

My beliefs are in the throes of a major upheaval, largely as a result of questioning post-modernism. Modernism ended abruptly for me in 1985, when I came across quantum and relativistic physics and its philosophical implications (Capra, 1983). Having begun to question the postmodern results of this, early in 1998, I had no ready-made place to turn. The choices in the literature seem quite stark: realism or idealism, positivism or subjectivism, quantitative or qualitative approaches (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Sparkes, 1992). What happens if neither pole seems to work? The dilemma is a very old one, of how to combine passion and reason, and social and individual needs (Russell, 1961). It is not a case of analysing, or explaining how "a new conceptual system [can] arise and replace an old one" (Thagard, 1992, p. 3). It is a matter of finding and/or constructing a new conceptual system, a complete world-view, a mythology (Denzin, 1997) without superstition, and to do so without being trapped by dualism. This essay is a small part of that journey.

My beliefs have differing degrees of conviction. Natural phenomena seem epistemologically simpler than psychosocial ones, until we discover the world of quarks and unknowability (Gribbin, 1996). I cannot persuade either myself or others that my beliefs are true in any absolute sense, although consistency is important. I don't have a problem with that. I am more concerned with their equity and usefulness, which are matters of degree. They have powerful subconscious anchors (Bandler & Grinder, 1979), rationales if you like, being things felt-and-concluded, from experience, and from reading, and they tend to be expressed globally. These general rules are applied situationally, but not dogmatically, and often adapted in the light of experience. I agree with Elliot Eisner that action "always occurs in the particular" (1997, p. 261). For example, it includes taking notice of my emotional responses to the people around me, analysing them, and expressing/adapting accordingly, something men are not very good at (Raeburn & Sidaway, 1995). It also includes decision-making strategies. How does one prove or measure the value, or respective validities or authenticities, of going back to University or setting up a business? These are not trivial pursuits. Indeed, I had to confront each of them at the beginning of 1998. To use quantitative research methods, or some rigid but general rules (e.g. religious doctrine), to make such decisions, are not ways that work for me in dealing with decisions of that type. I have a degree of "commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4) in such contexts. Yet to respond by saying "I just decide on gut feeling" can seem hardly any more sensible, even if that will tip evenly balanced scales. I use complex sets of methods and criteria in my life, including reading, discussing other people's views on similar matters, a rough attempt to weight variables for and against various paths, emotional/intuitive responses, etc, all set in an evolving net of guidelines.

Being a graduate student is intimately tied to my passion for learning, and the quest to find and identify with a research paradigm that reflects the critical themes and values in my life. Wanting to understand how things develop and interconnect, and to link scholarship with action, will help determine the research paradigm I select. Such a research view not only guides my scholarship, but the way I conduct my life. There is relevance in the belief that paradigms should reflect "personality disposition" (Eisner, 1997, p. 271). Is it possible to divorce

one's beliefs from one's psyche? Not that I assume that a suitable research paradigm is out there, ready-made, waiting to be found. Asking questions of old questions (Bohm & Peat, 1989), challenging common assumptions, and finding different ways of connecting things, are all deeply-ingrained habits and values in me. Thus, part of the process of finding a research paradigm is to question existing ones. This paper backgrounds selected events which have produced my general outlook, and the more recent beginnings of the search for a detailed research paradigm.

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I remember finding a wild plum tree, 10-12 metres high, in the bush, about ten minutes' walk from home, in Auckland, when I was maybe 14. It was mid-summer, and the tree was laden, with the plums on the outer branches of the tree. I climbed high, and well out onto a branch to pick some fruit. The branch snapped. I somersaulted backwards one-and-a-half times on my way to the ground about 20 feet below. The ground was steep, about a 2-in-1 gradient, and I landed head down, but on my back. Other branches must have broken my fall, and the ground was carpeted with leaves and twigs. I was unhurt. I just got up and walked away. It was an event which encouraged me to think that I was physically invincible.

That was reinforced when I bought a motorbike, a Triumph 650 Tiger 110, with a top speed of around 170 kph. I was 18 years old, in my second year at Auckland University, and fearless. I had numerous hairsbreadth escapes from death on it. On one occasion I had been to Ardmore Aerodrome in South Auckland to watch motor racing on the Grand Prix circuit. I had a friend riding pillion. On the way home a vehicle stopped in front of us unexpectedly. We hit the back of it. How fast were we going? Work it out for yourself. My friend was catapulted over the ute, landing on the road some meters in front of it, about an 8 metre trajectory in all. I went up in the air with the bike, and came down under it. The petrol tank hit my inner thigh and the tank was ripped off. I was bruised but not scratched. My friend suffered only minor grazing. We were wearing protective gear. I had that charmed life belief reinforced, again. A year later someone stole the bike from Princes Street outside the University. He hit a lamppost in Symonds Street, lay in hospital in a coma for a week, then died.

About 10 years later I took a class of 12-year-old pupils up Mt Tarawera, in the central North Island. One of the children's fathers came with us. We reached the summit on a warm, clear day. We enjoyed the views, and threw scoria rocks over a vertical bluff into a crater some 70 metres deep. We heard long cannon-like echoes as they hit rocks at the bottom.

### **Mount Tarawera**

Sandpaper landscape,  
cannoned red rocks, plasma scree.  
Seagulls watch for food.



limits. A lot of people have helped. That began to lead me away from tendencies towards an absolutist, black-and-white epistemology.

Other beliefs of mine are more obviously amenable to evidence, or at least analytical thinking, such as those concerning political and philosophical systems, although intuition plays a part in deciding specific actions. My evolving belief system, defined broadly, shapes and directs my whole life. What I do is a powerful indicator of what I believe. I presume others are similar.

This approach to belief-and-action is largely derived, I think, from the good relationship I had with my mother. She gave me love, the freedom to explore my world, and a home in which non-traditional ideas were openly discussed, surrounded by art, music, books, and a vibrant garden. An enquiring mind, a passion for life, and high self-esteem were some of the results. However, learning when not to act, when to let go, when to be silent, hasn't been easy. The rule of thumb I try to use is Lao Tsu's motto (Feng & English, 1972):

Be still, until the moment of action.

I learned as a child the importance of being aware of my feelings, and being in touch with people who were close to me, and with nature. I learned the importance of leisure by having it and by using it in multitudinous ways, both alone and with others, quietly and boisterously. Exploring the neighbourhood and city, bush and beach, boating and fishing, playing indoor and outdoor games, reading, listening to recorded and live music at home, and relating to friends, were central leisure activities in my childhood. With suitable adaptations, much has carried over into adulthood. I prefer active pastimes. I would rather dance than watch others performing on stage, or go to the gym rather than watch extreme sport on TV. This helps make me less vulnerable to mass media consumerist messages and more aware of the socially constructed realities I represent and inhabit (Andrews, 1993; Baudrillard, 1993; Lyotard, 1993; Williamson, 1978).

There are demographic elements which also help to shape my beliefs and outlook. Being white and middle-class have influenced my experiences. As a male, my attitudes towards women are shaped by biology and cultural ideologies, as well as by personal (mainly good) experiences. My attitudes towards power in society tend to be far more democratic, inclusive, and participative than normal. I am very consultative in organisational settings, not for its own sake, but because I believe that it is the best way to find really good solutions. In other words, outcomes tend to matter. This can sometimes get in the way of 'the journey being more important than the destination'. I have not had to cope with racism or poverty. My age doesn't seem to have much bearing on my personal and social life, as I mix with people of a wide age range regularly. Not having had a normal Christian upbringing has been of great significance, allowing my mind to develop openly and inquiringly from an early age, although I absorbed many of the dualisms inherent in our culture, in particular romanticism and rationalism, and have had to struggle against their narrow forms. This is central to finding an appropriate research paradigm for me, because by moving away from the strong subjectivism inherent in romanticism (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997), and from the

coldness of rationalism, I have begun to find common ground, somewhere in between the two.

I have travelled overseas regularly, which has significantly broadened my outlook, and weakened my sense of nationalism by the realisation of the commonalities I share with people from other cultures. I have political beliefs which are based on inclusivity, empowerment, and praxis. These also inform any research approach I will select.

If we internalise the beliefs underpinning existing power and property relations (Andrews, 1993), and the nature of reality and truth suggested by them, which is positivistic in essence (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), we will remain unable to generate major change in either the world or ourselves (Diversi, 1998; Weedon, 1987). This may well apply to the English language itself with its subject-verb-object and fragmenting biases, its focus on nouns rather than verbs, and its in-built dichotomising tendencies. We may need to reconstruct our language gradually rather than suddenly *à la* Finnegans Wake (Denzin, 1997), so that its static, object-based and fragmentary foci are inverted, over time (Bohm, 1980), and to recognise that linear, rationalistic thinking has patriarchal implications (Weedon, 1987). We may also need to ask different questions in order to uncover our deeply embedded dichotomising beliefs. "In fact, truly original discoveries in science and in other fields have generally involved such inquiry into old questions ... To do this is often very difficult, as these presuppositions tend to be hidden very deep in the structure of our thought [and language]" (Bohm & Peat, 1989, p. 28). Finding a suitable research paradigm is leading me to ask questions about old beliefs concerning reason and truth. Some of these questions are: 'Are the questions of ontology and epistemology the same questions? Are truth and reason normally defined to create unsupported dichotomies between what could otherwise be seen as gradations of truth and reason (differently defined)? Are the answers to these questions already contained in them as unstated assumptions about mind and matter, as a typically Western "binary, hierarchical understanding of the world" (Markula, 1997, p. 220)?

I believe that dancing, especially social partner dancing, can have an important role to play in changing social (especially male) attitudes. This may sound strange in the context of research paradigms. However, I believe that if social partner dancing was universally taught and practised, in a non-competitive, non-sexist, creative environment, the world would be happier, healthier and more unified, with relations between men and women greatly improved. It can help us recover from the stresses of daily urbanised living. It can help in the process of social solidarity, and in providing an outlet for socially expressed joy (Lange, 1975). Dancing happens to be one of my more recently discovered passions. *Ceroc* and its cognates (French Rock 'N' Roll) epitomise this.

### Evenings

Your arms 'round my neck.  
Bodies pulse. Mirrored skins close.  
John yells "Change partners".

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All this - my background, evolving paradigms, and dancing - imposes a particular morality on my outlook and behaviour: in essence, to aim to be constructively honest and caring towards self-and-others. The balance struck does not in itself answer the question of how to resolve the dilemma in the field of ethics between "consensus of opinion ... [and] an objective standard ... This is one of the issues in philosophy that are still open" (Russell, 1961, p. 134).

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I remember feeling concerned that my pupils (aged 11-12) were having too many arguments in the playground over a ball game called Four Square. I called a class meeting, and we collectively wrote a comprehensive set of rules. I had already drafted a set, but did not put them up. The result of our combined wisdom was a better set than I had drawn up, and I had thought mine were good. They then went out into the playground and won the whole school over to our rules by way of explanation and assertiveness, but not without resistance.

That changed my politics forever. It led me to the conclusion that while we need leaders, we also need the detailed wisdom of their constituencies, suitably channelled, in order to get the best policies. These policies will then be championed by the whole group, because they feel they own them. It is a quite different concept of politics, because the group can lead through its better ideas. To me, it's all about the quality of the ideas, and their practical consequences; not abstract notions of truth or justice - even if based on equity rather than utilitarianism (Sen, 1995) - but quality, which is much wider. In addition, it suggests that research questions should come from the group rather than from the researcher, and become a collaborative narrative-based enterprise with overt political agendas (Bishop, 1994). This then challenges the entire basis of traditional ethnography. Yet I'm not entirely at ease with its critiques. They, too, still seem caught in dualistic formulations. In addition, by concentrating on narrating selves, albeit with a collaborative emphasis (Bishop, 1994), there is a danger that such research "may ground itself in the technologies of the interview society rather than systematically questioning its root assumptions and methods" (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, p. 322). Visiting Manila's slums in 1988 had me question root assumptions of Western culture. That also changed my politics.

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I remember visiting a music shop in K'Road, in Auckland, with my parents in the mid-1950s. We were looking for music for a roller piano. The music comprised rectangular holes cut in very long rolls of paper in such a way that when air was sucked through a cross-sectional line of these holes a chord was formed. The piano had foot-operated bellows which sucked air through the holes in the moving paper, and each one of a horizontal line of holes was connected to a separate key on the piano. By peddling the piano (a bit like using an organ's pedals) the roll would unwind, the air would go through the holes, and the keys on the piano would race up and down without being touched, as if magically. And what did I discover? Liszt. Franz Liszt. Well, some of his piano music. What it did for me was to combine what I call passion and beauty. And Liszt became

one of my abiding passions. My mother played a lot of Chopin with her own hands, but she wasn't good enough to play Liszt. I thereby got the gentler beauty of Chopin and the wilder beauty of Liszt.

That mix remains compelling. It is part of the heritage of romanticism, "the elevation of the experiential as the authentic" (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, p. 305), which has brought great joy, and much grief, in my life. Finding a suitable balance has been a long and complex struggle. In adulthood, the beauty and passion, the power, of language and ideas has also had a huge appeal for me. It has applied intellectually, hence the attraction of Grand Theory (i.e. meta-paradigms), albeit in the last decade with increasing fluidity, with an ability to mix poetry and politics (Clifford, 1986). It has similarly been true for other passions, from philosophy to psychology, to creating/ inventing ideas and things, and more recently to dance. I think I've more or less got to a stage where I can find reasonable balance in all these things. It's been a long struggle, although the magnets still exert their pull. Finding a research paradigm which has the attractions but not the constrictions of traditional Grand Theory is my present goal.

The paradigms debate (Sparkes, 1992) has helped rekindle my intellectual passion. It is commonly held that a paradigm is "a basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator ... in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). I have begun to question the dichotomous formulations of its major strands, and of the ways of defining those strands. For example, I wonder if there is a genuine distinction to be drawn between direct and vicarious experience. I suspect that there is a continuum of gradations from one to the other methodologically and epistemologically. If so, it raises intriguing ways of conceptualising reality, the investigation process and of doing investigation. Similarly, I have begun to ask if there is a continuum which can be used in the ontological-epistemological debates, where the previously irreconcilable opposites merge into each other. This would lead to different ways of defining, thinking about, and using reason and truth, and their connections to ethics (Russell, 1961). The value of creativity in this regard is of crucial importance in the view of the physicist David Bohm. He argues for much greater creativity, for new paradigms, and that what is needed "is some new overall approach, a creative surge ... that goes far beyond the tacit and unconscious ideas that have come to dominate science" (Bohm & Peat, 1989, p. 25). Denzin argues that we "seek today a new mythology" (1997, p. 25): I would equate that to a new paradigm. Bohm's quest is for a dynamic, evolving paradigm, that focusses on interconnectedness rather than fragmentation.

If Bohm's view also means emphasising similarities rather than differences, and weakening the two central dualisms on which "epistemology rests: rational/irrational and subject/object" (Hekman, 1987, p. 65), and finding workable balances between conflicting views and interests, and between "prudence" and "passion" (Russell, 1961, p. 36), and the "endless oscillation [between social] ... ossification [and] ... dissolution" (Russell, 1961, p. 22), than I am for it. If it means stressing effective inclusivity and empowerment, and finding "hybrid forms of research" (Eisner, 1997, p. 271) and representation which mix quantitative and qualitative approaches to create bimodal research (Nau, 1995), and recognise "the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship

between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 4), then that is my goal, too.

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