The Stranger in Contemporary Practice: A Critical Autoethnography

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Abstract

The Stranger in Contemporary Practice explores the perils (Şenocak, 2009; 2016) of negotiating differences in public sector organizations dominated by neoliberalism. This autoethnography draws on my lived experience as a critically-informed workplace consultant to explore the existential issues I have confronted in striving to align my practices with espoused values of justice in contemporary practice environments. I draw on a critical incident (Tripp, 1993) in which I reached a communicative impasse – and found myself critically challenged in communicating with professional associates whose clinical views I found irreconcilably different from mine. My research question is: how do I discern right action where I perceive an injustice occurring in practice environments which are morally complex or ambiguous and I perceive my own position in peril?

My methodology draws on Ricoeur’s narrative ethics, which attunes to lived experience to discern right action in communicating with diverse others about hidden dynamics in the system (Horn & Brick, 2009). I trace my shifting identity as a change agent from a transcendental approach to critique where I “bracket” my perspective (Patton, 2002), to an existential approach based on Ricoeur’s critical wisdom (phronesis) (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003), where I become more visible and transparent about my own impressions arising from direct experience of critical issues that emerge in the field. Deeply rooted in my lived experience and life history, this existential-phenomenological study informs my professional ethics, sense of justice and existential understandings of what the stranger (L'Étranger) represents in contemporary public life and professional practice.

Keywords: narrative ethics, critical phronesis, critical incidents in practice, awareness-based action research, existential-phenomenology, hospitality, translation, integral practice
For a thought to change the world, it must first change the life of the man who carries it. It must become an example...

– Albert Camus, Notebook V, September 1945-April 1948

I remember my father who lived by example: thank-you for transmitting the oral traditions of the Detroit River region and the people of River Canard. These stories drawn from the mouth of the Great Lakes live in me and teach me what I need to learn about old world hospitality and welcoming strangers.

I honour my ancestors whose life histories inhabit this work, I recognize my grandmothers: mémé (Leah Mathilde (Lil) Lucier) and Grandma Lee (Isabel Chesnut), whose stories, though painfully obscured, are strangely familiar to me. You have passed on such a deep well of life experience, your stories inhabit these pages in unexpected ways and I recognize you in this work.

This work invites the Stranger that lives in each of us. To the living spirit!
Dedication

I dedicate this to Elizabeth Patricia Butler. Thank you for bringing your exuberance, wicked sense of irony, generosity of spirit and constant entourage of stray animals, I love them all.

With deep gratitude, I thank my mother Bettyanne, whose passion for child development and belief in the power of education to liberate and empower is a true gift.

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Summary for Lay Audience

*The Stranger in Contemporary Practice* explores the perils (Şenocak, 2009; 2016) of negotiating differences in public sector organizations dominated by neoliberalism. This autoethnography draws on my lived experience as a critically-informed workplace consultant to explore the existential issues I have confronted in striving to align my practices with espoused values of justice in contemporary practice environments. I draw on a critical incident (Tripp, 1993) in which I reached a communicative impasse – and found myself critically challenged in communicating with professional associates whose clinical views I found irreconcilably different from mine. My research question is: how do I discern right action where I perceive an injustice occurring in practice environments which are morally complex or ambiguous and I perceive my own position in peril?

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Keywords: narrative ethics, critical phronesis, critical incidents in practice, awareness-based action research, existential-phenomenology, hospitality, translation, integral practice
Chapter 1

1 Introduction: The Stranger in Contemporary Practice

– *I, a stranger and afraid*

*In a world I never made.*

*(Housman, A.E., 2009, n.p.)*

This narrative opens with a single encounter with a stranger which changed me immeasurably – altering my perceptions and enlarging me in ways that would take some time to fully absorb, comprehend and integrate. I was a Management Consultant living in Ottawa, flying to cities and towns across Canada. A senior consultant with the firm, it was my job to conduct fieldwork in health, education and human services. My role, as I saw it, was to enhance organizational capacity to address complex social issues facing the public sector by providing research-informed knowledge – documenting challenges and opportunities faced by practitioners in the field. I was tasked with evaluating whether donor and government-funded programs and initiatives were socially relevant, responsive to local practice realities and achieved the outcomes they espoused. The tagline on my business card read *generating knowledge for results.*

On this morning, I had just flown into a small southwestern Ontario town to facilitate interviews and focus groups with social workers, managers and career practitioners as part of an evaluation of a national youth employment strategy. This federal program was designed to address what labour market analyst Gunderson, CIBC Chair of Youth Employment at the University of Toronto, describes as the scarring effects of precarious employment on youth entering the economy during this cyclical downturn. Gunderson’s (2005; 2014) analysis of youth underemployment in Canada suggested that early negative labour market experiences lead to “scarring effects”, namely protracted financial and personal setbacks associated with a reduction in long-term life chances.

My colleague and I were assigned to conduct fieldwork with program and service providers and at-risk youth from across the southwestern Ontario region to evaluate this program designed to mitigate the scarring effects of precarity on youth. Our fieldwork
involved multi-stakeholder consultations, interviews and focus groups with employment specialists, career practitioners, case managers, senior leaders, subject experts, labour market analysts and youth at-risk.

The social service providers we encountered on this morning, as with most professionals we interviewed in the field – were keen to present their best results and show how innovative, forward-thinking and advanced their programs were, presenting impressive figures, best practices and success stories. This day was no different. Mid-way through the morning focus group session with professional/managerial staff, and after hearing many impressive testimonials, we paused for a break. As participants wandered over for muffins and hot coffee a small group of social workers convened in the reception area and began informally discussing the case of a youth in the program who simply would not cooperate with the professional team. From what I could gather as I overheard their discussion of this young man’s case, he was having difficulties adjusting to workplace expectations. He was looking for work but refused to follow through on the recommended course of action set out for him by agency staff. Each time his employment specialist sent him out on an assignment he would disappear and could not be located. He was becoming disruptive in skills development workshops and exhibited increasingly defiant and antagonistic behavior to the consternation of agency staff. Maladaptive behavior, they seemed to agree, reflecting uncooperative and anti-authoritarian tendencies. Who would want to employ someone who would not follow the rules?

One practitioner in the group suggested to the knowing glances of her peers, putting this young man in his place and making an example of him. If he was not prepared to fall in line and be a model client, follow the direction of agency staff and accept what was offered, *which appeared to me to mean precarious employment*, he would be excluded from all services provided by the agency, including any potential supports or incentives associated with the program. From my understanding, if this young man were unwilling to comply with agency standards, he would not only be stigmatized by agency staff, but shunned by the very professional networks designed to reach him, for not ascribing to what Wilson (2004) describes as the current “rules of engagement”.
1.1 A critical autoethnography

I introduce this autoethnography to position myself in relation to the kinds of ethical issues I have faced over the course of my career as an organizational consultant in the public sector. My intention in recounting this story is to make-meaning of the stranger who appears in this narrative and critically discern what hospitality and authentic engagement means to me in today’s workplace defined by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a form of governance where market interests drive decision-making (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). What is it like to practice in today’s public sector dominated by neoliberalism, where market values are imposed on every facet of social life and where economic indicators hold more weight than social possibilities?

1.1.1 The ethical meaning of the stranger in contemporary practice

This chapter’s opening illustrates the kinds of ethical issues that arise in today’s workplace defined by neoliberalism. The stranger who emerges in conversation between the social workers I encountered during the evaluation of the youth employment program, speaks to blind spots inherent in neoliberalism. Having worked in the public sector for many years, there is absolutely nothing remarkable about his appearance in the conversation between the social workers I encountered that day. This was so common a scenario, as to be almost innocuous, and yet it is critical because it speaks to deeper patterns and trends in contemporary practice (Tripp, 1993).

I draw on this example as a critical incident in my practice because it is characteristic of the kinds of structural issues I have confronted in my practice as a critically-informed practitioner in the field (Tripp, 1993). As an organizational consultant, I was trained to identify underlying structural patterns and situate what I was perceiving in the field in the context of larger societal trends. This narrative provides a critical description of the subtly violative (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) social interactions that arise with unsettling frequency amongst practitioners, and between practitioners and participants in today’s neoliberal workplace. From a critical perspective, neoliberalism represents a social domain where “clients” are seen from a market-based perspective and slotted into
preexisting systems and structures with little or no understanding of their needs, interests and diverse lived experiences.

1.1.2 Autoethnography as meaning-making

This autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011) draws on my lived experience as a critically-informed workplace consultant. Autoethnography brings together first-person accounts (autobiography) with ethnographic field methods (ethnography) to describe and interpret lived experience to gain deeper understandings of the workplace culture in which this narrative is situated (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). I came to this work because I wanted to explore the existential issues I have confronted in striving to align my practices in the service of justice in neoliberal practice environments. My objective was to research professional practice and the complexities of practice (Green, 2009) to develop a deeper understanding of the impasses I have faced in translating critical understandings into action.

This work examines what it means to walk with integrity as a leader in the face of perceived injustice (i.e. the perils, the possibilities) particularly when dynamics of power are unnamed or hidden from view. The research question that began this inquiry was: How do I discern right action where I perceive an injustice occurring in neoliberal public sector practice environments?

Navigating workplace dynamics in contemporary practice environments defined by market imperatives can be perilous. I wanted to provide a transparent rendering of the existential struggles I have grappled with as I have sought to align my practices and professional identity with my deeper convictions in current practice settings. Despite years of doing fieldwork as a critically-informed applied social researcher and workplace consultant in the public sector, I have struggled with how to communicate transparently about the hidden dynamics of power and systemic injustices I perceive in the field, and most particularly how to translate these critical understandings in the service of justice.

In undertaking this critical research, I realized I could not engage this work authentically without being willing to become visible about my own sense of agency and fault lines in
my practice. This critical autoethnography explores today’s workplace culture through my eyes, the lens of a practitioner, and the existential anxieties I have confronted in doing critically-informed work in public sector organizations, namely healthcare, education and human services.

Organizational autoethnographies provide first-hand accounts that illuminate moral dilemmas and ethical issues that arise in the workplace (Boyle & Parry, 2007; Parry & Boyle, 2009). I write about a critical incident in which I reached a communicative impasse – and literally lost my ability to reach out and communicate with professional associates whose clinical views I did not share. Critical incidents (Tripp, 1993) are incidents which occur in social settings that are morally complex or ambiguous. This critical incident (Tripp, 1993) sets the stage for the remainder of the manuscript and provides a social landscape in which to explore critical questions of leadership, integrity and justice in contemporary workplaces under the current rules of engagement (Wilson, 2004) based on instrumental reason (Taylor, 1991a; Saul, 1992).

1.1.3 Critical phronesis: discerning wisdom in troubling times
This work began as a critique of public sector management practices under current rules of engagement defined by instrumental reason. My intention was to use critical lens to bring awareness to the human consequences of neoliberalism, and the ethical implications of imposing market values on every facet of social life (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). What I found in taking up a critical approach, is what I now I believe to be a pitfall of the critical lens, namely the tendency to become so caught up in what is wrong, and not working: the corruption, the distortions, the small acts of negligence and betrayal, it can become difficult, if not impossible, to see possibilities for change and cocreation. I found myself so immersed in what appeared to be insurmountable challenges, I lost sight of where I entered this story, and where my agency lies.

I now believe, with existential-phenomenologists like Ricoeur (1996), in a world we did not create and have inherited, we do have choices and by naming what is hidden from view, making visible the hidden dynamics in a system (Thölke, Sipman Andriessen, & Herder-Wynne, 2013), we have the means to surface what has been previously denied, in
order to witness it, become more critically aware of its implications and ultimately change it.

From an existential-phenomenological perspective, transparency is challenging in the context of advanced capitalism because we are embedded in practices that tie us to others in material ways, in other words, we rely on the very market imperatives we are critiquing, and therefore our conditions make it very difficult to name things without potentially putting our material interests in peril by estranging ourselves from the very networks that tie us to professional worlds of practice (Wall, 2003).

This tension between conviction and action, is an existential problem that Ricoeur addresses in his critical approach, namely the difficulties of negotiating justice in the context of capitalism and imbalanced power relations (Ricoeur in Ezzy, 1998). With critical theorists, Ricoeur shares the view that we can never fully resolve the tensions of living life in a consumer, market-based society, and therefore a transcendental (or idealist) approach is not entirely possible, but he never abandoned the human capacity for critical discernment in the face of structural injustice, what he calls critical phronesis (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003).

Critical phronesis (or critical wisdom) begins by acknowledging the contingency of lived experience, recognizing from an existential vantage point that we can never entirely escape our worldly embodied experience of being human in a dualistic world and therefore, need critical strategies to discern right action in the face of complexity to ensure we not imposing on others, whether consciously or unconsciously. According to Wall (2003), the critically wise person has developed the capacity through practicing embodied awareness to mediate with diverse others without imposing (what Levinas (1969) calls totalizing violence).

1.1.4 What is the ethical meaning of the stranger who arises in this narrative?

This work explores the continental tradition of hospitality which is about reaching out across what might appear irreconcilable differences in a troubled and potentially threatening world. Continental philosophy has explored at length the self/other
relationship, and a key theme is the stranger who arrives unexpectedly. Focusing on the power of face-to-face relationships as a mirror to ourselves, and most critically, as a direct reflection of our practices which implicate us in relation to diverse others, I look at the human encounter as an opportunity for growth, social development and transformation.

In today’s divided and polarized workplace, I argue practitioners can no longer afford to separate themselves from the complexities of practice. I focus on this critical incident in my practice, as a catalyst for seeing my practice differently and apply Ricoeur’s critical wisdom (phronesis) (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) to develop deeper understandings of the meaning of this encounter. I trace my shifting identity as a change agent from an idealist (or transcendental) approach to critique (“bracketing” my perspective to attune phenomenologically to deeper structural patterns), to an existential-phenomenal approach to lived experience by becoming more visible and transparent about my impressions and perceptions of ethical and existential issues as they arise in my encounters with diverse others.

My methodology draws on Ricoeur’s critical approach to practice wisdom (phronesis) (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) which attunes to lived experience as a means to discern right action in communicating with diverse others about hidden dynamics in the system (Horn & Brick, 2009). Ricoeur believed we each are responsible for the culture we are creating and therefore must be willing to take responsibility for our actions even if no harm was intended. This means being prepared to look at ourselves and where we are situated in any given circumstance and becoming critically aware of how the culture lives in us (i.e. how we are situated, our limitations and fallibilities and how these may adversely impact others). Ricoeur’s critical phronesis (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) is about discerning right action in relationship, by being critically reflective about how we show up and construct meaning in our face-to-face encounters with diverse others. Critical wisdom requires being explicit about my lens and intentions in undertaking this critical autoethnography by working to articulate (Brossard, 1988) how my lived experience, namely my life history, memories and founding events, influence my perceptions and orientation in practice environments.
The Stranger in Contemporary Practice explores the contradictions of civil belonging (Lee, 1998) and the pragmatic realities, perils and travesties of negotiating differences in public sector institutions and organizations centered on rationalist deliberation. I investigate the deeper meaning of the stranger in this narrative by discussing my own contradictions of civil belonging and what authenticity means to me in contemporary practice contexts defined by neoliberalism.

As I overheard the social workers describing this young man’s case, I knew there was more to his story and yet I failed to communicate transparently with my colleagues about these critical understandings. I was critically aware, and phenomenologically attuned to the patterns informing this young man’s circumstances, but these structural understandings did not mean my social conditions inclined me to make my perspective visible by communicating with any degree of transparency with my colleagues and professional associates. My perspective as an emerging professional was that being transparent would have exposed me to risk in practice contexts which appeared to call for professional neutrality and detachment. This was an unmitigated risk I was not prepared to take, particularly at this vulnerable time in my development as an emerging professional with family and financial responsibilities.

In locating myself in relation to the broader cultural field, and the strangers I encounter in my practice, I explore my own “perilous quest” (Şenocak, 2009; 2016) to reconcile incongruences and misalignments between the values I espouse, and my own practice realities. What I hope to convey in recounting my story, this critical incident in the life of a practitioner – is to bring to light the “waters I have been swimming in” (Smith, 2009). The story's intention is to remain ever watchful and attuned to the ease with which instrumental practices become rationalized, practices which at a glance might appear inconsequential, innocuous or routine, and yet – when seen up close and personal, and cumulatively – that is, in its particularity – its more contradictory and complex aspects are exposed. I share this both a means to illustrate the complex nature of hospitality where there are hidden dynamics of power (Nussbaum, 1999) and to highlight the contradictions and tensions I have confronted as I have striven to align more deeply with my convictions.
While critically informed, I have struggled to name publicly the subtle nuances of power I have seen and experienced because I am part of the very systems that I am critiquing. In the absence of professional others willing to share insights as they arise, I have found myself professionally isolated. What I have realized in undertaking this critical work is that I cannot bracket my lived experiences of displacement when responding to perceived injustice without negating myself, my professional ethics and identity. This realization has led me to revise my research question to take my lived experience into account and therefore the question which has come to define my work is: how do I discern right action where I perceive an injustice occurring in practice environments which are morally complex or ambiguous, *and I perceive own position in peril?*

This learning journey for me has been a perilous quest to discover what it means to become an integral practitioner, to address difficult issues that arise in practice with integrity and compassion, and to do so even in the face of potential opposition. Deeply rooted in my lived experience and life history, this critical autoethnography embodies my professional ethics, evolving sense of justice and existential understandings of what the stranger (*L'Étranger*) represents in contemporary public life and professional practice.

### 1.2 Background

I wanted to produce awareness-based action research (Thölke, Sipman Andriessen, & Herder-Wynne, 2013) grounded in lived experience, research that would sensitize readers to the complex nature of hospitality and the hidden complexities of negotiating differences in contemporary workplaces defined by instrumental reason (Taylor, 1991a; Saul, 1992).

Instrumental reason is the kind of reason that comes into play when strategically focused on advancing vested interests (Taylor, 1991a). To advance our interests within current competitive market realities, we understand we must be strategic and take advantage of every opportunity for advancement. Social networks are treated as social capital (Witteke, Snijders, & Nee, 2013) to market ourselves and advance professional goals and aspirations. This kind of social contract is only possible if people are prepared to put their differences aside in order to advance projects and opportunities.
1.2.1 Current rules of engagement in professional practice

The rules of engagement, to use Wilson’s (2004) term, in today’s workplace are defined by instrumental reason. These rules presume people are primarily self-interested and to maximize their material advantage people are willing to objectify themselves to build social capital. The best strategy for maximizing one’s interests is by aligning with others in the least contentious, most diplomatic way by, as Sennett (1994) describes, subjecting one’s “passions and interests to the rule of reason” (p. 285). The implicit assumption being if you played by the rules and did all the right things by following the principle of deferred gratification – the system would reward you.

This ideal is highly appealing and in theory makes sense, as Wittek, Snijders, and Nee (2013) suggest: “well connected people are better positioned to meet their goals” (p. 225), and so it would make sense that professionals network to build social capital, advance socially and meet their financial goals. The neoliberal narrative has become so embedded in our mentality as professionals, it is almost impossible to imagine another way, or see our way outside of it. So much a part of workplace culture, one can take it for granted, as Lee (1998) writes "this account of facts and values is taken for granted in most modern thought; we have trouble thinking about things that matter without adopting its assumptions..." (p. viii). So enmeshed with daily public life and professional practices, entrenched in modern services and service delivery models, driven by mandates and policy frameworks; instrumental reason (Taylor, 1991a; Saul, 1992) becomes nearly impossible to think or negotiate one's way around.

So singularly focused on our goals and aspirations, so attached to our ideals and what we can achieve and motivated by our outcomes and results: our brilliant platforms, airtight strategic plans, innovative initiatives and ambitious workplans, we cannot see the distortions in the stories we tell ourselves and what is obscured from view (Taylor, 1991a; Saul, 1992). Perhaps it is not surprising then that suddenly every organization has developed management and corporate strategies, arriving just-in-time, rebranding their images by putting their best foot forward. For example, Watson (2004), explains, "all kinds of institutions now cannot tell us about their services, including the most piddling
change in them, without also telling us that they are contemporary, innovative and forward-looking, and committed to continuous improvement” (p. xxiii).

As professionals we develop and these fabulous initiatives, like the youth employment program I describe in this narrative’s opening. We imagine we are achieving great things by landing project grants and financial awards and other institutional incentives. Without stepping back from market imperatives and looking at deeper issues of purpose and meaning, we ignore what neoliberalism means for society as a whole, and for the kind of culture we are creating together. We convince ourselves into thinking we are acting in alignment with our values, because perhaps when seen in isolation, we are.

It is easy to get caught up with our project plans and be convinced we are doing good work, engaging on interesting and meaningful projects and making a contribution, when in fact on the day-to-day, in our mundane practices, and in our face-to-face encounters we may find ourselves out of alignment with our deepest convictions in all kinds of subtle and unnameable ways, and others will experience this from us even if they are not transparent with us. We think we are acting in others’ best interests without looking at the broader implications for those most vulnerable and for society as a whole.

1.2.2 Neoliberalism at play

Neoliberalism is the playbook (Giroux, 2015) which has dominated the social field for over 35 years and is based on the idea that the markets should drive critical decision-making (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). The neoliberal state configures itself as an impartial party to personal choices and governs not through society, but through what Miller & Rose (2008) describe as “the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspirations to self-actualization and self-fulfillment” (p. 25).

Personal responsibility is the centerpiece of good citizenship (DeVault, 1998) and the agent, irrespective of who they are or where they come from is expected to make the best possible decisions for themselves based on what is marketable and will advance their material interests.
Neoliberalism represents a distorted understanding of reality, one which sees people as autonomous free agents (Giroux, 2015) who exploit the marketplace for personal gain and material advantage. Within this storyline, people are technically free to pursue their interests and determine for themselves what counts as flourishing (Nussbaum, 2004), provided they are self-responsible, that is, they not impose on others and take responsibility for themselves financially.

Neoliberalism has become so entwined with professional narratives of self-responsibility, these stories feed into the way we think about ourselves, and our professional roles and obligations, perhaps most significantly, in how we see and describe the “clients” we serve. Deeper questions of meaning including risks and vulnerabilities become pushed out of awareness as larger objectives of meeting targets, and achieving program objectives, are foregrounded. It becomes nearly self-incriminating to point out or name intensifying risks, vulnerabilities and dangers within local organizations and communities – as though to do so would be to admit some kind of inherent failure or lack – a mark of being somehow less advanced, regressive or behind the times, or worse – evidence of mismanagement (potentially then raising red flags and exposing oneself to audits, third party intervention and other forms of micro-management).

1.2.3 Critique of instrumental reason

Critical theorists like Saul (1992) have illustrated the subtle consequences associated with the exclusive reliance on instrumental reason, a growing trend in Canada’s public sector in recent years. Neoliberalist practices informed by instrumental reason have brought the logic of the market to the public sector (Braeley & Luxton, 2010). Public services have become more and more aligned with market values, substantially changing the nature and scope of the work of public-sector professionals and their relationships within and across

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1 For an example see Obomsawin, A. (2012). *The People of the Kattawapiskak River*. Toronto, ON: National Film Board of Canada. This documentary film explores conditions inside Attawapiskat First Nation in Northern Ontario, which in October of 2011 declared a state of emergency due to failing infrastructure and health concerns. Chief Spence held a hunger strike to bring attention to conditions in her community and the federal response was to send in third party management for alleged mismanagement thus negating Aboriginal jurisdiction over their territory.
public service organizations, particularly in the human-service domains of education, healthcare and social work (DeVault, 1998). This has meant professionals are increasingly compelled to adopt the language of business to describe their work with people, changing the way professionals approach their practice contexts and the “clients” they serve. These changes have meant what DeVault (1998) defines as “new human service goal of supporting independence, self-reliance and competitiveness in those who at an earlier time would have been seen as ‘needing services’” (p. 44).

Within the structural constraints of market imperatives, we tend to be more inclined to focus our efforts on squeezing clients into pre-existing systems and structures, without necessarily considering their particular life circumstances, their personal imperatives and the hidden context of their lives. This can foster tunnel vision and a narrow-minded approach to our encounters because it is based on a transactional, not reciprocal, approach, calling us to prioritize our own professional advancement over social relations with others, including, as is the case in this narrative those most vulnerable, the strangers in our midst. Clients then become seen primarily from an instrumental perspective, specifically in terms of how they will serve organizational goals and outcomes. Rather than an end in themselves, people capable of making meaning of their own lives and defining for themselves what counts as thriving and focusing on these capacities in ways that build personal agency and self-determination, clients are slotted into their predetermined place in the social order deriving their significance from their overall roles and functions. As Shadd (2012) explains,

Rather than seeking to ensure that the end result of the encounter is that true return to an enriched self so necessary to the growth of an individual or the community of which they are a part, too often attention has been focused instead on directing those without power to that place where an external authority has determined they should end up – their so-called ‘proper’ place within the social hierarchy – with the result being an all-too-predictable alienation from the Self and often from the community as well (p. 167).
This is the broader social landscape which forms the backdrop in which this narrative unfolds. As I begin to work through the particularities of this story and the meaning of the stranger that arose in conversation between the social workers, a moral question emerges: what does it mean to practice ethically in today’s workplace defined by neoliberalism?

1.2.4 Crisis of professionalism

For many years, scholars have been writing about a crisis of professionalism, whereby the caring fields of education, social work, human services and healthcare have become saturated by market values, with practitioners struggling to align with the values they espouse (Schön, 1983; Schön, 1987). Scholars and organizational experts have homed in on the need to increase awareness about unjust practices in the field and have identified different reflective strategies to better align values of justice and integrity with workplace practices.

Within Aristotelian ethics, phronesis or practice wisdom is about discerning right action through contemplative practices. Practice wisdom is distinguished from techne, namely the acquisition of technical skills (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012) and requires a different kind of guidance system than instrumental reason. This form of practical judgement or discernment requires stepping back from outcome achievement and utilitarian goals (i.e. how to achieve this or acquire that, as our linear rationalist training based on instrumental reason has inclined us to do), and to ask deeper questions of meaning and purpose (i.e. why this, why that). Phronesis is the practice of attuning to the particularities of a given situation to discern its deeper meaning for ourselves by drawing on our human capacity for cultivating conscious awareness through reflection and self-examination.

From an ethical vantage point, the practitioner develops practice wisdom through examining one’s practices in pursuit of the good (Wall, 2003) and aligning one’s actions with a deeper sense of purpose by cultivating self-awareness. Schön’s (1983) reflection-in-action approach is designed to improve practitioner self-awareness through cultivating direct reflection as one practices in the field (as distinct from looking back in retrospect). Most recently, Kinsella and Pitman (2012) have identified phronesis as a means for
practitioners to become more critically aware of their practice contexts to foster a greater sense of agency in the field. The intention underlying these different reflective practices is to promote greater reflexivity, by building the capacities of practitioners to become more critically self-aware of complexities in the field and ideally make meaningful changes in their behaviour as a result of these expanded understandings.

In today’s practice environments defined by neoliberalism, phronesis implies not simply following along with market interests by replicating pre-existing or given practices, but rather reflecting on one’s actions in the world (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012) to better align one’s practices with espoused values and move forward in new ways that do not replicate old outmoded dynamics of power. Ultimately, this expanded awareness is intended to create better alignment between the values practitioners espouse and their practices in the world. Does practicing ethically mean leading an examined professional life as Aristotelian ethics might suggest (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012)?

1.2.5 The hidden dimensions of power in organizations

I have struggled with the question of whether practice wisdom alone can lead to ethical action in neoliberal society, given the hidden dimensions of power which perpetuate structural violence in current practice settings. Critical theorists tend to be suspicious of Aristotelian ethics and question the liberal assumption “that individuals are fully informed about all their decision alternatives, the probabilities of their outcomes and their consequences” (Wittek et al., 2013, p. 6). Named the “school of suspicion” Nietzsche, Marx and Freud were pioneers in challenging the modern idea of the autonomous rational subject (Wall, 2003). These continental thinkers threw out the idea of rational discernment altogether, arguing as with many neo-Marxists of the Frankfurt school, one must always remain vigilant to the potential misuse of power and be critically self-aware about one’s social practices in the context global capitalism with its single-bottom-line profit at any cost.

From this critical perspective, the social dynamics informing practice are more complicated than implied by liberal analysis, speaking to deeper, structural imbalances having to do with hidden relationships to power in advanced capitalist and technological
society, and impersonal social forces that function outside one’s awareness or control (Burston, 2006). From this vantage point, people act out in all kinds of unconscious ways that perpetuate the status quo and reinforce inequities on account of “internalized oppressive norms” (Meyers, 2004). Internalized oppressive norms in critical theory is a contemporary reconfiguration of the neo-Marxist idea of “false consciousness” (Nancy, 2008; Stout, 2010; Sennett, 1994; Rae, 2006; Engels in Benjamin, 1968) and the tendency for people to ascribe to dominant norms for fear of public censure or self-marginalization.

This speaks to the shadow side of community, the tendency to go along mindlessly with what is given and entailing the least possible effort in a world of global technology and mass production (Taylor, 1991a; Saul, 1992). Critical theorists emphasize the potential for violation (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) in late-capitalist society which privileges material advancement over social imperatives, posing acute risks where variations or asymmetries of power are unnamed leading to the potential for misuse or abuse of power. Structural violence defined here refers to unseen dynamics of power, namely hidden dynamics in a system, which privilege some over others, thereby ‘totalizing’ (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) or constraining those who are vulnerable or lack access to resources.

From a critical vantage point, the intricacies and nuances of social relations are not visible in our practices and there exists an invisible field of information (Horn & Brick, 2009). Professionals can fail to recognize how the organization as a whole is structured and the role they play in its formation (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipon, 1985). This can manifest in mundane ways, such as not considering others in one’s actions creating glaring blind spots, where people may think they are working in the service of justice in their projects and plans, and yet behave in questionable ways that demonstrate a flagrant disregard for their impact on others (Burston, 2006; Langdridge, 2008).

Very often leaders and people in positions of power do not see the consequences of their behaviour because the rules of engagement stifle dissent and dissuade people from being transparent about perceived injustices, and more to the point, because it is not people’s
best interests to do so, particularly when the very people who offer services, sign pay cheques or authorize access to institutional resources are the worst offenders. These dynamics most often remain hidden from view because although people may be aware of what is going on, rarely do they surface these issues publicly except under the most extreme circumstances because people are afraid of reprisals or public censure and therefore tend to avoid conflict of any kind (Sennett, 1994). What comes to mind here is the adage: people are weary of biting the hand that feeds them.

This points to a fault line in liberal theory – specifically its lack of analysis of the hidden dynamics of power that privilege the status quo. Nussbaum (1999) makes the important point that the current rules of engagement presume a fair and level playing field, which she argues “underlies the very idea and plausibility of reciprocity and mutual advantage” (p. 76), and she notes variations and asymmetries are not the exception, but rather “a pervasive fact of human life” (p. 76).

Without particular attunement to these nuances of power, current rules of engagement can foster calculating, self-centered approaches to relationships whereby “social networks are seen purely for their instrumental value and treated as a resource to advance personal goals” (Wittek et al., 2013, p. 225). This lack of critical awareness of others as distinct human beings with their own needs and imperatives (beyond being there for me) will distort our capacity to see outside our own limited perspectives, and for this reason, it is easy to delude ourselves into thinking we are acting with integrity, when in practice we may be rationalizing all kinds of behaviours that adversely impact others in all kinds of subtle, but significant ways that can undermine trust, transparency and the potential for justice.

Mezirow (1991) and Brookfield (1995) identify critical reflection as a means of transforming practices to generate social change and more inclusive practices. This critical work centers around unconscious bias and focuses on raising awareness of hidden dynamics of power. The central premises of Mezirow’s (1991) critical approach to adult learning in organizations, for example, are: 1) the idea of applying a critical lens to uncover hidden dynamics of power in organizations; 2) the idea that raising awareness
about structural violence will bring about necessary changes; and 3) the idea that being aware people will be compelled to take action (Mezirow, 1991).

Having done critical work in the public sector for over 20 years, I question these premises. My view is structural injustice is much more entrenched and intractable than even the critical literature might suggest, and my lived experience and practice-based knowledge in the field suggests that no one person can effect change in isolation.

I have been exposed to many organizations over the course of my 20-year career and have encountered many thoughtful, engaged, and critically reflective professionals who, like me, have desperately struggled to embody the values they espouse and have confronted immense difficulty in striving to practice wisely and communicate transparently in neoliberal institutional lifeworld’s where market-interests dominate.

1.3 The difficult practice of critically-informed work

I wanted to open a dialogue about the difficulties of doing critically-informed work by talking transparently about the impasses (Green, 2009a) I have faced as a professional in contemporary workplace cultures defined by neoliberalism. As I attune to my lived experience of doing critically informed work in the field, I question whether critical reflection alone necessarily fosters reflexivity, and meaningful systemic change.

I draw on a critical incident (Tripp, 1993) in my practice to illustrate the kinds of impasses I have faced in striving for justice as a workplace consultant in today’s public sector. Critical incidents (Tripp, 1993; Brookfield, 2016; Fook, 2015) are used by scholars as a tool to cultivate critical self-awareness and reflexivity about fault lines in one’s practices. Tripp’s (1993) approach to using critical incidents in practice is designed to critically attune to misalignments between espoused values and actions. Tripp (1993) suggests using critical incidents to critique existing practices to the extent they meet the criteria of social justice. I draw on a critical incident in my practice to look at incongruencies and misalignments I have experienced as I have sought to work for justice in the public sector.
1.3.1 I dare not speak

Though my work is critically-informed, and I used the critical lens to raise conscious awareness about the systemic issues at play, critical incidents arose in my practice where I have found myself entirely incapacitated in translating these understandings into concerted action in the service of justice.

I came to this work with a critical lens, seeing the complex psychosocial challenges facing contemporary public-sector institutions as rooted in deeper systemic issues, namely, what Wilson (2004) identifies as the contradictory social and market forces inherent in globalization and technological change. I was trained to examine the structural conditions informing contemporary institutional life and used critical analysis to raise awareness of the systemic forces at play in the context neoliberalism, technological change and globalization, revealing constrictive and restrictive practices hidden or obscured from view. As Wilson (2004) explains structural analysis is about “identifying the underlying principal power relationships and deeper contradictions – opposing social and economic interests – that determine the structure of society…provides a critical base for understanding and action” (p. 5).

The stories I encountered in the field, while distinct, could not be extricated from the broader social fabric in which they unfolded. This narrative, a young man entirely unknown to me, was no different. From a structural perspective, his story could not be fully grasped outside the broader meta-narrative of neoliberalism and global restructuring. As I listened to social workers discussing this young man’s case, what struck me most was the way in which this program was configured, between social workers and youth, and the underlying social dynamic – in which precariousness became framed as a personal or individual issue. A pathologizing stance which I imagined the young man in question absorbed – along with the implication that somehow his insecurity was the result of maladaptation, or bad personal decisions – a most insidious attitude no youth had any hope of overcoming with the tools and opportunities at their disposal (Vaillancourt, 2011).
I questioned the notion that youth precarity was the result of individual failure as opposed to market failure, seeing this as a symptom, as opposed to root cause. I understood from my systemic analysis, youth were not to blame for underemployment, nor was precarity a problem that would resolve itself with traditional skills development approaches alone. Labour market analysis suggests employment precarity among youth represented more than simply short-term adjustments in response to a temporary downturn. In the economic climate of the past two decades (characterized by jobless recovery and global restructuring) youth have been particularly vulnerable to the scarring effects of underemployment with potentially devastating consequences (McDonald & Worswick, 1999 in Gunderson, 2005; Gunderson, 2014).

Research in Ontario suggested an increase in precarious forms of work has exacerbated inequality along the lines of class, gender, ethnicity and race (Noack & Vosko, 2011). The consequences of precarity can have the most profound impact on people marginalized from social networks due to social dislocation such as newcomers and immigrants, migrant workers, domestic violence survivors and LGBTQ2 communities. Calhoun (2008) explains that the absence of strong and robust social networks can make marginalized groups vulnerable, pointing out, “human agency and action then requires more than simply desire, drive and intention… [it requires] …a world that is reliable, predictable and safe, thus hospitable to human planning and action” (p. 205).

The attitudes conveyed by the social workers appeared to exhibit a lack of understanding and critical awareness of the systemic impacts affecting this young man, as well the scarring effects of his circumstances, to say nothing of any potential trauma in his background which might explain his behaviour. While I knew what the presenting issues were and had sufficient critical evidence to launch a strong defense of this youth, all of this knowledge and expertise did not equip me to effectively communicate with my professional associates in ways that would allow me to translate what I was seeing when I perceived an injustice occurring before my very eyes.

Although I vehemently disagreed with the implication that this young man’s resistance to agency programming was somehow reflective of his poor character and understood the
deeper structural issues at play, I found myself entirely incapable of bracketing my own perceptions and communicating in any kind of detached way, let alone in the kind of removed or impartial way that my professional role seemed to call for. In that moment with these social workers in the room, words betrayed me, and I simply could not bring myself to them, my body refused.

While in some senses utterly forgettable (don’t these kinds of incidents happen every day), this critical incident held particular significance for me – it was the moment in which my being acknowledged what my intellect, in its relentless determination for achievement had yet to accept: my growing discomfort with my professional life as I had been living it. As Tripp (1993) explains:

incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgment we make, and the basis of that judgment is the significance we attached to the meaning of the incident (p. 8).

1.3.2 Leading an examined professional life

As I critically reflect on this critical incident, I question whether raising awareness alone and becoming more critically aware of structural imbalances, necessarily leads to ethical social action, thus generating conditions for justice and social change.

Though I was critically aware, my awareness did not prepare me to take effective action when confronted with injustice where I perceived my own position to be in peril. Incapable of separating myself from my life as I was living it, from what my life afforded, my complicity to market interests and self-estrangement (Burston, 2006) was more a reflection of my resignation to the instrumental and nihilistic tendencies of contemporary professional life than any kind of blind adherence. As Taylor (1991a) explains, the market economy – “demands reason whether it suits our moral outlook or not...the only alternative is an inner exile, a self-marginalization....” (p. 96) and therefore I could see no conceivable alternative outside the givens of my professional landscape. As far as I could gather from my practice realities and the imperatives of my work at this
time, I either had to conform to the dominant discourses and practices – oriented instrumental reason or abandon public life altogether.

What made this incident critical for me is that this was the moment in which I had reached my limit with the constraints and restrictions instrumental reason imposed on my practice. A moment of deep and painful recognition as I struggled to find my own place professionally in what appeared to me then a closed, austere and unrelenting system. Within this public domain, it suddenly dawned on me, I had no way of articulating my concerns about the gaps I perceived in this narrative without exposing my own vulnerabilities and conflicted alliances, fault lines in my practice; without potentially putting my own professional standing into question. In Lee’s (1998) words:

> to dissent from liberal modernity is to fall silent, for we have no terms in which to speak that do not issue from the very space we are trying to speak against. We may sense intimations of deprival to which modernity is not open, but we can sense them only inarticulately (p. 17).

This encounter put me in touch with my humanity, my multidimensionality, exposing deeper, more hidden aspects of my identity, making me conscious of my own embeddedness in the systems I thought I was working to change. This critical incident uprooted unseen forces at play, “enframing technologies” (Taylor, 2011; Heidegger, 1977) and the hidden dynamics of power rarely spoken about, reminding me in painful and uninvited ways that public life is much more complex than it appears. In this public forum defined by instrumental reason, I could see no way of engaging my peers and professional associates in a deeper dialogue of this stranger’s story without appearing contrary or antagonistic; to side with this young man, much as I was compelled to do, made no rational sense. Yet here I found myself more attuned to the gaps in this stranger’s story than my colleagues’ interpretation and rendering, provoking a profound sense of disorientation in my professional identity. To speak out from where I stood then, *from that perilous place*, meant detaching myself from my social networks, colleagues and professional associates, from my own professional identity.
My practices and orientation in the world no longer aligned with my core values of justice, human dignity and equality, the very principles that drew me to the field of organizational development and applied social research and evaluation in the first place. In Calhoun’s (2008) words: “It had become a life in which my desire, my passion, my convictions, my deep self-conception had no, or insufficient, place” (p. 201). This was the moment I realized I could go no further without suffering, awakening me to the depth of my estrangement from the current rules of engagement in public sector institutions and agitating the stranger that lived in me.

This critical incident, innocuous as it may seem, provoked a professional crisis because it showed me misalignments, between my professional identity and my deeper alignments and convictions, exposing fault lines in my practice. Most particularly incongruencies between how I imagined myself as a change agent and my practice realities: if I was so committed to social justice, why could I not say anything when I overheard my colleagues discussing this young man’s case? It brought to the fore misalignments I have struggled with in all kinds of subtle ways throughout my career but could no longer ignore: what is the point of being conscious if there is no place for these critical understandings to be realized, where I can act in alignment with my convictions through practices I embody in the world? Brossard (1988) writes:

what is the point of having a voice if there is no one to receive it or share it with? If there is no public...forming an interpretative community (or communities) which reject the official canon of definitive texts, for those voices which have not previously been heard... (p. 21).

1.3.3 A professional impasse

I had reached an impasse (Derrida, 1993)\(^2\) and could go no further by practicing in ways that had served me in the past and needed to radically rethink my identity as a

\(^2\) Derrida (1993) writes: “When someone suggests to you a solution for escaping an impasse, you can be almost sure that he is ceasing to understand, assuming that he had understood anything up to that point” (p. 32).
practitioner. The impasse is a threshold where the way forward is uncertain. It means coming to the end of something and seeing no recourse, but to release old ways of being and practicing by letting go of those things which no longer serve. The gateway cannot be crossed without reconfiguring one’s practice. To this extent it represents a transgression of space (Derrida, 1993): one is called to the difficult task of not only thinking differently but acting from a different place and approaching things in a different way from how things have been done in the past. In Derrida’s (1993) words:

All of these are possibilities of the ‘coming to pass’ when it meets a limit. Perhaps nothing ever comes to pass except on the line of a transgression, the death [trespas] of some ‘trespassing’ [in English in the original] (p. 33).

1.3.4 My shifting identity as a change agent

I trace my shifting identity as a change agent from a transcendental approach to systems change where I bracket my perceptions using Patton’s (2002; 2015) approach to attune to systemic patterns, to an existential-phenomenological by becoming more transparent about patterns I perceive in the field as they align with my own lived experience, memories and founding events.

When I entered the field as a management consultant I never would have communicated transparently about my own lived experience. I believed raising awareness about the hidden dynamics of power meant setting aside my perspective to cultivate greater understanding without imposing my perspective on others. Akin to Levinas’ (1969) approach to hospitality I thought bracketing my perspective and bias would allow me to attune phenomenologically to the Other.

I followed Patton’s (2002; 2015) example, and practiced phenomenological reduction, by bracketing personal biases to gain clarity on preconceptions, in order to attune to deeper structures and patterns and better understand local practice realities. I consulted with different groups and organizations across the country – from small towns, to major urban hubs and remote and northern communities and thought by “bracketing” (Patton, 2002)
my own perceptions I could focus on local knowledges and attune to emerging patterns without imposing my own biases.

This is what narrative researchers would call a “not-knowing” stance (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) which requires a humility when you place yourself with others by taking a non-violative or invasive approach (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) through setting aside personal biases (Paré, 2002). This “hospitality of presence” (Birnbaum, 1998) emerges out of the phenomenological tradition beginning with Husserl. Husserl sought to develop strategies for setting aside or bracketing preconceived biases in order to attune to the Other by not to imposing one’s own conceptual categories (Ladkin, 2005).

My own method and analysis as a workplace consultant and applied social researcher drew on concepts from critical theory, phenomenology and narrative approaches to raise awareness of structural violence (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) and support organizations in promoting safe, healthy and respectful workplaces by cultivating deeper understandings of the complex circumstances of people’s lives. As an applied social researcher who did ethnographic fieldwork, I was trained to identify broader patterns through strategies that included focus groups and interviews for program evaluations and social policy initiatives.

I adopted a systemic-perspective, which used phenomenological investigation of lived experience to identity patterns in systems of human interaction, the premise being there exists an invisible field of information (Horn & Brick, 2009) that can be identified by surfacing stories from those who may not previously have been heard. As a critically-informed practitioner, I was particularly attuned to unconscious or implicit bias and misuse of power and was highly vigilant about the potential for violation (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) in public-sector institutions, particularly in the context of vulnerabilities and marginalized communities. My early research focused on investigations into allegations of abuse in Indian Residential Schools for ADR and children in care. I have investigated different forms of organizational violence such as harassment, bullying and lateral violence in healthcare. I have also conducted evaluations of social and cultural
programs to determine whether they align with the values they espouse, including social
development programs and programs that target youth-at-risk such as the one described
in these pages.

To my mind, I was not only aligned with local communities in my professional
capacities, but deeply attuned to the desires and struggles of ordinary citizens. My role as
I saw it was to unleash local potential and enhance local capacity through social analysis
and applied research, by documenting local needs and the kinds of challenges
communities faced to ensure that donors and government policies and programs were
responsive to local realities. I saw myself as a knowledge translator between various
arms of government, funding bodies and delivery agents and civil society organizations,
non-governmental organizations and citizen groups. As an analyst who adopted the
critical lens, I believed that effective social policy, grounded in research-informed
practices, represented the most strategic and effective means of improving local material
and social realities and circumstances, and emerging risks for vulnerable populations and
communities in crisis.

What was wrong with me that I did not say anything? If I was so committed to social
justice, why can I not speak out when I see an injustice occurring?

1.3.5 The problem of civic solitude

This critical incident represented a moment of rupture for me professionally at a
particularly precarious and isolating time in my development as an emerging
professional. This was a time in Canadian public life marked by austerity, downsizing
and restructuring, by global and technological change. I wanted to be honest and
transparent about my vulnerabilities, and the existential challenges I faced. Attuning to
this incident as critical moment, a moment of awakening, I recount what this breakdown
in communication, in social trust, meant for me professionally, as a critically-informed
practitioner and workplace consultant, whose craft is words, and whose very work centres
on language and knowledge translation on critical issues facing the public sector. My
incommunicability in the face of this impasse challenged not only my integrity, but my
very subsistence and called me, existentially, to question my own deeply internalized
professional practices and beliefs. This impasse caused me to rethink how I see myself in the world, my place in contemporary workplace culture, my professional identity and the meaning of my profession.

I have never been comfortable with the kind of autonomous rationalism practiced in contemporary workplaces and the restrained, detached and unitary professional identity it seemed to call for. In my 20 years consulting with various arms of government and donors, I often felt like a stranger. Entering the tall office towers of the federal public service, I felt that I had to flick a switch, turn off my lights, as Nussbaum (1999) once put it, and repress entire parts of myself to fit in and function effectively.

I perceived early in my professional development that to expose different aspects of my social identity was to *self-marginalize*, laying bare my professional anonymity and opening myself up to undue risk. I could not imagine inviting others into the multifaceted dimensions of my existence as a practitioner – of being known and knowable publicly. Although I found this kind of dissembling (Moses, 2006) emotionally exhausting, and fragmenting in all kinds of subtle and insidious ways, I was prepared to leave my sense of self as a multi-faceted human being at the elevator door to advance the causes I held dear because I believed in the work and I thought I was being strategic, slightly subversive even, working the system to further a social justice agenda. And frankly I could see no other way. Instrumental reason is so deeply internalized – as Brossard (1988) explains the instrumental and self-interested way of operating is “subliminally transmitted to us as our only chance of participating in public life” (p. 108).

This is not to say I believed this, it just seemed inevitable. As an emerging professional in the age of austerity and falling expectations (Swift, 1999), I could not imagine how else to proceed, particularly in the absence of any conceivable alternate vision. I could not see outside the givens of my professional landscape: as far as I could gather from my practice realities and the imperatives of my work, I either had to conform to the dominant neoliberal discourses and practices – oriented toward instrumental reason or abandon public life altogether.
So isolated was I in my own particular circumstances, by the weight of responsibility to do right by others, to try and live with integrity, while still fulfilling my personal and financial commitments – supporting my family and saving my own skin – I could not see my way outside of these personal imperatives and even begin to consider how these impacts might possibly be affecting others. Alone with my thoughts and having the sense like Moure (1993) describes: “I feel this way but I’m the only one who feels this way” (p. 206), I felt out there on my own, separated from myself and others.

This is who my work speaks to, the professional who is there but not there – the person I was when I began this journey, an isolating condition Miller (2007) describes as the “ontology of solitude”: a person separated from others, with no bridge or means of communication tying them to others, he or she is “radically impenetrable, for translation....” (p. 56). Using critical phronesis (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) as a tool to discern the perils and possibilities in pushing the limits of my own narrative, I step outside my solitude by showing up more authentically and sharing my impressions of what I perceive in the field as it aligns with my own lived experience and life history.

1.3.6 Professional ethics as relational integrity

I write about the problem of civic solitude and the need to step outside traditional silos and subcultures, to reach out across divides to solve the complex challenges of contemporary practice. A narrative thread that runs through the existentialist phenomenological tradition is the stranger (l’Etranger) who arrives unexpectedly. How one responds to this uninvited stranger encapsulates the continental ethos of hospitality, namely how a human being, a citizen, a sub-culture, an organization or institution, a society takes in and extends itself toward the outsider, the foreigner or the stranger.

Continental notions of hospitality require a particular form of attunement: a kind of vigilance (Deluca, 2000) and sensitivity to the Other. The ethic of hospitality comes from Levinas (1969) and inherent in this philosophy is a heightened alertness to the potential for imposition, or violation where asymmetries of power are unspoken or hidden from view. Levinas (1969) believed through vigilant encounters with difference, we come up against the limitations of our own knowledge and understandings and are called to release
taken for granted assumptions by recognizing alternate ways of being and seeing. As long as we are attached to our thought perceptions, we miss opportunities to really show up in meaningful ways, to align with others and co-create new possibilities. Others mirror for us what we cannot see in ourselves, as Levinas (1969) explains; “the identity of a language can only affirm itself as identity to itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or of a difference with itself” (p. 10). The phenomenal quality of these encounters encourages us to become more relationally aware, showing us our blind spots and where we can do better, and emboldening us to overcome our insecurities to rise to occasions when called.

The face-to-face encounter in continental philosophy is a powerful force for change. The Other calls us out of our solitude, our insularity, to become more fully present with and for others. Levinas (1969) writes: “When I am chez moi, ‘at home’, I am in the joyous possession of an independent self-sufficiency, and I can be deaf to any strangeness in the Other that would deny my insularity” (p. 134). The face of the Other, pulls us out of our private struggles to become aware of those most vulnerable who require our attention. The face of the Other pulls us out of our own preoccupations, our internal tensions and divisions, and compels us to respond. This human capacity for critical self-awareness in relationship is integrally tied to our connection to others and by extension, our ethical responsibility to them and to extend our commitment and sense of responsibility beyond ourselves. These encounters call us to respond.

This means paying attention in our interactions with others by taking responsibility for the consequences of our actions and inaction and being prepared to look deeply at the consequences of our negligence. When we are caught up in systems that constrain us in all kinds of subtle and unspoken ways, it can become hard to see our way outside of it. We ourselves can feel victimized in all kinds of subtle ways, making it difficult to truly see ourselves clearly and understand our potential impact. Levinas (1969) reminds me the Other is other than me, that there are diverse others out there that require my attention and awareness. In other words, I am ethically responsible to others. The stranger emerges out of nowhere to pull me out of my solitude and provides unique opportunities to
redefine myself in new and expanded ways, outside the objectifying or totalizing narratives that kept me small. This is a major theme in existentialist writing.

Professional ethics, from an existentialist perspective, helps practitioners become more responsible for their actions (Yalom, 1980 in Winston, 2015). Existentialists therefore propose exercising freedom while also being aware of the consequences of their actions on others (Winston, 2015). This means becoming more conscious and aware of the needs and interests of others and paying attention to what is going on around us in the field, including hidden dynamics of power to ensure we are not acting out of our own suffering and isolation by neglecting the unspoken needs of others through small acts of neglect or betrayal. For Levinas (1969) awareness of Other’s presence compels us to action, we have a moral obligation to respond, no matter what the circumstance.

There is some debate in continental theory about our human capacity to respond in all circumstances. Hospitality in continental philosophy is complicated because we live in a dualistic world of hostile and hospitable relations (Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011). For this reason, the public can be perilous at times: dangerous, fraught with danger, hazardous, risky, unsafe, treacherous. There is a sense in continental writing that one must be careful who you let in, because you do not know who to trust. Kahane (2017) talks about the complex nature of collaboration in his book *Collaborating with the Enemy* and according to Kahane (2017) the term collaborator has a double meaning in continental philosophy: to work together, and to betray.

Ricoeur (1992) understands the dichotomies of collaboration in market-based societies and holds we are responsible for the culture we inherited including conscious and unconscious dynamics and we are responsible for the impact of our actions on others. For Ricoeur, it is simply not enough to hold convictions, these convictions must be embodied through one’s practices and actions in the world, a manifold world with diverse others who may not always agree with us. Ricoeur (1992) defines an agent as someone who can attest to his or her existence by taking responsibility for their actions and acting ethically in social worlds and under conditions they did not define, even, or especially, where others may be behaving in ways that appear confusing or incomprehensible. In a world I
did not create, and into which I am thrown, I am not totalized (as Marcuse (1978) reminds us) and if I am to exert agency over my professional life, I must find ways to align with my convictions through my actions in the world to embody the values I espouse and to manifest the world I endeavour to see.

1.4 Chapter overview

This introductory chapter, *The Stranger in Contemporary Practice*, traced my shifting consciousness as a workplace consultant. I wrote about a communication breakdown that occurred in my practice, a critical incident in which I became incapable of communicating with professional associates as I overheard them discussing a young man’s case. My own withdrawal from my colleagues left me isolated and estranged from professional associates and my professional identity. I share this both a means to illustrate the incongruences and misalignments between my espoused values and practices and to evoke the broader social context within which this communication breakdown emerged.

I am working with Ricoeur’s (1996) ethic of hospitality to make-meaning of this face-to-face encounter and to discern the ethical meaning of the stranger in my practice. Ricoeur (1996) writes, “what we most desperately lack are models of integration between these two poses [self and other]” (p. 3). The stranger who came into my field of awareness during the evaluation that day helped me to penetrate through my own professional constraints and limitations and see myself more fully and understand my practice from a more expanded place.

I draw on this critical incident (Tripp, 1993) in my practice, as a catalyst for seeing my practice differently, and trace my shifting consciousness as a workplace consultant from a transcendental approach to critique (based on a Hursserlian approach), where I have tended to “bracket” (Patton, 2002) my own lived experiences to attune to the Other and patterns in the system, to a more existential-phenomenological (or embodied) approach where I allow my lived experiences to guide me in critical and intentional ways, through a discernment process called “critical phronesis” (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003). I take up Ricoeur’s critical approach (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) to phronesis
which calls me to be more transparent about my lens and the landscapes I see, by identifying resonances within my lived experience as they intersect with critical incidents that arise in my practice, to make visible what I am experiencing and open up dialogue on unspoken issues, without imposing or speaking on behalf of others.

I take this autoethnography and put it in an existential-phenomenal lens to provide a transparent rendering of what it is like to be in this institutional world: limiting people’s ability to practice in authentic ways. I use my story as a way of surfacing hidden dimensions of power and to situate myself around some of the existential issues that have arisen in my work.

Working through this narrative existentially and from a phenomenological perspective, I consider my own changing practices and some of the wider conditions that inform my work as a practitioner and change agent in the public sector. In sharing this, I hope to transcend my own protective withdrawal and build common understanding from a practitioner’s standpoint, of the deeply entrenched institutional forces that limit movement, and the difficulties I have confronted as I have attempted to renegotiate my path forward.

Chapter Two: Literature review, public life re-examined

Chapter two traces my philosophical journey and the existential and ethical issues I have struggled with as I have sought to get beyond the impasses that have confronted my practice. My literature review challenges my own critical views of the public as I confront my own cynicism about the possibility for change and imagine new ways forward. I explore the ontology of solitude and how old-world struggles and polarization can marginalize those with complicated citizen identities. Drawing on Ricoeur’s narrative ethics, I explore how this can inadvertently push people to questions of identity, where people feel they have to choose and defend sides. I adopt Ricoeur’s critical approach to phronesis, as a means of getting beyond the impasses that close us off to others, which is about stepping outside of solitude and translating one’s lived experience to diverse others by naming unseen forces and hidden dynamics of power as they emerge in practice. Ricoeur’s critical approach compels us to locate ourselves and name our experiences to
expand the dialogue and transform restrictive practices that oppress and constrain those most vulnerable.

Chapter three: Meaning-making of the stranger in contemporary practice

Chapter three outlines my methodology and overall approach to this research. I am working with Ricoeur’s ethic of hospitality (1996) which is about the difficulties and possibilities inherent in aligning with our convictions and naming our experiences in manifold worlds that include hostile and hospitable relations.

What Ricoeur is inviting us to do is step back from a culture of separation, and look at the bigger picture, by welcoming the strangers in our midst who are calling us to respond. For Ricoeur, it is through face-to-face relationships that change is possible, and urges that we find the courage to take effective action on the challenges that confront us, if not for ourselves, for others.

Through our connections with diverse others, we become challenged to build our capacity to struggle for a better world and from a pragmatic perspective we also learn our limits, what we are not prepared to accept under any circumstances. I draw on the critical incident in my practice to explore and discuss Ricoeur’s three steps in enacting hospitality in face-to-face relationships: namely, first by offering linguistic hospitality and paying attention to and acknowledging the stranger in this story before recounting my own. Second, by becoming visible and transparent by articulating what prevented me from speaking out, by exchanging memories on my own founding events and lived experiences and situating myself by being explicit about my own sense of place at this vulnerable time. Finally, step three is about turning the lens back on my practices and looking pragmatically at my positioning from an enlarged perspective, to see how I can create better conditions of justice to welcome the stranger and deepening my practices.

Chapter four: Encountering the stranger, a practice narrative
Chapter four is about welcoming the stranger who arrives unexpectedly, by recognizing him as a distinct human being. This first step in Ricoeur’s ethic of hospitality builds on Levinas’s ethical gesture to the Other, which means witnessing and attuning to the Other before recounting one’s own. This means acknowledging where my story intersects with those more vulnerable than me. I write about my own encounter with the stranger in this narrative, an encounter which woke me up, and pulled me out of my routine practices, my isolated professional existence, and offered a poignant reminder of my potential impact on unseen others. This encounter awakened me to my presence in public venues, making me aware of how I show up publicly in uncomfortable circumstances – and clarifying who it is precisely that I answer to and serve, when my practice realities appear awkward, fuzzy and confusing.

This new awareness caused me to become more conscious of the ways in which my thoughts, actions and deeds are received out there, in the world of ideas, including indirect impacts beyond my immediate perceptual field (those I inadvertently impact through my actions and non-actions), the strangers in my midst. It crystalized how I position myself professionally, my citizenship practices, in a public sector racked by global technological change and restructuring. Causing me to consider how I might practice more hospitably in what I sometimes perceive and experience as an inhospitable, tight and at times, deeply unjust public sector. A quandary encapsulated within this subtle, but nonetheless critical incident in my practice. From this expanded vantage point, I was provoked to look at the bigger picture, to step outside my isolation and consider what would be in the best interest of this young man and to critically discern how to mobilize toward creating better conditions for the stranger.

I step outside my own limitations, my existential struggles, to consider how to be part of creating a culture that supports transparency, where people can communicate openly by naming what they are seeing and experiencing, particularly hidden dynamics of power that may be obscured. I realized creating an atmosphere and culture that models this, is something I could never do as long as I myself felt threatened and in peril. Derrida brought this to light for me when he said dwelling in language is difficult, if not impossible for those who are displaced (Derrida, 1993). I write about my own impasses
and challenges in doing this work to transform workplace culture. This was the beginning of my learning journey, a “perilous” (Şenocak, 2009; 2016) quest for integrity which called me to locate myself and name my experiences by situating my practices in a larger social context that includes both hospitable and hostile relations. Most particularly, this has meant exploring the contradictions and tensions inherent in my own story including incongruencies between myself and the broader culture in which I am practicing.

Chapter five: *Je me souviens*, I remember, founding events, memories, recollections

Chapter five explores my journey to become more transparent in my practices which involves exchanging memories on the founding events, memories and reminiscences that inform my orientation and approach to my work. This second step in Ricoeur’s ethic of hospitality represents a kind of… “taking up and letting go, of expressing oneself and welcoming others” (Ricoeur in Kearney, 2007, p.154). From a critical vantage point, my own lived experience shapes my questions as a scholar, and what I see as meaningful including the patterns I recognize in organizations and my perceptions of the untold stories and unseen forces at play. This second step is about being willing to exchange of memories from my own story to position myself in relation to the problem or issue at hand, by sharing founding events in my life and how these experiences influence how I show up. In so doing, I become more visible in my practices, and take responsibility for what I am seeing and experiencing. Recounting different stories of the same event, indicates “how each event may be told in different ways by different generations and by different narrators…carving out a place for several stories directed towards the same past” (Ricoeur in Kearney, 2007, p. 155).

I foreground the founding events (Ricoeur,1996; Ricoeur in Lyle and Gehart, (2000) which form the interpretative framework for understanding the factors ‘at play’ when this communicative impasse occurred. Most particularly this has meant confronting and coming to terms with my own non-belonging and invisibility – of working in a system where diversity is perceived as a non-value and differences are negated and my own
estrangement and protective withdrawal in the face of coercion tied into my own ancestral history of displacement.

I trace my quest to transform restrictive practices and deepen my sense of professional integration by exploring how my own life history and patterns of displacement, old wounds from the past, played out in my practice, unconsciously informing my approaches and responses to colleagues and allied professionals. I struggle to gain a deeper understanding of this incident by chronicling what is means to be a multidimensional practitioner. Here I explore the contradictions of civil belonging (Lee, 1998) and the possibilities inherent in naming these contradictions as a means of sustaining effective bonds by becoming more visible and resolving differences authentically.

Chapter six: A perilous quest, from disjointed to phenomenal encounters

Chapter six is the third and final phase of this translation, is about being prepared to come back into my practice from an expanded place. Ricoeur emphasizes how exposure to the Other alters your perspective and brings an expanded understanding your world by situating it in a broader context, outside one’s own narrow perspective and struggles, causing you to see yourself in a different light. What once felt like a profoundly disorienting encounter, I now see woke me up, pulled me out of my routine practices, my isolated professional existence, and offered a poignant reminder of my potential impact on unseen others. This encounter with the stranger reminded me of my scope of influence and capacity for change, to truly be of service to those I encounter in my practice, including strangers unbeknownst to me, whose lives are peripherally linked to mine through hinge points (Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011) in my relationships and connections with professional others.

Ricoeur identifies that transforming the past is not about “altering the record of what happened but discerning its meaning for us today, so the past can live in us in a different way” (p.10). For me this has meant repositioning myself professionally to situate my practice in a broader frame and social context, by bringing conscious awareness and
intention to my commitments, my presence in civil spaces even, or especially those which appear inhospitable to different parts of me, aspects of who I am and what I bring. This has required me to reconfigure my practices to better situate myself and more effectively and meaningfully translate my views and perspectives to those who may or may not share my assumptions, pre-understandings, and may even diverge from my way of thinking and seeing things in significant and irreconcilable ways. The appearance of the stranger in this story pulled me out of my solitude and adds an ethical dimension to the text, altering how I see myself in this neoliberal landscape, opening up new possibilities for social action.

**Epilogue: Intellect as shield, existential and phenomenal lessons from the field**

Working through this narrative, I have come to more complicated understandings of pacifism, integrity and justice as a change maker and practitioner in the field – defined *not by abstract theories of justice*, but rather pragmatism, citizen engagement and the courage to recognize *and act* when justice requires. I realize now my critical analytic stance of suspending judgement and analyzing the social world as a social analyst, which I rationalized for many years – served the status quo. It forced me to critically examine my practices and ask – was I in fact using my intellect as a shield to establish distance rather than connection (Williamson, 1993)? In bracketing my perspective, I relinquished my power, the power within me, to act in the service of justice, to invite and welcome in the stranger. This stance of detachment kept me from being the kind of leader I now imagine public life greatly needs – people brave and secure enough in their own professional identity, to lower their guard and reveal their vulnerabilities, sensitivities and gifts in the service of others. Willing to make themselves knowable – reach out across divides, and act boldly and fearlessly in moments of vulnerability and uncertainty. A true ally: someone willing to live out their story by extending themselves hospitably to others.

Having taken this learning journey, this perilous quest, I consider what it means to be an integral practitioner, someone willing to share their story in the face of potential opposition, as a means to participate more deeply in the dialogue on contemporary
workplace culture and advance the conversation on issues of integrity and justice in today’s public-sector organizations.
Chapter 2

2 Literature review: *Public life re-examined*

*Philosophy is really homesickness,*

*an urge to be at home everywhere*

*Where, then, are we going?*

*Always to our home.*

(Novalis, 1923, p. 179)

I chose to embark on this critical work because for nearly 20 years I have worked for
change in public sector institutions and over these years there have been moments that
have made me question whether systemic change is possible. This was one such moment.
In my years of working in the public sector, I have consulted on, researched and written
about structural issues facing the public sector and the hidden dynamics of power in
contemporary organizations. In this work I have undertaken social research including
program evaluations and assessments of social programs in the fields of education,
healthcare and human services, examining the impact such initiatives intended, the
outcomes they achieved, and whether they positively impacted and empowered those
people and groups they sought to reach.

Travelling across this country, and chronicling what I saw in the field, I became
increasingly aware of what Wilson (2004) so aptly described as growing contexts of
extreme deprivation. It was the human toll that disturbed me most, the marked decline in
physical and mental health, and the “scarring” effects (Gunderson, 2005; 2014) of
precarity – underemployment, poverty, housing and food insecurity and reduced life
circumstances and prospects. Seeing the lack of investment in youth, the lack of
sustainable opportunities, except for low paid, precarious employment, felt to be like a
betrayal. Giroux (2015) talks about critique as one of the most important capacities for
these troubled times and wonders what it will take for institutions to engage in critical
dialogue on the most important issues confronting the public, including candid discussion
about what neoliberalism is doing to our social world and actions we can take to find new
ways forward. Giroux (2015) argues this is a question not simply of self-responsibility as neoliberal narratives imply, but one of social responsibility.

2.1 Practicing in the age of falling expectations

As a workplace consultant who has been doing participatory and ethnographic fieldwork since the mid-nineties and having listened to testimonies in interviews and focus groups in cities and towns across this country, at a certain point I had to stop and ask myself – why am I doing this when the fundamentals, the rules of engagement (Wilson, 2004) are not adapting to the changing needs of vulnerable and marginalized people, and rather than getting better, more inclusive for those most marginalized, publicly-funded organizations and institutions seem to be getting tighter, more austere, stringent and unresponsive?

I shudder to think about the stacks of technical reports locked away in government offices in the national capital region. How to reconcile my commitment to social justice, to critical ideas, practices, policies that support people from diverse histories, social locations and backgrounds of understanding in achieving their fullest potential as distinct human beings – with the increasingly stratified, polarized, tight, austere and at times inhospitable and increasingly managed relations I was perceiving in my consultancy?

2.1.1 A critique of public sector management, or, imagining new ways forward?

This work began as a critique of public sector management practices under current rules of engagement defined by instrumental reason. My intention was to use critical lens to bring awareness to the human consequences of neoliberalism, and the ethical implications of imposing market values on every facet of social life (Braedley & Luxton, 2010).

Critical theorists like Saul (1992) have illustrated the subtle consequences associated with the exclusive reliance on individualist rationalist managerial-style leadership characterized by instrumental reason, a growing trend in Canada’s public sector in recent years. Saul (1992) explores the moral and ethical implications of the exclusive use of
specialized or expert knowledge in solving social problems in his book *Voltaire’s Bastards*. Saul (1992) writes: “by concentrating on an integrated management method, run by a single elite, we are giving power to people whose primary skill lies in the removal of contradictions, or at least the appearance of contradictions” (p. 135). The contradictions to which Saul (1992) refers are the contradictory market and social forces inherent in neoliberalism, a trend evidenced in Canada with the encroachment of market values into the public sector.

This has meant professionals are increasingly compelled to adopt the language of business to describe their work with people. As Sandel (2012) explains, technocratic and managerial language tends to instrumentalize human life and services with deeply unsatisfying, dry managerial ways of talking about public life. Sandel (2012) says such empty terms of public discourse leave out questions about public good, and meaningful dialogue about inherent values, making it more difficult to think of ourselves as citizens sharing in a common life.

I pause here to acknowledge how difficult it is to remain conscious and aware, awake to these influences and their consequences, without descending into cynicism in the face of what can only be defined as a leadership crisis. A leadership vacuum characterized by the laissez-faire attitude toward those most vulnerable in our society; and one which did not escape notice by social critics like Hedges (2010) who writes: “to avoid confronting unpleasant truths or rocking the boat...neutral observers banish empathy, passion and a quest for justice” (p. 75). As I entered this critical work, and started researching and writing, I began to have this sense of being up against a dehumanized system, where there appeared no avenues to pursue and no way forward. All I saw were contradictions between what was being espoused and what my lived experience and practice knowledge told me. Incapable of reconciling these contradictions for myself, the world became entirely incomprehensible and for a very long time I could not see clearly.

Looking back now, I had reached an impasse, that can only be described as an existential crisis: from my writing table I found myself alone with my thoughts and wondered, is anyone listening or paying attention? In all honesty, I had to stop approaching critique
from an analytic perspective because it was too discouraging, leading me down some very dark paths, and analytically I could see no solution or offer any reasonable actions beyond sheer resistance. At a certain point I had to ask myself, is there another way to consider this narrative, to tell the story of what neoliberalism is doing, if not to the Canadian social fabric, then at least to me in my practice and those I serve?

This chapter chronicles my intellectual and philosophical path through the inner life of public sector institutions and the subtext of public life in the context of globalization and technological change. Rather than critique leaders for what is going wrong in our systems and structures, which really does not engage anybody (after all, as Smith (2009) contends we know our market-based systems are deeply unjust), I have tried to come to deeper understandings of what keeps our institutions stuck and what it might take to approach public life differently. Most specifically I explore the perils of negotiating differences in neoliberal contexts where asymmetries of power are unnamed, to try and understand how structural violence (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) and old outmoded dynamics of power remain largely unchallenged and therefore become perpetuated in our systems. I undertake this review as a means to discern deeper understandings of the subtext of contemporary professional life and some of the ethical and existential issues I have struggled with as I have sought to foster greater social inclusion in the public-sector and advance the dialogue on key existential concerns that confront the public.

2.1.2 Manifold engagement in complex worlds of practice

In an incomprehensible world, that may appear chaotic, or confusing, and where leaders are not behaving in ways that we would expect, or wish for, we each have the power to make sense of the world, to name things that have not previously been named and to construct the world we choose to live in by setting a different example. The ethic that drives this existential-phenomenological inquiry is that no matter what is going on out there in the world, or how others are behaving, leaders like myself can no longer afford to separate ourselves from world and its troubles.

We are responsible for the culture in which we live and even if we are thrown into contexts we did not have a hand in creating and find ourselves in old outmoded structures
and systems that do not reflect who we are and aspire to become, we must resist projecting onto an external enemy and looking to others to solve societies problems for us. This means turning the lens back on ourselves and being reflexive in our practices by becoming more intentional and transparent about how we are showing up publicly in our face-to-face encounters. The quality of our attention, what we choose to focus on, where we are putting our energy, this all matters and will set the stage for our future sense of collective wellbeing and integration.

I have been called out of my solitude to do the work I need to do to become more fully present and to welcome the future with greater openness and an expanded sense of potential. Owning my part has required a fairly substantial pivot in my orientation and approach to this critical work, and rather than try to change leaders by raising their awareness of blind spots in the system, I now strive to more fully embody the qualities of leadership I wish to see in my relationships and encounters with others through sharing more transparently of myself and becoming more visible in my practices. Belonging to a world we did not create (Taylor, 1991a) is never perfect, and my mission is to do what I can, where I am and with what I have. This means belonging to this world, with all its troubles and complications, to work actively not to replicate old systems of power and find new ways forward. Building capacities for responsible human action, according to Ricoeur, begins with transparent communication, acknowledging our contingencies, and building the capacity to trust in ourselves in our own convictions (even when our own views and perspectives are not reflected or validated in the world).

While broad-based structural shifts and systemic changes brought on by advanced capitalism, technological change and global restructuring may appear inevitable, we (personally and collectively) do have choices. One choice is whether to follow the status quo in a dangerous game where the winner takes all – or to approach these changes with conscious intention, that is, intelligently and peacefully (Delors, 1996), by striving towards deliberative practices that are participatory, collaborative and co-creative.

Are we so pain and conflict averse, so addicted to convenience and ready-made solutions that we are entirely unwilling to put in the time, effort and energy required to engage one
another in deep dialogue and embark on what Scott (2011) describes as “the difficulty and possibility of human conversation” (p. 209)? Showing up for one another publicly being honest, listening deeply, naming difficult truths, establishing healthy but firm limits and boundaries – calling each other out when necessary – particularly when collective interests or the dignity of the human person is at risk? Can we afford to remain locked up in our own private worlds, fragmented polarized, detached and isolated? What would it take to be prepared to present ourselves in the fullness and complexity of our perspectives – even (or especially) when, as Taylor (2011) puts it, “things get tight”?

It may appear easier or safer to stand back and remain “enclosed in our own hearts” (Taylor, 1991a) and protect our own professional self-interests, I am the one, you are the one, we are the ones we have been waiting for. The intentions we bring now, our very presence – whether and how we show up – will determine the very character of public life and conditions of justice in our institutions. Whatever our relative position in the larger scheme of things: personal, family and life circumstances, belief systems, religious, racial, ethnic or linguistic affinities, gender, political ideology, sexual orientation, life and ancestral history, proximity to the tide line, it is for us, personally and collectively, to create spaces that are hospitable and just.

As complicated, inhospitable, incredibly confusing and painful as public-sector collaborations may be – and there are no easy answers or ready-made solutions, we are not entirely powerless and can choose how we enter each encounter and conversation with others. Surely, we must at least try to approach such encounters differently and from a more expanded place to get beyond this postmodern impasse.³

2.1.3 From liberation to co-creation: co-creating new realities

This work sets a tone based on my belief that change happens not in advocating on behalf of, or emancipating, others, but rather through human encounters in face-to-face

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relationships. This means getting beyond my thought perceptions and expectations of how things should be, to a more embodied place of being-in-the-world, where I am more fully present and acting in alignment with what is showing up and entering into dialogue to create meaningful change. This has required me to break out of old dynamics: power-over relationships and narratives of separation – to see my own part in the whole, and the role I play with others, even when I feel justified in my views and perspectives.

I trace my own development and shifting identity as a change agent and practitioner in the field. For many years I thought raising awareness by providing research-informed advice on systemic issues facing the public sector would be the catalyst for change and for transforming structural imbalances in the public sector. I had this image of myself as a change agent, seeing the problems out there, and seeing it as my job to raise awareness of critical issues in the field. I have come to understand in doing this work and taking this learning journey, while motivated by a deep respect for the Other, my approach was not co-creative. In Rabil’s (1967) words:

to refuse one’s determination by the world in the fullest sense of the word is only another form of refusing to be in-the-world. It is, in fact, to explain the world, to act as if one were a transcendent spectator (p. 41).

My transcendental approach to phenomenology, where I bracket my lived experiences and advocate on behalf of others, however well intentioned, creates a separation where I am apart from the problem and not implicated. This approach preserved existing power dynamics because it kept me out of relationship and located me as the liberator rather than collaborator; and as Paré (2002) asks: “Who gets to decide which stories oppress and which liberate” (p. 15)? To become truly collaborative, required entering into relationship which has meant allowing myself to become more visible in my practices, seeing and being seen, witnessing and experiencing, and allowing others in, and becoming knowable in my perceptions and practices.

This work draws on Ricoeur’s approach to narrative ethics which has encouraged me to rethink the self-other relationship and reconfigure my story in better alignment with my intentions and vision forward. I trace my transition from an ethnographic lens of self
studying the Other to an ethnographic exchange between self and other within a single text (Patton, 2002).

Ricoeur’s approach to critical phronesis (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) is about attuning to context and the nuances of power that arise by discerning meaning through embodied awareness in the field and paying attention to what is showing up. This means becoming more visible in our practices by authentically communicating about the critical issues we perceive in the field by being prepared to translate our impressions and resonances as they intersect with diverse others. This shift is difficult because it requires practitioners not to bracket personal bias, but rather to critically discern right action through direct experience where one mediates understandings face-to-face relations.

Ricoeur’s critical approach can be used in mediation, for example to handle disputes within working groups, on teams, whether between staff and management, in healthcare, education or human service team settings, on commissions (i.e. truth and reconciliation commissions and remediation) or in any context where there are hidden dynamics of power and the intention is toward authentic resolution by surfacing unspoken issues within a system without resorting to legal and human rights disputes.

2.2 The continental tradition of hospitality

This work explores the continental tradition of hospitality which is about reaching out across what might appear irreconcilable differences in a troubled and potentially threatening world. Continental philosophers (like Heidegger, Arendt, Sartre, Beauvoir, Levinas, Derrida and Cixous) have explored at length the ethos of hospitality in uncertain times and how a human being, a sub-culture, a society, a nation, takes in and extends itself toward the stranger, the outsider who arrives unexpectedly.

Kearney argues there are different kinds of hosts and different kinds of strangers and who we are as a host and how we approach hospitality co-determined by our experience of strangeness and encounters with strangers. Concepts of hospitality are primarily drawn from phenomenology, existentialism, humanism, critical theory, post-structuralism and pragmatism and reveal vastly different notions of hospitality based on differing
ontological and epistemological conceptions of presence, being-with, placemaking, worldmaking, changemaking, dwelling and sheltering, harbouring and offering refuge.

The American pragmatist tradition of hospitality, emerging from the New School holds self and other in tension. In a manifold world that includes adversaries, and potential enemies, hospitality requires risk, going to the edge of possibility (Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011) to meet the other. This requires critical self-awareness, meaning that we not bracket our experiences, but rather draw on our lived experience to share our impressions of hidden dynamics of power that circulate in the field. What makes it so difficult to become more fully present is that in a world of hospitable and hostile relations, we are required to declare ourselves and who we are in the face of potential opposition and even hostility. Extending hospitality in a manifold world that includes not just friends and allies, but adversaries, means confronting existential anxieties and stepping out from behind the wall of professional self-interest to encounter vulnerability, including our own, in the service of creating conditions of justice for those who are suffering and facing hardship.

2.2.1 Hospitality as an ethic for deep democracy

Hospitality at its core, is about opening to foreign views and perspectives even, or especially when others’ behaviour appears incomprehensible or potentially threatening. This ethic follows the tradition of hospitality in the American pragmatist tradition of the New School for Social Research. The New School in New York City in the mid-twentieth century consisted of a robust but intellectually diverse community of (many of whom were affiliated with the Frankfurt School including exiles facing persecution in war-torn Europe who fell loosely under the continental philosophical tradition). While intellectually divided, they shared a common history of displacement and persecution for their religious and ethnic backgrounds and political beliefs which yielded in them a profound sense of justice characterized by old world hospitality and recognition of the ‘other’ – which translated into an openness and generosity toward ‘the stranger’ and diverse forms of expression, ways of life and worship.
This pragmatic vision of citizenship for an increasingly complex, diverse and polarized world was pivotal to the drafting of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When Maritain first addressed the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Mexico City two years after the end of World War II he asked: “can intellectually divided men cooperate in practical matters?” (Power, 1980, p. 159). For Maritain, this question was rhetorical. By the time he posed this deceptively simple question at UNESCO in 1947 he had already discovered the New School.

The School of Social Research and the bonds and working relationships he formed during his time there, were both challenging and transformative for Maritain. There he encountered people radically different from himself, those with whom he often disagreed and hotly contested – yet who would over time become his most unlikely and lifelong companions and trusted friends. Through these connections he learned to see life differently, including his faith and religious convictions – which he never surrendered, even as he was compelled through these relationships to reconsider his beliefs in light of other perspectives and faith systems. But not without struggle. These connections forced him to confront and come to terms with his own blind spots and vulnerabilities, the contingency of language and the pragmatic realities of trying to communicate with those whose belief systems, conceptual realities and even terms of reference not only differed from but seemed to contradict the very truth as he knew it. These intellectual and intensely personal ties both challenged and deepened Maritain’s own thinking and understandings of pluralism and justice.

These complicated relationships raised existential and philosophical questions for Maritain because it caused him to wonder: “when two doctrines meet opposed in spirit and logically irreconcilable in their principals, what would you have them do, must one consume the other? (Maritain in Power, 1980, p. 167). Maritain saw little distinction between absolutists and relativists – “the first imposes truth by coercion and the second shift their right feeling from the subject to the object” (Power, 1980, p. 167). Neither satisfied his social imperative for mutual exchange and understanding, therefore he believed “a society should tolerate within itself multiple ways of worshipping and hence ways of conceiving the meaning of life and ways of behaving” (Power, 1980, p. 100) and
a plurality of views and perspectives should be fostered in any society that calls itself free. Maritain discovered what he would come to consider the very nature of tolerance and recognition – deeper than what he had ever conceived possible – for Maritain, hospitality meant:

being absolutely convinced of a truth and at the same time recognizing the right of those who deny this truth to exist and to contradict him and to speak their own mind not because they are free from truth but because they seek the truth in their own way (Power, 1980, p. 173).

Which means ostensibly not being exclusive or closing off to perspectives we find incomprehensible or offensive, and associating only with like-minded people and accepting others so long as he or she ‘stays quietly in their place’.

Maritain’s vision of pluralism, as articulated to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) General Conference in Mexico City in 1947, was underlined by “the belief that no single explanatory system or view of reality can account for all the phenomena of life” (Maritain in Power, 1980, p. 9). The question for many countries and nation-states after the second world war was, in an increasingly mobile and pluralistic world, how to bring together radically different peoples, backgrounds and histories, even those with historic grievances – together peacefully and sustainably under one nation or governance structure. These were the very challenges facing western liberal democracies during the mid-twentieth century.

2.2.2 How societies open and close

Wolf (2007) writes, “most of us have only a faint understanding of how societies open up or close down, become supportive of freedom or ruled by fear, because this is not the kind of history that we feel, or that our educational system believes, is important for us to know” (p. 4). Wolf (2007) explains:

disconnected from 'democracies tasks', alienated from the idea that [we] are the ones who must lead...the ones who must decide and confront and draw a
line...history of the mid-twentieth century has a great deal to teach us about what is happening right now... (p. 4).

This work moves beyond “the fact” of pluralism to consider how diverse needs, interests and desires even seemingly irreconcilable ones, can be effectively translated and authentically reconciled within and between people in ways that deepen conditions of justice. This is what Taylor (2011) would describe as the spirit of participatory democracy, that is, “ensuring people take charge of their own lives rather than simply being the beneficiaries of benevolent rule...which calls for the autonomy of each person, demanding in effect a minimal use of coercion in human affairs” (p. 114).

Participatory democracy, social democracy, means being prepared – that is, willing and able – to engage in deliberation and negotiation, knowing no one, regardless of position, can have or control or keep everything that one wishes – to be fair, just, to make it worthwhile, everyone at the table must know, understand, they matter, regardless of their background, their standing, whether they have “a history”, their political ideology, including whether they fit within the ideal of citizenship that predominates at this time or even how conscious or cooperative they are perceived to be. They have the potential and power within them to exert at least some control over those things that matter the most to them as discerning human beings, from within their carefully tended traditions and cultures and need to be offered a chance to realize this potential. Hosting these emergent spaces means letting go of old outmoded styles of engagement as Taylor (2011) urges, including entrenched relationship patterns, ideologies, alignments, traditional silos and historic divides, to figure out more adaptive ways of working together across differences and developing new relationships to power. These new ways of working require among other things, breaking through historic mistrust and deep-seated fear, and cynicism particularly in the face of injustice and in contexts where there are asymmetries of power.

2.2.3 Integral practice: embracing irreconcilable differences

In today’s complex workplace this requires new psychosocial competencies and abilities to thrive and adapt to change. In an increasingly pluralistic world, of diverse views and perspectives, change begins with ourselves which means becoming attuned to how our
own perspectives intersect with diverse others. How do we interface in masterful ways, particularly in complex settings where there are asymmetries of power and where the views and perspectives of others may not only contradict us, but we experience as threatening? It starts with cultivating a deeper presence to how we show up in public spaces with diverse others, what are our trigger points, how do we respond to others when we feel cornered or constricted or misunderstood?

Practitioners need to be able to engage with people even if they challenge us, their behaviour is incomprehensible or others seem to contradict what is deeply held to us. Beck and Cowan (2005) use the term “integral” to describe a developmental stage of consciousness which follows the pluralistic stage: it is both inclusive of the pluralistic mentality and exceeds itself by extending inclusiveness to those outside of the pluralistic mindset, who may be closed to the very philosophy or ethos you are trying to cultivate. An Integral practitioner is prepared to articulate their views and perspectives publicly, not only among like-minded human beings, but with the broader public – people of diverse and wide-ranging opinions including potential allies, strangers and opponents who may or may not understand or agree with you.

2.3 Hospitality as “sense of place not sanctuary”

The stranger in practice is my attempt to translate what has come to define my philosophical and ethical approach to public life and service – hospitality in the most pragmatic sense, one which opens to the unexpected ways people show up with one another and reconcile differences by being willing to step into the unknown, confront uncertainty, and work through existential anxieties to become more fully present. This approach calls leaders themselves to share their own vulnerabilities and experiences transparently with the intention of opening dialogue and serving the whole. Like Sennett (1994) I envision the public platform as embodying a “sense of place not as sanctuary, where people come alive, where they expose, acknowledge, and address the discordant parts of themselves and one another” (p. 354).

Ricoeur’s critical approach requires that I be transparent about lived experiences, founding events and memories, and share these impressions in ways that are intended to
open, rather than close dialogue. This requires transparency including being prepared to speak publicly on critical issues of concern that arise in practice, and naming impressions and perceptions from an embodied place (not on behalf of, but rather identifying how a given event or critical incident is evoking a response in me, based on my own lived experiences). To do this work ethically, requires a degree of self-mastery and critical self-awareness. This is what Ricoeur (2004; 2008; 2012) refers to as “the work of memory and mourning”, namely working through distortions in our own narrative, by critically examining the knowledge and understanding we have received from our culture and figuring out where we stand and what matters to us, our deepest convictions.

This requires taking a learning journey and coming to terms with how we ourselves have been harmed by the systems we inhabit, and reconciling our own wounds, understanding what holds us back and hinders us so that we can become more fully present and clear to what arises in the field. As Sennett (1994) suggests, “people who can acknowledge this dissonance and incoherence in themselves understand rather than dominate the world in which they live” (p. 25).

**2.3.1 Setting the table for allies, adversaries, and strangers**

The complexity of the world is requiring me to encounter people I do not always agree with or share my values. These new forms of engagement require communicating not only with known allies and colleagues, but strangers and opponents, and even potential adversaries to re-orient and re-align relationships between self and other and redefine the scope of possibility. Kahane’s (2010; 2013; 2017) work on process facilitation and scenario planning indicates the complex challenges confronting practitioners today require new forms of engagement, calling for social action that is systemic, participative and collaborative. This means learning how to engage meaningfully across traditional silos and historic divides – of belief systems, ideologies, expert or specialized knowledge, ways of knowing, perspectives and understandings – to attempt to ‘solve’ complex challenges. As Kahane (2010) writes: “the complex and vital challenges we face cannot be addressed effectively by any one leader or organization or sector, and so we need to build our capacity for co-creation...” (p. 127). Kahane (2010) explains:
to contribute to co-creating new social realities, we have only one instrument – ourselves. We cannot rely on others to effect change for us, nor can we, without violence, get others to change... if we want to exercise leadership in changing the world, we must be willing to change ourselves (p. 127).

2.3.2 Finding deeper meaning in the collective

While leaders in the public sector are being called to styles of engagement that are co-creative (Kahane, 2013), these new and emergent forms of power are not well articulated or conceptualized within current practice realities in the public sector defined by fluid power relations and in the context of global and technological change. Redefining collective action towards collaborative practices across difference, bringing together plural views and perspectives in an inclusive way is much more complicated than implied by liberal accounts. As Fletcher (2004) writes:

> It is generally recognized that this shift – from individual to collective, from control to learning, from ‘self’ to ‘self-in-relation’ and from power over to power with – is a paradigm shift in what it means to be a leader. I argue that this shift is even more profound and difficult to achieve than the leadership literature would have us believe (p. 5).

2.3.3 “Dropped threads”: the inner life of public institutions

Striking this balance between empowerment and non-coercion – of striving for achievement and self-realization while upholding and respecting the dignity and autonomy of others – I have found not only harrowing but cause for moral distress within the increasingly austere, stratified and polarized public sector environments I encounter as a workplace consultant and practitioner in the field. Holding these tensions under the most ideal of circumstances, namely among relative equals and within trusting, reciprocal and authentic relationships characterized by transparency, ethical conduct, self-awareness, and a genuine willingness to balance diverse needs (Avolio, Gardner, & Walumbwa, 2007), is challenging in and of itself. This balancing act is made more difficult in contemporary human systems marked by subtle variations and asymmetries of
power (Nussbaum, 1999) – dynamics rarely acknowledged or spoken about and most often obscured or concealed from view within contemporary organizational culture and human systems where individualist and rationalist deliberation predominates.

Within the current rules of engagement, ones which strive to hold the balance between self-determination and non-imposition, there seems to have been some dropped threads (Shields, 2000) – about the nature of belonging and interdependence in contemporary public life. Most neglected – the subtle but profound ways in which people influence and impact one another through their actions and non-actions – oftentimes in subtle and unconscious ways that reinforce the status quo and perpetuate historic asymmetries of power, informing the shape and moral character, the very circumstances of justice across organizational and institutional life. Williams (1994) writes, “we, people and organizations, are constantly relating to one another as though there were no relationship between us” (p. 18), and yet, he writes, “we are constantly experiencing mutual influence with one another” (p. 18). It is these unspoken social relations, hidden dynamics, characterized by asymmetries and imbalances of power between people of diverse backgrounds, lived experience and histories, that concerns me most.

2.4 Literature review: the pragmatics of advancing divergent views in contemporary practice settings

I am concerned with understanding the nature of hospitality in today’s public sector, particularly in complex systems such as contemporary healthcare, education and human services. Specifically, I am interested in the difficulties and potential perils of negotiating diversity under the current rules of engagement defined by instrumental reason, where variations and asymmetries or power are unnamed and hidden from view. I wanted to situate this work within the complexities of contemporary public life and the peculiarities of practicing and attempting to collaborate in contemporary practice environments centered around instrumental reason. My literature review focuses on a pragmatic question I have yet to entirely resolve but is essential to re-negotiating my own sense of integrity as a multifaceted practitioner in contemporary public sector life: Is it possible to advance divergent ideas, thoughts and opinions in advanced liberal institutions –
healthcare, education, human services – without jeopardizing one’s own professional standing, and while sustaining strong and effective bonds and working relationships? If no, why not and if so, under what conditions?

Questions of alterity and identity and social coexistence are immensely challenging to grapple with in any kind of meaningful way in contemporary practice settings dominated by individualist rationalist styles of deliberation. Least understood are the subtle nuances and as I will argue, pragmatics of power that circulate within and between members of a collaborative, particularly where variations and asymmetries of power between stakeholders in a deliberative group are hidden or unarticulated. The primary challenge as I read it and what I believe makes contemporary public-sector collaboration and deliberation so contentious, is what Connolly (1994) describes as “acknowledging difference in society which, ostensibly claims to be inclusive” (p. 464).

Nussbaum (1999) acknowledges this blind spot in liberal deliberation premised around rationalist individualism and point to a fault line in liberal theory – specifically its lack of analysis of the nuances of power in (post)modern societies, and the hidden dynamics of power that privilege the status quo where imbalances exist both within and between deliberative entities. In Nussbaum’s (1999) words, “liberal strategies of negotiation based abstract approaches to justice, lack immersion in the concrete realities of power in different social situations” (p. 58).

2.4.1 Ricoeur’s narrative ethics

Ricoeur understood the difficulties we now find ourselves in within contemporary western thought and culture. A 21st century critical philosopher, Ricoeur recognized the stubborn persistence of structural inequality, and noticed that while structural violence (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) may be less visible in postmodern societies and institutions, its cumulative effects were no less scarring than more overt forms of discrimination.

From an existential-phenomenological vantage point, structural violence (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) refers to systemic ways in which social structures constrain people from
pursuing their own ends. Ricoeur is concerned with how in pursuing goods in common with others can imply a totalizing violence (Ricoeur, 1992), namely, of reducing others to one’s own projects. Violence as understood here means any form of reducing others to one’s own teleological projects – physical, social, political, or otherwise – what Levinas (1969) calls “totality” or “sameness”. Structural violence is typically “marked in some way by asymmetry, by hierarchy, with the intentions of one side forcibly prevailing over the desires of the other” (Shadd, 2012, p. 166). This most often occurs in social arrangements that put people at a disadvantage, the arrangements are structural because they are embedded in organizational practices and from a critical vantage point they are considered violative because they limit or constrain people from pursuing their own imperatives. Structural violence is subtle, invisible, and often has no one specific person who can (or will) be held responsible (in contrast to behavioural violence).

What makes structural inequity so difficult to address is in part because structural injustices are difficult to name. We can think of structural violence as the waters we swim in; it is so much a part of the culture we do not notice being immersed in it (Pajot, Berman, Hussain & Abdelwaha, 2009). This is an apt metaphor because it speaks to the undercurrents of social interaction in neoliberal contexts: there is a deep well of information that is unspoken in our culture, and therefore much of what takes place in human interaction remains unseen.

**2.4.2 A critique of autonomous reason**

At the heart of critical theory lies a critique of reason, of rational modern man, unselfconscious, in their own insular world, entirely unaware of him or herself, and others, unwilling or unable to control their desires and ambitions. This is what Taylor (1991a) describes as classic atomistic behavior so prevalent in contemporary public life, perpetuating a mentality of self-interest where in Taylor’s (1991a) words people are used “as tools for one’s own projects…to consider others primarily in terms of how they can advance our own self-interests” (p. 15).

What I am describing here are the potential perils of negotiating diversity under circumstances of justice characterized by variations and asymmetries within and between
members of a deliberative unit. Missing from liberal conceptions of justice (Rawls, 1971) were the pragmatic realities of citizen deliberation and negotiation where variations and asymmetries of power are not simply observed but lived. The very idea of the autonomous rational subject presumes a moral agent secure in his own position and mediating on behalf of others.

What liberalism failed to recognize were the potential challenges of negotiating diversity under circumstances of justice characterized by variations and asymmetries of power between and among the negotiators and mediators themselves. Within this public platform his or her very position and relation to power remained unchallenged and uncontested, and his very standing as a speaker was never in question. And so, while encountering and confronting differences with associates – ones which could feasibly create tensions and divisions amongst peers, the complexity if you will, remained out there. To this extent the public gaze went in one direction, as Kundera (2000) explains, the modern autonomous agent was “sole judge of other people’s woes and without anyone else to gaze on him” (p. 66).

Without feedback of any kind from others, either because they are surrounding themselves with people who are mostly like them, or with those who only ever agree with them because they are afraid or intimidated into complicity, then it becomes impossible for the person to see alternate perspectives. This inevitably creates blind spots because the person is not seeing themselves and their perspectives moderated through the eyes of diverse others and therefore can take their own perspective as given. Taylor’s (1958) earliest writings addressed these tendencies toward instrumentalism in modern life drawing on the work of Durkheim to examine the phenomena of anomie – an image of “anomic men are men who accept no rules, no boundaries” (p. 15). Perhaps the most cynical illustration of this is found in Nietzsche’s critical and existentialist analysis of power. Sennett (1994) explains, Nietzsche:

conceived of the strong body as blind to itself, unburdened by self-consciousness, by mind...such a person does not judge his own behaviour, not rein himself in by
thinking about the other, reckoning what [others] might suffer due to his desires. They simply do it (p. 148).

With no relational checks and balances, one’s lens becomes totalizing because there is no one to moderate it. In the absence of other voices, and where there is no relational integrity, there is always the potential for misuse or abuse of power.

2.4.3 Undercurrents of contemporary workplace culture

The choices we make today are under conditions which have been defined and shaped by a small number of powerholders at a different time in history, when the few ruled over the masses (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). In today’s global, technological advanced liberal society, Rawls’ (1971) abstract image of the public platform as a marketplace of fair competition among roughly equal competitors, simply does not resonate with the rapidly changing actualities of the broader, global context of intercultural negotiation in contemporary civil society (Shadd, 2012). The basic presumption of relative equality amongst stakeholders in liberal-style negotiation overlooks the hidden imbalances of power that characterizes ever increasingly diverse and stratified human systems where relationships to power are becoming more complicated, fluid and less clearly defined.

While Canada’s public sector has become more global, mobile, diasporic and fluid, including all levels of leadership, the rules of engagement (Wilson, 2004) framing public deliberative practices have remained relatively unchanged. Despite increasing diversity in all strata of civil society (and at all levels of leadership in the public sector) organizational cultures have failed to transform to integrate this diversity, and plurality of voices and perspectives brought to the table, revealing deep fractures within and between people of diverse personal histories, life trajectories and social locations.

One question facing the public sector today in an increasingly mobile and complex world, is how to bring together people, of diverse backgrounds and histories, under one governance structure. New social realities brought on by global and technological change call for adaptive models of deliberation that speak to the increasingly complex, fluid and diverse relationships within and across civil society. People at all levels of today’s
organizations now come from different places and encounter one another from different personal and social histories. As more and more people of diverse backgrounds, origins and lived histories enter public dialogue and encounter one another in civil spaces, stakeholders can no longer assume leadership is bounded and unified in its perspective and outlook. Taylor (1991b) explains, people have different backgrounds of understanding, including modes of social belonging, understandings of time, of god, the good or the common. Each person brings their own unique history, perspective, lived experiences, ways of approaching challenges and priorities. This has radical implications for developing mutual understanding because it means that people will not always agree with one another on the nature of a given problem, let alone potential solutions and how to move forward (Kahane, 2013).

While liberal strategies of negotiation based on instrumental reason, are theoretically intended to be neutral, the pragmatic reality is this form of negotiation imposes strict stylistic parameters on public discourse in ways that “enframe” (Heidegger, 1977) the dialogue and foreclose on the potential for free expression of diverse views and perspectives. Taylor (1991a) argues such trends “severely restrict our choices…they force societies as well as individuals to give weight to instrumental reason that in a serious moral deliberation we would never do, and which may even be highly destructive” (p. 8). By blocking out anything that does not fit within one’s own prescribed or pre-set understandings and frames of reference, you exclude. Modern rules of engagement, based on instrumental reason attempt to neutralize – rather than engage differences, sending the infuriating message, in Goldberg’s (2013) words:

I will recognize you on the condition that you meet the standards of current conventions of discourse ... if you step outside these conventions, you will be marginalized (p. 54).

This stance implies a rigidity and closedness to new influences and approaches, it sends the message: this is the way things are and will always be, get used to it. For this reason, liberal styles of negotiation, while arguably striving for neutrality, can have the contradictory effect of profoundly alienating people at the table, particularly in instances
where contradictory modes of belonging and backgrounds of understanding are represented, and/or historic grievances are at play, potentially giving rise to misunderstandings, alienation, mistrust, social withdrawal and resistance. This can create impasses and lead to conflict and polarization if not authentically engaged, forcing differences underground and leading to impasses in unexpected and unforeseen ways including pushing people from being opponents and adversaries into enemies.

The danger is this can lead to negation. Ricoeur (1992) defines negation as denial of the Other, namely other ways of being, seeing, understanding. Coming from an existentialist vantage point, the Other denotes the person (other than me) most vulnerable to being totalized within a given context. Negation happens when what one person stands for is different from another and therefore in order to reinforce one position the other is negated, and as Scott-Baumann (2010) explains, “negation easily slips into negativity, becoming denial of the other’s right to exist on their own terms” (p. 71). Negation is provocative because it denies a legitimate avenue for people to express the truth in their own way as they perceive it, be it a perceived grievance, unfair dynamic or injustice. Williams (1994) finds negation is more common in cases where “diversity is perceived as a non-value while homogeneity is the norm for acceptance and inclusion among peers and superiors” (p. 10).

People may lash out in random or chaotic ways or have a radical response to even the smallest slight. Leading researchers on incivility, Andersson and Pearson (1999) find tensions can reach a tipping point when left unaddressed, where the small injustices, taken cumulatively can provoke a strong response where “the individual suddenly feels threatened and somehow loses the motivation to maintain control over his or her actions” (p. 452). The example I provide – threat of exclusion from a program for not behaving as expected, effectively staying in one’s place and doing what one is told, could be read as negation. Negation can provoke a very strong reaction in someone who perceives themselves to be disenfranchised in some way. Institutions and organizations perceived to be overly rigid or unyielding, can be radicalizing and the smallest slight or injustice can ignite strong indignation.
What might appear a routine request on the part of a social worker trying to compel a client to comply with a simple request – to attend a workshop or take an opportunity offered to them, could be read as coercion. Buried or deep-seated anger can become perceived and dismissed as an overreaction or misconstrued as a personal issue because “one party has subjective and often exaggerated assessments of the severity of the harm to his or her identity” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 463). Research on citizenship and civility (Evers, 2009; Rucht, 2011; Hall, 2013) suggest, far from being arbitrary, or random, civil unrest, and radicalization particularly among youth, speaks to unarticulated frustration, anger or rage. Ricoeur’s (1996) critical analysis suggests that, far from being arbitrary, or random, or indicative of lack of discipline and self-restraint, such vehement reactions can speak to unarticulated frustration, anger or rage, unresolved resentments or unfulfilled promises from the past, speaking to broader structural forces at play.

2.4.4 Practice realities in a VUCA world

The challenges facing the public sector today are exceedingly complex. Workplaces have seen an intensification in recent years of conditions in the field characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009; St. Croix, 2016). As workplaces have become less psychosocially safe, so too have they become less civil, with people turning away from one another, becoming more polarized, with a marked increase in structural violence and micro aggression between professionals. A workplace survey by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (2012) found seven in ten Canadian employees reported concerns about psychosocial safety in their workplace. Public sector organizations: healthcare, education and human services, have seen a rise in incivility, harassment, bullying and lateral violence in workplaces (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Leiter, 2009; Porath, & Pearson, 2013). Studies show incivility and harassment disproportionately impacts women and racialized communities suggesting incivility and micro-aggression as modern forms of discrimination (Cortina, 2008; Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2011).

The problem is that if differences are not effectively engaged, they do not disappear, but rather will go underground. Where resentments and tensions remain submerged with no
outlet for resolution this can lead to what researchers refer to as volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA). These characteristics are becoming increasingly associated with organizational life (Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009). Volatility refers to tensions arising suddenly and in unexpected ways, where for example a conversation can suddenly and quickly escalate and become very charged. Uncertainty refers to the lack of predictability, where there may be sudden emotional outbursts that seem to come out of nowhere. Complexity refers to the confounding of issues, where there appears no cause-and-effect, an example is where the smallest incident can set someone off, and there seems no immediate identifiable reason to explain the reaction. Ambiguity is where issues can be interpreted in a variety of ways by different people leading to the potential for misreads (Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009). Combined these forces can create a great deal of disruption, insecurity and uncertainty in workplace settings and passing through these environments can appear chaotic and very confusing because the dynamics of power that circulate beneath the surface of institutional culture are not visible.

2.5 Deliberative practices for a brave new world

Ricoeur is critical of any deliberative practices which eliminate passions and collective forms of identification (i.e. culture, history, traditions) from the public sphere. He believes rather, differences should be taken up and authentically engaged in dialogue. What kinds of deliberative practices are called for, and what form of action is required where there are power differentials within and between stakeholders in a deliberative unit, particularly where such dynamics are unnamed, invisible or hidden from view?

I explore how Ricoeur’s ethic of hospitality (Ricoeur 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000) can be applied as an ethical tool to increase transparency in situations where dynamics of power are hidden or unnamed. Ricoeur emerges from the existentialist-phenomenological tradition, which holds as a basic premise that in systems of human interaction there are invisible fields of information (Horn & Brick, 2009), namely hidden dynamics in a system, which can be made visible through transparent communication. This is at the heart of Ricoeur’s critical approach which requires being transparent about our lived experiences by translating how our history and lived experiences influence our
perspective, actions and intentions in order to become more visible in our practices and create spaces for authentic dialogue about the challenges that confront us.

I am working with Ricoeur’s ethic of hospitality (Ricoeur 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000) which is about extending narrative hospitality in a world that includes diverse others. People enter the field from different places, different landscapes of meaning and lived experiences. In a manifold world that includes allies, adversaries and strangers, we cannot presume people are coming from the same backgrounds of understanding or that others will necessarily know where we are coming from and our intentions unless we make our perspective explicit.

Linguistic hospitality for Ricoeur means being prepared to communicate across differences by reaching out beyond one’s immediate network to include those who may or may not share your values in the service of justice. There would be no need for hospitality if people were the same and therefore intercultural translation is necessary in diverse settings with manifold others (Ricoeur, 2006; Scott-Baumann, 2010; Shadd, 2012). From an existentialist perspective, this level of transparency requires risk. Communicating in these contexts can be complicated because we must be able to communicate transparently in contexts not only in contexts where people will not always necessarily agree with us, but where we may find ourselves displaced. This means being prepared in the midst of diverse others, to be explicit about our perspective and the landscapes that we see by translating our lived experiences and how this influences our perspective and actions. This is what Etmanski (2015) would refer to as “setting the table for allies, adversaries, and strangers” (np) which captures the essence of hospitality in a complex world.

2.5.1 The complex nature of hospitality

From a pragmatic perspective this is no easy task. For critical theorists, postmodern negotiation poses grave pitfalls and difficulties because of the complex nature of hospitality in advanced liberal society that calls for ascription which poses the risks to one’s identity. Critical theorists are skeptical about the liberal idea of a “community of free rational beings [who] regard one another with respect and awe and who are
committed to promoting one another’s happiness and well-being because of the respect they feel for one another” (Nussbaum, 1999, p. 60).

Critical theorists tend to hold a more cynical view of human behavior in self-interested capitalist society. Seeing individuals in technological society as driven by unconscious desires, particularly the desire to conform in ways that advance material interests, what Heidegger called ‘the fate of the age’, is what he believed cause people to act in all kinds of unconscious ways that enframe the dialogue and reinforce traditional imbalances of power. In negotiating across differences, particularly where there are structural imbalances and hidden dynamics of power, there is always the risk of cooption and self-betrayal.

Continental philosophers write about complex and dualistic nature of collaboration in the context of global capitalism and technological change: for example, Kahane (2017) writes about the double meaning of the collaborator in continental philosophy: to work together and to betray. In a globalized, technological world with manifold others, it becomes less clear who the adversaries, friends, allies and enemies are.

This follows a long history and sentiment of mistrust of the public in critical theory, going back to Europe in the early 20th Century. This is a common theme in neo-Marxist writings, particularly those coming out of the Frankfurt School where the public is seen as imposing and the very presence of the crowd is seen as coercive and threatening (Sennett, 1994). The crowd is depicted as menacing and inhumane as Engels describes, where “no one bothers to spare a glance for the others...the greater number the people, the more repulsive and offensive becomes the brutal indifference, the unfeeling concentration of each person on his private affairs...” (Engels in Benjamin, 1968, p. 167).

Descriptions of the public in critical thinking retain residues of the undifferentiated mass in Marxism, seen with a high degree of cynicism and suspicion. Such images portray the public as hapless and unthinking, prone to manipulation and therefore not to be trusted (Engels, 1968). This is a world where people are not transparent to themselves and therefore not to be trusted, where no one is who they say they are, and where alliances can lead to compromises, co-option and self-betrayal. Critical theorists tend to be
skeptical of others and their intentions, because Meyers (2004) explains, such individuals are seen to have internalized oppression and not wanting to “do anything that would challenge social norms and provoke an antagonistic response, individuals can be acting freely (doing as they want without outside interference) in virtue of having internalized oppressive norms” (p. 298). These ‘internalized oppressive norms’, create what Meyers (2004) describes as a divided self “beset by unconscious drives and repressed desire, people are not transparent to themselves, nor can they exert complete control over their conduct” (p. 298).

The false consciousness of the masses represented the greatest threat to freedom and authenticity in neo-Marxist writing (Stout, 2010; Sennett, 1994; Rae, 2006; Engels in Benjamin, 1968). Stout (2010) notes this notion of the undifferentiated mass came from Emerson which he called the herd: “the herd is a powerful and worrisome engine of social conformity. To be absorbed into the herd…is to lose one’s individuality – that is – to lose one’s capacity for critical resistance” (p. 146).

For Heidegger, “being-with”, implied a loss of self and therefore to stand out is to refuse to ascribe to imposed narratives and practices which marginalize or oppress (Heidegger in Miller, 2007). One becomes authentic, in Heidegger’s view, by standing against society and resisting oppression. The emancipatory narrative is a counter-narrative which resists oppression. In Scott’s (1988) words, where ascription appears the only option, there appears no recourse but to:

insist continually on differences – differences as the condition of individual and collective identities, differences as the constant challenge to the fixing of those identities, history as the repeated illustration of the play of differences, differences as the very meaning of equality itself (p. 46).

Merleau-Ponty (in Rabil, 1967) criticized Heidegger for failing to describe the actual experiences through which the opposition of men to one another is overcome. According to Rabil (1967), Heidegger’s world, in the final analysis, is not a social world at all. It is similar to Sartre’s world in which men are alienated from one another” (p. 41).
Beauvoir sought to overcome these divides and find ways to reconcile differences. From the very beginning of her intellectual development she wondered – is it not possible to disagree and still belong with someone, and even care for them deeply, as she did for her parents, and even Sartre (Moi, 2009)? What an achingly simple question, and yet one Beauvoir struggled with throughout her intellectual career. This question which Beauvoir posed to Sartre, was rejected outright and he absolutely refused to entertain such a compromising idea (Moi, 2009). Sartre’s response speaks to the kind of mistrust of relationships that persists in critical theory: what is important to understand is that Sartre was not rejecting relationships per se, he was reacting to the image of relations that call for self-negation. Derrida’s philosophy embodies a very similar sentiment: if being with someone means giving up freedom, he refused:

> do not consider me one of you, don’t count me in, I want to keep my freedom, always: this, for me, is the condition not only for being singular and other, but also for entering into relation with the singularity and alteriority of others (Derrida in Miller, 2007, p. 57).

This position signifies a refusal to belong if belonging means absolute conformity. Rather than conform to such codes, he chose not to belong at all – “I am not one of the family [Je ne suis pas de la famille] (Derrida in Miller, 2007, p. 57). Cixous understood the subtext of Derrida’s rejection of social relations, for her it signified a resistance to collectivism and the surrender of self to shared identity… “resulting in compromise, compromising self, compromising others” (Derrida in Cixous, 2004, p. 25). For someone trying to define themselves on their own terms, social relations can feel compromising in critical ways that have the potential to be negating to one’s sense of integrity and overall wellbeing.

### 2.5.2 Retreat from manifold engagement in the world

This is what Taylor (1991b) so marvelously describes as a retreat from “manifold engagement in the world”, which signals a separation from belonging to a complicated world, and to others in this utterly imperfect and at times imposing world of family, work
and community. This separation signals a resistance to the world as it is, and as Taylor (1991b) contends, modern notions of authenticity necessarily leave out:

all the ways in which we are not sovereign individuals who make the world, but embodied beings who are part of the world who belong to each other, to a place to a language to a society, things we have not chosen or made, and which we only have a very limited capacity to remake (n.p.).

Withdrawal from the public in critical theory speaks to underlying anxieties about assimilation, conformity and of being absorbed into the collective, and therefore surrendering one’s very identity to it. As Arendt (1998) insightfully observed, this kind of withdrawal signaled an urge to escape the suffering associated with cultural assimilation in the context of globalization and American mass culture. Arendt (1998) writes: “the principle of all hedonism is not pleasure but avoidance of pain” (p. 209), signaling:

a deep mistrust of the world whereby the person is moved by a vehement impulse to withdraw from worldly involvement, from the trouble and pain it inflicts, into the security of an inward realm in which the self is exposed to nothing but itself (p. 209).

2.5.3 Ontology of solitude

This internal exile is what Miller (2007) calls the “ontology of solitude” – namely, the desire to withdraw and go inward and surround yourself with only those who share the same language, and assumptions. This desire is driven by what Miller (2007) describes as a “strong nostalgia, a wish to live in a community that is defined as being with, togetherness” (p. 47). This nostalgia for togetherness in a fractured world can lead to insularity and withdrawing into an enclosed society with members only of one’s tribe or identity group, where one is not exposed to the outside, preferring to remain untouched by the troubles of the world and contemporary society.

Levinas’s resistance to solitude and insistence on heeding the call of the Other, was an ethical call and spoke directly to the tendency to become so caught up in one’s own suffering, one misses the strangers in our midst, those most vulnerable and in need of
refuge in times of trouble. Levinas (1969) was speaking directly to the insularity of Heidegger’s work which found him at the center of controversy for his perceived philosophical alignment with the Nationalist party in Nazi Germany (Wolin & Rockmore, 1992).

Like Levinas, Ricoeur (2004; 2008; 2012) writes about the dangers of civic solitude and is concerned with how histories and stories can become memorialized, with counternarratives centering on founding events, harkening back to a loss of culture or identity. Nostalgia about a lost language or culture, to which one can never return can foreclose on the possibility of moving forward because it can ignore what is coming into being, and what trying to emerge. Rushdie (1992) writes about these tendencies in imaginary homelands:

hard not to look back, be haunted by a sense of loss, some urge to reclaim…but if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge…we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands (p. 10).

These tendencies toward idealism in critical theory, marked by extreme alienation from society, including institutional and bureaucratic life – never fully resolved, continue to sit with us and skew contemporary intellectual dialogue about the nature of change, feeding into our collective sense of justice and severely restricting change and new kinds of social relations that might be possible.

2.5.4 Perilous kinship and complicated citizen identities

Public life today remains highly polarized and deeply fractured, it becomes impossible to express divergent viewpoints without seeing it as an infringement on one’s own position, and affront to one’s ideals. In this polarized environment, one could not possibly align with anyone who does not share one’s values, image of community, or conception of the social world and its imperatives without having one’s ideal vision, one’s authenticity, violated or coopted (Burston, 2006). This kind of rigidity and polarization, if held too
tightly can push people with complicated citizen identities to questions of identity and belonging (Huysseen, 2003).

Turkish-German writer Şenocak (2016) explores complicated citizenship identities in today’s globalized world characterized by fluidity and complexity. His protagonist, a German, Jewish, Turkish character, comes from multiple cultural histories, ones which do not historically align and may be at odds with one another, even irreconcilably. Şenocak (2016) notes:

My main character in Perilous Kinship is Turkish, Jewish, and German and this is a problem for him, but my question was, why is this a problem? If you have all these backgrounds, is it really necessary to ‘be’ one of them and to fight the other ones? (n.p.)

Şenocak (2016) asks a provocative question in the context of postmodern identity politics characterized by fragmentation and polarization – if one belongs to multiple citizen identities, must one choose one side over the other? Must one fight against the other?

Şenocak (2016) writes about migrating into Germany’s traumatized history as a Turkish immigrant, which he described as perilous, denoting the contradictions of belonging inherent in having complicated identities falling outside of normative categories of difference. In contexts where cultural identity is too tightly held this can create contradictions for people who belong to multiple social identities and diverse and mixed backgrounds and histories. As Mook (2008) explains:

we have many social selves and belong to many social groups, which are no longer connected to and may actually be in conflict with one another. Antagonistic social selves may give rise to neurotic symptoms when pushed out of awareness into unconsciousness (p. 208).

This can lead to anxieties about revealing the complexity of one’s identity and one’s history which can create a separation from others, with people turning away from one another and becoming insular with a focus on the self and a shutting out of awareness, deeper identifications, be they cultural, or historical. As Ricoeur (1996) writes:
the concern here is not to discover a single language that can encompass all of
these separate realities, rather the concern is that we may find ourselves unable to
communicate at all as a result of protective withdrawal of each culture into its
own linguistic tradition…it is here that the model of translation entails
requirements and assurances which extend all the way to the heart of the
ethical...life of both individual and peoples (p. 4).

In today’s complex civil society, identities are fluid and stark binaries no longer hold,
requiring a more nuanced understanding of equality and difference. In the face of global
and technological change, Shadd (2012) writes “questions about integration and
distinction, about identity and alterity, have never been more current in our world than
they are today” (p. 159). Debates about negotiating the space between self and other,
friends and adversaries have come to the fore of public discourse. According to Shadd
(2012), “these are precisely the sort of social situations for which Ricoeur realized we
had need of an ethical model to guide us, helping us to effectively negotiate between
similarity and difference and to integrate identity and alterity” (p.165).

Contemporary life is characterized by widespread mobility, labour market transition, and
global and technological change. With population shifts and cultures coalescing at an
unprecedented scale, questions of identity grow more complicated every day. Differences
between people have become much more nuanced, as people inhabit multiple social
identities and locations. Shadd (2012) sees this as further accelerated by mass migration
caused by global risks and insecurities and global economic crisis. Within these
changing social realities, questions of identity and the nuances of power have never been
more complicated in Shadd (2012) words:

Once thought to be naturally fixed result of one’s relation to a series of discrete
and easily distinguishable categories – male versus female or black versus white,
for example – identity is now recognized as being a much more flexible and fluid
concept than was previously assumed (p. 160).

Ricoeur’s philosophy urges moving away from preconceived categories of difference
based on abstract notions of justice, as the world is becoming too complex and
multifaceted for structural analysis-based on fixed notions of identity and difference. In his well-known essay, *Reflections on a new Ethos for Europe*, Ricoeur (1996) saw the task of European political union as being to focus at the personal and interpersonal level rather than at a national or social level to solve the complex challenges that confront advanced liberal democracies.

Ricoeur’s work addresses “the formation and representation of identity, whether on a national, collective, or individual level” (Ricoeur in Shadd, 2012, p. 160). Ricoeur writes about how histories and stories can become memorialized in ways that can be polarizing and foreclose on possibility for reconciliation. People and groups emerging from histories of displacement can define themselves in counternarratives that are so tightly held in relation to founding events and traumatized pasts, they can fail to see how they may be harming others who fall outside of this troubled history.

Ricoeur contends that change happens in relationship, not in abstract theories of justice. In existentialist writing, the stranger arrives to pull us out of old-world struggles from the past and urges us to consider old narratives in new ways. Turkish-Germans migrating into Germany’s traumatized past bring new meaning to questions of national identity and belonging. In the same way, newcomers and immigrants to Quebec and people of multiethnic backgrounds urge us to reconfigure what it means to be Quebecois, as defined outside the context of English imperialism. Face-to-face encounters with people of diverse backgrounds and social locations reveal unseen dynamics that we may not otherwise have considered from our own polarized frame of reference, allowing us to see ourselves and our perspective from a new and expanded place.

It is in relationship that we are compelled to grow and develop and through the eyes of diverse others, particularly those who fall outside dominant citizenship identities, we truly come to see ourselves in our fullness, our greatest gifts and vulnerabilities. If we embrace relationship with others in all of their complexity, we expand our human capacity for understanding and human development. Ricoeur identifies that transforming the past is not about “altering the record of what happened but discerning its meaning for
us today, so the past can live in us in a different way” (p.10). This means “lifting the price”, what Ricoeur (1996) describes as:

lifting the burden of guilt which paralyses the relations between individuals who are acting out of the suffering of their own history. It does not abolish the debt insofar as we are and remain inheritors of the past, but it lifts the pain of the debt (p.10).

Reconciling with one’s past is about lifting the burden of guilt that causes people to act out of their own suffering, according to Lyle and Gehart, and through this process one can break a “vicious cycle of those who seek to make others suffer as they have been made to suffer by shattering the debt” (p. 82).

2.6 Practicing critical discernment in face-to-face relationships

The past forms a part of our own unique history and is not something to be evaded or overcome but reconciled for ourselves, based on our own unique histories and trajectories. Ricoeur’s narrative ethics emphasizes relationally responsible narratives, where “liberation is better understood to occur within, rather than in rebellion against, relationship, including our relationship with history and tradition” (Lyle & Gehart, 2000, p. 85).

Ricoeur’s critical phronesis (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) recognizes that we live in a manifold world where people are located differently and have different horizons of experience. (Wall, 2003). We live in a multifaceted world where people have different social identities and within each community there is diversity as to how people identify and see themselves. Seen here, one’s authentic existence takes in a relational world that is multifaceted and complex and includes diverse communities and identifications associated with different aspects of life, work, home, community, subcultures etc. Ricoeur’s narrative ethics recognizes the singularity of the human person, where “selves not only have different and conflicting traditions but they also, more fundamentally,
interpret even the same traditions differently and in conflicting ways” (Ricoeur in Wall, 2003, p. 336).

Each of the others who approach us have a special kind of meaning (Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011) therefore, we need to pay attention to who has arrived and how we situate ourselves in relation to diverse others, in order to attune wisely to the particularities of each interaction. Critical phronesis (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) attends to the particularities of each encounter we have and calls us to situate ourselves in face to face relationship. In a complex world of hostile and hospitable relations we need to be discerning about how we position ourselves relative to those we encounter, and approach others with conscious intention about what we are called to in that moment by being present to what is showing up.

Unlike Levinas, hospitality for Ricoeur is not unlimited because we live in a world of hostile and hospitable relations where people are capable of inflicting harm, whether conscious or unconscious. No one, regardless of position or background is above reproach. In a manifold world with diverse others, Ricoeur saw the need to be discerning of who is appearing in the field, maintaining “to be absolutely hospitable to the other [without selfhood] is . . . to suspend all criteria of ethical discrimination” (Ricoeur in Wall, 2003, p. 72).

Ricoeur sees critical phronesis from “the good to the right to critical phronesis” (Ricoeur in Wall, 2003, p. 328) as building moral or ethical capability to respond in the face of injustice. This means practicing humility by recognizing how our narratives overlap with others more vulnerable than ourselves and considering the impact of our stories on diverse others (Ricoeur, 2002). To develop this capacity requires critical discernment and a phenomenal vigilance to the nuances of power in postmodern society. For Ricoeur, moral or ethical capacity is derived from knowing oneself and one’s historical and social location and being able to form a coherent narrative that creates meaning for oneself and orients one’s actions in the world in alignment with the broader culture, beyond one’s own narrow self-interests (Ricoeur, 1992).
What distinguishes Ricoeur’s critical phronesis from Aristotelian ethics is the recognition of the limitations of human knowledge in a material world where there are asymmetries of power and hidden dynamics that are unnamed and unseen. Therefore, the perceiver cannot presume to see or know all that is, and transparency is not entirely possible. Within face-to-face relationships, provisional mediations (Wall, 2003) become possible, remembering these are the mediations of limited and singular human beings. Narrative ethics from this critical vantage point means knowing where one is situated based on one’s lived experience and being explicit about how one’s lens influences one’s perspective and orientation to practice. The critically wise person can engage with others without totalizing by taking ownership and acknowledging how their story intersects with others and taking responsibility for any harm even if not intended.

Engaging in deep dialogue with diverse others requires a particular kind of critical self-awareness, one deeply attuned to the potential impact of one’s story on others. This means finding a way to negotiate one’s lived experience and translating how one’s story aligns or resonates with others without imposing (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992). In the following chapter, my methodology details how I am working through my own narrative adopting Ricoeur’s critical phronesis (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) as my lens and considering how my own story and life trajectory intersects with diverse others in my professional life and practice.
Chapter 3

Meaning-making of the stranger in practice: A critical autoethnography

Traduire, c’est éprouver que les mots manquent.
To translate is to find the words are wanting
(Porter, 2013, p. 64)

This is where my autoethnography begins, as I consider my own changing practices and some of the wider conditions that inform my work as an organizational consultant. The Stranger in Contemporary Practice is a critical rendering (Ricoeur, 1996), drawn from my lived experience as a critically-informed practitioner struggling to communicate about the existential issues I confront in today’s public service defined by neoliberalism. I define this journey as a perilous quest (Şenocak, 2009; 2016) because this work has called me to confront irreconcilable contradictions between my professional identity and my deeper convictions and alignments. This perilous quest for professional integrity has led me to ask deeper questions about what it means to be conscious of my public presence, to be known and knowable professionally and to lead an examined public life.

My practice and those of my associates have seen an intensification in recent years of conditions in the field characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) (St. Croix, 2016; Ross & Pajot, 2017; Pitre & Pajot, 2018). As workplaces become less psychosocially safe, so too have they become less hospitable, with leaders, practitioners and participants turning away, rather than towards one another. These times of uncertainty – have called me out of my solitude to discover how I can approach this critical work differently. This has required me to reposition myself as a professional who has tended to bracket (Patton, 2002; 2015) my biases and opinions, to a practitioner who now challenges myself to become more explicit in my readings of the systemic issues I perceive as they arise in my practice by translating how these confusing and often painful interactions intersect with my own lived experience, history and founding events.
(Ricoeur 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000). My purpose in presenting this critical narrative is to cultivate deeper, more nuanced understandings of the complex nature of hospitality in contemporary professional life. Specifically, I grapple with the moral and ethical tensions of civil engagement in a manifold world that includes hospitable and hostile relations, and where there appear limited avenues to reconcile the differences that arise.

3.1 Research question: discerning right action in the face of complexity

The complexity of the world is requiring me to encounter people who do not share my convictions, including those who challenge my sense of integrity in critical ways. The research question driving this inquiry is: how do I discern right action where I perceive an imposition or injustice occurring in practice environments which are morally complex or ambiguous and I perceive own position in peril? How do I interface in these settings in masterful ways, particularly where there are variations and asymmetries of power (Nussbaum, 1999) and where the views and perspectives of colleagues and professional associates I experience as not only offensive, but violating (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) in critical ways?

3.1.1 Translation as quest for meaning

This critical question has perplexed me throughout my professional development and I have not been able to fully resolve this until I was prepared to take a hard look at my own contradictions of civil belonging, namely tensions between my professional identity and the more hidden aspects of who I am as a multidimensional (Seigel, 2005; Seigel in Sennett, 2012) human being. To show up and become more fully present in these troubled times, I sought to find ways to extend myself beyond the confines of my immediate networks, by reaching out and communicating with those who may or may not share my worldviews, perspectives and sensibilities. This has meant repositioning myself professionally by situating my practice in a broader frame, by becoming more vigilant (Deluca, 2000) to others in my field of awareness and noticing what I am paying attention to, particularly in critical moments where I find my integrity challenged in critical ways and perceive an injustice occurring (however subtle). Stepping out of my solitude in this
context means more than being present and offering hospitality to the Other, for me it means becoming more transparent about my own impressions and direct experiences in the field as it aligns with founding events in my life, including my deepest commitments and principles – even, or especially in the presence of those who appear inhospitable to aspects of who I am, and what I represent.

I am working with Ricoeur’s narrative ethics which provides a framework for translating lived experience within an ethic of hospitality (Ricoeur 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000) that includes diverse others. In today’s postmodern society, with diverse people encountering one another in unprecedented ways, it becomes important to generate communicative opportunities and spaces for people of differing and potentially conflicting historical and social locations to encounter one another and dialogue in new and emergent ways.

I draw on Riceour’s critical approach to situate myself as I recount my narrative and translate myself to others. To make myself knowable in a manifold world, requires me to first become clear on my intentions and how I situate myself before I can translate my lived experiences to others. Kearney (2007) explains, the question “who are you?” always entails both translating oneself to oneself and oneself to others. Translation requires I develop deeper understandings of why I hold the positions I do and the things that matter to me by attuning to what is showing up for me in my practice and witnessing my embodied responses to these experiences. This work has driven me to become more aligned with my convictions and has challenged me to come to terms with my moral and ethical limits: that is, knowing where I will and will not cross a line or let things slide. These deeper existential lessons have come not without struggle, as I have reconnected with my own life history, and founding events (Ricoeur 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000), remembering where I come from and getting clear for myself where my professional commitments lie.

When I began this journey, I did not realize what a difficult and perilous task this would be. This work has compelled me to step outside my own existential anxieties to share of myself and my lived experiences as someone who has experienced a sense of displacement at different times in my professional life to try and convey my own
contradictions of civil belonging, and the perils I have faced in trying to communicate in a “world of bony-structured concepts” (des concepts aux dures aretes) (Beauvoir in Moi, 2009) and rigid assertions. These are provisional truths: articulations of a singular human being and I do not claim to speak for others, but I do feel a strong sense of responsibility to speak out about contemporary workplace culture as someone who has felt displaced and powerless to implement meaningful changes that would make a space for the fulsomeness of who I am and what I represent. Drawing on a critical incident in my practice as a way to convey the difficult and vulnerable moments I have experienced where I found myself in opposition or struggling to communicate something of significance to me, I explore possibilities for expanding this dialogue.

Ricoeur’s critical approach to phronesis (critical wisdom) holds that in a material world into which we are thrown, we can never be entirely transparent, or know ourselves absolutely, but we must find meaning for ourselves, from within our own lifeworld and lived experience, if we are ever to live in alignment with our convictions (as they change and evolve over time). Following Ricoeur’s critical approach, my perspective on the critical issues facing contemporary professional life are intertwined with my own memories, life history and founding events in both conscious and unconscious ways. Because of the limits of language, mutual understanding is never assured (Ricoeur, 2006; Scott-Baumann, 2010; Shadd, 2012), and so this translation necessitated that I become more conscientious about naming things that I may otherwise take for granted, something Brossard (1988) calls “the work of articulation”. What I have discovered is that this requires developing a strong enough sense of alignment in my convictions and intentionality about what I am prepared to risk, that I do not dissolve at the prospect of opposition and exposure. In other words, I have had to figure out what I am not prepared to concede on even, or perhaps especially, in the face of those who may or may not share my assumptions, pre-understandings, and may even diverge from my way of thinking in significant and irreconcilable ways.

What I present here is life as lived, no single incident exists in isolation, but is formed and informed by other events and occurrences. My inner world and relations with significant others, my memories, life history and founding events – who I am and how I
perceive myself, my sense of place and security in the world, could not be disentangled from my social existence, including the tone of my work, its cadence and how I show up in my practice and experience the world of action, ideas, projects and initiatives. Recounting this critical autoethnography and discerning its meaning through a process of critical phronesis (Ricoeur 1992; Ricoeur in Wall 2003) I have deeper compassion for myself and other practitioners in the field and the great difficulties we find ourselves in as we seek justice and meaningful representation in our public world and institutions.

3.1.2 Methodology: Autoethnography as critical educational research

I wanted to provide an account that does not gloss over the tensions between outer realities and what is really going on inside or repress the contradiction between the ideal professional image and the pragmatic realities of professional existence. In so doing, I wanted to expose some of the contradictions and tensions I have struggled with in making-meaning of my professional life and open up a space for others to critically reflect on their experiences (Ellis, 2004). Stories provide a context for cultivating deeper understandings of people’s lives, the backdrop for who we are, what motivates us, and our joys and struggles. By situating one’s narrative within a broader social and historical landscape, one can develop perspective on the cultural and social influences that inform one’s identity and social location. Understanding how one’s lived experience fits into this broader social landscape gives a frame for understanding the complexity of our lives and the challenges we encounter as we negotiate the competing narratives that inform our experiences. I see autoethnography as educational research since, as expressed by Bochner and Ellis (2006), this method of inquiry “…show(s) people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live and what their struggles mean” (p. 111).

I have chosen to expose aspects of public life that have pained me, and at one time very nearly crushed me – or most certainly squeezed me into corners far too small and constrictive to practice in any kind of meaningful or effective way. Sharing this has meant being open about my professional struggles and the complexities of my professional existence: exposing perceptions, sensibilities and lived experiences with those I may otherwise be withdrawn, guarded, or reserved. This has required
considerable risk – letting down my guard and being prepared to go beyond the familiar image I have of myself as a change agent out there in the world, to present myself more fully, as a flawed human being, *flesh and bone*, with commitments and alliances that may not always hang together neatly, and may at times be at odds, but are nonetheless integral to who I am and how I define myself. A complex, multifaceted human being, confronting perplexing questions on contemporary problems and struggling with professional quagmires, where the answers are often not entirely clear.

### 3.1.3 The existential issues, struggles and impasses in my practice

When I embarked on this project to try and uncover and understand the waters I was swimming in, I did not have the foggiest notion of what was going on – with me, my professional relationships or the source of my professional discontent. I just knew something was wrong – I felt estranged in profound yet unnamed ways that set me apart from my colleagues and associates in all kinds of subtle ways.

This project is my way of making sense of a very confusing and seemingly irreconcilable time in my professional life, a time I found myself profoundly isolated — cut off from my past, my history and my deeper sense of purpose. My fieldwork began with unresolved questions I had about my own sense of estrangement from my professional life and relationships. I was looking for ways to interpret my experiences and to put them in a frame that was not only comprehensible but meaningful, in Taylor’s (1991a) words, “the agent seeking significance in life, trying to define him or herself meaningfully, has to exist in a horizon of important questions” (p. 40). As Taylor’s (1991a) explains, “things take on significance against a backdrop of intelligibility. One of the things we can’t do if we are to define ourselves significantly is suppress or deny the horizon against which things take on significance for us” (p. 37).

This work emerged from a desire to be honest about the complexities of my practice and transparent about the struggles and difficulties I have faced. The existential issues practitioners confront are incredibly tough in today’s practice environments dominated by neoliberalism. Green (2009b) addresses the challenges of practicing professionally in the context of neoliberalism: the struggles, the aporias, and the impasses. In recounting this
narrative, I wanted to acknowledge these unspoken struggles, even the most difficult parts; the moments of confusion, disorientation and disillusionment. The continental tradition of existential-phenomenology deals with deeper issues of meaning and does not shy away from the difficult issues that confront society. Existentialism is concerned with the inescapable aspects of being human, anxiety, loss, estrangement and the deeper meaning of human existence (Winston, 2015). It is a philosophy which seeks to help people confront anxieties that arise from our existential experience of being human (Winston, 2015) and strive for authentic engagement with one’s world.

I write about the complexities of contemporary professional life and the multidimensional nature of being human (Seigel, 2005; Seigel in Sennett, 2012) – the contradictions, paradoxes and ironies, and the seemingly irreconcilable tensions as they have affected me within my practice as a workplace consultant. My intention is to open a dialogue on the subtext of professional life and the impasses I have faced as I have struggled to assert my convictions and define myself as a multidimensional professional in today’s public sector. This has required me to reveal my vulnerabilities and contingencies by being transparent about what has surfaced and arisen for me in my practice contexts, including subtle misalignments between my practices and the values I espouse.

In sharing this I aim to find constructive ways to reach out and communicate transparently about the critical issues I perceive as a mid-career professional, concerned about the insidious and often unspoken challenge of structural violence (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992) in public sector organizations. What I have found over the years in working to improve conditions of justice in the public sector is that structural violence is difficult to name because it is the waters we swim in (Smith, 2009) we are so embedded in it, it can appear almost appear natural. Quite simply, structural violence from an existential perspective, is where a person or people, whether intentionally or not, negate another (Levinas, 1969; Ricoeur, 1992), “Othering” them by making assumptions without full knowledge of who they are or their circumstances thereby rendering their lived experiences invisible. Naming everything in these waters could make a person begin question their sanity. I have chosen to foreground one very subtle example to illustrate
that words matter, how we choose to use them in our daily practices matters, so much so that a comment, for better or worse, can have the power to change the course or trajectory of one’s path for a lifetime. I know I am not alone in feeling this way, and what has given me the courage to do this work is the sense I have that these impasses and challenges that professionals face, cannot be confronted by any one person in isolation.

3.2 Public life, private memories: the narratives that define my practice

This work reaches out beyond my own horizons, the narratives which have defined me in the past to consider how I can position myself differently, more expansively to open dialogue on the polarizing and distorted times we now find ourselves in and to locate new ways forward. The grand or master (Ricoeur in Kearney, 2004) narratives of our time powerfully define the stories we tell, and “enframe” what we can see and hear in all kinds of subtle ways by foregrounding some stories over others. These master narratives can limit our vision and separate us from the people and the ways of life we so privately cherish, obscuring the deeper sense of meaning and purpose of our lives.

Neoliberalism has dominated the field now for 35 years; this is the story we have been telling ourselves, and what we have convinced ourselves of: that it pays to sell yourself for market gain, to put yourself out there and exploit your talents and abilities to succeed in this materialistic world. This powerful story compels us to go where the jobs are, to take advantage of every opportunity to advance our careers and exploit social capital to advance our interests.

How I perceive myself, my life and the struggles I encounter are all influenced by this master narrative, and much as I have tried I have never been able to transcend this. Market interests define not only what we do as practitioners, what we choose to prioritize and focus on, now it has come to define who we are as leaders. Part of what makes this narrative so difficult to see beyond is how very compelling and aspirational it is for those who choose (or have been given no reason to believe otherwise) the arguably delusional belief that human beings can and do make it on their own (Callero, 2009). This ethos
characterizes what Taylor (1991a) defines as the modern notion of authenticity which lies at the heart of liberal ideals of freedom and agency and is about “my finding the design of life against the demands of external conformity” (p. 68). We seem convinced authenticity can be found by striking out on our own and defining ourselves exclusively on our own terms, separated from any and all constraints and unhinged by the trappings of traditional culture and old-world struggles (Moody-Adams, 1998; Nussbaum, 2004).

This grand narrative reflects a certain view of the modern age, a heroic figure who refuses to let anyone or anything hold them back and will exert their personal will to overcome all barriers on their path. Liberal citizenship has dominated civic life throughout the modern age – privileging a public figure who is autonomous and rational, leaving behind the troubles of the past to become who they are meant to be. Deeply rooted in this metanarrative is the ethic of individualism, namely a respect for the freedom of the individual to choose for themselves what counts as flourishing (Nussbaum, 1999). Inherent in this philosophy is a deep reverence for the autonomy of the individual to make these decisions privately, with no outside interference, as expressed by liberalism’s laissez-faire attitude to private affairs.

This cheerful and optimistic view of life, the sense of unlimited potential and possibility, is so seductive and convincing it is difficult to see outside of it. In other words, it has become an ideology (Davey, 1999). Neoliberalism, an extension of the values of individualism that underlie modern notions of authenticity, are so much a part of professional discourse, this narrative has come to entirely define our approach to public life and service. Professional life is envisioned as this expansive forum with the best venues and technology available, the best skills, the best innovations and good jobs where everything is organized and functioning. And of course, this can be true for many at a material level.

What the ideology of neoliberalism eclipses is what these achievements actually mean in human terms, namely: the compromises, the sacrifices, the small acts of self-betrayal, the abandonment of self and others as we become engrossed in meeting often far reaching and idealistic targets and goals (Taylor, 2011; Saul, 1992). Within the narrative of
neoliberalism is a catch, the rules of engagement (Wilson, 2004) require that we compromise essential parts of ourselves, by putting our differences aside: our culture, our background and history, and our traditions, including deeply held principles and convictions we have learned through experience, in order to advance our material interests (Taylor, 2011).

This is the dark undercurrent of neoliberalism, and a very old story in French Canada. My father believed that for his children to be successful they needed to learn the language of business. Driven by memories of his Franco-Ontarian childhood: the ancient farmhouse in River Canard with its cross hung at the entrance door and its wooden table covered in newspaper for the day’s harvest; its rows of iron beds upstairs for the children who huddled under thin blankets, he knew he did not want this life of impoverishment for his family.

In those days, Francophone children travelled hundreds of miles to Ottawa to receive the only French education offered in Ontario, and often, as in my family, only a few could attend at any given time because (or so I am told) they could not afford new shoes. These children did not come home for Christmas, staying instead with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (now the University of Ottawa) until Paul Martin Sr. would whisk them off to Parliament Hill each year for a day’s reprieve from the incredible loneliness and isolation of Catholic boarding school. Martin knew their circumstances, and his hospitality came from his familiarity with the parents who attended Assumption church in his riding, something my father never forgot.

The Two Solitudes speaks to the underlying anxieties about French assimilation in an English majority culture, and the internal conflicts evoked where culture, roots and language interface with market imperatives. As MacLennan (2018) explains:

In every generation there arose French-Canadians who tried to change the eternal pattern of Quebec by political action and nearly all of them had been broken, one by one. Indeed, they broke themselves, for while they fought for change in their minds, they opposed it with their emotions. If they went far enough, they were
bound to find themselves siding with the English against their own people and if nothing else broke them, that inevitably did. It was a very old pattern (p. 86).

3.2.1 Contradictions of civil belonging

In the face of global technological change old questions resurface about the nature of culture and belonging: How to adapt to the future without turning one’s back on the past? How to forge a path and fulfill one’s fullest potential from within one’s own carefully tended traditions and cultures? How can one’s autonomy be balanced with the free development of others? For Ricoeur the broader patterns of our lives, the overarching themes of history that touch us and cast a large shadow, are significant representations of our past that need to be authentically engaged and reconciled rather than discarded, outsmarted or overcome (Ricoeur in Lyle & Gehart, 2000). This work explores the contradictions of civil belonging (Lee, 1998) in contemporary professional life and practice.

I have struggled to define myself in professional milieus where my way of seeing things is not represented and where I do not feel part of the deliberative unit and therefore feel I cannot enter the conversation (Taylor, 2011). Because of my own complicated history, my in-between-ness can sometimes cause me to feel like I am caught in an undertow between cross-currents of different cultures, belief systems, and paradigms, different ways of being, perceiving and responding, and that if I try and articulate my position in any kind of authentic way, it is me who will be the first in the water.

3.2.2 “This is water”: memories, founding events, reminiscences

Translating what my public life means to me as a multidimensional professional, given who I am and where I come from at this time and place in history, seems to me an essential starting point. To examine my own contingencies and vulnerabilities, those parts of me that never entirely aligned within established systems and structures. Those displaced, uncomfortable, ill at ease parts that made me feel exposed and seemed to set me apart and estrange me from professional associates and colleagues. I needed to confront my own precarity, how close to the waterline I felt.
Ricoeur attempts to get at the root of troubles, to what he calls “founding events”; founding events are a “means of explaining how the narratives of individuals, families, peoples and nations became absolutized, immutable and problematic” (Ricoeur in Lyle & Gehart, 2000, p. 79). I recall my own lived experiences of displacement, coming of age in the highly politically charged atmosphere of Quebec’s independence movement in the early 1980s, and my own ancestral history, as an English-speaking French-Canadian with ethnically and racially diverse roots both inside and outside of Quebec. Founding events which have, over the course of my life and professional development, inclined me to be attuned, and at times highly vigilant, to the subtext of civil relations, and the hidden dynamics of power that circulate between people in civil society.

Having struggled with a sense of displacement at different times and places, I tend to feel highly exposed where positioning around issues of identity become too deeply entrenched. Smith (2009) writes, “saying ‘this is water’ is a less complicated way of reminding us that wherever we have language, we have the artificial conditions, limits, and possibilities of our existence” (p. 285). Because of the limits of language, mutual understanding is never assured, therefore, if there is any hope to be understood, I must try to articulate the founding events, lived experiences and commitments that inform my thinking and moral lens.

For someone like myself with complicated citizen identities and who does not fit comfortably into one singular category of difference, my own contradictions in civil belonging bring to the fore those aspects of myself that do not cohere. This is what Siegel refers to as the multidimensional self, “a self-full of contradictions, paradoxes and ironies that could not be resolved easily – if at all” (Seigel in Sennett, 2012, p. 126).

I know what I represent within the narrative of self-determination in Quebec. This makes my identity a problem. I will not deny the irony of who I am: assimilated. Such a loaded word in the history of Quebec independence: I accept this fracture in me. I fight it in myself. It’s complicated and speaks to the undercurrents of the text, its cadence and how close to the waterline I have felt as this narrative unfolds, with all the different voices
within me and elements I needed to attend to and consider. I think of all sides of the argument and the force my words, which can be immobilizing.

3.2.3 Translation and the contingency of language

For me this translation is a river crossing, a perilous journey where the outcome is never assured. Inherent in Ricoeur’s philosophy and approach to translating lived experience is an “acceptance of imperfection and of limits to success and a determination to face up to life without absolutes” (Ricoeur in Scott-Baumann, 2010, p. 73). I can never expect to be understood as perfectly as I imagine, but if I am to be of any use in this world and encounter others in any significant way, I must work to articulate (Brossard, 1988) the founding events, lived experiences, bonds and commitments that define what matters to me and how I show up in my practice. As Rabil (1967) writes:

What could make men persist with the effort to communicate in the midst of repeated failures and only partial successes except a faith in man, a trust that no matter what the barriers are it is possible to communicate with others and through this communication to enhance the quality of human life (p. 242)?

3.2.4 Tightly bound to this material world

I explore my own trajectory and professional path in the context of neoliberalism and my own struggle to define the scope and principles of my practice and communicate meaningfully in the face of competing narratives, what Scott-Baumann (2010) describes as our “contradictory obligations to each other and to our society” (p. 70). What is it like to practice in a world where material advancement is more valued than social relationships? I look at the difficulties and challenges of navigating a managed world that favours acquisition and external goals over internal gifts and capacities and where personal advancement can supersede attention to interpersonal relations. What I would like to convey is how easy it is to deceive ourselves, not because we are unthinking or inherently inhumane, but more pragmatically because we are embedded in practices that make it appear there is no other way.
Like the young women Wolf (2005) taught at the Woodhull Centre for Ethical Leadership, coming from a professional or pre-professional education and “trained to see what they have to say not in its own light – the old liberal arts ideal – but in terms of various marketable categories” (p. 107), I too had been intimidated into using corporate-speak. Wolf (2005) explains, in today’s market economy:

the notion of one’s own unique voice and vision – as understood outside the context of the marketplace – is as arcane as an idea...and as dangerous to trust, as the notion that you can base your future on weaving, or cooking artisanal food, or growing heirloom flowers (p. 107).

Not that I believed this, it just seemed inevitable. At the time, I could not see outside these images of contemporary professional life and could not imagine another way, particularly in the absence of any conceivable alternate vision. I was terrified. I had the life I thought I wanted. House, lovely gardens, family outings by the lake – all made possible thanks to my successful career in the gracious capital city. So immersed was I in my particular life, attached to my ideals, my home, my family, dinners with friends, nights by the fire and the fabulous career I imagined I had. Well – if not as it appeared to me then, at least as I imagined it would/could have been – that is, as I sipped Shiraz, and dipped into warm brie, dropping bits for my Basset Hound looking on adoringly from the fireside. I simply could not find my way outside of it. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, my existence was “too tightly held in the world to be able to know itself as such at the moment of its involvement” (Merleau-Ponty in Rabil, 1967, p. xvi).

Taylor (1991a) might say I was “enclosed in my own heart” preferring to stay at home and enjoying the satisfactions of private life; was I partaking in petits et vulgaires plaisirs (small and vulgar pleasures) to escape “the trouble of thinking and the difficulty of living” (p. 139)? Had I created my own insular, self-contained world, friends and family forming my entire worldly existence?

I was not exactly the man in the grey flannel suit. I entered professional life in 1994, a time in which, as Toronto career expert Moses (1997) describes it, professionals were routinely “squished, squashed, sliced and diced”. It was a period characterized by
recession, deep fiscal cuts, downsizing and reorganizing. The federal government introduced ordinary Canadians to the meaning of the word austerity in the 1995 Liberal budget, with a 35 percent cut in provincial transfer payments to education, health and social services; slashing over 29,000 public service jobs, and an additional 26,000 in the following three years (Stanford, 2003). It also marked the start of Ontario Conservatives’ common-sense revolution, which introduced a 22 percent cut in social assistance rates and a downloading of program responsibilities to municipal governments (Ibbitson, 1996). So, with massive student loans, precarious work prospects, and a demolished social safety net, my generation entered a brave new world, aptly described by Swift (1999) as “the age of falling expectations”.

I despaired if I revealed the hidden dimensions of my professional existence, my alliances and affinities, my deepest convictions, there would be no place for me in public and professional life. While my closest associates knew and understood my deeper convictions, I dared not expose my private identifications, alliances and solidarities. To be candid about my views and perspectives privately, that is – in hushed voices and behind closed doors with mentors and close allies was one thing, but publicly? In my estimation – to take any position, let alone a strong one on any social issue was career suicide – it went against rationalist standards of deliberation which called for detachment and neutrality. These pressures to conform can have neuroticizing effects, leading people to question themselves and flounder in contradiction – as Brossard (1988) describes: “the subject is placed in a double bind to stammer, lie or contradict themselves” (p. 145). Brossard (1988) writes:

when everything conspires (individuals, language, and society) to deny your perceptions, that is, the primary information from which it is possible to state something with conviction (whether to assert something definitively or to pronounce something true), how does one not have self-doubts, how does one avoid foundering in incoherence, ambiguity, or contradiction? How does one elude paradox (p. 142)?
As an emerging professional, my alliances and identifications, my inner convictions and certainties, my very presence, made me feel exposed. Evoking confusing, powerful reactions I could not fully articulate or explain. Just when I thought I was becoming professionally integrated, developing a solid and grounded sense of identity within public life and service, critical incidents would arise in my practice, take me aback, throw me off kilter and profoundly disrupt my sense of security, belonging and integration. How could anyone outside my inner circles and private life possibly understand the quagmires and dilemmas I faced, the things that kept me up at night, my own deeply held convictions, loyalties and affiliations? Would it not undermine my professional standing to expose the different dimensions of my life publicly?

There seemed no words to describe the paradoxes and contradictions, the seemingly irreconcilable tensions, those parts of me that seemed utterly incommunicable. I felt untranslatable even to myself and sensed that no one, outside my innermost circles could possibly understand what it was to be me at this time and place in my professional life – the impasses I faced, the seemingly insurmountable hurdles. The quagmires: how could I articulate my position and speak out on deeply held beliefs, to express my true alliances and connections publicly – without self-marginalizing?

This spoke to my utter sense of futility in this entire project. Belonging in public life, let alone bureaucratic public-sector institutions, like healthcare, human services and education – what are you talking about? My father’s voice inside my head spoke to me directly and said repeatedly: why make life difficult for yourself, it makes no sense! Why go against the life opportunities I have sacrificed to provide for you, the life I thought you wanted (and who can possibly contend with these kinds of arguments)? Yet something in me could not, would not let go of the life I imagined for myself, one where all of me, all of my irreconcilable parts, could be integrated and thrive. Something inside of me said, do not disappear. Your deepest convictions matter. You matter. The incredibly diverse and wonderfully surprising people you encounter every day matter, including the poignant and heartbreaking stories you hear. Stay where you are. Be present. Attune. This is the work.
3.2.5 Navigating with a critically distorted lens

When who I think I should be to make a living and survive in this world is different from who I privately experience myself to be in critical ways, these contradictions can create incredible ambivalences that are not easy to reconcile. Ambivalences arise where I privately feel one way but feel I cannot act on these desires and therefore have mixed or contradictory feelings, giving rise to being unclear or incapable of moving forward, being on the fence, or vacillating between two different and incongruent realities. It can seem like my own lens is critically distorted, causing me not to trust myself, and to rationalize going along with things that can so easily slide into self-betrayal. The protagonist of Two Solitudes, Tallard, embodies the perils of being conflicted within himself, of being of two minds, where these irreconcilable life choices confront him, and his head tells him one thing and his heart another:

when he was calm, he could admit that his failure to do anything positive in his life had been caused by this deep split within himself. Always, before the reasoned act, an unseen hand reached out of the instinct-ridden past and tapped his shoulder (MacLennan, 2018, p. 87).

These kinds of ambivalences can be paralyzing, and can create difficulties in discerning right action, because I not only question what I am looking at and seeing, but in the absence of others who appear willing share their unique perspective publicly, I can begin to question myself and my own judgement, and whether authentic engagement is viable in public venues. As Taylor (1991a) explains,

my own inner nature which it sees as in danger of being lost, partly through the pressures towards outward conformity, but also because in taking an instrumental stance to myself, I may have lost the capacity to listen to this inner voice (p. 29).

It can be incredibly confusing and painful to be in this place of critical uncertainty because it can feel like my gauge or internal moral compass is broken leading to a crisis of perception. How can you know what to trust, when your own lens is distorted, as
Taylor (1991a) writes, “there is no model out there in which I can rely, I have to find it in myself” (p. 29).

3.3 Aligning with my deepest convictions

Ricoeur understands the difficulties of negotiating the modern world and recognizes we can never entirely escape our worldly experience of being human in a dualistic world, or fully resolve the ambivalences and insecurities of reconciling ourselves with worlds we did not have a hand in designing (Ricoeur in Lyle & Gehart, 2000). Recognizing the fragility of memory (and our vulnerability to being prone to manipulation), we define ourselves not through thought perceptions or ideas in our heads, but rather through taking up our presence in the world and embodying our values through a life of sharing memories, transparent communication and exchange and engaging on projects (Ricoeur in Kearney, 2004).

Ricoeur builds on Heidegger’s existential-phenomenological approach which “emphasizes the reality of lived experience, of acting in the world, as foundational to any attempt to understand the interpretative process” (Ricoeur in Ezzy, 1998, p. 244). My perceptions extend beyond my mind’s eye and move into the world through my physicality and my capacity to embody my presence in the world through my actions and relationships with others. Through my active engagement in the world and my relations with others, I come to know the world and define what matters in connection with others.

3.3.1 Critical choice points

Whatever my life circumstances, or the challenges I face, I do have choices and can exert power over on those things that matter most to me. Here Ricoeur aligns strongly with the existential-humanism of May, who argues our greatest power is the freedom to choose how we will define ourselves in worlds we did not create, despite anxiety, isolation and necessary rebellion (May in Winston, 2015). Power comes in summoning the strength to face life’s contradictions and grapple with ambiguities by not suppressing or repressing anxieties that arise even if painful or uncomfortable. As Winston (2015) suggests, anxiety can be constructive because it awakens oneself to challenge and opportunity to grow.
In every life we are faced with choice points, perhaps not unlimited choices as the liberal ethic might have us believe, but from a narrative perspective every life story has alternate potential paths available. These choice points define the trajectory of our lives; for Ricoeur, narrative identity:

> is not a stable and seamless identity…just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents…so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives… (Ricoeur in Wall, 2003, p. 333).

From a narrative perspective, choice points are pivotal in defining the trajectory of our life. They define what matters by where I am choosing to put my energy and attention in keeping with who I am and strive to become. Intentionality, in phenomenology is about my orientation in the world, and becoming conscious and aware about how I am positioning myself in relation to others. This means paying attention to how I engage in relationships, my work, and my service in the world by becoming more critically aware of myself and how I show up in practice spaces.

### 3.3.2 Human encounter as learning journey

Every interaction, the people I run into in the lobby of a reception hall, or in the elevator, the participants I encounter in boardrooms, my meetings with colleagues and professional associates, may seem incidental, but every encounter is an opportunity to practice, and make choices to expand my practices. Authenticity as it is understood here, draws on Taylor’s (1991a) insight: that authentic engagement “is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands…that come from beyond our own desires be they history, tradition, society, nature or god” (p. 58).

This is the nature of the face-to-face encounter, it provides immense growth opportunities. Our lives are part of a broader social fabric and how we engage matters, in Kearney’s (2007) words, “life stories and life histories are always parts of larger stories and histories in which we find ourselves entwined” (p. 153). Very often our encounters may not appear significant at the moment of their occurrence, but rather take on meaning as one reflects back on the broader trajectory of one’s life and the role that incident
played in defining one’s path. This can be an encounter which at the time may have appeared incidental, but later proved to have a profound impact on your life in some way or may be a chance meeting with someone who radically altered your way of thinking or caused you to consider choices you never previously thought possible. Sometimes these choice points show up as moments of moral or ethical distress, where what you are witnessing in the field evokes powerful responses, we can miss these powerful opportunities for change if we are not paying attention and attuning carefully to what is arising in my field of perception and the deeper meaning of our distress.

Exerting agency in contexts I did not define means knowing my limits. This is an important aspect of Ricoeur’s critical phronesis, the “wisdom of limits” (Wall, 2003). In a world of shabby compromises, we each need to figure out and come to our own discernment about what is worth struggling for. When navigating circumstances or systems where I am compelled to go along, and that require daily compromise, it becomes imperative to know my limits and I locate this by paying attention to what matters to me. Specifically, paying attention to my embodied responses in the world, and striving to more deeply understand where these responses are coming from provides me with the knowledge I need to understand my limits and where I not cross a line under any circumstances if I am to practice with integrity.

We really only come to know our limits by direct experience, by being thrown into scenarios and coming up against them. Being in this world and developing practices that ground me in material reality and increase my capacity to become more fully present to practice realities, with all of the contingencies, triggers and hot spots, provides a base for me to discern right action by getting clear about how I position myself through direct experience. From a critical vantage point it becomes vital to learn to distinguish compromise from self-betrayal, including subtle forms of self-negation where we deny who we are, what we stand for or where we come.

This comes from remembering where I come from, my communities, my commitments, and what brought me to where I am today, the people and places I have known, and where I will not yield. In a world that is self-negating in all kinds of subtle ways, I have
needed to become discerning and intentional about what I am saying yes to, what I am saying no to. In Brand's words, “to survive and to not go crazy, you must distinguish how much of what you are going to take today, but not tomorrow” (Brand in Daurio, 1998, p. 36).

Such moments of rupture call us out of our solitude and take us beyond our own narrow imperatives, agendas and self-interests, imploring us to drop the old agenda and pay attention – these are moments for pause – disrupting our thinking to consider things that had not occurred to us before and imploring us see things from a different perspective. As Davey (1999) points out:

the recovery of other logically possible ways of thinking allows us to look at and, hence, to feel differently about an issue. We do not so much lose ourselves...but become more ourselves. Such reflection offers the possibility of recognizing in other traditions and practices the otherness of ourselves (p. 17).

3.4 Experimental writing: paying attention to what is emerging in my field of practice

I used existential-phenomenological writing in the way Brandt (1993) describes: as a “process of coming to consciousness as a human being and understanding yourself as an inquiring, curious, embodied mind” (p. 38). A phenomenological approach requires that one engage possible understandings to discern different meanings from the text. This kind of imaginative play or imaginative variation (Spiegelberg in Dowling, 2007) allows one to reflexively examine alternate realities and possibilities. This means connecting with the various voices within oneself and finding new ways forward, Brandt (1993) writes, all too often “people can repress or put aside that questioning self” (p. 51).

A key task of phenomenology is “laying bare certain truths that capture the richness, complexity, ambiguity, ambivalence of lived experience” (Finlay, 2006, p. 196). As Borren (2010) explains “phenomenology concerns the way things and events appear to us in lived experience” (p. 18) and lived experience refers to “how we, human beings, live our lives, are involved in projects and interact with each other” (p. 47)
3.4.1 Writing adrift and the work of articulation

I drew on Brossard’s (1988) method of writing, “writing adrift” which she calls the work of articulation. The work of articulation is about paying attention to the senses, the body, the emotions, not abandoning oneself, or excluding parts of self or others that do not cohere but rather trying to understand what is arising and putting words around it, another way to say this, is what is arising within my story, what wants to emerge…?

The work of articulation requires labour because it means putting into words and articulating that which has yet to be spoken. It takes work to make these experiences visible, by paying attention to the senses, the body, the emotions, not abandoning oneself, or excluding parts of self or others that don’t cohere.

This meant not withdrawing from the troubles of the world, but rather becoming present to the pain and let myself feel things. Become more aware of sensitivity arising within me when with others, understand where my responses are coming from, what this says about me and my story. I did this by paying attention and phenomenologically attuning to my lived experience and making my impressions and perceptions visible through writing.

I used my writing practice to look at moments of confusion, moments when I could not see clearly, allowing memories to arise that I did not know were there. It is easy to overlook or dismiss these moments as small, relative to the big things that go on, and it is so easy to rationalize setting aside these incidents or moments in practice as other projects and outcomes loom.

My position in public sector institutions has often been confusing and disorienting, with experiences of mixed loyalties and divided affinities. Occasionally, something would happen, where suddenly I would find my own professional standing in jeopardy because of strong identifications or attachments to others, either because I was witnessing something, a pattern or trend my professional associates were not seeing, or my colleagues were reading a case very differently than what I was perceiving. This would cause me moral distress and a profound sense of displacement from my professional identity, where I suddenly would have this sense that I was on the opposite side of the
table, more aligned with those I served than with the colleagues and professional associates with whom I was tasked to collaborate, creating all kinds of ethical tensions, and quandaries.

3.4.2 “That which shows itself”: Moods, concerns, awakenings and attunements

I needed to access my lived experience by attuning to what was “showing up” for me to try to uncover what imperatives are emerging and driving this narrative (van Manen, 1990). According to Bambach (2011) explains, the term phenomenology, derived from the Greek noun phainomenon (“that which shows itself”). Rather than try to stifle my experiences of discomfort and estrangement as I had been doing, I attuned to my pain to try and discern its deeper meaning and the source of my suffering. I paid attention to what showed up, what emerged by to allowing tensions to surface and bring this to conscious awareness by externalizing and amplifying it, naming it.

As I stopped trying to retreat from my suffering and withdrawing from relationships with others into a protective inner realm, of avoiding the pain of living as I had been, and rather leaned into the experiences of alienation, estrangement and inauthenticity, things gradually began to become more clear. As I shifted away from “tuning out” by controlling and suppressing my responses and rather attuned with an embodied mind, and took a body-centered approach – paying close attention to what showed up, and amplifying these experiences in words, working with the words to find the “mot juste”, precisely the right expression to capture the essence of what it was I was trying to say, and naming these experiences in ways that resonated with who I am and aspire to be in my life and my profession – the fog lifted and the trajectory of my life, all of it, began to make more sense.

3.4.3 The stranger as threshold

The stranger who surfaced in dialogue between this group of social workers during the focus group break, the young man who refused to comply with external authority – became a hinge point (Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011) for me to discuss my own sense of estrangement from my professional identity – and disorientation in my professional role,
illustrating the kind of alienation I have experienced at different times and places in my professional practice.

The stranger in this text is threshold between self and other, a hinge point in the way Kearney and Semonovitch (2011) describe “that conceals and reveals, outward and inward at the same time” (p. 4). I draw on the metaphor of the stranger, to describe my struggle to communicate in the face of deeply rooted divisions and tensions, within myself, and between myself and others. This has been a perilous quest driven by my desire to overcome fragmentation and historic divides to reach out and communicate authentically about some of the issues that show up and matter to me.

### 3.4.4 A perilous encounter

This encounter with the stranger propelled me into a sudden and abrupt sense of disorientation in my professional role, evoking my own sense of discomfort and disorientation, causing me to feel suddenly at the wrong side of the table – more strongly identified and resonating with this young person, someone I had never met – than with my peers and professional associates with whom I was tasked to collaborate, and the values and ethics they seemed to be espousing at the reception table that day.

As this narrative unfolds, I find myself so caught up in this stranger’s story, and incapable of separating my story from his, I could not bracket. A most perilous identification which alienated me from my colleagues and professional associates and dislocated me from my professional identity as I struggled to effectively function within the current rules of engagement that defined my professional practice, rules which called for professional neutrality and detachment. Challenging my sense of self and leaving me grappling with my sense of place within my professional life and profession.

This is what I take to mean “perilous kinship” (Şenocak, 2009; 2016), perilous in the sense that it evoked a kind of visceral sense of identification that can only be described as tribal – a tribalism founded not on mutual recognition or sameness (after all I did not even know this person) but an acute sense of difference. This profound sense of recognition of the deeper patterns of displacement that wove our narratives together in
unseen ways, created a perilous sense of kinship for me in that it evoked and revealed my own contradictions of civil belonging, surfacing divisions and tensions within myself and between myself and others.

This perilous encounter with the stranger put me in touch with my own humanity, my multidimensionality, exposing deeper, more hidden aspects of my identity, making me conscious of my own embeddedness the systems I thought I was working to change. It evoked a heightened vigilance to my own fragility as a speaking subject within the system. A moment of deep and painful recognition as I struggled to find my own place professionally in what appeared to me then a closed, austere and unrelenting system. This critical incident awakened me to the depth of my estrangement from the current rules of engagement and agitating the stranger that lived in me.

These social workers seemed so detached, so removed, so entirely focused on their own agendas and professional interests. So not there. Whatever common ground we may have shared was entirely unavailable to me. How could they possibly know what weighed on my mind, what hurt me day after day? I felt like a foreigner in their presence. Perhaps I had become unreachable. For all I knew I had lost my ability to connect and communicate altogether. The space between us seemed so polarized and disjointed I could not see how I could possibly bridge this divide. I could not possibly imagine sharing my thoughts, let alone emotions with them, any of them. I was far too threatened, defended and unhinged.

It was so easy in that moment to slide into cynicism about these professionals’ intentions and motivations, and project onto an external enemy because of how ascribing they appeared to be with market imperatives to the detriment of this youth who I imagined to be in peril and requiring their support. They seemed more concerned with their own professional interests and advancing professional goals, than the existential issues facing this youth-at-risk and collaborating with them felt to me like self-betrayal: colluding with existing power structures. This is what Sartre (2003) calls, “bad faith”, where people are acting more in alignment with roles than hidden private identities and deeper convictions.
At the same time, I could see no way of articulating my moral distress. In that moment, with those social workers in that room, and the evaluation strategy well underway, to speak out was to self-marginalize. From where I stood then, *that perilous place*, expressing myself transparently seemed to require me to turn away from the professional life as I had been living it, estranging me from my social networks, colleagues and professional associates, from my professional identity. In Lee’s (1998) words, the language was drenched with [my] non-belonging and words – bizarre as it sounds, even to myself – words had become the enemy. To use them was to collaborate further in one’s extinction as a rooted human being (p. 18).

### 3.4.5 Checking my story: revisiting old narratives

On this quest for professional integrity, I knew I had to attend to these fractures, these rifts within my practice and professional existence – within myself and between myself and others, by working through experiences of misalignment and alienation from the public and professional associates as I perceived them then. A seemingly insurmountable task, but if I were ever to be effective in any meaningful way and re-engage from a deeper place on issues of public significance, I needed to try.

I needed to check my story, opening my narrative up to rigorous and disciplined self-examination. Critical phronesis from Ricoeur’s vantage point means being willing to critically re-examine my lens and what I once held to be true, by being willing to revisit my perspective as new understandings emerge. This means being prepared to revisit stories I tell myself about myself, by being reflexive about the choices available to me given my social location and relationship with others at a given time and place. Taking responsibility for my stories and how they overlap with others is what in narrative terms is called ethical use of self (Kaushik, 2017). Ethical use of self entails witnessing what is arising in one’s practice and in the outer world by becoming more self-consciously aware of what is being evoked within one’s own lived experience as issues emerge. I needed to confront my own incapacity to communicate on the critical issues that mattered most to me by trying to understand what was showing up for me in my life history. This required me to dig deeper into my ancestral history and cultural inheritance to retrieve what has
been suppressed and recover new meanings, so I am not acting out of old conditioning, old wounds from the past. This begins by looking at how I am showing up in face-to-face relationships.

3.5 Method: Ricoeur’s ethic of hospitality

I am working with Ricoeur’s ethic of hospitality (Ricoeur 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000) to revisit my narrative to reposition my story in a broader frame that aligns more deeply with my convictions and allows me to act in the service of justice. Narrative ethics, from Ricoeur’s existential-phenomenological perspective, extend beyond my own isolated existence into my field of relationships, and include others, including strangers in my midst who may otherwise fall outside of my field of vision. This is at the heart of Ricoeur’s narrative ethics, positioning our stories in social contexts that include diverse others, and considering this larger context by attuning to the hidden realms as we recount our stories in public platforms. For Ricoeur hospitality is about seeing yourself through the eyes of manifold others, understanding in a pluralistic world people will hold diverse views and perspectives and we are accountable to others whose stories overlap with ours. What Ricoeur is inviting us to do is step back from our immediate grievances and look at the bigger picture, recognizing that others exist outside our own contingencies and struggles. Others perhaps more vulnerable than ourselves who require our attention and if we are so caught up in our own grievances we may fail to see this. We are responsible for the culture we inherited and need to be prepared to look at how we are implicated in the systems we inhabit, and how our behaviour, conscious and unconscious impacts others.

3.5.1 Linguistic hospitality

Cultural change requires that we each own our part in how we show up, how we are implicated in the difficult challenges that face contemporary society. According to Kearney (2007):

we are responsible for what we cannot and do not control – our unconscious fears and their affective representation. In addition, we are responsible for those fears, desires and effects on others (p. 149).
Linguistic hospitality the first step in the translational process in Ricoeur’s ethic of hospitality (Ricoeur, 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000). The practice of narrative hospitality is about recognizing and acknowledging any potential ways in which we have infringed upon or harmed others before recounting our own story.

To practice linguistic hospitality and extend myself hospitably to the other, I needed to take a sober look at myself and attune to misalignments in my own practice, disjoints between my convictions and actions in the world, and where I have fallen short in practicing with integrity. I hone in on my failure to act in the service of justice and my incapacity to align with the youth-at-risk by speaking out and communicate with my professional associates. This critical incident compelled me to ask, what was wrong with me that I did not say anything? My history did not teach me to stand passively by and watch, be a bystander – a passive participant (Sennett, 1994). I was raised in the spirit of hospitality: the kind that opens doors to strangers who arrive unexpected and unannounced in the night – the teenage runaway whose parents did not understand him; the young woman beaten by her father for dating outside her culture; the schoolmate who fled amid a mental health crisis and arrived at our door, a door which was always open. My parent’s basement harboured all kinds of people in crisis, and who arrived at our doorstep under harrowing circumstances. I come from a long history of people who kept a light in the window, and the door unlatched, people who went down to the shoreline at night, and knelt by muddy riverbanks to extend a helping hand – *as we ourselves have sought refuge at different times and places in our complicated histories*. We knew the winds of change swung both ways and all my people had at one time or other stood on both sides of this threshold. This is the kind of hospitality I knew and understood.

### 3.5.2 Exchange of memories: founding events, reminiscences

To understand where I enter this story, and what inhibited me from being fully present on that day, acting with integrity and embodying the values of shared leadership, authenticity, transparency and justice I espoused – I needed to come to terms with and reconcile my own relative sense of place at this difficult time in my professional life.
What I realized in working through this narrative is that my inability to act, and to speak out when I perceived an injustice occurring, related to my own precarious sense of place, tied into my personal and social history and deeper founding events in my own personal and social history.

Ricoeur’s narrative ethics requires we communicate transparently about resonances in our own story as they align with the other. This ethic goes beyond attuning to the Other and requires the listener to become visible and transparent. Recovering deeper meaning of self-in-relationship requires becoming knowable by bringing founding events and memories to the surface (Ricoeur in Kearney, 2004) so that they can be explored and understood publicly. Recounting different stories of the same event, indicates “how each event may be told in different ways by different generations and by different narrators…of carving out a place for several stories directed towards the same past” (Ricoeur in Kearney, 2007, p. 155).

I foreground the founding events (Ricoeur, 1996; Ricoeur in Lyle & Gehart, 2000) which form the interpretative framework for understanding the factors at play when this communicative impasse occurred. Seen without context, this communicative impasse can perhaps be read and interpreted in a variety of ways. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that this single event is intertwined with a series of other, more hidden events – overhearing a conversation among social workers in the reception room, the stranger who appears unexpectedly, my own tribal identification with the stranger, and simultaneously my deep sense of estrangement from colleagues and disorientation in my overall role and function. These events, not isolated from one another, mutually inform each other influencing my responses, engagements and perceptions in the world. Through a crisscrossing of memories, I provide multiple readings on this single critical event to get at the underlying imperatives and experiences driving my behaviour and what it speaks to cultivate an understanding of my lived experience and the imperatives underlining my practice.

Taylor (1971) writes a successful translation makes clear the meaning of something that may previously have been confused or cloudy. Taylor (1971) explains, “this is not to say
all behavior must “make sense” if we mean by this be rational, avoid contradiction, confusion of purpose ... even contradictory, relational action is made sense of when we understand why it was engaged in” (p. 43). Seen in this way, as de Visscher (2001) notes, “something incomprehensible, represents not a problem but a gap in our knowledge [rather something] we have not yet discovered what is at play” (p. 120).

This deeper inquiry into the narratives that define our lives and practice is what Ricoeur calls “the work of memory and mourning”, contending that it is not until we bring ancestral losses and cultural inheritances to conscious awareness, that we can release them and let them go and allow for new stories to emerge. Ricoeur contends that in melancholia, a person grieves for a loss they are unable to fully comprehend or identify, and because this takes place in the unconscious mind it becomes difficult to resolve. Mourning in contrast, is considered a healthy and natural process of grieving, and therefore, bringing founding events to light allows for historic losses and intergenerational trauma to be brought up for release (Ricoeur in Kearney, 2004).

This is a process of building conscious awareness of my own lived experience requires attuning phenomenologically to my impressions: memories, founding events and reminiscences and putting my these perceptions and embodied knowing into words, as Davey (1999) explains, “for what is given to us through insight, intuition or revelation has to be understood and then translated into forms permitting others to grasp what we have come to understand” (p. 6).

This investigation is both difficult and revealing, involving what Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 2004; 2008; 2012) describes as the work of memory and mourning. I write about the fragility of civil space and what authenticity, belonging and self-determination mean to me, growing up in Montreal and belonging to multiple ethnic backgrounds and traditions at a time in Quebec’s history marked by fierce self-determination and a singular definition of French identity.

I remember my own sense of security within the enclosed spaces of my childhood home; of belonging to my French Canadian and multi-ethnic family, juxtaposed with my precarious public existence coming of age in Montreal’s turbulent history in 1970s and
early 1980s. Of living in a cosmopolitan city, filled with all forms of life – where I saw myself and imagined I belonged – and yet never fully realizing or coming to terms with my own uncertain place in Quebec society dominated by a Québécois narrative of separation, independence and self-determination. How these competing personal and social narratives intersected in my own life trajectory, opening wounds and deeper histories of displacement in my own ancestral heritage. Histories which go back so far into the reaches of memory only fragments remain. Still, the losses are palpable, like a dream I once had but can no longer remember – the impressions stay with me and play with my mind.

These founding events (Ricoeur, 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000) shape my experiences of citizenship and belonging – to my workplace, my degree of trust, confidence in my professional identity, my identifications and affiliations and overall sense of place in public life. Formative experiences which inform the tone of my work, its cadence – how I show up as a professional, the things that matter to me as a change agent, and my perceptions (real or imagined) of opportunities and threats that arise in my practice.

This life history has instilled in me a particular vigilance to infringements, or violations however subtle. When I see someone infringed upon, rendered invisible, mistreated, or misunderstood, this is what I see. While I did not fully understand or grasp the significance of this at the time, as I listened to the social workers discussing this young man’s case my body told me something was wrong. While uncertain about the source of my discontent, I knew I was violating my ethical and moral sensibilities by passively observing situations and circumstances that involved the negation and discounting of another, specifically someone I perceived as vulnerable. This is my lens, what I perceived and how my lived experience intersected with this young man’s story. As I attune to my embodied presence in the field that day to try to understand what was going on for me, it has become clear to me in taking this learning journey and doing my work of healing wounds from the past, that I was in moral distress, and that an ethical code had been broken.
This critical incident caused me to reconsider the nature of moral judgement and intervention in the context of (neo)liberal public-sector negotiation where neutrality is practiced, and diversity is a non-value. It made me question what I am here as a practitioner to do. I knew from my own profound discomfort and moral distress, I was called to practices larger and more expansive than the isolationist and rationalist constraints my profession imposed. By neutralizing myself, cutting myself off from my past, my sense of power, purpose, and history, I inhibited myself from accompanying others (or at least being a bright light) on theirs.

3.5.3 Returning to the field enlarged

Return to the field expanded implies first being able to see myself from different vantage points outside my own. I have compassion of the person I was then and my incapacity to see beyond my own pain, it can be so difficult to see myself clearly when I am caught up in practices that make me feel separated and isolated. For Ricoeur, being reflexive is about stepping outside the isolation of one’s own mind and being willing look at yourself through another’s eyes, by positioning your story in relationship with theirs, particularly others more vulnerable than you and requiring your attention.

Attuning to subtle patterns of our lives, moments arise, gifts of grace, that give us a sense there is more going on than the random and inhospitable world that we are trained to manage. The stranger’s presence, caused me to stop paying so much attention to the totalizing gaze of the social workers, and something shifted. The presence of the other caused me to look at myself more expansively, to become an outsider witness to my own experiences of displacement and the limitations that kept me silent. Imagining myself being seen through the eyes of the stranger gave this work an ethical dimension (Sartre, 2003) and I felt a deeper sense of responsibility in terms of how my narrative intersected with the stranger that emerged in this story and owning my part in this story. This is the power of relationship, to want to be better, do better, by considering how our narratives are positioned in relation to diverse others. It was a poignant reminder I am not alone, I am participating in a larger field of consciousness and can expand and deepen my practices by stepping outside the delusion I am separate (Callero, 2009), alone out there driving my existence as a practitioner in the field.
To become the professional, I aspired to be, and inhabit a more authentic and integrated professional identity, one which more fully reflected my commitments and alliances, I had to let go of self-limiting thoughts, including resignation to the complexities of contemporary practice and an underlying cynicism about my capacity to effect systems change. I revisit my own internalized images of the public as someone who has experienced a sense of displacement at different times and places in my development, to explore how my lived experiences feed into my perceptions of what is possible. Within my own critical lens, I needed to discard any residual images I had of the public, and its leaders as prone to manipulation and cooption by the powers that be and therefore not to be trusted. It is here that I recognize that my own internalized (and dehumanized) perceptions of the social world, kept me from engaging differently; from showing up and being truly present with and for others. In beginning to come to terms with my culpability, I could see where I entered this story and how I was implicated in its unfolding. How the woundedness and dysfunction of the very systems I occupied lived in me.

I needed to become more present to all those ways in which my own internalized messages led me to think I was set apart from others in my public and professional existence – a separate individual – a schism which precluded me from perceiving colleagues and professional associates, as complex human beings, like me, with limitations and constraints. To get at the root of this separation, I needed to come to terms with those times I myself felt misunderstood, invisible and unheard. Not allow the strangeness I felt, the sense of exposure, of being different – my ancestral history, old wounds from the past, and my instinctive desire to hold onto and protectively conceal my differences, to keep me from connecting and reaching out to those who I imagined would not, could not, possibly understand or see things from my perspective.

Having deeply contemplated and read widely on the subject, my perception of the public as cold and indifferent was inherently flawed. This work alerted me to my own preconceptions about the public as dehumanized, blindly conforming and entirely unconscious of their actions – or, as my story would have it, as a threat to my own authenticity, “my beautiful self” as Beauvoir (in Moi, 2009) once put it. I now wonder, in
isolating and setting myself apart in this way, had I not violated my own fundamental needs and desires, what Burston (2006) seemed to understand so astutely as my need “for intimacy, for community involvement, for calm reflection and authentic self-disclosure” (p. 128)?

It took me some time to see my incapacity to reach out across professional divides and communicate candidly and openly with my peers – to effectively translate my own reading of this story, came as much from my sense of alienation from professional associates, as my inability to come to terms with my own ambiguous and precarious sense of place within my professional existence at this very vulnerable time in my development. My sense of double jeopardy – of simultaneous invisibility and exposure, and fine-tuned awareness of how far I am prepared to go, the extent to which I am willing to expose my multidimensionality (Seigel, 2005; Seigel in Sennett, 2012), and the diverse communities to which I belong, given my lived experiences and life history. Specifically, what I am and am not willing or prepared to share publicly.

Having felt different, and being acutely aware of my differences, it seemed there was little or no room for me, all of me – including the fulsomeness of my views and perspectives, beyond the safe confines of my familiar ties and inner circles. What I have come to realize in doing this work, is that I so deeply identified with this young man, this stranger, because he lived in me, was part of me – the estranged parts of me that in my single-minded quest for professional recognition, I refused to recognize or acknowledge. The stranger within.
Chapter 4

4  Encountering the stranger: a practice narrative

Who loves the stranger?

Whom else is there to love?

(Derrida, 1999, p. 105)

The Stranger in Contemporary Practice is a practitioner’s narrative, drawn from my lived experience as a critically-informed professional struggling to communicate my perilous sense of place, non-belonging and insecurity in a globalized technological world – one calling me to new forms of engagement and collective action. The shifting landscape of my consultancy brought on by global and technological change has required me to step outside my own protective withdrawal, my solitude, to situate myself differently, more hospitably (Ricoeur, 1996) by locating my practice in a broader context outside the old divisions and tensions and self-limiting beliefs and perceptions that have defined my practices in the past. Practices tying me to old ancestral struggles inherited from my culture, which are no longer relevant to who I am today (wounds I unsuspectedly carried around with me until doing this work, this work of memory and mourning (Ricoeur, 2004; 2008; 2012)).

This has required me to revisit old narratives which have shaped me in the past, to rethink their relevance for me today, opening me to more adaptive, expansive ones. Stepping outside the confines of the worlds I have known to look beyond my neighbourhood, subcultures, friends and familial relations, to reconfigure my practices by finding new ways of being and reaching out beyond my insular world.

4.1 Linguistic hospitality: Hosting the stranger

Relationally responsible narratives entail situating my narrative in a broader social context by taking responsibility for my social actions and cultural practices even when no harm was intended (Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011). The call of the Other, a hallmark of continental hospitality, is most closely associated with Levinas’s (1969) approach, whose
narrative ethics calls us out of our solitude, our own insular worlds, to become more radically and unconditionally present to the stranger who requires our attention in a given moment.

Narrative hospitality is about recognizing others with integrity, by acknowledging where your story overlaps with theirs and recognizing the ways in which their experiences are distinct from yours. Because our stories are entwined with others we are ethically responsible for how our story impacts others. In Ricoeur’s (1996) words, the stories we tell about ourselves are mingled with those of others such that “the story of my life is a segment of the story of your life, of the story of my parents, of my friends, of my enemies, and of countless strangers” (p. 6).

4.1.1 The stranger’s call

This first step in the translational process, linguistic hospitality, for Ricoeur (1996) involves the act of “imagining the suffering of others before recounting one’s own” (p. 9). This is about taking responsibility for cultural practices including how our behaviour may have impacted others, consciously or unconsciously. The practice of narrative hospitality is about recognizing and acknowledging any potential ways in which we have infringed upon or harmed others before recounting our own story.

This narrative pivots around an at-risk youth, a stranger who emerged unexpectedly in dialogue between social workers in the conference reception room during a focus group session I was facilitating. This young man, the subject of much consternation amongst this group of social workers, while a stranger to me, struck me as uncomfortably familiar as I overheard these professionals informally discussing the young man’s case.

As I attune to the stranger’s story, I imagined a young man at the very beginning of his life path struggling to make his way in this world and find a place for himself in a fragile and harrowing economy. From my critically-informed perspective, this youth-at-risk was being unjustly penalized for not following through on external directives and stigmatized as “the problem” for not ascribing to agency rules. I perceived deeper structural issues at play which required understanding, further probing and investigation.
Whatever the specifics of his story – whether he was a model client, performed well in workshops, or had a “history” – this young man had somehow found the nerve to walk through those doors. Looking for, asking for, evidently needing – help. Needing help – but not at all cost. I imagined he had his own ideas about what he wanted for his life, even if not entirely worked out, or thought through in fine detail, I had no doubt he would have figured it out for himself if given a chance.

From what I was perceiving there appeared little room for his ideas or ways of approaching the challenges that confronted him. What is more, rather than being welcomed and taken in hospitably irrespective of where he was on his life path and in his development, he was being publicly censured for asserting his autonomy and self-determination, for struggling to advance himself in whatever ways he knew. Negated for nothing more than fiercely protecting his aspirations from outside interference, the imposing gaze and professional interests and agendas of agency staff.

This narrative evoked an unsettling range of responses in me as a professional, change agent and practitioner in the field. Rationally, I had a role to play. The evaluation was mobilized, and we were propelling full speed ahead with our logic models, performance indicators and evaluation plans. Our team had our evaluation strategy set out, including interview guides and a pre-arranged list of participants the agency had selected. And yet troubling questions were emerging that gave me pause. Questions well beyond the scope of the evaluation plan – ones which challenged our strategy and lineal rationalist approach. From my critically-informed perspective, I wondered – who was this young man and what was his story and where did he come from? What was his place of origin, life history, founding events and background of understanding? How did he perceive himself, his place in the world, in society and the social and economic climate he was entering? What impact did he hope to achieve? What hindered him or filled him with doubt, frustration, rage or dread: did he have the internal resources, secure family foundation and predictable relationships necessary to pursue his vision?

Perhaps most perplexing and indecipherable, what was causing him to react so antagonistically? He had after all entered the program freely, willingly – at least insofar
as the sessions were not mandatory. What was the problem? Was he the problem? Was there something in his story, his history, founding events which no one was seeing or attuning to, unknown factors at play causing him to react as he did in resistance to agency staff? Was something in their approach or the structure and design of the program, misaligning with his needs and imperatives – or was he bucking up against an overly rigid, unyielding system?

So much was unclear to me then, the absences and gaps in this narrative spoke volumes to me. Like muddy waters I could gaze into, perceive its depths and imagine what lingered there. I knew there was more to this story and could infer the range of systemic issues at work and surmise analytically what could be operating beneath the surface from a critically oriented perspective, but would never know for certain, for the sediment was thick – too much obscured and unseen. While the particularities of his young man’s story were not available to me, the deeper patterns that structured his experience, the broader structural forces if you will, were all too familiar as a workplace consultant and social analyst in the field.

I had seen waters like these before – delved into them even, and knew, almost instinctually, the chances of knowing more about this young man’s story and discovering what would become of him was very slim, not likely to happen. Not in this context. In a large-scale evaluation like this, there were few opportunities to veer off course, to loop back for what, or who – was missed.

What did become of this young man, this stranger? And what would become of countless others like him – nameless, faceless statistics, outliers of an inhospitable market-driven culture, fragile economy and precarious employment landscape. Beyond the shiny success stories and glossy statistics, I privately wondered – what did I miss in the absence of this young man’s story, as spoken by him, in his own words? Was he not the very person – precarious, vulnerable, adrift – this program was intended to reach?

I never would have the opportunity to meet this stranger who appeared to me like an apparition that day. But I have thought of him often in the development of this work. His absence evoked many troubling and unanswered questions. I suspect management never
intended to select this particular at-risk youth as a participant for our client focus groups planned that afternoon. Anxious to see good reviews for renewed funding, he was not what might be characterized (at least from a (neo)liberal governance perspective) an exemplary case, or shining example of good citizenship, in other words, he did not embody the principles of personal responsibility and self-regulation that the program wanted to feature. He was an outlier, not considered representative of the program’s success. And so, I would push on, reserve my questions and try not to let the fading images of the one we left behind distract me from what I felt I needed to do to effectively complete the evaluation fieldwork. But much as I tried to suppress and control my thoughts, my mind kept going back to this searing image in my minds’ eye of the face of this young man at the very beginning of his life’s journey, alive and awake to possibility, adrift in deeply troubled waters and navigating alone.

This stranger’s appearance highlighted far more than gaps in our evaluation design, recruitment strategy or the results of our findings. This was personal – as much about the successful and effective roll-out of the program itself, as the people whose lives this program touched. While I would never know the particularities of this young man’s story, or ever claim to understand its hidden dimensions, I could attune to mine, and shine a light on what this stranger represented for me as a multidimensional practitioner at a very vulnerable time in my practice. The stranger who showed up unannounced that day (a young man I knew only indirectly but who nonetheless seemed so utterly familiar) spoke to me at a visceral level and left an indelible impression. And though we never met, he penetrated my defenses and changed me in immeasurable ways, altering how I saw myself professionally, my sense of place and security in the systems I thought I was working to change.

Something changed for me that day; this was the day I recognized how my own reactions, my tendency to withdraw in the face of coercion, my very alienation kept me from stepping outside my comfort zones, to reach out into the unknown and take risks in extending myself hospitably to others, especially when the stakes seemed high. I failed this young man, someone with whom I identified very deeply. I became the bystander that I never wanted to be by allowing my own rationalizations, internalized fears and
inhibitions to keep me from stepping back and questioning what I am observing and speaking out on practices that made me uncomfortable or uneasy. Leaving him to fend for himself in this seemingly inflexible system – one that appeared incapable of yielding to the kinds of complex, diverse and changing needs and circumstances his story, and perhaps most ironically – mine, called for.

4.1.2 Heeding the call, resisting solitude

This is my hinge place (Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011), that pivotal point where my story intersects powerfully with another and drives the narrative impulse. This critical incident became a catalyst in my existential quest to explore the complex nature of authenticity and hospitality in contemporary public life – to find out what it means to find one’s place, to be at home, and to collaborate in ways that restore a sense of belonging, security and integration in this complicated and often troubled world of practice. It called me to ask myself – what kind of leader are you being called to be at this pivotal time and place in your professional life and development?

The existential dilemma that came to define this project and which I asked of myself many times as this narrative unfolded, is this: what do I do when I become aware of the negation and discounting of another, someone I perceive as vulnerable, when my own position seems uncertain or precarious and the outcome is unknown? Do I reach out, knowing my peers are going in a completely different direction and it is unclear how they will respond? For example, if I found myself in deep water trying to reach out to this stranger, would my colleagues extend themselves and make room on the raft, or would I put myself in peril trying? Such was my quagmire as I perceived it, and philosophically, morally, inclined me to ask the deeper question that underpins much of critical theory – what is the nature of hospitality in what can sometimes appear to be inhospitable world?

This is a question Derrida poses as he considers the limits of hospitality. Derrida claims that in a world of hostile and hospitable relations, there must be limits (Derrida in Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011). Limits to what we are willing to tolerate and allow, knowing the consequences, particularly for those most vulnerable. Ricoeur had compassion for the complexity human beings find themselves in, and balanced critique
with compassion. He acknowledged the contingency of human experience and recognized the perils of taking a stand and make oneself visible when the overall institutional culture does not support it.

To side with this young man, this stranger (as much as I was inclined to do) and question the professional judgement of my peers (as my conscience guided me) was in my mind not only to expose myself to public censure, but to put my own professional standing on the line. These risks seemed all too real and crippled me from acting in accordance with my principles. I could not see outside this polarized frame.

This polarity I contemplated deeply in the development of this work – a dichotomy I have come to see lived in me – between how I perceived myself, my sense of place as a practitioner, what I felt called to do, verses what others seemed to require of me professionally, in my professional role. Identities at irreconcilable odds, insinuating me in contradictions of civil belonging that held my professional life, my very future, in the balance. Could I express myself authentically, transparently, reveal my true alliances, beliefs and perspectives publicly while belonging to professional worlds dominated by neoliberalism?

This impasse (Derrida, 1993; Green, 2009a) held me suspended – for a very long time. At a pragmatic level, I wonder what would have happened if I had said something to the professionals in the conference room that day. If during this informal discussion, rather than responding as I did, in old, inherited and familiar ways – by withdrawing and hiding behind my intellectual mask, I had taken up this platform in the kind of embodied, collaborative leadership style to which I aspired and extended linguistic hospitality by inviting professional associates into dialogue about critical aspects of this young man’s narrative as I perceived it. Would they re-consider their approach if they had a deeper understanding of the potential scarring effects of precarious employment and the systemic changes I was perceiving in the field and in my practice? Or would my own professional standing come into question for not knowing my place and imposing where I did not belong?
4.1.3 Making a place for myself at the table

These ethical dilemmas sent me on a journey of discovery into the complex nature of hospitality in contemporary practice environments dominated by neoliberalism and the complexities of today’s practice environments. Ricoeur strongly urges practitioners not to put their own critical discernment aside in the face of these complexities, but rather to discern meaning for themselves based on their own lived experience and practice wisdom and to trust in their own judgement to guide them and discern for themselves what kind of host they are and strive to become.

I step outside of my solitude and exchange stories on where I intersect with this stranger’s story and how it resonates with larger ethical and existential issues I have grappled with in my practice. I write about founding events in my life, times when I have been displaced and experienced a sense of non-belonging, as a way to explain why human contingency and diversity in public sector organizations matters so much to me and why I believe workplace culture can and should transform to become more inclusive of diverse voices. The time has come for practitioners to make a place for themselves at the table and bring their stories forward in order to foster greater diversity in our institutions and the strangers who enter our practice spaces each and every day.
Chapter 5

5 Je me souviens, I remember: Founding events, memories, recollections

What might have been is an abstraction.
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present

Maritain (1944) once wrote, to deny any of senses of who I am, I cut myself in two. When we minimize the significance of culture in all its dimensions from public discourse we lose our ethical capacity for critical discernment and meaning-making in the contemporary world. This has been my experience, by bracketing my own perceptions in the field, and my readings and impressions of what I experience, I cut myself off from my past, my lived experience and deeper sense of purpose on my professional path, and in so doing I inhibited myself from accompanying others on theirs.

5.1.1 Exchange of memories

Exchange of memories is the second step in the translational process (Ricoeur, 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000) and involves sharing memories, and reminiscences on founding events in my life to provide some perspective on where I am located and why I hold the perspective I do. The stranger who arrived unexpectedly, penetrated my defenses and put me in touch with my own contingency by showing me contradictions in my practice that allowed me to see myself more clearly and to position my story in a broader narrative.
Kearney (2007) writes “when we translate our own wounds into the language of strangers and retranslate the wounds of strangers into our own language that healing, and reconciliation can take place” (p. 154).

I write about how this encounter brought me in touch with founding events in my life, awakening the stranger that lived in me. I struggle to gain a deeper understanding of this incident by chronicling what is means to be a multidimensional professional (Seigel, 2005; Seigel in Sennett, 2012) in contemporary practice where differences are negated, defining this journey as a perilous quest (Şenocak, 2009; 2016) for integrity. I share my narrative as a means of discovering more embodied, integral and authentic forms of relating and presence, built on transparency, self-awareness, ethical conduct, mutual trust and recognition (Avolio, Gardner & Walumbwa, 2007).

5.1.2 L’Etranger: Encountering the stranger within

This is where I enter the story and where my work of memory and mourning (Ricoeur, 2004; 2008; 2012) begins. My own incomplete journey and what Ricoeur (1996) describes as the founding events which shape the way in which this narrative unfolds, the tone of my work, its cadence and how I show up in my encounters. It is a translational journey (Ricoeur, 2006; Scott-Baumann, 2010; Shadd, 2012) driven by a desire to reconcile the stranger within, one I have been wrestling with for a long time, and to bring these lessons home.

Growing up in a leafy neighbourhood on Montreal’s West Island, you would think that I, with my English mother and French father, would have found my place of acceptance and belonging. True, I was at home in Montreal, and for a very long time I did belong, it was the only home I knew. But owing to my complicated heritage, my Englishness being the least of it, our sense of belonging – mine and my families – was far more precarious than I could have imagined from the security of my childhood home. And so, the dream – of streets teeming with diversity, lively, cosmopolitan culture, blending and coalescing in all kinds of unpredictable and electrifying ways, of belonging to a place and a society – would be snatched away in a milli-second once the climate turned ugly. This is the Montreal I remember, je me souviens.
It really was not until my family, along with thousands of others who did not fit with the ideal vision of Quebec – neighbours, friends, family – left the increasingly hostile and tense atmosphere of Quebec in the turbulent wake of the Parti Québécois’ rise to power and the first separatist referendum, that I came to a deeper sense of human diversity, my own and those around me. It was in Toronto’s inner city that some of my more unclaimed parts began to surface and I first encountered the stranger within: if not French enough for the French, who was I then? Definitely not English – a French Anglophone, non-status métis/Chippewa, non-racialized African-American, closeted queer, even god hardly seemed to recognize me.

Thus began my journey, one that started long before I was born, one of displacement, of non-being at home, a stranger among strangers. This is a very old story only mine unfolds under the searing fluorescent lights of the tall office towers of the federal public service, your local hospital or school, the cubicle next door. I am your co-worker, your teammate. Your next new hire.

You may not recognize me. I am the stranger within.

It has taken me some time to introduce myself like this. As a professional I have not always been this forthcoming. I come from private people on all sides of my family – not accustomed to sharing our history outside the protective inner sanctum of trusted friends and family – if at all. For many years I had difficulty understanding the reasons for this protective withdrawal. Since becoming the first (of several, who knew?) to come out within a large, diverse and multiracial, multilingual family and as an aspiring professional striving to define myself on my own terms while struggling to support my family, I have come to deeper and more complicated understandings of the nuances and complexities of passing – not she, he...

This is how Derrida speaks to me – it is the absences and losses, the sense of displacement, the Sephardic Jew from colonial Algeria who is also French and represents a problem to both cultures for different reasons. Derrida’s (1982) commentary on différance, societies autoimmune response to difference (Derrida in Miller, 2007) and his telling intimate correspondence with Cixous (2004) is to me a shibboleth on the subtleties
and nuances of passing – “not Bar Mitzvah but communion, not circumcision but baptism…” (p. 76). Here of course she is referring to Derrida’s past as an assimilated Jew, something she knew much about as a Jewish, Algerian, French, woman identified woman, *the love that dare not speak its name*.

This kind of vigilance, one can only describe as an acute sense of self as an outsider, a stranger, someone who does not belong. Being aware of this displacement in others, the codes, the subtle cues, the strange, unnamed sense of familiarity, strong identifications that I cannot fully explain or understand. This affinity is tribal, as Marda describes in *The Last September*; …we look like you and we speak like you… well almost but we are not. Well we are not you, are we…well we are not so much a people as a tribe really, and of course tribal people always prefer their own…even if their own come from a different tribe... (Warner, 1999, np)

This identification is constituted not so much on sameness, but a shared sense of exclusion and non-belonging in civil space, of being an outsider. This is what I take to mean what Şenocak (2009; 2016) calls perilous kinship. This kind of vigilance is constituted not so much on mutuality and fellow feeling, but rather an acute and visceral recognition of what might be submerged underneath the surface.

### 5.1.3 Myself as another

The stranger who appeared to me that day, like an apparition, woke me up to who I am. Truth be told I felt like they were talking about me. *Lady Jane* as my father would say. The girl who refused to be constrained or defined by the narrow-mindedness of others. Who knew what she was made of and what she was or was not prepared to do. For a long time, I had forgotten about this courageous and sensitive girl who thought she could overcome any obstacle in her path, slay dragons and rule the world.

This perilous encounter (Şenocak, 2009; 2016) put me in touch with my own contingency, evoking the stranger that lived in me. Surfacing deeply buried experiences
of estrangement and an acute awareness of myself as a stranger. This moment reminded me forcefully of who I am, when suddenly I saw this young man through their eyes, a totalizing gaze, and suddenly the walls came down and all these thoughts came rushing in:

Passing will not protect you, it did not protect me as I navigated the frigidity of institutional life, the queer jokes I let slide one too many times in the lunchroom. What did passing do for my mother’s mother, Isabel? It did not protect her from stones in the schoolyard and called the “n” word (only to become school principal, mind you)! Or my father’s mother Leah, concealing her Metis roots, did not protect her people torn apart on both sides of the Detroit river, she never closed doors on anyone. What about my father, who thought he escaped all this and spoke the right language and did all the right things by acculturating his children to the English majority. Hiding did not protect him or his family from being tossed out along with hundreds of thousands of others not considered pure enough for a Quebec in the passionate throws of French Nationalism. Let me be clear, the government did not throw us out, instead it was a thousand indignities at the depanneur as we bought milk, the post office, and on the street, daily incivilities that told us we were no longer welcome and did not belong. Perhaps it should be no surprise then that my father would be dismissed from his job, and along with every family on our street save one – erecting “for sale” signs on their lawns and practically giving their homes away.

When I found myself in the inner city of Scarborough as a young woman, with its knives and gangs and cocaine locker busts, I secretly prayed every night in the privacy of own room, if I ever get out of here – I will never forget, Je me souviens: the people, this place and what I have seen and experienced here. I think of Shield’s (2000) words:

unless you’re lucky, unless you’re healthy, fertile, unless you’re loved and fed, unless you’re clear about your sexual direction, unless you’re offered what others are offered. You go down into darkness, down into despair (p. 224).

This is what brought me to struggle for justice and human diversity in the public service, in healthcare, in education, in human services. What brought me to work on Residential
schools and researching indigenous children in care for alternative dispute resolution. What brought me to evaluate social and cultural programs and initiatives supporting newcomer and immigrant youth and what compelled me develop mentoring, civic engagement/citizenship and leadership programs for marginalized and at-risk youth.

I know what it does to people when they feel they have to hide who they are to survive and make a living in this world that can be so unjust and unfair in all kinds of insidious ways. The trauma of cultural displacement and marginalization inflicts wounds that can last not only a lifetime, but generations.

Estranged parts of me woke up that day as I overheard this group of professionals informally discussing this young man’s case. I sensed all too well what this stranger was up against. A human being who as far as I could tell, barely had the chance to figure out his own life path before the system and its rules of engagement came crashing in on him to put him in his place. How can I articulate the poignancy of this encounter? While I never knew this young man personally, his trajectory nonetheless collided with mine. It was a conversation changer. Seeing this young man through the eyes of my peers and professional associates was like peering into a broken mirror, a fragmented lens. Not only did I not resonate with what I was seeing and hearing in their discussion of his case, I experienced their conversation as subtly dehumanizing, causing me to reflexively raise my guard, and recoil in self-protection.

All these latent influences were stirred up and evoked in this encounter. In that moment, I had reached my limit. What Cixous (2004) describes as a resistance to the “repetitive compulsion of debt, owning the truth…” (p. 100). Enough! No more being bogged down by the troubles and limitations of this world, acquiescing to others! No more inheriting! I could feel myself closing to the world, and going inward to a protected place, a wordless place, uncomplicated, free – where no one imposes, and I am left to my own devises. A place where no one can touch me. And yet the face of this stranger continued to haunt me, draw me out of my solitude and I struggled to resist this urge to escape, to ignore and walk away.
Resisted being *pushed out* of this public arena I have struggled so hard to enter and become part of. There was something larger within me, conscious, awake, present and attuned to the estranged parts of me, that called me out. That needed me to more fully attune, show up and be of service to the cacophony of voices within and surrounding me.

Imagine the faces of young people I have known – feisty, original, brave, and my own self at that age, 17, 18 – so crushingly filled with range and scope, of raw potential. The wildly disparate communities to which I belong – friends, teachers and mentors, broad assortment of relatives, family members, siblings and cousins – each representing different orientations, ways of being, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds, races, generations and heritages, all eclectically co-habitating in me. Divergent parts that desire to cohere, to belong together, within a common language, a culture, a place, a society, an organization. To fit into the broader scheme somehow and see myself reflected. But not at all cost. Not if it means suppressing and denying significant parts of myself, my history, substantial parts of who I am and where I come from. And so, the union I seek is an imperfect one, one that is comprised of irreconcilable parts.

I thought of those who recognized this multiplicity in me, and rather than try to tame or control it, or mold and deform it toward their own instrumental ends and professional interests, were willing to make room for me at the table. Without perhaps knowing the intimate details of my story, yet recognizing my distinctness, accepted me in all my strangeness, sitting shoulder to shoulder with me, and creating spaces for me to inhabit and become who I needed to be, to find my own way through the impasses I confronted. A deeply hospitable gesture that acknowledged one day I too would be one to lead.

This all struck me, as I stood there in the employment office that day, under those searing fluorescent lights, with my agenda, and timelines and expert advice. Though wordless and unexpressed, my body knew – this is not right, this is not how it was supposed to be and how I am meant to enter this story.

I knew I could not remain as things were, the ascription, the small acts of self-betrayal, of missing things on the periphery of my field of perception, without knowing exactly what. The imperceptible sense of loss that formed a hole in the center of my being, the
confusion and disorientation, no, I knew I needed to return differently. I return to this place with fresh eyes, after having taken this learning journey and developed a greater understanding of my narrative and how I am situated, including the broader social forces and contexts that inform my story. Returning from a place of critical self-awareness, I return as an outsider witness, with a clearer sense of my place in the world and my broader intentions and re-enter this landscape and describe what I see. This process of reconciliation, of returning to the field from a different, more expanded place, is what Lyle and Gehart (2000), explain “enables painful memories of the past to be understood anew” (p. 79).

5.1.4 Looking back with fresh eyes

When we have been displaced it is as though something essential is taken from us and we adopt certain strategies and tools to manage and survive, and this sets us up to behave in a certain way in the future when we are faced with a situation that reminds us of the original event. What we know about ourselves thus becomes filtered through a narrative of loss and limitation, where we feel compelled to get back what was stolen from us.

This perspective filters how we hear and see things and I wanted to capture this in my writing, to embody it. I was guarded and separated from my colleagues and professional associates, but I was also separated from myself. It is this estranged part of myself, the part that had become submerged beneath market and neoliberal imperatives, I wanted to recover in this work. Seeing the public through disillusioned eyes, misaligned with the institutions and people I thought I was there to serve, and alienated from my profession and professional identity, it is my alienation I want to capture. I sought to capture the tone, atmosphere of the work and what it speaks to. Shine a light on the background energies and influences underlying my narrative, the subtext and undertones; “feel the cadences and timbre…the physical and sensory dimension of the text” (Cole, in Allen & Bernofsky 2013, p. 9). I adopted what Smith (2009) calls simple awareness:

awareness of what is so real and essential, so hidden in plain sight all around us, all the time, that we have to keep reminding ourselves over and over: ‘this is water. This
is water. It is unimaginably hard to do this, to stay conscious and alive in the adult world day in and day out (my emphasis, p. 265).

To my eyes the world appears devoid of meaning, people fragmented from one another in all kinds of subtle ways. I am unsure about my own place in this fragmented world. It was as though I could not find my way into the public: it was closed off to me, to use de Visscher’s (2001) expression, it was “a world in which it is not possible to dwell” explaining, “to be deprived of a home, to be unable to incarnate one's existence, means to become all at once strangely transparent and invisible” (p. 123).

5.1.5 Moods, concerns, awakenings

I revisit this place of suffering, alienation and awakening in The Stranger in Contemporary Practice. The atmosphere, mood and texture in which this story is set, its “cadence” to use Lee’s (1998) word, a low-grade hum, ever present, but barely perceptible – flickering in the background like a moth – is in some senses the feature character of this story, the ineffable thing I sought to capture and understand.

The fluorescent lights and windowless rooms seemed an apt metaphor for the sterility and closedness of contemporary public life and service. A constant drain on my energy and psychic resources, its cumulative effects on my mind and body – emotional exhaustion, cynicism and burnout, were straining me to capacity and I knew I could not carry on like this indefinitely without incurring irreparable damage to my mind, body and spirit. What I knew for sure – whatever it was I was contending with was compromising my sense of self, alienating me from the conditions of my work and the people I encountered each and every day. Most acute was my isolation, how alone I felt, my estrangement from colleagues, professional associates, community connections, friends.
Chapter 6

6 A perilous quest: From disjointed to phenomenal encounters

*QUEST*: always to be ‘on the way’, between an irremediable hopelessness and a final reconciliation. And it is because this is true that life required commitment or, better, passion. Life is an adventure; it is the struggle of freedom in the face of many limitations and constant uncertainty

— (Rabil, 1967, p. 242)

This is a cautionary tale about the inner life of organizations, the complexity of human experience and its separation from human systems (Smith, 2009). When I embarked on this quest for meaning and to understand my place in contemporary professional life, I was so alienated from my profession, I was not certain whether I could communicate at all. A crippling condition which compromised my professional identity, and for a time, made it difficult for me to see myself out there in the world – of professional connections, ties and alliances – that is, to imagine bringing myself, “my being” to use Heidegger’s (1962) expression, to public life.

Fifteen years as a knowledge broker and workplace consultant for the public sector and I was more than a little spent, I had entirely lost my bearings. And yet my pain was utterly unnamable. There was nothing tangible I could put my finger on and say: *this is what ails me*. Instead it was a thousand small indignities – the long stare of public servants as the elevator door closed in my face, averted eyes in the boardroom, the way the air left the room as the door closed. The coldness, the incivility. Like people were not really there. My friends, colleagues and I coined the phrase “freezer burn” to describe the coldness of bureaucratic life experienced routinely in the nation’s capital and we readily exchanged anecdotes, comparing sad and classic tales of frigidity and dejection over sandwiches. *But*
I was not immune. The coldness of the social monad affected me more than I let on to colleagues over lunch.

On the ride home, I welcomed the privacy of the crowded bus, relieved not to be spoken to by strangers, or impinged upon, each minding our own business and affairs. These stolen moments, the silence this afforded – a small respite from my day. Finally, alone with my thoughts, I could look out the window, let my mind wander, muse, and release the troubles of my day. The imposing brown and grey office towers, however, never fully receded from view. From the ByWard Market to Westboro beach you could not escape its constant stare, a reminder of bureaucratic life in this nation’s capital. Regrettably this imposing gaze followed me into the field.

6.1.1 Reflectere: Bending back

I wanted to juxtapose what was going on in the outer material reality, with my perception of the lifeworld as it appeared to me then, so fragmented and cold. I take the reader back to this place to imagine what it must have been like. The third and final phase in the translational process is about witnessing oneself from an expanded place, by turning back to oneself and one’s lived experience with a renewed sense of understanding (Ricoeur, 1996; Lyle & Gehart, 2000). This is akin to what Taylor & White (2000) would call the reflexive turn, “reflectere” which means “to bend back”, by looking back upon oneself with new eyes. This backdrop or lifeworld provides the context for my encounters with the stranger and the unseen others who show up in this story, my professional associates whose life stories are obscured or hidden from view.

These encounters, taken together, brought me to expanded understandings of different parts of myself, revealing things I could not see then, I was too barricaded. Looking back with new eyes, I now have compassion for the person I was then, the limitations I was facing, and the challenges I was up against, including my own fears, contingencies and vulnerabilities and by extension I believe I now have a better understanding of my colleagues and how they showed up in this story and the constraints that limit people’s ability to act in authentic ways.
6.1.2 The disenchanted field of practice

I go back to this place, what I saw was a closed, meaningless world where social action appeared nearly impossible, and one which appeared to be slowly closing in on me. My interactions seemed to be becoming more limited and constrained, only further perpetuating my sense of alienation and view of myself as being up against a dehumanized system. The more isolated I became the more polarized and closed things appeared. Leading me at moments to feel so utterly isolated and estranged from those I encountered in the field.

What I encountered was a pervasive atmosphere of “dullness, monotony and tactile sterility” (Sennett, 1994, p. 16), a constant grey that seemed to cloud my vision. Even in some of the more remote and small coastal and rural areas, I was beginning to see traces of what Tocqueville, defined so characteristically as evidence of the age of individualism. This is characterized by a strong orientation towards self-reliance certainly, but also can lead to civic solitude as Sennett (1994) describes, “wherein each person behaves as though he is a stranger to the destiny of all the others” (p. 323).

Being in the field make me realize just how alienated I had become. Sure, I was out there, in the field, on the front lines tackling the important issues. But how engaged was I? Was I really there – immersed, connected, thinking deeply, and resonating with others – alive and awake to possibility? Or was I simply appearing to be there – managing my role, functioning as best I could – applying my analytic skills on behalf of others without ever fully implicating myself in the dialogue?

My practice was becoming more and more consumed by evaluative measures and accountability frameworks, by processes and procedures, with buzzwords and shiny objects, and less and less with engaged leadership, collaboration and co-creation. At a certain point every presentation, report and position paper started to look the same – in Kundera’s (2000) words,
same ordering of the table of contents, under the same headings, in the same journalistic phrasing, the same vocabulary, and the same style... the same ranking of things deem[ed] important or insignificant (p. 18)

I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable and strained in the field and was finding myself more and more displaced in my role and function. I had arrived at my intended destination, and yet it “does not appear to be where I want to be...” (de Visscher, 2001, p. 123). Words had become clichés and platitudes, nothing more than false hopes and empty promises, as Smith (2009) explains, “not quite convincing in their optimism” offering “more of a willed solution than an instinctive or deeply felt one” (p. 282). I was saying buzzwords that sounded good, but I no longer believed – masking over unsettling questions about the real complexity of the problems at hand and my growing sense of uncertainty and helplessness in the face of them.

An Ottawa-based consultant, I had come to expect a degree of detachment in the tall office towers of the federal public service (yes, I had had more than one elevator door close in my face to the long stare of public servants, entirely unmoved by the person [me!] needing in). Still, I expected different, more, walking into a church basement in Cape Breton, or an NGO in small town Alberta. All those philanthropic volunteer, charity, community and grassroots organizations across this country, focused on representation, citizen engagement and service delivery (Swift, 1999). If it was benevolence, connection and mutual recognition I sought, what I found in the field left me perplexed and wanting.

What surprised me most was what Taylor (1991a) describes as classic atomistic behaviour, “individuals seeking his or her own interest without regard to others” (p. 15), with people seemingly less and less bound to others common projects and alliances. People, even the most community – and justice – minded among them, fragmented from each other. How very strange, to be together like this, convening on issues yet here we are, set apart, in a kind of civil abyss – each so utterly alone. Sennett (1994) describes my experience in the field so fittingly as a kind of “co-existence of people inward turned, tolerating one another out of mutual indifference” (p. 323).
It was my body that alerted me to this, surfacing thoughts and feelings, barely perceptible, and incredibly confusing, but there nonetheless. At first this manifested as a vague but unyielding sense of loss. It was almost as though I had forgotten something, but I could not name what. As Byatt (2009) describes in her anthology, *Memory*: “how do we know we know if we can’t remember (p. xii)”?

What was I to do with this inchoate sense of loss, flickering in the back of my mind like a moth? If I could not name or even conceive of what it meant, how was I to trust it? Was I prepared to risk opening to what my body was awakening in me, even if it meant asking deeper, more unsettling questions? Questions in which my professional life, the life I shared with significant others, my very subsistence would be implicated? At first, I viewed these early inklings with skepticism. After all, did I not have the life I thought I wanted? Was I prepared to question all of this for what seemed nothing more than a vague and indefinable sense loss?

So subtle and insidious, its earliest manifestations were difficult to decipher, a condition Taylor (1991b) so marvelously characterizes as a separation from “manifold engagement in the world”. It was as though life had lost its luster, like things no longer touched me. Incapable of being absorbed, of bodily knowing, of taking in and receiving life, I began missing things. Like the Hawthorn, I passed en route to work, its twisted branches reaching towards the roadside near my stop. How long had I passed this thorny brush – its dark red fruits tossed along the path? How many days had I walked right by, indifferent to its flowerings even as it revealed itself in tiny white clusters of blossom petals on the tips of leafy branches? I, in my own complete world, it’s strange earthy odor lingering in my hair.

This image of the Hawthorn on my daily route speaks, in de Visscher’s (2001) words, “of indifference and of a world to which one has lost access” (p.122). What she calls

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4 Here I evoke Shield’s (2000) passage in *Unless*: “Unless is the worry word of the English language. It flies like a moth around your ear. You hardly hear and yet, everything depends on its breathy presence” (p. 224).
“secretus”, from Latin, which represents “what has been separated and set apart...and what belongs together” (de Visscher, 2001, p. 122). Could this disturbed sense of place, at first so subtly experienced as removal and estrangement from the world around me, from life itself, represent an early manifestation of a deeper more pervasive condition, what Taylor (1991a) describes as a sense of disenchantment – namely, the sense “that life had become impoverished [with a] loss of resonance, depth, and loss of meaning and fading of moral horizons” (p. 110)?

The truth is I had reached an impasse.

Like Laura, in Cunningham’s The Hours, at the time of her malaise, her disenchantment – “there is virtually no indication that there is something else she wants more than the life she has” (Calhoun, 2008, p. 203). Calhoun (2008) explains, this “absence of some alternative...is part of what makes this particular way of losing one’s self so devastating. One loses the only self one wishes to have” (p. 202). As de Visscher (2001) explains, this narrative is truer for us today, the impasses we face, the sense there is no going back to how things were,

it reflects a particular cultural and spiritual stance that is entirely characteristic of our modern age...we no longer believe in the ultimate redemption of human existence and feel that it is our duty to surrender all illusions and face a cold and cruel fate (p. 129).

How else to explain how long I ignored the intense and acute symptoms that entered my life uninvited – my “disturbed relations with others, social isolation, loneliness, ambivalence, insecurity, identity confusion, and vague bodily complaints” (Van Den Berg in Mook, 1984, p. 208)? For a long time, I stifled these sensations that seemed to have no point or resolution. Increasingly my public life was making less and less sense to me and I began experiencing increasing dissonance and incoherence (Sennett, 1994). More and more I found myself reducing, minimizing, stifling, rationalizing away the growing divisions and tensions that arose within me, divisions within and between my thoughts and feelings, my mind and body, myself and others. I was drinking a little more than I should. The food was a great comfort and the company reassuring – but not enough
to quell the seemingly irreconcilable tensions and contradictions that were rising up and threatening to overtake me.

Much as I tried to push on and ignore the confusing and contradictory voices within me, I began to have this disembodied sense that my voice was not my own. Like I no longer recognized myself. It was as though I had entered into a fog and became incapable of seeing things clearly, of separating out my own thoughts and ideas from what was out there in the world – what seemed an inevitable part of the professional landscape. It was all so permeable and diffuse, out there, in here, it all got so mixed up. Things just all started to look the same, grey, grey, grey – becoming what Smith (2009) would forebodingly describe as “the waters I was swimming in”.

6.1.3 The impossible passage

The great teacher is the bringer of pain and limitation and this was the impasse I confronted. The impasse can be likened to an impossible passage, a gateway that cannot be passed through or crossed in the old way. Derrida (1993) defines this kind of impasse as an “aporia”, namely:

the difficult or the impracticable, the impossible passage, the refused, denied or prohibited passage, indeed the non-passage, which can be fact be something else, the event of a coming or of a future advent (evenement de venue ou d’avenir) (p. 8).

The existential quest begins in Borren’s (2010) view when “something unexpected happens, when things break down or when for other reasons our attention is awakened, that the automatic pilot of everyday implicit understanding makes place for the circle of explicit understanding or interpretation” (p. 23). For me it was this single moment of rupture, a day like any other, as I stood with a group of professionals in a hotel venue in a small Ontario town. As I stood in the reception hall by the muffin tray, listening to the professionals talking about the youth who simply would not cooperate with agency rules, I could feel myself recoiling and words just utterly failed me. What can I say? My body refused. In that instance of bodily refusal – my being acknowledged what my intellect, in
its relentless single-minded pursuit of achievement, had yet to accept: my growing discomfort with my life as I had been living it.

This communicative rupture represented both a moment of crisis and opportunity. It held the potential to wake me up to what lay beneath the surface of appearances, to discover that there was more to this story than meets the eye. Exposing hard truths, cracking open my ideals, shattering illusions and uncovering fault lines in the impressions I held of myself as an accomplished professional and change agent. If grasped, this moment of rupture held the potential to profoundly alter my social practices and perceptions, my being-in-the-world, and my own sense of professional integrity in ways I could not even begin to imagine.

6.1.4 Reconstituting my identity as a practitioner

This rupture, and the disorientation it caused, compelled me to ask, as de Visscher (2001) does, “do you feel comfortable, do you feel at home” (p. 120)? It drew attention to disturbances in my environment – I experienced a kind of awakening to the extreme social isolation and displacement I had been experiencing but suppressing. It forced me to look at my own situatedness in the field and see myself as I was then, I had become “a wanderer uprooted, no longer at home in the world” (Sennett, 1994, p. 130)? Alone with my thoughts, isolated and set apart. I become self-enclosed in my own private world, sealed off from others, incapable of relating or taking in what was going in around me.

The truth is I had become almost unreachable, even to myself. What I saw was a world closed, dehumanized and dehumanizing. A nihilistic world where social action appeared nearly impossible, and one which was slowly closing and tightening in on me. My interactions seemed to be becoming more limited and constrained, only further perpetuating my sense of alienation and view of myself as being up against a dehumanized system. Leading me at moments to feel so utterly isolated and estranged from those I encountered in the field. My colleagues and professional associates seeming less and less like allies and seeming to me more like “enemies of anything intelligent or sensitive or beautiful” (Rae, 2006, p. 191), an affront to my authenticity and sensibilities.
Rather than close myself off to my vulnerability – and remain infinitely alone with my thoughts, in my own private world, I could not do that anymore – I surrendered to my sense of loss, anxiety, separation and fragmentation – of inadequacy and confusion and listened to my body’s imperatives. In being fully present and paying attention to my embodied presence in the field, I realized, in Potter’s (2006) words what a “violated person” I had become – sensing myself as others may have perceived me then – as someone who “no longer feels at home in the social world – indeed if she ever did – but rather feels alienated from it” (p. 128).

In letting down my guard I woke up and started to look around, and for the first time in a very long time, I actually took people in rather than closing myself off to others. *I sensed their presence*. It was my humanity that reawakened that day making me realize I was not alone. And so as I stood there, a fully embodied human being, attuned to my body’s resistance – something else happened. It took me out of my own pain, to a different kind of pain – the pain and suffering of others.

The force of neoliberalism and the imperatives of my work not only blinded me to alternate meanings, it also made me inaccessible and unavailable to others. My own sense of separation within this practice space kept me from asking deeper questions about my own practices, questioning my own ethical concerns about what I was experiencing and seeing humanity in the social workers. In confronting my professional mask and being willing to embrace the complexity of my own condition, the “immediacy of the spell was broken” (Davey, 1999, p. 6) and alternate realities and experiences became available to me outside of the narrow frame in which I had been practicing and perceiving.

It forced me to look at my own practices and ask – was I in fact using my intellect, “as a personal armour to establish authority or distance rather than exchange” (Williamson, 1993, p. xiv)? In confronting my intellectual mask, I punctured through the invisible and arbitrary divide between myself and others. It made me realize that I had become not only untouchable but incapable of reaching out hospitably to others, of engaging in the fullness of my humanity in practice spaces. I suddenly became more conscious of how my own defense mechanisms, my tendency to withdraw in the face of incivility,
inhospitality, inadvertently and unintentionally closed me off and foreclosed on my capacity to reach out hospitably to others.

It was my humanity that reawakened that day, Kahane (2010) would say, this was the moment I realized I was implicated in the problem, not outside of it. In this moment of rupture, I realized that the very challenges I thought I was struggling against, I was replicating in my practices. By implicating myself in this way I was no longer on the outside looking in, like a passive spectator, or detached observer – but rather was beginning to come to terms with my own engagement in this story and my relative sense of agency in the face of such challenges.

I failed this young man, and equally I failed myself, by not living with integrity and practicing the values I espoused. Confronting myself in this way caused me to step back and ask deeper questions – to become more conscious – about my perceptions, engagements and responses to the world, to look at my own responsiveness and social responsibility – inviting me to become culpable for my relationships with others, more fully engaged, more willing to show up and be prepared to do the work required to shift the culture from within. This was no longer my own private inner struggle. Now I could see it was about relocating the struggle, from a deeply private one – inside of myself where it lay dormant or festered in self-referentiality – to one that lived out there in the world of ideas, thoughts and actions where it can be shared, explored, problematized and resolved collectively. I knew then, regardless of outcome I must try to communicate from a deeper, more integrated place, the imperatives of my work, the things that hurt me, that constrained me at this challenging crossroads in my development as an emerging professional. These insights urged me to show up and be present even if the world was not as I hoped or imaged it to be, knowing there are strangers our there navigating these waters.

6.1.5 Returning to public life enlarged

For me, returning from this quest and becoming re-integrated into public life from a deeper more expansive place is about the complicated process of negotiating these pragmatic realities without losing touch with my own interconnectedness, my humanity –
what connects me to others, my responsibilities and commitments, my ties to people and projects. Finding those hinge points that connect us together, the commonalities we share, to make this work, the constant demands, the aggravating institutional and technological imperatives and the inevitable foibles and breakdowns in communication that can and do arise, worthwhile.

Of not becoming so overwhelmed by surface appearances, so alienated – that I allow my fears to keep me from digging deeper, finding common ground, or hinge points (Kearney & Semonovitch, 2011) and recognizing our commonality. This was new territory for me. I remember a time in my professional life when it seemed I was utterly alone out there, fishing in the waters of experience – and that I needed to brace myself and make my own way in this inhospitable world. “A slumped back against the weight of the world” as Walker (1979) once wrote. The sad and funny thing – I never was. I belonged to all of it, the entire human landscape, the smartboard prezis, the daunting icebreakers, the long corridors entirely lacking in signage, standing room receptions, bad lighting and appetizers on awkward little napkins. And on rare and inspired occasions, meaningful moments of dialogue where something hidden was revealed, a moment of mutual presence, or surprising alliances from unlikely places emerging, and strangers who arrive out of nowhere to remind me of who I am and where I come from. I think of practitioners I now meet, who despite institutional constraints and limitations, extend hospitality in whatever way they can, in large and small ways, these moments are illuminating, surfacing thoughts and feelings that may not otherwise be visible and reminding me anything, everything is possible.

Everything, complicated as it was, was all there waiting. I just needed to open to and access the hidden complexity that surrounded me, not be afraid of being overwhelmed and consumed by the more painfully oppressive, constrictive and threatening aspects of institutional culture – the searing fluorescent lights, the long stare of public servants, public cynicism, apathy and indifference, the reels and reels of documents looking more and more identical to me each day. I now have deeper compassion for the person I was then, remembering my own desperation to keep my head above water, negotiate my own thoughts and perceptions, while trying to get on the same page with everyone else, say
and do what I thought was expected, what I imagined others needed to hear and required of me as the focused and credible leader I took myself to be. How absolutely exhausting!

I needed to carve out some private space in this overexposed professional world, turn off the phone, shut down the computer and become present to what was emerging for me. To find ways to more effectively inhabit my practice spaces in ways that gave me room to breathe, to think and act from a deeper more integrated place. Trusting that I could penetrate my defenses and find my way through the hurried, harried professional world I inhabited, where the timeclock never stopped and one hour equalled 50 minutes if that even. Where everything was so tightly managed, there was no room for surprises or unknowns. For anything different. Sensing that other professionals too must have their own responses to these pressures, their own ways of coping, even if they did not discuss it, or think they have time to even contemplate such a thing. Their own story, and while different from mine, was right there, waiting to be told if only I were a little less threatened, less defended, if I were only willing to try and open this dialogue and have the conversation. Underneath it all, I needed to feel secure I would not lose ground by re-entering the fray of public life – the human community, from this deeper more integrated place. What would happen if I opened myself more fully to the messy, complicated, and utterly infuriating world of extremely busy, distracted people, whose endless and insurmountable institutional demands were just a click away.

Practicing in an imperfect world where people do not always behave as I would like has its difficulties. But staying present, working with what shows up, probing into the unknown, and attuning to its imperatives, which now, more than ever need this kind of presence and engagement. *This is the work*, the work of cultivating healthier, psychologically safer, more integrated and inclusive workplaces, and making space for deliberative practices and civil spaces that invite differences.

Being present and attuning to what is showing up, while remaining open with myself and others, this is my greatest challenge now as I re-open this dialogue about the complex challenges arising in my professional practice at this incredible time of global and technological change. I am interested in what we, as professionals, can reasonably expect
of one another to sustain a semblance of trust, fairness, responsiveness and mutuality within our human systems and the organizational cultures we occupy. The impulse driving this narrative is my pragmatic belief that new and emergent forms of collaborative action are possible within institutions, if we are willing to risk opening to them, that is, not stifling and resisting what arises, the unknowns – while remaining conscious of oneself and others. Conscious that is, of the pivotal bonds that tie us together as complex human beings, and the hidden truths that reveal themselves within the fragile, often inhospitable and austere public-sector environments to which we belong, occupy and serve.
Chapter 7

Epilogue

gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe.

— (Camus, 1942, p. 154)

As I slow down and consider with greater intention, the inherent value of naming the complexities that inform my practices and responses to the world, I bring these understandings to words, despite, or in perhaps in resistance to, the espoused truths that prevail about “the way things are”. I wanted to invite the reader into my lived experience of negotiating contemporary professional life and some of the existential struggles I have confronted.

Working through this translation, I have had my share of responses, some unpredictable and surprising. There were times I remember thinking to myself that I didn't realize I felt so strongly or passionately about my experiences of displacement. I had very powerful emotions that came from the sense that it was the unique character of my own life that was being violated in subtle and unnamable ways, ways I could not name or explain, that compelled me to toward this project, as Atkins (2008) explains, "it is our lives that we lose, which is why we experience hope, despair, longing, regret and the like, because we care about our lives, our caring endows objective time with phenomenal qualities” (p. 92).

Having embarked on this quest to make meaning of my professional existence, of contemporary public life in these fractured and troubled times – I realize and appreciate that however disjointed, perilous and painfully contradicting, my public life matters. As Smith (2009) puts it, "no matter how many people have dived before, or have watched other people dive...this is you, diving now, and it should be thought about, and there should be a wonder in it" (p. 263).
I bring my multidimensional self (Seigel, 2005; Seigel in Sennett, 2012) to these pages, exposing deeper dimensions of my public life and professional existence in the service of something larger than fears and inhibitions that keep me guarded – to enter new, unknown terrain in search of deeper, more authentic and inherently just ways of connecting with one another in professional venues and capacities. Ways that set a new tone in institutional life that is hospitable to the differences between us and brings a spirit of generosity to the distinct, surprising, strange and unexpected ways people show up in our lives. These encounters remind us we do not always have the answers and cannot possibly know or do everything on our own, and sometimes we need painful reminders of this. Paying attention to what the stranger represents for me in my practice gave me the resolve to say finally: today, today will be different, and in the words of Brossard (1988), “the difference is that I cannot live deferred” (p. 51). This was my painful reminder, I had reached my limit with closed institutions, the deferrals, the sense of displacement and incivilities, the coldness and invisibility. Just as I had reached my limit, a stranger arrived and whispered in my ear:

you have wandered long enough, the time now is to stay, even when you do not feel welcome. This is the practice, be present with those who may oppose you, be present with those who need your light, no difference. Tell them ‘I am here’ and know you are not alone.

Living this story has not been easy. Despite the precariousness this rupture in my professional existence so painfully interjected into my life, as Bambach describes “like an unpredictable, unexpected future...that broke in unexpectedly at that moment” (p. 266). I learned not only to accept, but to come to terms with, the contingency and fragility of human life, and to mourn the possibilities of the past (Bambach, 2011). Not to erase or transcend these experiences, but so the past could live in me in a different way.

My intention in recounting this narrative has been to try and understand, if not reconcile or integrate the profoundly divergent, and at times irreconcilable needs of the diverse worlds to which I belong, occupy and serve. A perilous quest which has called me to come to terms with estranged and unclaimed parts of myself in order to become more
present to the practice spaces I inhabit and strangers in my midst. Pearson (1986) explains:

Paradoxically often it is in resolving what sometimes seems an intolerable opposition that people find more fully who they are. They come to know themselves moment by moment by the decisions they make, trying to reconcile their care for others with their responsibility to themselves (p. 63).

After a great deal of pain and anguish of releasing and letting go of the life I thought I wanted, a space opened. Through the process of writing I discovered ways to translate my own trajectory from a deeply divided professional struggling to communicate the complexity of my public existence, to a more integrated practitioner, one with deeper compassion for human contingency. Somehow along the way I became more human and re-learned (or was it for the first time?) how to become present in the deeply phenomenal sense, that is, in the presence of, and with, another. What Merleau-Ponty describes so eloquently as “mutual presence”, a presence of the deepest kind, made possible only, and paradoxically, when one comes to see that “the other is truly for himself alone, beyond his being for me” (Merleau-Ponty in Rabil, 1967, xii). This is what claims me now.

### 7.1 Hosting places for dwelling in this complex world

This work has explored the phenomenal world of hospitality. Unlike the transactional approach to client service that dominates contemporary professional practice, the continental tradition of hospitality is about extending the best of oneself and what one has to offer in any given context. As Lyle and Gehart (2000) explain:

this kind of hospitality is not the modern American version of ‘polite society’ but rather the 'old world' version in which the host offered the very best available in the household and sought to make that guest feel special and unique... (p. 77).

Hospitality is more than good food and conversation, this tradition is about stepping outside of solitude and offering refuge and dwelling with others in spaces of generosity and vigilance (Deluca, 2000) holding the potential to expand, alter and transform all who
enter into this space. As the Aga Khan once said hospitality “is a culture, a habit of mind, a set of practices that celebrates difference, is curious about the unfamiliar, and actively embraces the other” (the Aga Khan in Stein, 2014, n.p.).

### 7.1.1 Hospitality as placemaking

In a manifold world that includes diverse others, we, as professionals can no longer afford to bracket our lived experience from the important conversations that are taking place in public and need to find ways to bring our own unique voices and visions forward. This requires that we situate ourselves by becoming more intimately aware of our stories and where we stand to become prepared to rise to occasions when necessary in the service of justice.

These complex times require practitioners who recognize we can no longer separate ourselves from the troubles we confront in contemporary practice. Offering hospitality has traditionally meant paying attention to, and engaging more humanely with, those who are suffering and require our attention: vulnerable people, people striving to heal and to create better lives for themselves and their families and seeking to find their rightful place of belonging and recognition. This has meant heeding the call of the Other (Levinas, 1969) and hosting dwelling spaces for others to come into their own strengths and capacities without imposing. These times now require a new kind of presence and engagement, calling professionals to host our own encounters with difficulty in the service of transforming workplace culture to become more fully reflect human diversity.

### 7.1.2 Integral practitioner

The complex circumstances in the field require new skills of practitioners including critical self-awareness, ethical judgement, critical discernment, embodied engagement and moral courage. These are the qualities and characteristics of an integral practitioner.

An integral practitioner is someone who has embarked on a learning journey to share their impressions and resonances on the world in all its complexity and share of themselves in practice settings with the intention of expanding dialogue. These are professionals who are prepared to articulate their position in masterful ways which
requires communicating in manifold worlds with diverse others, and sometimes this means hosting difficult conversations.

Becoming an integral practitioner requires being prepared to dwell in this material world, with its struggles and difficulties, triggers and hot spots, to discern right action on the unseen concerns that circulate where dynamics of power are unspoken. This means becoming existentially aware and phenomenologically attuned to what is said and not said, the subtext of conversations, and what is hidden beneath the surface including hidden dynamics of power and cultural practices which are violative in subtle ways.

7.1.3 Making sense of practice in a VUCA world

As practitioners how do we respond in intelligent and peaceful ways to differences that emerge, not reacting when collaborating with people we find offensive or where we feel our integrity being violated in subtle ways? This is the question I have grappled with deeply in this work as I have sought to stay present to the complexities of practice without adding to the fear and coercion in this world when my own sense of trust and place has been tested, and I have found myself in peril. I have needed to develop tools to discern right action in complex circumstances, where my own lens is distorted by outside imperatives and pressures and where I have come up against my own internal contradictions and tensions.

What I have searched for in these distorted times where material interests dominate the field, is a moral compass that provides balance in the face of injustice. I was looking for a process of discernment that critically addressed imbalances of power, particularly where people may be acting out in conscious and unconscious ways. Ricoeur’s critical phronesis (Ricoeur, 1992; Ricoeur in Wall, 2003) is a tool for discerning right action among mixed values, different social locations and competing and seemingly irreconcilable differences, particularly in contexts where there are imbalances of power. Practical wisdom situated in the complexity of lived experience in postmodern society recognizing that we live in a manifold world where people are located differently and have different horizons of experience. Ricoeur’s critical phronesis (Ricoeur 1992; Ricoeur in Wall 2003), encourages shared meaning-making through face-to-face encounters, through sharing
impressions and resonances of direct experience to cultivating deeper understandings of why people respond and react as they do. This process begins with extending linguistic hospitality to others, and it also includes knowing oneself and having a deep understanding of what is meaningful in order to know and understand our limits when we are tested. In my experience, this comes with practice and showing up again and again, even amidst failures and being prepared to look at one’s mistakes to learn and grow.

7.1.4 Journeying towards professional wellbeing and integration

My work as an organizational consultant has brought me to advise leaders and professionals who strive to create healthier workplaces. In my practice I support leaders in critically reflecting on the issues and incidents that arise for them in their day-to-day practices to help them become more reflexive about how they are showing up by exploring how they are aligning with the values they espouse.

The leaders who I see in my practice struggle with psychosocial safety issues in their workplaces, particularly where conflicts or critical incidents arise such as harassment or bullying. People who come to me are most often seeking to develop greater awareness about the hidden and often troubling issues that arise to try to prevent psychosocial risks before they become troublesome by addressing some of the subtler forms of structural violence, which erode morale, creativity and workplace culture.

This work focuses primarily on helping practitioners to become more critically self-aware and reflexive in their practices. This means building the capacity to hold different witness positions, to examine blind spots and imagine things from other perspectives, while at the same time having compassion and cultivating trust in themselves and their own perspective and discernment process. These critical capacities are not achieved overnight and require practice, including sitting in discomfort and uncertainty where there are no absolute givens. In my experience, leaders who have honed these abilities have greater capacities within themselves to engage the complexities of practice and host their own experiences with difficulty. As Kahane (2010) describes, when we do the work to heal ourselves, we do not “see the world anew, but we see ourselves – and our role in creating
the world – anew” (p. 22). We embody a more integrated whole and bring a new presence into the world. Kahane’s (2010) explains:

in healing ourselves (and others), our wound becomes our gift. It points us to the part of ourselves that is sensitive and vulnerable and so requires our compassionate attention. Our willingness to recognize and admit our woundedness enables us to take the risk of stepping forward and stumbling or falling, and so to learn and grow (p. 130).

Practitioners who have taken journeys of self-discovery are better able to situate themselves in the context of complexity and have deeper self-awareness of what they are in the field to do. Having this clarity makes it possible to penetrate distortions and see through chaos, by being better attuned to the subtext of social interactions and cultivating a stronger, more embodied sense of what is going on beneath the surface, including hidden dynamics of power. This broader understanding and sense that perhaps it could be possible to communicate transparently about the subtext of contemporary public life, makes the existential struggles seem worthwhile. People who have been able to walk this path are better equipped to hold a place of dwelling for others who are confused, bringing clarity into this polarized world and making spaces for people to come to into their own, thus providing hope and dignity for those in crisis and facing very difficult life choices.
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Kahane, A. (2017, June). *Collaborating with the enemy*. Tele-learning seminar with Mark Cabaj, Tamarack Institute, Waterloo, ON.


Curriculum Vitae

Name: Michelle Pajot

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:
Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
Bachelor of Arts, BA (Honours), Canadian Social History, 1995

University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Master of Education, MEd, 2003

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
Doctor of Philosophy, PhD(c)
Health Professional Education, TDO

HIGHLIGHTS

➢ 20 years of senior-level experience in organizational consulting: educational consulting, workplace assessments and interventions, experiential learning and applied social research and evaluation.

➢ 5 years of direct management experience in staff management, coaching, training and mentoring post-secondary students, staff and professional teams. My leadership style is collaborative, and I have a strong commitment to promoting positive, inclusive, and supportive relationships.

➢ Masters-level training in Counselling with expertise in workplace interventions, assessments and training. I have coached and consulted with the private sector, community-based and international NGOs, Ottawa-based firms, university institutes and all levels of government.

➢ Strategist and Evaluator with extensive strategic consultation experience on a variety of processes including program planning and evaluation, accreditation, needs assessments and program and policy reviews.
➢ **Applied social researcher** with extensive practice-based knowledge and a considerable body of community-based publications and government reports.

➢ **Exceptional facilitation skills** strong and effective presence on working groups and extensive experience with diverse stakeholders including advisory boards and committees. I have consulted on a variety of multi-stakeholder research and evaluation projects that address issues relating to youth employment, indigenous and newcomer issues.

**MEMBERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

➢ Member, Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2018- (recently renewed)

➢ Make It Our Business training on employer obligations under the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act, 2017


➢ Fundamentals of Intercultural Competency, CCLC, 2016

➢ Anti-oppression training for health providers, AnnaLise Trudel, FSTV, 2016


➢ Five Mindfulness Trainings, Retreat for Educators, Brock University, 2013

➢ Post-graduate clinical training in systemic therapy, AAMFT approved post-graduate clinical supervision, Family Service Thames Valley, 2006-07


➢ Canadian Certified Counsellor, Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2003-

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Manager, EAP and Workplace Wellness, fseap Thames Valley, London ON, 2016 - 2018**

➢ Consulted with HR managers, business and union leaders in developing integrated workplace wellness strategies including wellness and training plans;
Oversaw clinical case management and performance referrals
Managed the Critical Incident Response team for delivery of trauma response in the workplace;
Workplace consulting: Conducted workplace wellness and needs assessments and provide research-informed strategic interventions;
Developed Peer Support and Referral program and workplace mental health training
Provided interventions to respond to workplace conflict, workplace challenges and performance issues

Manager/Research Associate to the Chair Health Human Resource Optimization, Faculty of Nursing, Western University, ON, 2013-2015
Managed very active research program ($2M research program with tri-council and Ministry funding (SSHRC Insight Grant, MOHLTC, CIHR PHSI) with 4-7 staff
Applied Research focus:
Healthy Workplaces: Develop theory-driven, evidence-based strategies to create healthy workplace environments
Supportive Professional Practice Environments: To develop a theoretical understanding of the factors that promote effective professional practice
Recruitment and Retention: To study factors influencing retention and recruitment
Oversaw all aspects of research program (grant and proposal writing, ethics submissions, editing, writing, publishing, background research)
Assisted managing editor in peer-review for the special issue on Burnout in Healthcare for Burnout Research, London, UK: Elsevier Publisher UK, Sept. 2014

Project Manager/Consultant (School of Human Services, School of Nursing), Health Sciences and Human Services, Fanshawe College, ON, 2011-13
Lead the accreditation review and report for the School of Nursing
Consulted on several projects in the School of Human Services including the customization and roll-out of Fanshawe.ca a college-wide field placement database
Provided leadership to working groups (consisting of coordinators, faculty and staff) and senior management
Education Research Coordinator, Interdisciplinary Network for Scholarship in Professions' Research in Education (INSPiRE), Faculty of Education, Western University, 2010 - 2013

- Assisted with the development of framework and curriculum design for proposed interdisciplinary Graduate-level program in Professional Education.
- Undertook strategic plans and reports for the Interdisciplinary Network for Scholarship in Professions’ Research in Education (INSPiRE)
- Fund development (including project development and grant writing)
- Developed concept and proposal for a Social Innovation Lab
- Organized and hosted community forums, symposia and visiting scholars

Health Researcher, Centre for Education Research and Innovation (CERI), Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, Western University, 2009; 2010

- Undertook social research on project related to communication on inter-professional teams. Examined professional development activities targeted to medical residents to assess the quality of engagement with faculty during clinical rounds. This fieldwork included resident and faculty interviews at University hospital, Victoria Hospital and LHSC
- Undertook background research and analysis on use of social media and information technologies to promote patient-directed care

Applied Research Coordinator, Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women and Children (CREVAWC), Faculty of Education, Western University, 2008-2010

- As project coordinator for Rethinking Relationships: Promoting Healthy Equal Relationships (Ontario Women’s Directorate) I undertook research, writing and analysis on strategies and tools for promoting healthy equal relationships and wrote a manual featuring practices/strategies for promotion non-violence and healthy sexuality.
Oversaw and coordinated research advisory committee and trained and supervised research assistants. I was the lead conference organizer for Rethinking Relationships which included keynote speakers and youth leaders from across the province.

Managed Research Assistants

**Senior Management Consultant, Goss Gilroy Inc. (GGI), Ottawa, ON, 2006 – 2007**

- Conducted multiple assessments and evaluations in social and cultural spheres addressing: health and mental health, Indigenous and youth issues, labour market transition and essential skills for the workplace
- Supervised, trained and mentored junior researchers
- This work involved senior level consultations including focus groups, key informant interviews, document and literature reviews, stakeholder consultations and site visits across Canada

**Educational Research Manager/Senior Consultant, Canadian Development Consultants International (CDCI), Ottawa, ON, 2004 – 2006**

- Led research team addressing claims of abuse at Indian Residential Schools (IRS) for Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada (IRSRC)
- Managed archival research team of 20 researchers undertaking general histories and perpetrator and plaintiff reports at the National Archives of Canada on residential and day schools located in British Columbia, Alberta, the Yukon, NWT and Nunavut
- Oversaw document retrieval, Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) access, reviewing finding aids, managing and training researchers in the field

**Educational Consultant, Partnership Program, Status of Women Canada, Halifax, NS, 2004**

- As principal investigator, liaised with leaders and professionals from across the province and successfully created a plan supported by all stakeholders (including the Ministry of Education, the Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia and local settlement organizations) to develop horizontal and inclusive systems to support needs of ethno-cultural girls in Nova Scotia
Educational Consultant, Student Services Needs Assessment, Western Quebec School Board (WQSB), Gatineau, QC, 2003

- Identified and provided recommendations on gaps in student counselling services in adult education centers for the English Western Quebec School Board
- Coordinated key informant interviews with school administrators and support staff in all adult education centers across the board to assess counselling services and needs as part of a province-wide initiative
- Oversaw program evaluation, mapping and program reviews of counselling support services

Senior Educational Consultant, Research and Analysis, Noramtec Consulting, Ottawa, ON, 1999-2003

- Conducted extensive research and wrote multiple reports on the legacy of residential school abuse on First Nations communities in northern and remote communities in Canada
- Undertook archival research, wrote perpetrator/plaintiff reports and general histories on residential and day schools located in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia
- Undertook research and analysis on Aboriginal children in care

GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

- Research Director/Advisor, corners, an international NGO, 2012 - 2015
  As research director/advisor I provide program consultation and development, strategic planning and evaluation of our service learning programs by documenting stories, successes and challenges in the field.
- Member, Cooperative Housing Federation (CHF), 2010-
- Member, Pillar Non-Profit Network, 2015-

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5 In 2014 we brought Fanshawe Design and Horticulture students to our project site in Kisumu where we are engaged in a multi-year social development initiative at the school to redesign the building to meet international accessibility standards. Here is the link to a documentary film that gives a wonderful depiction of our work in Kenya: http://cornersglobal.com/.
Treasurer, Board of Directors, New Brighton Housing Cooperative, 2014 -
President, Board of Directors New Brighton Housing Cooperative, 2011-2014
Researcher, Interdisciplinary Network for Scholarship in Professions' Research in Education (INSPIRE), 2010
Research Affiliate, Centre for Education Research and Innovation (CERI), 2009;2010
Advisory Team Coordinator, Promoting Healthy Equal Relationships project, Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women (CREVAWC), 2008-2011
Advisory Committee Member, GirlEmpower, METRAC, 2009-2010
Community Affiliate, Institute for Women in Leadership (IWIL), 2008
Ethno-cultural Girls Research Project, Advisory Team Coordinator, 2004
Metropolis Institute, Advisory Member, 2004

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, TEACHING AND FACILITATION

Leadership training for professional executives and professionals
Conflict resolution training program, Healing “Us vs Them” a leadership rendez-vous, co-facilitated with Louise Pitre, 2018-
Mental health in the workplace program, for community development and NGOs, co-facilitated with Tammie Ross, 2018 -
Peer Support and Referral Program, developed and packaged for Western University in collaboration with Tammie Ross, 2018 -

Field Placement Coordinator, School of Human Services, Fanshawe College, 2011-2013
Field Placement Coordinator for the Social Service Worker Program. Courses included: SOWC 3017; SOWC 3004; SOWC 3008; SOWC 3010, SOWC 3016

Seminar Co-facilitator, Health Professional Education field, Western University, 2011
Facilitated professional seminar series for faculty and graduate students in Health Professional Education field
Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Health Sciences, Western University, 2010

As tutorial instructor for Introduction to Ethics in Health, I facilitated weekly seminars, provided one-on-one student assistance related to course content, academic and special needs, marked assignments and proctored examinations.

AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

- Scholarship Award for Service, Retired Teachers Federation of Ontario, 2014
- Western Graduate Research Scholarship, Western University, 2009-10; 2010-11, 2011-12; 2012-13.
- Awarded Faculty of Education Top Graduate Prize for Outstanding Achievement, University of Ottawa, 2003

SUMMARY OF EDUCATIONAL, LABOUR MARKET AND SOCIAL PROGRAM EVALUATIONS AND REPORTS

- Process Evaluation, Conscientious Citizenship Program, corners global

I undertook a process evaluation of our service learning program pilot at Joyland Schools, Kenya by documenting stories, successes and challenges in the field. This evaluation included surveys of Kenyan students and a background review of resources from key stakeholders. Fund development, strategic planning, and project reporting.

- Evaluation of the Youth Employment Strategy, Human Resources and Social Development (HRSDC)

The Youth Employment Strategy (YES) is a horizontal federal government initiative designed to assist Canadian youth to enhance their employability skills, while increasing the number of skilled young Canadians in the workforce. At present, thirteen federal departments and agencies participate in its design, delivery and evaluation. YES program streams include: Career Focus, Skills Link, and Summer Work Experience. The evaluation includes a document review, survey, case studies, and key informant interviews. Developed key indicators from Conference Board’s research on
Employability Skills and identified skills sets for survey baseline. I wrote a case study report and analysis of the success of the strategy in relation to immigrant and newcomer youth.

- **Essential Skills Toolkit, Human Resources and Social Development (HRSDC)**

  Assisted in developing a user-friendly guide and assessment tools for implementing Essential Skills in the workplace. This tool is targeted to small- and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) distributed by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. I undertook background research and assisted with compiling the resource.

- **Model for Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR), Association of English School Boards in Quebec (PROCEDE) and the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS), Quebec**

  Managed a needs assessment for the development of a model for Prior Learning and Assessment and Recognition within the nine English school boards in Quebec. The project included: 1) the development of an inventory of current services offered and tools in use with respect to PLAR in the English school boards; and 2) an assessment of clientele needs with respect to PLAR in the English school boards. This project included a document review, key informant interviews and socio-economic community and student profiles of participating communities.

- **Labour Market Transition Project, Canadian Trucking Human Resource Council (CTHRC)**

  This project included research into establishing a transitional workers program for moving surplus workers out of identified sectors into the trucking industry. Specifically, the project: focuses on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) within the trucking industry; examines sectors with a surplus of workers who have skill and competency profiles that are compatible with the demands from the trucking SMEs; and identifies a suitable framework and related requirements to develop and implement an effective transition program for the trucking industry. I developed competency profiles for the
trucking industry, undertook a needs assessment and identified potential methods of matching candidates with appropriate positions in the industry.

- **Summative Evaluation of Learning Technologies, Office of Learning Technologies (OLT), National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources and Social Development (HRSDC)**

This evaluation was the first phase of the Summative Evaluation of the Office of Learning Technologies (OLT). The Office of Learning Technologies (OLT) promotes innovation in skills development and learning enabled by technology. The purpose of this phase was to assess the feasibility of enrolling/registering OLT end-users to track performance outcomes. This evaluation included a survey of client sponsors, analysis of OLT administrative data on projects, and project case studies. I undertook case studies that included key informant interviews, site visits to educational institutions and social organizations across Canada supplemented by a literature and document review. I wrote the case study analysis and summary of findings for the evaluation.

- **Evaluation of JobsNow, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario (MCSS)**

The purpose of the JobsNow pilot was to evaluate the effectiveness of providing sustained job retention supports following employment placement in helping longer-term social assistance recipients to stabilize in the workforce and achieve greater financial independence. GGI assisted the Ministry of Community and Social Services to refine the evaluation design, conducted preliminary key informant interviews and then conducted analysis of administrative data to provide preliminary information on the effectiveness of the JobsNow pilot project. My involvement included assisting with key informant interviews with clients and social service managers and staff in Hamilton, Mississauga and Ottawa.
➢ **Evaluation of the Reserve Land and Environment Management Program (RLEMP), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)**

Assisted with the evaluation of the RLEMP Pilot, a professional land management training and certification program that gives First Nations the tools to manage the broadening scope and complexity of land and environmental management. The evaluation focused primarily on the post-secondary training currently being delivered by the University of Saskatchewan and the technical training being delivered by the National Aboriginal Land Managers Association (NALMA) and included a document review, interviews with students and key informant interviews. Interviewed university students, administrators, and professors, undertook research and analysis for an evaluation of the RLEMP Pilot project. I drafted the final report.

➢ **Evaluation of the Third World Urban Forum Conference (WUF3), UN-HABITAT**

The World Urban Forum is a biennial conference that includes: governments, national and international associations of local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations and experts (e.g., urban professionals and academics), to address issues related to sustainable cities. The methodologies used in this evaluation included site visits and site observations, interviews with key informants (partners, key organizers, partner agencies, etc.), a survey of participants, and analysis of registration data to assess participation rates. My involvement included a literature and document review, data collection (surveys) during the conference, assisting with the survey report, analysis and report on key informant findings.

➢ **Summative Evaluation of the Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP), Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC)**

The Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP) is a horizontal initiative between the Government of Canada and the social non-profit (SNP) sector to support the full inclusion of vulnerable populations in all aspects of Canadian society. In undertaking this work, the limits of SNP capacity was recognized. This approach was designed to result in
outcomes that are feasible and practical to implement for the longer term. My work included a literature review and analysis of key measures for success of social programs in meeting the needs of vulnerable populations.

- **Summative Evaluation of the National Homelessness Initiative, Human Resources and Social Development (HRSDC)**

The National Homelessness Initiative is a horizontal initiative with four main participating departments (HRSDC, INAC, CMHC, and PWGSC). The evaluation included a focused literature review, extensive administrative data review, community case studies, project case studies, shelter case studies, and individual/family case studies. My involvement included key informant interviews with participating federal departments, a report on these findings, and community and project case studies in Hamilton and Ottawa.

- **Review of Periodicals and Educational Resources, United Church of Canada (UCC)**

This review of United Church of Canada (UCC) periodicals and educational resources focused on one periodical – Mandate (a social justice periodical focused on global issues) - and involved an assessment by selected pastoral charges across Canada and an e-Delphi assessment by an expert panel. Undertook key informant interviews with representatives of selected ethnic and Francophone ministries to identify responses from diverse communities and managed expert e-Delphi panel.

- **Evaluation of Neighbours Friends and Families, Ontario Women’s Directorate**

Neighbours, Friends and Families (NFF) is a campaign to raise awareness of the signs of woman abuse. It is designed to give people who are close to an at-risk woman or an abusive man the information they need to get involved and prevent a further escalation of the violence. I was contracted as the lead evaluator. The evaluation used various qualitative and quantitative methodologies including a literature review, several surveys,
an e-Delphi and interview results. Goss Gilroy In. (GGI) provided survey data and
analysis on this project.

➢ Identifying Best Practices to Safely House Abused and Homeless Women,
The Homelessness, Knowledge Development Program, Homeless Partnering
Secretariat, HRSDC

The Centre for Research on Violence against Women and Children (CREVAWC)
partnered with RESOLVE Alberta, a research centre at the University of Calgary, to
conduct a national environmental scan of the best practices to safely house women who
have been abused and homeless. The project involved conducting interviews with about
70 to 100 women across Canada who have been both abused by intimate partners and
have been homeless for a period of time to best assist women in similar circumstances. I
was contracted to do the in-depth interviews with women in the London area.

➢ Breaking the Links Between Poverty and Violence, Family Violence
Prevention Unit, Public Health Agency of Canada

This project involved developing a violence prevention guide entitled Breaking the Links
guide for the Family Violence Prevention Unit, Public Health Agency of Canada
(National Clearinghouse on Family Violence). I was a co-author on the publication that
highlighted current approaches and “best practices”.

➢ Rethinking Relationships: Engaging Youth, Connecting Communities,
Ontario Women’s Directorate

Rethinking Relationships explored and highlighted promising practices for engaging
youth from diverse communities in the work of challenging violence and fostering
healthier, more equitable, patterns of social interrelationships. Lead conference
coordinator for conference undertaken by the Centre for Research and Education on
Violence against Women and Children (CREVAWC) and primary author on publication
featuring practices/strategies for promotion non-violence and healthy sexuality.
➢ Ethnocultural Girls Research Project, Partnership Program, Status of Women Canada

As principal investigator, liaised with leaders and professionals from across the province and successfully created a plan supported by all stakeholders to supporting needs of ethno-cultural girls in Nova Scotia. I worked with multiple stakeholders including the Ministry of Education, Status of Women, the Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia and local settlement organizations to develop systems in support of newcomer youth, particularly young women, in the province. I increased leadership capacity among ethno-cultural girls and young women by mentoring young leaders and developing a train-the-trainer model in focus group facilitation.