a way of trying to avoid this 'objectification' I have used strategies in the research procedures to allow the research participants to name, position and describe themselves. In Chapter Four I reported at length on the discussions with the activists and critical community workers where they took up the spaces provided during the research to talk about their own identities and the ways in which they wished to position themselves both within their community practices, and, in relation to this research.

This chapter builds upon the identity work of Chapter Four and Chapter Five where input from the research participants is helping to build knowledges about the neighbourhood centres and practising place. This chapter pays attention to the contributions of one research participant, Tevi, who reminded me that rather than revealing answers, research can also reveal increasing complexity. In the case of this research participant, the complexity highlighted is to do with managing difference in a multicultural society. For this research participant any talk of place, neighbourhood or community always evoked responses about identity, difference and culture. Tevi's view of community work and sense of the possibilities of social change stood in contrast to other research participants. Tevi engaged with a great deal of interest in the theories and themes introduced through the research, but always engaged in a 'sceptical way', constantly questioning dominant cultural practices - including the practice of community development. Tevi also challenged me during the research by describing herself as 'the other', confronting me with how 'the other' is constructed, and indeed, challenged me with my complicity in that construction.

In writing this chapter I was mindful of that I was involved in a process of ‘othering’. Even by structuring the thesis in this way and selecting Tevi’s contribution to write a chapter around I had to ask myself - was I also setting up a text which continued to marginalise another? Lather (1995a:15) quoting Huag [1987] warns that ‘To make something available for discussion is to make of it an object’. Aware of the potential of this kind of objectification I did seek Tevi’s consent to structure a separate chapter around her input into the research.

Tevi: *Thinking about it, growing up not wanting to be ‘other’ and wanting to be part of the majority was quite important to me. Wanting to be part of the majority shapes some of my views and ways of being. And you only realise this only down the line that that is futile - you can’t be part of the majority because you are the ‘other’ that doesn’t slot in and will never slot in. That’s why providing the spaces to be another is quite a difficult space to create in a multicultural society, and, quite often is not created because it’s too difficult. It’s in the too difficult basket.*

Tevi: *Behaviour is culturally shaped and through migration etc...transposed onto a new culture. There will always be some aspects of it that are misunderstood...or aren’t transferable. Then, in a new place, that ability for the majority to decide who the proper community member would be intrinsically intolerant toward ‘otherness’.*

Tevi also argued that the experience of being ‘empowered’ was not necessarily a comfortable experience as it often bought with it responsibilities and understandings that made decision making far more complex and understanding far more tentative. Tevi argued that coming to knowledge was not necessarily coming to a place of easiness or comfort.

Tevi: *I could talk to you about marginalised community workers and disillusionment. (laughter) The word empowered and disempowered need to go together...being empowered and being active can also lead to disillusionment and scepticism and non-participation. Give a person the right information and it can lead to agonising responsibilities. I’m recalling all the agonising responsibility that being on the Board of Immigrant Women’s Speak Out brought with it. Trying to work out the right thing to do all the time, late meetings, we talked about that before...absolutely exhausting! Some of the consequences of empowerment...well it’s not all rosy (laughter).*

This chapter devotes a significant amount of textual space to the voice of one research participant. Tevi's is a powerful and interesting voice; a voice that provides a distinctively different storyline in relation to the key questions about empowerment, participation, place and community.

The first section of this chapter includes Tevi's reactions to participating in the research project and also the way in which Tevi made use of the poststructural theoretical material about governmentality, political subjectivity, and technologies of community. In the second section Tevi talks about the possibilities of place focused community work but also provides a critique of 'traditional' forms of community development and critiques 'old school' activist approaches because of their ethnocentric frameworks. In the third section Tevi takes up the ideas of 'becoming communities' – this is done through telling stories about her own identity and the struggles of managing difference in a multicultural society. Textually the chapter is a mix of research participant voice, dialogue and researcher commentary.

## USING POSTSTRUCTURAL THEORY

During the research, Tevi provided feedback that the research opened up a valuable space for reflection on previous community work experiences.

*Tevi: I guess what I found interesting, being out of the community sector for some time. The readings and transcripts that you circulated was like... slipping into a second skin... I understood where everyone was coming from...that familiarity that I hadn't felt for a long time. It's just like...yummy...and like I said you picked out a few nice quotations which...yeah I cringed a bit at what I said...and then I thought about it...yeah, I did hate that word community development...it's too nebulous.*

*I guess that's for me the interesting thing....that first inkling I had that there was a theory behind what I'd been doing...of course there was the community cultural development practices and processes but in the first interview we had I couldn't actually name any theories. But in fact, through the Rose chapter you've actually introduced me to the more theory side of what is actually happening, the dynamics of the way community works...The second interview after you'd introduced me to Rose, this reading material, was, sort of, a bit of a revelation.*



*Having been so far removed from the community sector, like it's been about four, five years now...But it is interesting for me after that five year separation in getting some new theories that have sort of emerged in that time, putting the words to sort of things that I felt that were a bit more nebulous back then, you think oh yeah, that makes sense, or, oh great.*

For Tevi the research provided a space to think about theories, to talk about the ambivalence felt about community development approaches, to test new theoretical frameworks and directions and to use these to examine past practices. Despite what Tevi said are the difficulties of 'creating space for others', Tevi seemed to be suggesting that the research process had created some space for reflection upon previous community work experiences not available to her previously. In the conversations Tevi critiqued community development as an approach because of the way in which it had traditionally ignored the 'cultural' dimensions of community and because community development often failed to take account of the different ways of working with marginalised groups and especially migrant communities.

*Tevi: ...well all the community development, most of it looked at the welfare aspects of the communities and left out the cultural aspects of the community and it's diversity.*

*...sometimes there is a reluctance to be identified by people. A reluctance to participant in ways that would make them vulnerable - especially for migrant groups. Why rock the boat? That's a big issue for some groups – not wanting to be exposed. That needs to be understood but often isn't [in community work].*

For Tevi the analysis of community provided by Nikolas Rose (1999:167-196) was a useful framework. Tevi suggested it updated theories from which to view community work practice.

*Tevi: It's actually very interesting, opening up and starting reading all this [the Rose chapter] I started reading and then the last two days I've been asking customers in the shop what they think about all of this!*

Tevi was interested in responding to the hypothesis about government through community, political subjectivity, communitarianism and identities proposed by Rose. For Tevi, even though there was some ambivalence about community development theories, 'theory building' itself seemed to be a very useful activity.

*Tevi: So for me, theory becomes something that is ummm... tried and tested. In the sense that, I guess people like you, like what you're doing, in terms of looking at those processes, how it*

*works, experience of those processes. And the more that you link the academic process to what actually happens on the ground, the more beneficial, all those go to make up the layers of the theory. So...yeah. Maybe it's less tedious than that but that's how I understand theories.*

I have organised the sections that follow around Tevi's interest in Rose's framework (1999:167-196). Tevi's interest in this was also about her interest in using a poststructural framework to re-examine and her community work experiences and practices.

### **Government through community**

Tevi talked at length about the way in which she saw her community work as being a response to 'structural racism'. She argued that community work provided an opportunity to change the way that organisations operate in terms of how racism operates within organisations. Tevi was talking about structural change and argued that changing the way that government, institutions and organisations operate could bring about that structural social change. She suggested that perhaps it was easier to aim at those structural levels of government and institutions in the first instance, hoping that community and personal change would follow. But Tevi also argued that it is not so simple and talked about her own personal 'puzzlement' about whether, for example in the case of anti-discrimination or anti-vilification legislation, institutional and government arrangements necessarily had effect on daily lives and behaviour. So from the very beginning of engagement in the research project Tevi was interested in talking about structures and governing arrangements.

After the concept of governmentality was introduced Tevi began to explore, from her own experience, the notion of government through community and the ways that community workers are engaged in operating within a governmentalised community sector. In Tevi's analysis, seen in the quotes that follow, the community worker can be seen as operator or negotiator within a governmentalised community sector. The community worker does the negotiation at a community level that bureaucrats are not authorised (or trusted) to do. Often, as Tevi described here and later, the outcomes of these negotiations are not always supportive of community structures and interests.

Tevi: *Yes we are part of some kind of governance. Rose uses the word control but for me it is about management. For me...what's the word...need something more flexible than control...It's about giving people physical space and permission for people to feel comfortable to say things that sound stupid at times.*

*I think the link made between governance and community development is a good one. Yes it is governance.*

*Yeah, I guess that's the thing. I guess how government works influences how the community programs that you run works. Cause it all ties together; it doesn't matter whether it's one form of government or another.*

*Being the meat in the sandwich. That's what it felt like. At the Migrant Resource Centres, at Immigrant Women's Speak-out, at every single welfare organisation, even peak bodies...yeah definitely the meat in the middle of the sandwich. And quite often you're caught between a rock and a hard place. That's the structure of it – the structure of government funding and positions, your advocacy role on behalf of the community. Your personal political views quite often need to be set aside in order to work with people who have very different personal views.*

*And you were caught between very large organisations who had a lot of resources and there were very few avenues there for you to get in there and get your piece said and acted on. And I found that extremely difficult and you had to deal with a community who was divided. One section of the community were real pro-development, another one who were anti-development, another who didn't care if it happened in their back-yard and it was difficult to get them to care.*

*I think in a lot of ways. I say this not lightly that I felt it was more, in the time that I was at the.... Centre – not so much control – it's a harsh word but when I say try to lower both sides expectations about what they could achieve. That was managing. It's not about control it's about providing the information so that people can make realistic requests of each other and try to bring them into the middle ground. I felt it was more of juggling and trying to be quite innovative in that. There was a lot of, well... why don't we try this and you know...that might work. And trying to present a picture to government about what could work in a more innovative way rather than going full throttle.*

As with the other research participants Tevi was given a copy of the chapter by Rose on 'community'. Tevi had then written notes in a direct response to the headings that Rose had used and introduced her own notes in the research conversations. In one of the conversations, after talking about government through community we then talked through her response to Rose's heading of political subjectivity.

## Political Subjectivity

Nikolas Rose describes the way in which different subject positions emerge as a reworking of ‘bonds of obligation and responsibilities’ (1999:176). In earlier chapters there was some discussion of how community workers, adult educators and many other social and welfare professionals play a role in reminding individuals of their allegiances to particular communities. In this process different political identifications are mobilised and shaped. For Tevi, there were complex connections made between community and identity, and, Tevi provided a very clear explanation of how she saw this operating within the communities where she had worked.

*Tevi: All attempts at empowerment are attempts to reconstruct: probably in lots of ways overt. If you give them information they wouldn't have access to, it gives them an opportunity to rethink their stance. If that information is new, they can take that information away and absorb that, then shift.*

*Usually the first ones to be mobilised [in migrant communities] are the ones who are outspoken to begin with. Not necessarily the most constructive but the person who feels they have the right. Not necessarily the spokesperson but those who feel a sense of connectedness, but those feel they are on their home turf.*

*Migrant communities often don't feel a connectedness. Usually it's the one with the most language skills and the one who sees the most benefit in being a community leader because they have those skills. And usually they use the community as a springboard for other aspirations. So it's very difficult...Often an entire family or clan has their own political agenda to achieve and the population at large doesn't understand that. Those community leaders are using the situation as a political springboard for their own political agenda. This sits less comfortably with me.*

At the end of this explanation from Tevi I made a comment to the effect of ‘That’s all very subtle isn’t it?’ Tevi’s response was, ‘No quite common really’. Tevi pointed out that there was a word for this that is often used – the gatekeeper role. That for migrant communities who have come from a space where there is not the ability to participate, the role of the gatekeeper is enhanced. Community workers who are not from migrant communities need to understand this dynamic and Tevi thought they generally did not. The gatekeeper may not be in a position to ‘speak on behalf of the community’ but may be forced into that position. Tevi said that many community workers do not understand these cultural complexities.

Tevi describes her experience as having the opportunity to see how identity formations change across time and place and that in this sense her experience is that identities are not fixed. She provided a brief explanation of how that occurs across generations of migrant groups and in the conversations was very clear that ‘fixing’ or making concrete particular identity formations could ‘unhinge things’. In that sense Tevi seems to resist a politics of closure and states her openness to an ethico-politics, as described by Rose (1999:191-196), which seeks to ‘un-work’ identities.<sup>20</sup>

*Tevi: Some of these identities arise, or are mobilised or develop only when there’s a system that doesn’t recognise what they, the groups are saying. If you think your government has done well by you then you don’t have to do the political dissidence thing. People have to constitute themselves as the Chinese community or the Serbo-Croatian community or the ‘whatever’ group because the structure has not catered for their needs.*

*I think it’s also about gaining the right to be recognised as a community that hasn’t been catered to. An example is the Bosnian community. White European migrants came to Australia for building the Hydro scheme. They were all mixed in together and not identified separately. Some groups didn’t come to the fore until there were wars in their own countries. And then large numbers came along and additional influx and family reunion and that sort of thing. So how do they gain rights and recognition? By something huge happening in their own country and then something puts them in the headlines. For example the idea of a Bosnian welfare group was not created until the post Bosnian war. Greek community was created through critical mass a long time ago. And there are other examples. So if you’re fixing identities and meaning and making it all concrete this can also unhinge things.*

*I guess that there are other identity formations if you look across inter-generations of migrants. There are differences. As you move further away from initial settlement there is either a sense of empowerment or disillusionment.*

### **Critiquing communitarianism**

Chapter Two included a lengthy section on writers and theorists who provided a critique of notions of ‘community’ developed within liberal democratic societies. For writers like Clifford

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<sup>20</sup> Rose describes one form of politics which ‘...seeks to govern a polity through the micro-management of the self-steering practices of its citizens. Rather than endeavouring to make forms of life open to explicit political debate, it attempts to technically manage the way in which each individual should conduct him- or herself...in order to produce politically desired ends’. By contrast there is a form of ethico-politics closer to that described by Tevi where ‘Against closure...would be a politics whose ethics is a reluctance to govern too much, that minimizes codification and maximizes debate, that seeks to increase the opportunities for each individual to construct and transform his or her own forms of life...’ (1999:195).

(2001), Cruickshank (1994), Dean (1999) and Rose (1999) this critique (following on largely from the work of Foucault) questioned presuppositions about personal autonomy and the apparent ‘naturalness’ of community formations. Tevi responded to the debate in a way that questioned consensus assumptions about participation but also suggesting that forms of community or connectedness were inevitable.

*Tevi: Yes there is an assumption that participation is good...Usually it's an assumption of those who have a certain level of empowerment. This assumption of participation is intrinsic to the human condition. I guess it's a question of how you see ourselves and our social networks.*

*Some sort of engagement is part of the human condition ... Humans are social beings and can be solitary for a particular amount of time. Intrinsically they will connect with 'the other' in whatever form. There is always connectedness even if it's to the next stage.*

Rose argues that there is a new game of power operating which he calls ‘the community-civility game’ (1999:187-188). Rose suggests that those locked within communitarian traditions are unlikely to see the dynamics of this game.

Despite claiming above that the notion of ‘connectedness’ is ‘intrinsic’, in the sections that follow Tevi describes some of the dynamics of the civility game in a way that challenges some of the assumptions of communitarianism, that is, the ways in which groups who are marginalised are drawn into playing the ‘community-civility’ game. In effect these groups are encouraged to participate in ways that might expose them or work against them, groups are encouraged to participate in a social structure only to be betrayed by those social structures. Tevi gives one example where a group shows distrust of participating within the ‘civilized’ game of the media. Tevi also sees that ‘civility game’ as something which is learnt and describes the consequences of not participating in ways that are established by ‘the mainstream’.

*Tevi: At the...Centre there was such a reluctance to use mainstream media. But really I would have liked to have been able to train people up to use that avenue with some kind of confidence. I guess other people have had the confidence to use those avenues. Others are not just reluctant but sceptical about the outcomes...That comes back to the Chinese communities reluctance to even be identified in some debates and now, thinking back I can see that small communities reluctance to use that avenue has been problematic.*

*A proper community member in an Australian context is based on Anglo-Christian ethics which isn't necessarily so for others coming from other ideological backgrounds. So that civility game*

*and I do see it as a game can only be played with some who have understood what the majority behaviour is. Only then can you play that game. If you don't understand the majority you are still locked out and can only play the game within your own communities.*

### **Technologies of community**

Communities themselves have become the objects of new forms of political technology. These technologies of community were discussed in Chapter Two, while in Chapter Five the activists and critical community workers identified many of the ways in which new forms of authority have been constituted and enacted within the sector called 'community'. Tevi identified 'consciousness-raising' as a technique that is deployed to bring about certain effects. One of the effects is that of positioning the community worker or the 'empowerer' as the one who then is authorised to 'speak with power' or 'speak to power' on behalf of communities.

*Tevi: In the consciousness-raising thing you feel part of the majority. Feeling that you should be indignant and write letters, go to rallies... It's not going to make a difference. There is a limitation to how much change you can bring about. It doesn't matter how much consciousness-raising you do. It won't change government or what they are going to do.*

*I think workers generally try to get as wide a participation as possible because I suppose your reliability is much more credible.*

This led to some dialogue between Tevi and myself about the role of community workers and the way in which community workers, even though often claiming to be part of challenging governing arrangements are actually deeply enmeshed in managing populations in a governmentalised state.

*John: So is the function of the professional community worker to make themselves and their views more credible? Is this any more or less ethical really than a policing or corporate business model?*

*Tevi: If you don't come up with the goods you don't have credibility to go on to the next project and you won't get funding to go on to the next project. Also credibility amongst other community workers is an issue.*

*John: This is suggesting to me that the moral or ethical position is compromised in terms of fitting in with funding arrangements or position of workers in the community.*

*Tevi: ...yeah, that's true. That's interesting because if you are to participate with government at a higher level your links have to be seen to be strong. Also you have to be able to compromise – that's the 'meat in the sandwich' that I referred to last time.*

The dialogue above is very similar to the dialogue in Part Two of Chapter Five where Monica and Sarah were discussing whether, looking back on their own community work experiences and attempts at social change, they had been involved in 'social control or social change'. Tevi seems to have adopted a more pragmatic approach to this dilemma, recognising that there are indeed compromises, but that to engage with the power structures means sometimes having to be the 'meat in the sandwich'. Tevi's approach to achieving social change seems less programmatic and more about working with power wherever it can be accessed, activated and shifted. Her conceptualisation of power does seem to be more closely aligned with the way power is understood in poststructuralism.

#### **THE LIMITATIONS OF COMMUNITY WORK PRACTICES**

At the beginning of the research Tevi talked about the possibilities in community and neighbourhood work, and suggested that local community work could bring many benefits:

*Tevi: Empowerment in a community in a neighbourhood Centre setting was about giving people the opportunity to take part in a flexible way. To take part in whichever way they wanted to whether it be a learning structured classroom environment – providing for space and teachers for that, or whether it be in a drop in manner to meet people. Or whether it's about providing directives services...counselling and support.*

*Tevi: It's about giving people physical space and permission for people to feel comfortable to say things that sound stupid at times. To be themselves whatever that might be.*

Tevi talked about attempts use the discourse of community development and turn it around in her own practice to use what she called a 'nebulous concept' in meaningful ways.

*Tevi: So ...I was in London, could be in the late 80s and there was a lot of black communities getting together and wanting to get their arts, and their sort of cultural stuff, urban culture, to be published or exposed, and that sort of, it was such a struggle, for all those on the fringes. And when I came back to Australia, I translated that back to the community arts work at local level.*



But Tevi also suggested that community development traditions in Australia were not closely linked to ‘gender-equity’, ‘cultural-equity’ or core beliefs of ‘equity and social justice’ and these were the limitations. She argued that in her experience community development was too often seen as a process that did not reinforce core social justice beliefs. During the conversations we talked about how this may have happened and in a discussion about language, Tevi offered these observations about the way that social justice ideals became displaced in a complex interplay between language and governing arrangements.

*Tevi: We used to call things racism. And now, there comes something called ethnocentrism and the lines between them are a bit grey. But to call someone out right racist seems harsh, but if you call them ethnocentric most people that you try to tag with that, won't even understand what that is! And so it's got me thinking about how, well how do we use language? And how it's shaped how we perceive certain aspects of the work...*

*I remember sitting in a community meeting and having one guy who I thought was that borderline between being racist and ethnocentric and he's certainly ethnocentric. But there's a very fine line between that and outright racism and he always walked that middle line so I never knew whether to just pull him up as an out right racist or just write him off and say he's ethnocentric...sort of generates a level of dilemma...*

*...in a way that you have to mimic what the government wants [i.e. by talking about ethnocentrism not racism]. You have to start micking that language, and then that language becomes, you know, the language you use.*

Tevi critiqued the ways in which the language of community development, empowerment and participation often obscured the realities of community work.

*Tevi: You translate something, when you transcribe something it doesn't mean the same, hasn't the same sort of emotional tie. Might be... not something that's frequently used or valued in the same way, in terms of bilingual but also in terms of our own use of English. Like my use of English and someone else's from another part of the country...there's different values placed on the same words. So it's coming from our different value bases, our educational bases and all of that...*

*...assumptions have to be made, but someone with knowledge would recognise that they're assumptions...Quite often people have difficulty identifying those underlying assumptions, and that's where it can get tricky.*

Tevi was critical of what she called an 'old school activism' which she argued alienated many, particularly those from migrant communities, from participating in community projects. In talking about the successes (or not) of different forms of activism Tevi starts to talk about the 'knowledges' that have been developed in community work in the inner city and how these knowledges can be passed on. In the paragraphs that follow Tevi talks about the difficulties of transferring knowledge about community work from one 'generation of community workers to another'.

*Tevi: I think in lots of cases, some of the activism that happens in the community sector is self-defeating and ineffective. Like ...you know... around developments [in the inner city]. You know that development is going to happen; come hell or high water, there is no going back. There's no point in trying, in leading a community, or in assisting a community to have it not go up. That's not going to happen. That's not gunna be a reality ... in terms of knowledge that we produce each worker will carry away a particular amount of knowledge but they won't be able to share with the next worker. Or in terms of how they document it.*

*There is no way I can document the feelings I have, that sense of the relationship and trust with the community. You always walk away with that trust and the next worker has to build up that trust. Others can try to develop and massage that trust but in the end it's up to each community worker.*

*There's quite a few people that I call old school activists that alienated a lot of others. Yeah so their knowledges how do they pass that on? If your first experience and your continuing experiences [with the old school activists] were unpleasant, if they were too demanding of your time or your efforts or interests...it taints some of the body of knowledge that that person might actually be able to transfer to you.*

*I'm the sort of person who questions knowledges. So whenever...say I'm reading documentation that someone has written on community experiences. I'd be looking at it going – What? No? Really? And I anticipate whatever I produce in terms of knowledge, not produce but I document for future use, will hopefully be questioned in the same way. I do not want someone to read what I've written point blank and not have the experience of it... Even when I was handing over to ... one of the things she knew about me and the position I had – she knew I knew a lot about*

*the community, the composition of the community, the issues, the various strata of the community but when it came to handing over, you can't just do that without... going out... and having the experience ...*

*...so the 'three D' effect, the cushioning out of the nuances and how [the next worker] interacts with those nuances is quite different to how I interact. So that body of knowledge, that I hand over, say, is slightly flawed, because it's coming from me as the teller. You know there's nothing you can do about that.*

For Tevi community work is something that can only be understood through experience – through the building up of relationships and trust. The scepticism spoken of by Tevi about the possibilities of community development is not total; in another section Tevi talks about the way in which involvement in community work has deepened her understanding of social processes and structures. And she says that this has not been a straight-forward or linear journey to some kind of understanding. Some of this was mentioned in Chapter Four, but here again Tevi uses the image of a 'circle' to describe how she understands community work experience. Also she describes how this research has provided an opportunity to look back at the community work experience.

Tevi: *....you've given me an opportunity, by doing this [research], to go over what I've done and sort of close that circle... See it as more of a whole. And it's also making me realise that it's not a place that I want to go back to.*

*It's like I've done my time, and if I were to go back to it, it would not be a pretty sight (loud laughter). In some ways, I find people like, long-term activists, I don't know what sustains them... I find it very hard to believe, to understand the depth of motivation. So someone who is working in the health sector, say as long as George has been working there, twenty or twenty five years, however long, I find that astounding. But he knows that system, he knows the ebbs and flow, he knows the limitations yet he still preservers in that system. I would have left three governments ago...you know the health sectors slow degeneration and now if it's to built up again, you know the tide is so hard to turn. There's a lot of big issues to deal with now. You know its all policing and zero tolerance...oh god what a nightmare!*

*In terms of looking back in hindsight, I can understand a lot more of why I was so frustrated. And I remember R [Another community worker at the Centre] actually saying to me when I went on holidays, she said, 'and now who's going to have all the anger'. Because, I was the angry one! Whenever I came across some sort of you know, injustice or inequity, an issue that, I*

*sort of, I'd unearthed from the community, I'd get quite angry and indignant on the part of the community. That's what fired me up, that was what drove me to develop projects to get around these sorts of things.*

*There are different stages in how you position yourself, you get people with two or three years experience [as activists or community workers]...who have still got that drive who have got those core ideals, still operating on those core ideals. And then you get the 8-10 year worker, it might be an interesting strata to draw upon. You know community activists – their life cycle. Because, I guess in terms of how I'd position myself now – a few years ago I might have said burnt out, but now it's more sceptical.*

*And it's a circle that I place somewhere else. I'm no longer... that's no longer where I participate. Yeah. So I, it's like an ornament. Something attractive, valued and something I hold dearly but something quite removed now which I feel quite good about. Honestly John I'm glad!*

*You know you read the paper, you read stuff about changing policies that come out and you know you read some of the... what's happening with this, what's happening with that... and you think. All these things go through your head... and you think, and that's not gonna happen...doesn't matter what people say or what government policy comes in, there's not gonna be change, never in a million years. And it's nice, and you know, you process things much more quickly.*

*You think oh that's interesting, that might work, that wont work...your filter becomes deeper and deeper. Which is quite nice, what I call the bullshit filter (laughter). It's enhanced enormously through your knowledge of community!*

Tevi talked often about the experience of being 'the meat in the sandwich'. Between communities, government instrumentalities and developers and described the community worker role as having to come up with some kind of negotiation, often something that was quite limited from the point of view of the community.

*Tevi: The doomsday sort of predictions that were happening in the community, the old community [about the re-development of the Ultimo Pymont area], I thought I had already filtered and tempered some of that, to seek what was going to happen in the future, here. Neither of them were true, the reality is quite different. So, the community had their sort of doomsday predictions, I sort of raised the bar a bit and said well it's*

*not going to be that bad, it's going to be isolating for a time... now looking at it... well it's not too bad.*

## **BECOMING COMMUNITIES AND IDENTITY WORK – ‘IT’S THE LINKAGES YOU MAKE’**

As indicated earlier Tevi appreciated taking part in the research project because it provided a space for her to reflect upon previous community work. Tevi said that the chapter from Nikolas Rose had been of interest and she also responded to the work of Agamben (1993) and the ideas of ‘becoming communities’ and from The New London Group (1996) the concept of ‘designing social futures’. What follows is some of our dialogue about ‘becoming communities’ and social futures. For Tevi, as described earlier, the community work had also been about her own identity work, finding a place and not wanting to always be ‘the other’ - these themes continue throughout the following dialogue. Tevi talks about ‘making linkages’ as an important part of her work.

*Tevi: So becoming communities? Yeah, there is nothing greater to becoming a community than giving a community a common adversary. If you want to gel a community together, in some form, whatever form, give them a common adversary like Lucas Heights or the airport site, anything. That's an easy way to become a community. There are much longer, harder processes.*

*John: What are some of the longer harder processes?*

*Tevi: It's much more nebulous. I guess here, now [talking about the Ultimo-Pyrmont area], it would be much harder, not knowing the issues that would bring a community together. I would find it difficult to reach individual members within, mainly because of the structure. You know bigger buildings, lack of community participation, most likely have their socialisation in a dispersed environment that sort of thing. But I just saw the notice of the Pyrmont/Ultimo festival. Now that is not the way to become a community. These sort of community festivals, as much as I love them, and next Sunday there's the Eastlakes one, Eastlakes multicultural festival which I helped initiate years and years and years ago. Now both of these...I don't know why we do it. Other than just a party, if you think of it just as a party, it's fine. That's how I thought of it in the end. Giving people a reason to gather. But if you want something more than that...*

*So I don't know. Becoming a community and being a community? Does becoming a community mean only newcomers? Or does it mean maintaining the people who have only been there? Or does it encompass fringe who have dropped away? And how to bring them back? And what would re-engage you in the community? I'd be very hard pushed to say what would re-engage me...*

*I'm quite happy with non-participation and non-activism. People send me emails all the time about fundraisers, you know, petitions to be signed, letters to be forwarded. I choose not to. Like – I know those petitions; I know the letters to parliamentarians ... I know the limited effectiveness. But I know by not participating I'm probably limiting it even further but still I think... all that work, for very little gain, it's just heartbreaking..*

*So it's an interesting question: becoming or maintaining?*

*John: One of the notions that Agamben is exploring is this idea of the self and singularities. And actually this was objectionable to me at first. But it's not just about going back to some idea of 'I'm some independent separate person from everything'. But it's something about what that kind of development of the self is about.*

*Tevi: Yes well linking the stuff that's sort of happening around Western self-development pathways together with the community and how that affects the community.*

*John: Yes, that's what Agamben and also the writer James Clifford who I have mentioned are carrying on about. Because we can't escape from the Western liberal notion of what the self is or what self identity is, and that you know there are 'savage identities' and historically if we talked about any kind of social structures, it is some self-thing or some kind development of singularity which Western liberal democracies have picked up on very well and have used it...continue to use it in ways that is perhaps not as healthy as it could be. So part of this singularity is looking at that notion of self and identity and self but not necessarily in the Western Liberal democratic tradition but not being able to escape it...we can't escape it because we're so trapped in it.*

*Tevi: Yeah yeah...there is a dilemma, and I think most people face that dilemma... between self serving choices and choices that will serve the common good. And (laughter) let me tell you the self always wins out. And there's a whole body of guilt when you do that but then there's a body of resentment when you continue to do the common good sort of stuff.*

*So trying to find that balance between participating in the community as an individual to bring individual knowledge, charisma, whatever to that group and at a nurturing level where you won't burn yourself out... you know and completely withdraw. I haven't struck the balance but at the moment I'm making improvements bit by bit. Say ...OK...going to a fair day won't nurture me but going to dinner with my Muslim cousins ...that may be more nurturing for me at this particular point in time. But that's only at this point in time maybe next year I will have to go to fair day. But those individual choices we make need to nurture us.*

*With our diverse experiences, our broader knowledges we are becoming more diverse. And there's more things pulling at you. I'm part of this community, I'm part of that community, I'm part of that community, I don't know which to turn my attention to. So I think 'oh that'll do for now' or 'I think that will be better for me in the long run'. So there's just so many more choices to make as an individual. I don't think that there were those choices in the past. I don't think there were that many choices in the old idea of what community was.*

*So those dilemmas, those personal choices, together with Western democratic individualist you know...yeah...makes it extremely difficult.*

*John: Of course part of the dilemma is that the Western Liberal democratic tradition has opened up all those possibilities.*

*Tevi: Yes, that's right, and also the idea that those choices are valid. You know all your personal choices that you make...I know I'm quite personally paralysed at times by the number of choices of I have. And the other day, on my day off, I chose to go to the shopping mall on my day off. You know that was the no brainer, there were ten other things competing for my attention. And you know I went with the one that was minimal resistance and that is the shopping mall and it will always be the shopping mall...minimum resistance, you know...on a Monday morning, no parking problems, air-conned to the hilt...you know soft target. And, so how participatory I am depends on how worn out I feel.*

*I guess it's about what choices we are making and the syphoning off guilt if I you chose say...one particular community activity over another one or chose not to participate. I don't know. Is it better to have those community commitments that obligate you to carry through but still become nurturing in the long run? I don't know. That's yet to be written for me personally. I've made choices and I've seen my sisters make certain choices. And I know that those choices they've made to be part of the Muslim community would be extremely stifling for me. I know that I could not make those choices. And so I respect them in their choices, I hope they respect*

*me in mine in not participating in that way in the Muslim community, or in the Chinese community and it's not because I can't.*

*And it's not that I can't do any of that - my mother rang me the other day said, well her way of saying "would you like to come" to a Taiwanese Chinese overseas cultural performance. It's a cabaret, you have no idea it could really be just so bad! (laughter), but at that point in time I thought yeah, why not. It was a Friday night so I said yeah OK. I felt like a bit of Chinese (laughter).*

*So I went over to their place and had like, spag bol...my sister made spag bol! So much for the Chinese food! And so we then headed off to some Chinese cultural entertainment and it was just you know diabolical but in an absurd way quite enjoyable. Got mum and dad there... dad being in a wheelchair...so mum doesn't like taking him out on her own... can't get him in and out the car... so she need help... I was there as the help. But ended up sitting there gossiping with mum about what was happening on stage. Yeah it was really, really enjoyable and I thought – this is the level of cultural stuff that I can go to, if it meant sitting there stuffing envelopes to do a mass mail out for the Taiwanese Overseas Association, nope! But I can pay my fee and help in that way. And same with the Muslim community if they have some sort of social money raising thing if I can't go I'll give my sisters the door money to buy me a ticket.*

*John: It's amazing all the things you keep up with.*

*Tevi: Yeah that's what I mean it's about keeping those balls juggling. What do we have to say about them? Well I have to say I have to pick and choose for me, what's good for me at that particular point in time, and it's got nothing to do with you know what the community is or isn't doing. Because there's so many competing things, you know I might be quite unique in that sense – the number of balls I have to keep in the air.*

Some research conventions would probably encourage me as the researcher to make some commentary on the above dialogue but I do think the stories about identity and community, which Tevi has told speak for themselves. The fact that I do not offer any commentary here does not mean as the writer and research I have abandoned analysis. Rather, I think my writer and researcher role is to say in relation to the above, that it is a powerful story that does speak for itself.

The sections that follow were spoken towards the end of the last conversation in a slightly 'playful' way, although what is being talked about is far from playful. Some of Tevi's talk



points toward the ‘terrible exclusions’ that operate when the concept of community is invoked. Tevi is trying to contrast the experience of those who had been ‘settled’ in Australia and were part of what could be described as ‘traditional’ communities in Australia and her own experience of migration and trying to ‘fit in’, of trying ‘not to be the other’. For Tevi, this extends beyond a personal experience and offers it as an example of the experience of many others. In the end however, Tevi suggests that social futures will necessarily be diverse and cannot be ‘definitive’, and this is occurring for more and more people.

*Tevi: I mean someone like Mary S. who lived in Stockton in Newcastle and who all barracked for the bulldogs for three generations – she might have different choices and different balls to keep in the air. Their idea of a big night out was going to the RSL club. Mary was the first person I met, made friends with when I migrated here to Australia and she lived in a street in Stockton, she lived there, her parents lived there, her sisters and her grandparents all live in one street. Different houses up and down the street and everyone in the family barracked for the same football team.*

*I remember this as being quite unique because I had never in my entire life met someone like her. So Mary was a revelation. I had a different experience...because we had just migrated, we’d meet other migrants...we’d hang around in communities that we don’t really belong in. So being Chinese hanging out in a Muslim community with all Egyptians, Turks and Lebanese. At that time there was very few Asian Muslims. They were all still back in Asia. So being an outcast in that community. So also being Chinese and going to Chinese functions and not being able to eat anything because it all had pork in it – we had to bring our own food! You know it was unheard of! So being an outcast in that community also. Spoke Chinese but no Arabic but had Udur and Turkish.*

*For me the linkages are really important because coming from so many different background, having so many balls in the air the only things that keeps them together is the number of linkages I can make. Sort of ‘that makes sense’, ‘oh right’, and I can keep them going around. If I couldn’t see where all those different parts of me fit in that would be pretty lonely. Whereas my sisters have made sense of it, by connecting to one particular layer of community. That they felt that’s comfortable. Whereas I’ve kept them all, and, not participating in one of them, all the time.*

*I guess in terms of social futures I don’t have a definitive social future. And there are many people like me and more and more of us. We don’t have any definitive social future because it is so diverse.*

Talking of 'social futures' evoked in Tevi a personal response about identity formations. It was about 'making linkages' and establishing relationships between a constantly changing 'self' and constantly changing sets of community relationships and ties. Tevi talked about the assemblages of identity within which she operates and has also talked about the assemblages of identities that she has seen operating in other social groupings. This response resonates with Rose's description of the radical potential of 'becoming communities' and an accompanying radical ethico-politics where:

Within such an ethic, it is not a question of the discovery of one's truth, of a commitment to the project of one's individual and collective identity, but of the active, material technical, creative assembling of one's existence, one's relation to oneself, even one's corporeality. Community here would be the name for the forms of collectivisation that create new types of non-individuated subjectivity and bring new mobile forces into existence. (Rose 1999: 196)

Even though Tevi has talked about situations very similar to the 'rootless and indeterminant postmodern habitat' (Bauman 2001), where community often appears as little more than something for consumption by those who can afford it, this chapter has shown that 'community', at least for Tevi can be seen as dynamic and 'be-coming' – fixity and closure can be challenged. The social futures may be indeterminant but this chapter has shown that identity and community as concepts are productive and helpful as a way to talk about sustaining a future multicultural politics.

This chapter concludes that section of the thesis where the input from the research participants has been seen to substantively contribute to the knowledges about practising place and inner city Sydney neighbourhood centres. Chapter Four highlighted the 'identity work' of the research participants and suggested that this identity work was an essential part of practising place. Chapter Five provided an analysis of language and social institutions, social change processes and social relations (which included the possibilities of be-coming communities) as essential components in practising place. Chapter Six showed how one of the research participants engaged with the research project and extended practising place to include the ability to accommodate cultural difference within community- to provide a space for 'the other'. This chapter also highlighted many of the difficulties of 'creating space' for 'the other' within community practices.

Concepts of empowerment, participation and community organization have been scrutinised and deconstructed. The desires and intentions of those involved in inner city Sydney NCs and activist community work have been explored further. This exploration has demonstrated the contradictory nature of community development work in particular contexts. The extent to which the organisations have been able to engage in dissent and operate outside of the 'mainstream' within a governmentalised state and community sector has also been discussed.

I recognise the thematic structures I have used in Chapters Four, Five and Six was one way of ordering the rich and diverse stories of practice and reflection that have been told. My textual management of those stories, my attempt to create a layered text, where participants' voices, my commentary, and the weaving in of theory, was an attempt to set up some 'play' between the different elements involved in research. As Cherryholmes says,

Subjects as well as researchers have something to say. What subjects and researchers say (write) is located in an inherited context of time and place enforced by power relationships. What is said and written can be criticized. There are alternative interpretations and stories to tell' (Cherryholmes 1988:120).

The following chapter is the concluding chapter where the research is reviewed. This includes returning to those central research questions about empowerment, participation and citizenship. There are some final notes on activist and community worker identities and the possibilities for re-invention of those identities. There will also be a review of the ways in which poststructuralism has been used as a standpoint from which to view community organisation practice and a summary of the dimensions of practising place.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ALIGHT HERE

Kublai asked Marco: ‘You, who go about exploring and who see signs, can tell me towards which of these futures the favouring winds are driving us.’

‘For these parts I could not draw a route on the map or set a date for the landing. At times all I need is a brief glimpse, an opening in the midst of an incongruous landscape, a glint of lights in the fog, the dialogue of two passersby meeting in the crowd, and I think that, setting out from there, I will put together, piece by piece the piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them. If I tell you that the city towards which my journey tends is discontinuous in space and time, now scattered, now more condensed, you must not believe the search for it can stop.’ (Calvino 1974:126)

I am reluctant to say ‘concluding’ just as I was reluctant to use images of research as ‘a conquering’, ‘a homecoming’ or, ‘an arrival at a place of understanding’; so in the spirit of the ‘journeying’ of the earlier chapters, I ask the reader to simply ‘alight here’. There are four sections in this chapter.

The first section describes the reflexive research approach used in this research. In the second section, the contribution of this research to the field of adult and community education is discussed. In the third section, poststructural theorising is presented as something which has enabled community organisation practitioners to ‘find their place’ in contemporary debates about locality and community. In the research space, poststructuralism, and especially the concept of governmentality, provided ‘another language’ for the activists and critical community workers to conceptualise and talk power, community and place. The language of poststructuralism enabled the research participants to ask different sets of questions about the social institutions and social change processes in which they were involved. I argue that using the concept of governmentality enabled the activists and community workers to continue to tell reflexive stories about the way they worked with power (Rule 2005).

The fourth section is a summary of ideas associated with ‘practising place’ and suggests that ‘practising place’ could be a useful concept within a collection of theoretical resources from which community organisation practitioners may draw.

## **A REFLEXIVE RESEARCH APPROACH**

### **Reciprocity and catalytic validity in research**

Positivist and empiricist epistemologies and assumptions have been challenged by contemporary analysis and many involved in educational research have sought to describe some of the features of post-positivist research approaches including; Usher and Edwards (1994), Luke (1995), Stronach and MacLure (1997), Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997), Boud and Garrick (1999), Garrick and Rhodes (2000), Lee (2000), Pennycook (2001), Sanguinetti (2000) and MacLure (2003). In this research I have drawn heavily on Lather (1991a,1991b) whose work is quoted by some of these authors as having successfully provided some ‘signposts’ for a post-positivist approach to educational research. In previous chapters I have drawn attention to my interest in how principles of reciprocity, discussed by Lather, can be understood in research and the way in which catalytic validity, again raised by Lather, can be some kind of measure of the effectiveness of educational research.

Lather was not providing a cookbook, formula or guide but was describing an approach to research that is, ‘More emergent than codified and more experimental than standardized...’ (1991a: 98). Part of this emergent research approach concentrates on the space given to the voices of research participants. In my research, participant voices appeared early in Chapter One, were evident through Chapter Two and Three, and, in Chapters Four, Five and Six were given a substantial amount of space within the text. My researcher commentary, theme making, questioning and structuring of the text is present, but in a reflexive mode I tried to acknowledge that presence and draw attention to it at a textual level. I also tried to draw attention to the social relations of the research act by problematising my role as a researcher and by describing how my own frameworks and theoretical pre-dispositions have helped shape the research process and the research text, this is seen especially in Chapter One and in Chapter Three where I provided a number of different possible accounts of the research journey.

One of my aims in the research was to see whether the research method and procedures could be shaped in way that was congruent with the interests of those who were participating in the research. The research participants had experience and interest in critical analysis, not only of the social structures in which they operated, but also had a critical interest in the role of research. They expected a research design and outcome that would link to their own (critical) understandings of the activity called ‘research’. I was conscious from the beginning of the research that the participants had an expectation that the research itself would include a critical

appraisal of the effects of research. Another word for this is reflexivity, and, from the initial stages of the research I knew that the research participants expected a reflexive research approach and this challenge was presented in the dialogues written up in Chapter One.

Being 'reflexive' was not achieved simply by presenting my own professional and personal journey, which provided some of the impetus for the research, but also by being present, as the researcher, in the text, in dialogue with the other research participants. In other words being reflexive, as the researcher in this research has not involved a simple declaration of my 'position' or statement about 'where I come from' as in Chapter One, but by continually examining, throughout the research how my own researcher identity and presence was being shaped, challenged and changed.

The principles of reciprocity and dialectical theory building described by Lather (1991a: 57 – 64) seemed to be relevant to the context in which the research was carried out. Lather suggests that in terms of procedures this requires that interviews be conducted in a manner that is 'dialogic', that the researcher is involved in acts of self-disclosure to develop trust and mutual understanding, that the research focus be something which can be 'probed' through sequential interviews and facilitated small group work and that there is negotiation about the meanings which are developed. 'At a minimum, this entails recycling description, emerging analysis and conclusions to at least a sub-sample of respondents...' and further, that this reciprocal and dialogic research design would '... lead to self-reflection and provide a forum in which to test the usefulness, the resonance, of conceptual and theoretical formulations' (p.61). Chapters One, Five and Six provide evidence of dialogue between myself, as the researcher and the research participants.

The research provided a space for reflection for the activists and critical community workers. It was a space that the participants acknowledged had not been available previously. There were a number of statements from participants as to what they gained from being part of the research. One participant said, *'I get an impression of what other people felt as well and that allows me to reflect on how I sort of see things'*, another, *'For me it's just interesting to look back ....I'm happy just to do it no matter what happens...because it's my whole working history, my whole life I've been involved in this....So having an opportunity to read about other people and the fact that you're writing something that would be relevant to me, and worthwhile...I'm shocked how little people know about the history of what we've done'*. Another participant said, *'their considerations about their practice'* had been given some 'additional tools', mentioning particularly the postmodernist and poststructuralist ideas introduced through this research. The research process was challenging of the theoretical positions of some research participants and

one provided this reflective comment in relation to theory, *'So it's of use to me. Because from a structuralist perspective some of the actions that people had taken, back then made sense but the result of the change was not as clear or coherent as some of those theories told us'*. Another participant described their experience of the research process in this way; *'It's like telling a story and on reflection, you are giving me and others, another way of understanding the issues in those stories'*.

According to their own feedback the dialogues with the activists and the opportunity to tell stories of practice by the critical community workers did provide some sense of *'re-orientation'* and *'re-focusing'* with regards to their engagement with their community practices. This *'catalytic'* function, to a certain extent flies in the face of notions of *'researcher neutrality'*, but within the post-positivist framework as described by Lather (1991a) and Usher (1996), the catalytic role of the researcher is to be encouraged. Research design, which values the catalytic role of the researcher, positions the individual researcher as a *'social subject'* along with the *'research subjects'* who are also involved in the processes and products of inquiry. Within this research I was positioned as a social subject as much as the research participants.

There were shifts in the perspectives of the research participants, as seen from earlier quotes and especially in Chapter Five where the critical community workers take up the concept of governmentality and discuss how it does apply to the inner city community organisations. The research did act as a knowledge producing process even if it was a catalysing and re-invigorating of knowledges that were already there. In that sense I argue that the research process helped to establish a space in which knowledges already present, were looked at a-new.

### **Constructing knowledges through dialogue and stories**

Perhaps *'constructing knowledges'* is misleading. The word seems to suggest a deliberate intent to build knowledge (or knowledges) out of that which did not exist before, or may have existed before, but needed to be co-joined, with others or previously developed knowledges, to have any sense of meaning. However this does not really convey what occurred during the research. It does not convey what happened *'on the road'*, or what arose that was *'unanticipated'*, that was *'not deliberate'*, or what arose in the process of *'journeying'*.

One good example in the research revolves around the work on governmentality, which I introduced into the research at an early stage by circulating amongst the research participants, the chapter by Rose (1999) on *'government through community'*. For a number of the research participants this provided a useful framework for analysing what had been happening within the

community organisations over the last thirty or so years. Speaking of the community sector organisations one of the participants said *'Yes we are part of some kind of governance'* and another said *'I think all of us thought if we worked hard at changing government that we could bring about change but I now think I now understand that as part of governmentality.'* Another participant argued that theoretical frameworks were much more complicated and governmentality was only one explanation of what had happened in the history of the neighbourhood centres. Here again the research participants were involved in constructing knowledges about the NCs and surrounding political, economic and social environments. It is an example of the participants working and talking together, through conversations with me, but confirming some definite views on the conditions under which government through community was being effected. Perhaps this was not new knowledge; perhaps it was confirmation of knowledge already present but now confirmed through access to a language through which to speak of that knowledge.

As the research project proceeded<sup>21</sup> the conversations took on a deeply reflexive quality as individual storylines, explanations and narratives were challenged, questioned and probed. This became a way of generating knowledge/s about the NCs where the knowledge/s took the form of being constructed through conversation and dialogue. This process also encouraged an exploration of the theoretical frameworks of the research participants and positioned their own theory making as complementary to the theoretical directions in which I have been interested. This is why I argue that the knowledge/s developed during the research were constructed (and to an extent co-constructed by the researcher and research participants) and that a reflexive space, not previously available to the activists and community workers had been opened up through my research.

MacLure suggests, *'...we need new metaphors of the relation between researchers and subjects, such as entanglement, knots, weaves and tissues...'* and says that all research accounts are fabrications, *'...weaving something new, yet assembled out of fragments and recollections of other fabrications such as the interview 'data' and field notes, as well as the scattered traces of innumerable other cultural texts...'*(2003:127). There is a sense in which this research was intent on the 'weaving' of different stories rather than trying to provide one particular storyline. The plurality of voices within the thesis assists in the project of resisting a monolithic story or a 'master narrative' about the NCs and the roles of the activists and community workers.

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<sup>21</sup> During the research there were some occasions where semi-structured interviews were used but the method of data collection resembled more closely a conversation between myself, and the participants (all of which were recorded and transcribed), and, through the exchange of transcript material and meetings, amongst the research participants themselves. These conversations were focused on the lived experiences of the activists and community workers. In addition some of the participants responded after conversations and meeting by providing written responses to questions that arose or their own reflections on readings.



## **THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH TO THE FIELD OF ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

### **The discourses of empowerment, participation and citizenship**

In the research I was interested in examining the social and political discourses, or, 'sets of practices' (Olssen 1999:45, Ball 1990) that exist in and around these neighbourhood centre sites. I was not so interested in examining linguistic details of texts produced by the activists and community workers, or the linguistic details of texts produced in the research. I did not carry out a microanalysis of language, nor was I concerned with a method or procedure for mapping discourses - rather it was a contextualized analysis of the operation of discourses in specific sites.

I started with the view that social and political discourses were brought to the NCs by activists, community workers and a range of other social actors and that these have been changed, challenged and extended as the organisations developed (Rule 2005). Through the research I intended to contribute to what others, including: Foley (1991, 1999), Knights (2000), McIntyre (1995), Neville (1996), Newman (1994, 1999), and Rooney (2004) have identified as important educational community contexts and research sites, but I was also interested in exploring this through some form of poststructural analysis. I was interested in tracing the political and social discourses, that were brought to these places, that have developed in these places and that might be emergent, as a result of the participation of a range of social actors in these places. Described by MacLure (2003) following on from Foucault, discourses:

...can be thought of, rather, as practices for producing meaning, forming subjects and regulating conduct within particular societies and institutions, at particular historical times (MacLure 2003:175).

In my research the activists and community workers located themselves within discourses, such as economic rationalism and social welfare, but described also how they activate other 'resistant' discourses in their practice, including those of feminism, multiculturalism and urban environmentalism. Taking the view that discourses are always situated within social practices (Lather 1991a:89), the central research questions helped set up particular discourses, such as the discourses of empowerment, citizenship and participation, and examined how they were discursively practised as well as their contradictions, ambiguities and different readings. Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997) point out; discussions of empowerment and citizenship need to be

‘situated’ and in my research I have situated these discussions in a specific place, the inner city and the NCs.

What I can say after this research journey is that empowerment, participation and citizenship discourses and practices still have the potential to continue to play a productive role in radical adult and community education traditions, but their meaning cannot be assumed to be the same in all contexts. In the context of the inner city NCs, drawing attention to these discourses raised questions of practice – of what to do and how to invest meaning into practices. It raised questions about whether these sites were involved in reproducing traditional notions of citizenship or whether ‘new’ citizen formations were being activated. The research indicated that in the past the organisations have encouraged the emergence of ‘new’ citizen identities, and these ‘citizens’ saw their role as contesting a range of social processes and power arrangements. The research participants were unwilling to say whether this could continue in the future with a complete rethinking of the role of the NCs and ‘the local’ in new networks of power and governing patterns.

### **Identities, dissent, oppositional knowledges and practising place**

During the research, activists and community workers who had been involved in the establishment of these organisations or worked for the organisations in the past talked about their lived experiences, what they have tried to change, the motives behind their activism and community work and the theoretical resources that informed their work. In some of their stories participants drew upon the language and traditions of critical social theory and included a feminist and class-based analysis of social structures and institutions as well as reference to discourses of environmentalism and multiculturalism.

Discourses of inclusion, social justice and the importance of oppositional political practices were also evident in the way that the community workers talked about their work and a social action framework drawn from critical theory perspectives was present in their conversations. During the research, the community workers made a distinction between their practice of community work and ‘traditional’ community work practices. They tended to define themselves as ‘critical’ in their orientation and contrasted this to the type of community work linked to church based and local government sponsored projects.

From my research it can be seen that the subject positions of activist and community worker have been occupied, or taken up, in the inner city NCs in ways that are distinctive of those sites. Being able to mobilise different identities has been an essential part of activist and critical

community work practice and the participants in this research described a wide range of subject positions they have occupied. Their concern was that the space for different identity practices is becoming limited. The research participants described how their sense of ‘self’ as activists and critical community workers shaped the work in which they were involved, and how they were in turn shaped by those experiences and practices. While doubts were expressed about what was actually achieved through these practices (for example, some of these doubts appeared in discussions about the professionalisation of community workers and discussions about whether community work practices were empowering or were effectively some form of social control), there was still a clear sense of how the research participants saw themselves. They saw themselves as ‘*oppositional*’, ‘*committed to inclusive processes*’, ‘*questioning of the social order*’, ‘*trying to change things politically*’ and ‘*mediating*’ between communities, developers, government and other organisations in an attempt to redress what they saw as imbalances in power.

Chapter Four especially explores the different identities taken up by the activists and community workers and in sections of that chapter there are detailed accounts of the ways in which particular subject positions have been resisted or when necessary ‘taken-up’. Quite often the research participants described themselves as being positioned by ‘authority’ because of the nature of the resistant activist and community work practices in which they were engaged. Through an exploration of this identity work it became clear that the research participants saw themselves as working with power but constrained in the context of governmentality or ‘government through community’.

Chapter Six was originally intended to be a case study. I had intended in the tradition of ‘case studies’ to provide an in-depth account of conversations with one of the participants. The aim in the tradition of ‘case studies’ would have been to elucidate, articulate, deepen, strengthen, clarify and build upon the ideas presented in earlier parts of the thesis. In my thesis it would have been to add to the ideas about practising place that came out of discussions with all the participants and written up, at length, in Chapter Five. However, quite the opposite has occurred. Instead this research participant confronted me with the dilemmas of being positioned as ‘the other’; both in their community work practice and to a certain extent within the context of this research project. Chapter Six developed as central (not an ‘additional’ or an ‘illuminating case study’) to the knowledges being developed. My research journey as well as the assumptions of shared experience found in statements from the critical community workers in Chapter Five – ‘journeying together’ was troubled, problematised and ultimately challenged by the contributions of the research participant in Chapter Six – ‘a singular journey’.

As seen in Chapter Six taken-for-granted assumptions about identity, community and theory were thrown awry and challenged. The contributions of Tevi to discussions of empowerment, community development, citizenship practices, notions of self, belonging and place provided a counterpoint to those of the other research participants. This counterpoint came from a very different way of describing and practising place by drawing attention to the ways in which consensus and community practices constructs 'the other'. This suggests that practising place, if it is to be a new language for describing a particular form of community work, must necessarily involve supporting differences, oppositions, tensions, contradictions and must be prepared for encountering 'the other'. As Tevi warned, *'...providing the spaces to be another is quite a difficult space to create in a multicultural society, and, quite often is not created because it's too difficult'* and also that as *'Behaviour is culturally shaped and through migration etc...transposed onto a new culture. There will always be some aspects of it that are misunderstood...or aren't transferable. Then, in a new place, that ability for the majority to decide who the proper community member should be would be intrinsically intolerant toward 'otherness'*. If 'practising place' is developed to resist exclusions, those who practise place must be aware of the complicated and non-transparent ways in which exclusions can operate and Chapter Six has drawn attention to that.

## **POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATION PRACTICE**

A poststructural analysis has 'opened up' the stories that could be told around inner city Sydney neighbourhood centres and the introduction of the concept of 'governmentality' encouraged reflexive stories to be told.

In Chapter One a chronological story based on existing written social histories suggested that inner city Sydney resident activism and community work provided a background for emergence of community organisations like the NCs. I referred to the work of Barry, Clohesey and Smith (1985), Burgmann and Burgmann (1998), Edwards (1996) and Jakubowicz (1974, 1984) and traced the emergence of these organisations from residential and working class inner urban areas threatened by development and overdevelopment in the late 1960s. In the 1970s resident action groups, along with the green bans imposed by unions in alliance with sections of the environment and women's movements, helped establish formal local community based organisations. The organisations became linked to government funding, policies and programs in the 1980s. From the 1990s onwards a conservative social policy environment and a tendency for government to use these organisations as the mechanism for the delivery of a range of community services had substantially changed the focus and nature of the organisations.

This account suggested that the empowerment and community development role that the organisations were playing was straightforward and uncomplicated, and that after thirty years the organisations lost focus because they were co-opted into government planning processes. The research process, through engaging activists and community workers in a series of dialogical conversations began to untangle the explanation (seen for example in the writing of Sharp and Inwald 1986, Mowbray 1985a, 1985b) that the organisations were simply co-opted by government.

I critiqued some of the studies of community organisation because they presented an either/or analysis. Some suggested that it was a story of community liberation and empowerment (Foley 1991), or conversely of co-option and control by government (McIntyre 1995, Mowbray 1985a, 1985b). I argued in Chapter Two that there was more to the story than this dichotomy.

The research conversations moved beyond the simple dichotomy of liberation or control. The critical community workers and activists examined in detail the assumptions that lay behind these explanations. A deconstructive approach focused on limitations, uncertainties and contradictions in practice but also on the agency of the activists and community workers and the ways in which they worked with power. Some of the stories that emerged by taking a deconstructive approach focused on the changed relationship with the state, a loss of '*political clarity*' of the organisations, stressing their dependence on government funding and acknowledging the contraction of '*political knowledges*' that could be found within the organisations. Other storylines in the research described how the organisations, workers and activists had themselves become part of the systems of surveillance and control of populations, often in quite covert ways. One of the research participants summed this up by saying that '*there is now a bureaucratised community sector with no identity of community worker anymore*'; while another participant provided a lengthy analysis of the ways in which the language of empowerment, social justice and community services had been manipulated in the community sector, resulting in the community organisations being colonising in their effects. Other storylines recognised that through their own agency the activists and community workers were able to effectively re-align power arrangements at a local level. None of the participants argued that this led to any sense of 'liberation', but they argued that some of the power arrangements were fundamentally changed because of their interventions.

Encouraged by a poststructural approach which draws attention to political subjectivity the critical community workers talked about their own identity journeys (recounted in Chapter Four) and the activists engaged very directly in examining how it was that their own activist positions were constructed. Participants drew attention to their own, limited ways of telling

stories and the activists described a sense of frustration about not having the necessary vehicle (or language) with which to convey the experiences they had been through – in other words they were examining the way in which they ‘produced’ their stories. As one of them kept saying *‘Language is a problem here...it doesn’t reflect reality’* and the other activist who argued consistently that there is no absolute view of the history of the community organisations and that all authorised versions need to be subject to refutation, kept raising the question *‘...but in what language will it [the challenge to authorised versions] be communicated?’* Participants were also reflexive in their talk about theory. The activists drew attention to the construction of theories and knowledges with which they saw themselves operating and they also drew attention to the inability, or difficulty of conveying their experiences of how different knowledges had been constructed through their community organisation work.

The potential of a poststructural analysis of community organisations, including the concept of governmentality, was introduced through dialogic conversations and through the sharing of reading material. In this way the taken-for-granted stories, those that talked about the successes of community development and empowerment, were also examined. Also those stories of social action and challenges to structural power arrangements were opened up to various readings.

Governmentality provided a counter-reading to the story of complete control or co-option by government of community and community organisation. Explored in the work of Clifford (2001), Cruickshank (1994), Dean (1999), Dean and Hindess (1998) and Rose (1999), among others it draws attention to the less obvious technologies of governance, described as ‘governing through community’. Social service and community organisations are part of these governing and disciplinary arrangements (Clifford 2001:107).

From my research I argue that the concept of ‘governmentality’ has explanatory power when applied to community organisation work. It is a concept that mobilises further critique and raises questions, rather than one that provides a master narrative or final conclusion about the effect of community practices. Johnston (1997). Lather (1991a. 1991b), Pennycook (2001), Stronach and MacLure (1997), Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997), and, Usher and Edwards (1994) argue that opening up areas for questioning and encouraging many possible readings is a central task of educational research work. Introducing the governmentality into the research conversations has had the effect of opening up the readings of the history of the organisations that were available.

The ways in which the concept of governmentality might help to understand the history and trajectory of inner city neighbourhood community and activist work has been tested empirically

and has assisted the research participants (and myself as the researcher) in coming to an analysis of the way in which these organisations currently function as a form of government through community. Building further on the concept of governmentality, one of the participants talked about community organisations as being ‘proprietary’ and part of governing arrangements that support the status quo. This is a counterpoint to claims that the community organisations have been sites of radical community development and empowering processes that are supportive of individuals and disadvantaged communities. One of the participants, Trevor examined the construction of the story of ‘community organisation’ by talking about ‘proprietary’ organisations:

*Trevor: This is where government through community is seen....I hesitate to call them community organisations actually. I've got a lot of discomfort about using that word. Because the word community organisation tends to convey the idea that we're talking about groups of people that emerged and are operating as a kind of, fairly close collective, who are owning everything that is being done by the group. Whereas, I think that's not the case with a lot of community organisations operating in my time in the inner city, and operating there now. They are what I call proprietary organisations. By proprietary I mean that the community organisations aren't owned by people who are the members of the groups that are supposed to benefit from what the organisations are doing. They are owned by some small group of people often comprising mostly of professional social welfare and community welfare practitioners employed by other services in the area, and are effectually run by the employed professional practitioners.*

Trevor suggests that community organisations can be ‘proprietary’ and an extension of state governing arrangements. This story opened up further questions about the subject position of community worker and suggested that the identity of professional community worker within a governmentalised community sector creates problematic relationships in terms of the potential for genuinely empowering community work practices. Another research participant described the way in which community organisations had become part of governing arrangements in this way:

*Monica: Community organisations have been seconded as part of the surveillance process. In the police targeting of particular areas and ‘zero tolerance’ approaches community organisations are linked into that process. It seems a contradiction because how can community organisations be really community based if they are linked with zero tolerance? It has been happening for quite a long time now where community organisations are working with police at large public meetings to*

*identify problems and responses. Well then, the result is community organisations then aren't trusted by all sections of the community and have been captured by certain interests and groups who don't speak on behalf of, or even care about the communities they work with. These people don't even want to tolerate other interests....Board members of community organisations these days are accountable only to self-motivation. There is no direct link to community. This suits those board members because they are not interested in that link. Their interests lie elsewhere. In the end government doesn't really monitor this or even care that these organisation don't meet community needs. It suits those board members, it suits their own career paths and aspirations, and, it suits government.*

Some of the research participants questioned the explanation of 'governmentality', even after having taken it up and made use of the concept. The research participants Monica, Sarah and Trevor suggested that using the concept of governmentality, as an overall explanation, would simply be to replace existing stories with another 'grand narrative'. This was actually supportive of the uses of poststructural analysis as the participants continued to speak with a suspicion of any 'grand narrative' that attempted to tell the whole story of inner city Sydney Neighbourhood Centre activism and critical community work.

Poststructural perspectives provided another language through which to talk about power and community work. One of the research participants described the way in which structuralist notions of social action and change had been challenged by the introduction of poststructural theories in this way:

Michael: *They're useful tools. I think some of the structuralist understandings have been tools. I'm at a stage where those tools are still useful but I see other ways of understanding things. So it's of use to me [poststructural theory] because from a simple structuralist perspective some of the actions that people had taken made sense but the result of the change was not as clear or coherent as some structural theories told us.*

What the research around the inner city Sydney NC's has demonstrated is that poststructural perspectives and analysis has added more layers to the stories of social action that can be told. From some points of view this would be deeply problematic as it does not suggest a social project with a definitive outcome, however, from other points of view, for example that suggested by Sandercock (1998), the point is to add complicated layers to stories of practice and social action.



## **DIMENSIONS OF PRACTISING PLACE**

Garrick (1999) and Garrick and Rhodes (2000) argue that all analysis is interpretive and that researchers are inevitably involved in the 're-writing' of the stories told during research projects, and Cherryholmes says: 'Research findings tell stories' (1988:2). I realise that in a sense through this research I have 're-written' the stories of the activists and critical community workers who participated in this research. I have 'written' their stories as 'practising place' and have done so hoping that this 'new language' of community work practice emerging from the research can have some effect by invigorating and energising community work practice. I suggest that the language of practising place will be a contribution to the field of community work and in this last section I describe the different dimensions of practising place.

The work of the activists and critical community workers which I have labelled 'practising place' has similarities to the 'politics of location' described by Giroux (1994), hooks (1992) and Keith and Pile (1993). Central dimensions of this practice include, a commitment to identity work, and openness to exploring citizenship and identity formations that are emergent and non-essentialised and the practice of using local knowledges to develop a critique of social structures and institutions. Another dimension of practising place emerging from the research is that it involves developing an analysis of the operation of power with an aim of working 'with power' to bring about social change and transform social relations within local community structures. The local, in a geographic sense, is central in practising place but it is an understanding of locality which includes a critical analysis of the way in which conservative and liberal notions of community, as well as liberal left communitarian traditions are based on 'nostalgia' (Nancy, 1991, Rose 1997) and have the effect of creating exclusions (Dirlik 1996, Rose 1999). Practising place is a way of working that remains aware of the way that language, such as 'community' and 'belonging', constructs exclusions. Practising place draws attention to the way in which exclusions are constructed in an effort to overcome exclusions.

### **Practising place – a suspicion of 'fixing' identities**

The activists and critical community workers (see especially Chapter Four) pointed out quite often during the research that their social identities were often imposed upon them because their activist and community work placed them in contradictory relationships power structures and they were often then labelled or positioned in ways they did not necessarily identify with. They argued that their identities arose in the 'performance' of their activism and community work and some were identities that were ascribed by others rather than identities they wanted to claim. One of the critical community workers when talking about the subject position of *'left wing*

*feminist*’ said that is not always where she would position herself however, ‘...*that’s where the language of the culture positions us...*’. The activists, when talking about their work said that at times they were positioned as ‘*aggressive*’ and as ‘*trouble makers*’ by those who held some form of institutional power. But in fact their own strategies were ones that tried to avoid ‘*outmoded*’ methods such as acts of aggression. The activists and community workers in the ‘performing’ those roles were often given identities that did not want to claim.

Adult learning for citizenship (Giroux 1992, Johnston 2003a, 2003b, Usher 1994, and, Usher, Bryant and Johnston 1997) was introduced into the research. Chapter Two includes some lengthy responses from the research participants testing the applicability of this concept to work around the NCs. Adult learning for citizenship did resonate with some of the research participants and the ‘identity work’ that this concept raised within the research had another productive effect. It led the activists and community workers to a discussion of their own particular identity formations (see especially Chapter Four), as well as to a consideration about the effects of their work and the kinds of ‘identities’ they were encouraging as they carried out their activist and community work.

Research participants expressed a reluctance to see either their own ‘selves’ as fixed in terms of being activists or community workers and were suspicious of defining community or community participation in a way that ‘fixed’ either their own identities or the identities of those with whom they worked. So ‘practising place’ remains suspicious of attempting to ‘fix’ or make ‘concrete’ identities.

### **Practising place – a suspicion of ‘utopias’**

Whilst each of the research participants voiced, during some stages of the research, their imaginings of social futures and perhaps even their social utopias, some of the participants remained sceptical about mapping out what that utopia may be. There was a suspicion stated about utopian thinking and certainly an argument was developed (similar to that proposed by Sandercock 1998) that ‘my utopia is not yours’. There was an acknowledgement by the research participants that history and the history of some community development work projects demonstrate the dangers and rigidities of utopias forced upon others. Castells (1997), Dirlik (1996), Massey (1993, 1999) and Sandercock (1998) argue that utopias cannot be imagined alone and are always unfinished and contested and necessarily characterised by their space for difference within that imagining. The research participants seemed to concur with this approach supporting the view that one should be suspicious about utopian thinking and be aware that one person’s utopia is not necessarily another’s. This is a challenge to many strands of

communitarian thinking and ‘the possibility of, but the suspicion of utopias’ constituted another area of knowledge that arose from this research.

### **Practising place - the importance of ‘becoming’ communities**

Some questions remain in closing this chapter: How can practising place be a source of re-energization of community organisation practice? How can practising place assist in developing re-(new)ed identities for activists and critical community work practitioners? How can practising place distinguish itself from a method or set of procedures?

Agamben (1993) inserts the notion of singularities into his analysis of becoming communities, arguing that new forms of ‘collectivisation’ wherein ‘new types of non-individuated subjectivity’ are forming. These will arise and coalesce regardless of the intervention or non-intervention of the state apparatus. The state cannot tolerate or control the fact that there is always this ‘birth-to-presence’ and always ‘becoming communities’. Agamben argues, humans will ‘co-belong’ whether state apparatus allows them to or not. The concept of becoming communities was used by the participants in this research as an antidote to the narrative of ‘government through communities’. This is because the State cannot, ultimately do anything about the ‘becoming-ness’, the State cannot stop the inevitable and potential co-joining of singularities. The state may murder, deny, cajole, ignore, torture, separate, control, punish or take any other number of paths but the potential of ‘becomingness’ of singularities remains. As Tevi, one of the research participants said ‘...*the other will always connect, even if it is to the next stage*’.

Adrienne Rich has declared that she can do nothing more than write ‘notes towards’ a politics of location because any other form of writing would seem to have the effect of coming to a conclusion when the point of the exercise is ‘to keep moving’, to ‘keep it all in play’, to resist saying ‘this is the conclusion’.

In the work of Harvey (1993), Massey (1993), Nancy (1991), Rose (1997) and Sandercock (1998) there is a determined resistance to describing the shape of their various imagined utopias. Agamben also resists making a map and refers only to the ‘*whatever*’ which is ‘*neither particular nor general, neither individual nor generic*’ in picturing the becoming communities. The quote from Calvino (1974) used at the beginning of this chapter shows that he also doubts the ‘map’ can be drawn.

If theorists resist describing the futures, then I also found an echo of this in the words of the research participants. One of the research participants made this summary statement, *'I don't have a definitive social future. And there are many people like me and more and more of us. We don't have any definitive social future because it is so diverse.'* Through their refusals to describe the shape of these social futures, the research participants have resisted my attempts at 'emplacement' or 'emplotment' (MacLure 2003) and continue to inhabit their own diverse and resistant geographies.

Talking about the possible social futures and using a framework of 'becoming communities' was evidently useful for participants in this research. As one participant summarised it, *'Compared to the theoretical and disciplinary practice that I was introduced to [in my training] I think these questions about social futures and becoming communities are a set of more interesting questions because it poses a challenge and creates a dialogue across us. That something can 'be-come', but we're not sure what it is, and we can be involved in collectively looking at those questions.'*

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