

## **Chapter 6: Research Design and Methodology**

There has been a paradigm shift in the academy: Positivist notions of objectivity are unhinged by postmodern epistemologies, while the empire of signs that has dominated since the 1960's is challenged by a sensual revolution. This sea change requires us to develop methodologies that "articulate the importance of the body on an experiential and subjective level of 'the everyday'" (Ahmed, 2004: 286). Such methodologies demand new ways to demonstrate rigour and validity: "In order for qualitative research to pursue embodied understanding, it requires procedures that show phenomena in both experientially evocative as well as structurally coherent ways" (Todres, 2004: 24). The methodological approach I develop embraces the need to respect the mind/body/self intersubjectivity of "the mind in the body" (Csordas, 1994: 20), and develops an "ethnography of experience" that recognises "that the self is constituted out of visceral processes as much as expressed through them" (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991: 293). It follows Gendlin's "reflexively constituted practice" (Levin, 1997: 45) in that it uses a methodology of embodied knowing to explore embodied knowing.

I begin by setting out the requirements of my methodological approach, which Action Research and feminist methodologies to some extent meet. However, hermeneutics ultimately serves my purposes best, so after discussing the general background and issues, I explain how an embodied hermeneutics can answer McGuire's call for a "mind/body/self intersubjectivity" (McGuire, 2002: 209) by adapting Gendlin's Focusing technique. I then describe my methodology in practice, beginning with a brief discussion of my sample selection procedure. Although my pilot phase proved valuable, the methodology I'd developed was inappropriate, so I took a different approach, developing the semi-structured interview into the 'Focusing Interview', which I describe in detail. During this fieldwork phase I had a "complete membership role" (Adler & Adler, 1998: 97) that enhanced my observation of life on protest sites. I explain how the insights gained from this role fed into my autoethnography, which provides an aesthetic texture to my research. Finally, I describe my application of an embodied hermeneutics to the interpretation and validation phases. As discussed in my introductory chapter, I prioritise the term 'embodied knowing' in this chapter because my primary concern here is with the phenomenological aspect of this process.

### **Methodological Approach**

I needed a methodology that satisfied four key criteria:

- 1 It needed to allow me to access knowing that may normally lie outside conscious awareness.
- 2 It had to facilitate the emergence of valid research material.
- 3 Philosophically, it was important that it recognised different ways of knowing – what Heron calls an "extended epistemology" (Heron, 1996). Although we can make propositional statements about embodied cognition, embodied *knowing* emerges from engaged experiential understanding.
- 4 It had to be congruent with my personal integrity as an insider.

Although I found valuable strategies and theoretical approaches common to Action Research (New Paradigm Research) and feminist methodologies, neither satisfied my needs but remained influential on my methodology. The New Paradigm Research (NPR) described by Reason and Rowan (1981) is a methodology which falls within the range of approaches known as Participatory or Action Research. I chose not take a full Action Research approach, which requires goals and methods to be defined by participant researchers, because I had a clear aim from the start of my project. However, I followed the Action Research model in several important ways. The fundamental criteria of Action Research is that we conduct research *with* people rather than *on* them (Dick, 2007), which necessitates producing knowledge that will be useful to participants who have in turn been involved in dialogue about research conclusions. The itinerant lifestyle of many participants made dialogue impractical, but I discussed research outcomes with representative participants before coming to final conclusions. Action Research recommends the "planning, acting, and reflecting" cycle (Koshy, 2005: 5) wherein the researcher begins with a tentative plan which they action and then reflect on. In principle, reflection informs a new plan and the cycle begins again, but in practice this valuable process is "more fluid, open and responsive" (Koshy, 2005: 5).

Although Harding rejects the notion of a "distinctive feminist method" (Harding, 1987a: 1), she makes recommendations, claiming that "[t]he best feminist analysis ... insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter". This locates the researcher, thereby revealing them "as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests" (Harding, 1987a: 9). Many feminists (though not all) affirm this rejection of the "ethos of scholarly objectivity" confirming the now widely held view that "there is no dispassionate, disinterested scholarship" (Christ, 1987: 497. See, inter alia, Harding & Hintikka, 1983; Stanley 1990a). For many researchers this stance has "replaced misleading notions of scientific objectivity, complete impartiality, and metanarrative, with issues of reflexivity, diversity, and difference" (Wallis, 2004: 195). Both Action

Research and feminist methodologies use research to stimulate change, and if the researcher and participants share experiences (Harding, 1987a: 9) we would expect change in all parties. In practice my spirituality was first challenged and then nourished by my research, which simultaneously contributed to Eco-Paganism via my workshops, talks and articles.

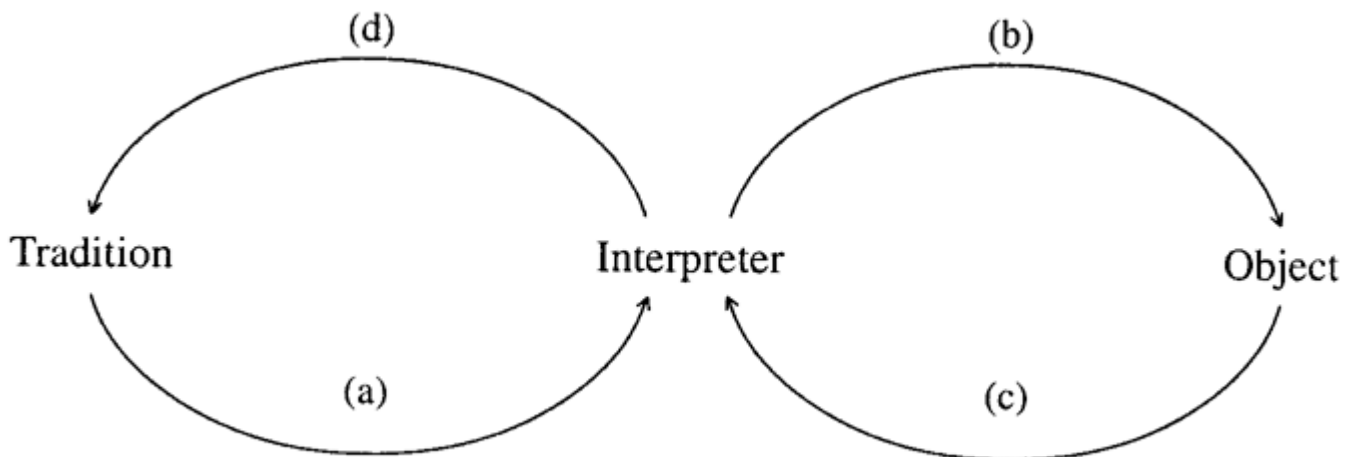
New Paradigm Research and feminist methodologies have influenced my approach through their concern with lived experience, accountability, reflexivity, and emotional engagement. Feminist methodologies have the obvious additional concern with gender, notably the gender linked dualisms already mentioned in chapter 5, "Embodied Philosophy". Given the complex and sometimes controversial discussions around women's ways of knowing, intuition and the 'masculinity' of objectivity, I remained sensitive to issues of gender and knowledge throughout my research.

## **HERMENEUTICS**

The embodied hermeneutics at the heart of my methodology is in no way incompatible with the principles discussed above, and in some ways develops from them. There is no "general theory of hermeneutics" (Penner, 2000: 65), but in principle it is a "theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning" (Bleicher, 1980:1) which different thinkers have variously developed. Some emphasize philosophical hermeneutics while others focus on methodology, while Heidegger (1962 [1927]) applies hermeneutic philosophy as method. Gadamer claims that hermeneutics allows "what is alienated by the character of the written word or by the character of being distanced by cultural ... distances to speak again" (Gadamer, 1979: 83) while Ricoeur emphasises reflexivity, describing hermeneutics as "explicitly or implicitly, self-understanding by means of understanding others" (Ricoeur, 1974: 17).

Hermeneutics has a long and complex history which I will not review extensively. Briefly, hermeneutics originated as a Medieval technique of biblical interpretation which Schleiermacher broadened to apply to textual interpretation in general. Dilthey then extended it further to encompass the process of interpreting all "human behaviour and products" (Honderich, 1995: 353), opening the way for Heidegger to transform it into a phenomenological hermeneutics that could interpret Being itself (1962 [1927]). More recently Gadamer emphasized using hermeneutical dialogue to deepen understanding of our shared world through a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1989).

Several insights of contemporary hermeneutics will be familiar from the discussion of New Paradigm Research and feminist methodologies. Hermeneutic philosophy rejects 'objectivism' because it recognises that we always bring understanding to a situation - what Gadamer called our prejudices (Bleicher, 1980: 77) - so we cannot approach with a "neutral mind" (Bleicher, 1980: 2).



**Fig. 5: The Hermeneutic Circle**

This insight is based on the fundamental notion of the hermeneutic circle, a reflexive and subtle form of "connected knowing" (Belenky et al., 1986: 113) that has parallels with the Action Research cycle. In fig. 5 above, Gallagher (1992: 106) shows the hermeneutic circle operating on two levels, in a general context and a more specific one. Our foreknowledge, labelled 'Tradition', inevitably *influences* (a) the interpreters *understanding* (b) of a text, person or situation (unfortunately named the 'Object'). Foreknowledge may be tacit, but in any case makes any claim to objectivity partial at best. We cannot escape our foreknowledge as such "[p]rejudices" are the very "conditions whereby we experience something [that can say] something to us" (Gadamer, 1976: 9). Once we accept that our knowing takes place within the hermeneutic circle, it can facilitate understanding: As far as possible we note the extent of our foreknowledge and then turn to what we wish to interpret (b). What we learn from our engagement with that text, person or situation gives us greater understanding (c) which we can once more apply to the question (b). The process is thus cyclical and may provide new understandings profound enough to change our foreknowledge, as indicated by (d) above. For Fisher intuition is essential because we need to be sensitive to "a taste or feeling for that which has yet to be formulated" and allow intuition to guide us into deeper understanding (Fisher, 2002: 40).

Penner (2000: 66) summarises three fundamental hermeneutic assumptions as central for religious studies:

1. Hermeneutics seeks to understand our "lived experience" (*Erlebnis*), "the familiar, unreflective, everyday world which involves a tacit knowledge and orientation" (Penner, 2000: 59).
2. All lived experience emerges from our historical and cultural context, including our consciousness and any interpretations we make. This entails problems of relativism which I discuss below.
3. Hermeneutics tends to view the history of science with "suspicion" (Penner, 2000: 66) as evidenced by debates about whether the study of religion is a *science* of religion or not.

I have already discussed the third point in my chapter on embodied philosophy, but I need to unpack the first two.

### **Understanding 'Lived Experience'**

On van Manen's phenomenological hermeneutic model we research meanings "as we live them in our everyday existence, our life-world" (Van Manen, 1990: 11), translating lived experience into a text that - ideally - expresses its essence in a way that allows the reader to re-live it (Van Manen, 1990: 36). For this process to succeed we must recognise the 'prejudices' we inevitably bring to a situation before seeking engagement and greater understanding. A hermeneutic engagement is a dialogical (Bakhtin, 1981) "conversation with few hard and fast rules" (Fisher, 2002: 36) that seeks to widen our original horizon of understanding in an effort to meet that of the unknown in a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 1989: 306). In hermeneutics the "keys to understanding are not manipulation and control but participation and openness, not [data] but experience" (Palmer, 1969: 215) and the process is transformative because it leads us to "gain self-understanding ... through our interaction with others" (Fisher, 2002: 39). Thus, as Rorty understands it, a hermeneutical discourse is "*supposed* to be abnormal, to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings" (Rorty, 1979: 360; author's emphasis).

### **Historical and Cultural Context: Validity and Relativism**

The hermeneutic insight that we can never come to any situation with a neutral stance collapses the "the insider/outsider question" because it recognises that we *all* carry prejudices into our research. In recognition

of my own prejudices, I note that I've been an Eco-Pagan for over a decade. However, I conclude that an insider will be more adequate to this task because researching embodied knowing benefits from an empathetic approach *from within*. I understand the experiences of research participants by reference to my own experience, which in hermeneutic terms means that my initial horizon of understanding is close to theirs. Moreover, because I am exploring embodied knowing in a group of which I am a member, my own reflexive understanding becomes part of my research data. (See *Autoethnography*, section below, and Wallis, 2004). I thus exemplify Wylie's assessment that our situation as insider researchers "should be regarded as a resource, not a liability" (Wylie, 1995: 268-70). However, I am aware that my prior experience of Eco-Paganism will influence my research, so I am particularly reflexive in my interpretation of material about which I have a strong feelings or opinions.

If all lived experience, including the process of interpretation itself, is simply an individual's perspective, in what sense is any interpretation valid? Scholars either avoid the issue or appeal to "the given", often via a phenomenological strategy (Penner, 2000: 61). Van Manen's phenomenological hermeneutics is a good example: "*a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience and recollects lived experience - is validated by lived experience and it validates lived experience*" (Van Manen, 1990: 27; author's italics). The lived experience of the *reader* becomes a key element in its validation, as credible study presents "something we can recognise as an experience that we have had or could have had" (Van Manen, 1990: 27). Caputo takes a similar tack: the 'rightness' of a hermeneutic interpretation "comes down to its ability to provoke the ultimate hermeneutic response: 'That is what we are looking for. That puts into words what we have all along understood about ourselves'" (Caputo, 1987: 81). Such hermeneutic validity is a felt 'rightness' in a specific context that does not claim to be objectivity true at all times for all people.

## **AN EMBODIED HERMENEUTICS**

I have presented a theory of embodied cognition and an embodied epistemology, and on these foundations I build an embodied hermeneutics that can articulate the embodied knowing of a particular individual or social group.

Fisher notes that Gadamer remains focused on writing and interpreting texts and "tends toward kind of linguistic idealism" (Fisher, 2002: 38). Clearly a hermeneutics which emphasis the *textuality* of experience may dry the flesh on the body, and Stoller cogently asks if it "is it not problematic to use the body as text metaphor in societies in which the

body is felt and not read?" (Stoller, 1997: 5-6). To answer Stoller's question I discuss embodied approaches to understanding lived experience, and then show how they can be integrated into an embodied hermeneutics. Davidman suggest that we use "alternative sources of knowledge, such as our own emotions and feeling states ... to understand and convey the experiences of those we meet in the field" (Davidman, 2002: 20), and McGuire's work provides an excellent example of how this works in practice. McGuire describes an interview she made while researching attitudes of farm women in rural Ireland. Both McGuire and the interviewee were mothers, and McGuire was nursing her child as they spoke. McGuire describes how she related to the other woman through feeling "the sheer physicality of our mutual understanding. We understood each other, not only cognitively or emotionally, but also with our bodies ... I remember this moment now with my body/mind, not just mentally" (McGuire, 2002: 204). McGuire explains that their shared experience of nursing provided a "shared physical experience", which drew on her own "body/mind experience" (McGuire, 2002: 205). Kleinman and Kleinman argue for such an "ethnography of experience" as an antidote to the de-humanising tendencies of science:

We live in the flow of daily experience; we are intersubjective forms of memory and action ... the self is constituted out of visceral processes as much as expressed through them (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1991: 293).

McGuire notes the Kleinman's claim that the 'mind/body/self' "can be intersubjectively understood and that it can intersubjectively know others" (McGuire, 2002: 205), adding that if we could train ethnographers to use this understanding "by raising intuition to the level of consciousness" (McGuire, 2002: 208) they could apply this "mind/body/self intersubjectivity" to social situations (McGuire, 2002: 209). McGuire has been unable to develop such a methodology, but suggests the work of Csordas as a possible model (McGuire, 2002: 209). I discussed Csordas in my embodied cognition literature review, but briefly, he proposes a 'cultural phenomenology' that attends to "somatic modes of attention" (Csordas, 1993). These are culturally constructed ways of being aware of a situation through the body; for example in a ritual healing the healer might feel, see or hear visions that provide information about the healing process. McGuire concurs with Csordas that phenomenology is the appropriate tool for a methodology of mind/body/self intersubjectivity as long as it demonstrates "precision and rigour about exactly *how* we know what we claim to have apprehended" (McGuire, 2002: 209), and Gendlin's phenomenological hermeneutics provides exactly that. As Madison explains, "Gendlin has described the hermeneutic interactions between our experience and

symbols in a way that supports an intersubjective understanding while remaining verifiable in our lived experience" (Madison, 2001: 10). This process of verification is called *Focusing*.

## **Focusing**

A felt sense is "readily accessible in experience and thus we are able to work with it phenomenologically" using Focusing (Madison, 2001: 7). Although Focusing is initially taught as a series of steps, it is actually more an approach than a technique, and different teachers present the steps in different ways (see Cornell, 1996; Gendlin, 1981 and "Appendix 1: Focusing Instructions"), but the principles remain the same. Focusing begins when we sense our bodily response to something, which can be our felt sense of an interview question or a fieldwork situation. We then seek a symbol for that response - what Gendlin calls a *handle* (Gendlin, 1981) - and sense whether that symbolization fits our felt sense. If it does, we can spend time exploring the symbol and allowing it to carry forward our initial felt sense (adapted from Jordan, 2005: 6). In chapter 5, "Embodied Philosophy", I referred to the sense of release we experience when we find just the right word or phrase to express an understanding that had been implicit. If we come to a similar sense of completion in Focusing we experience a bodily 'felt shift', a physical affirmation that we have brought some significant knowledge from the implicit into conscious awareness. A 'felt shift' describes just what we mean by an 'Aha! moment' that is accompanied by a release of bodily tension (Gendlin, 1981: 39).

Descriptions of the therapeutic use of Focusing speak of a process similar to McGuire's description of mind/body/self intersubjectivity. Psychotherapist Madison explains how throughout a Focusing session he keeps his attention on the "one intersubjective world" occupied by him and his client "as it exists each moment in our individual bodies" (Madison, 2001: 12). Another Focusing psychotherapist describes the experience of what Csordas calls "somatic modes of attention": "In my work I have felt an ache in my chest in the presence of a patient's grief, or a tingling in my arms and legs in response to another's anger etc. and I frequently consult my own body sensations (and my reveries and stray thoughts) to help me understand my patients' experience" (Solomon, pers. comm., 2007). Solomon uses Focusing in this process of consulting his body<sup>1</sup>, and describes it as a way of "speaking *from* the body rather than *about* the body" (Solomon, 2006: 9).

---

<sup>1</sup> Solomon notes that he began attending to his body sensations before he became aware of Focusing. His body sense had been enhanced by Tai Chi, Bio-energetic therapy training and Vipassana meditation.



Gendlin appreciates that Focusing can be "very helpful innovation for phenomenologically-orientated research", suggesting that it "may result in outcomes that are different and deeper than other qualitative research practices" because it "opens up the whole vast implicit experiential level" (Gendlin, 2003, quoted in Todres, 2004: 25). Todres has discussed the use of Focusing in qualitative research (Todres 1999, 2004 and 2007) and uses Gendlin's work to explore the role of "interembodied understanding" (Todres, 2007 [1999]: 39)<sup>2</sup>. Focusing has also been applied within Grounded Theory (Rennie and Fergus, 2006) and in Heuristic Research, which does not use Focusing in interviews, but recommends it to elucidate the researchers own process of self awareness because it allows them to "identify qualities of an experience that have remained out of conscious reach" (Moustakas, 1990: 25). Although few researchers use Focusing to access embodied knowing in an ethnographic context, I have been in contact with several, one of whom, Jane Bacon, Reader in Performance Studies at the University of Northampton, advised me on my application of this methodology and I have referenced her specific contributions.

My embodied hermeneutics has five principles:

- a) Recognising that the body "is an ongoing interaction with its environment" (Gendlin, 1992: 349) moves us "beyond the subject/object distinction" (Gendlin, 1997b: 15). This intimate involvement with the world defines the "conditions whereby we experience something" (Gadamer, 1976: 9).
- b) The circumstances of our being-in-the-world (principle A) enable our awareness of what McGuire calls the "mind/body/self intersubjectivity" of social situations (McGuire, 2002: 209) which we can access by various means including Focusing.
- c) Researchers can develop this awareness in themselves and help facilitate it for their participants. (See, inter alia, Gendlin, 1981; Solomon, 2006).
- d) This awareness affords a *embodied* phenomenological hermeneutics grounded in "lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990: 27; Penner 2000: 59).
- e) Gendlin's description of the "hermeneutic interactions between our experience and symbols" (Madison, 2001: 10) brings

---

<sup>2</sup> Todres' 1999 paper has recently been reprinted in Todres, 2007 where I came across it for the first time. Although it did not inform my methodology this paper supports the approach I developed independently.

hermeneutic validity to this "embodied understanding" (Todres, 2007: 40) by grounding it in a felt 'rightness' (Caputo, 1987: 81).

Of the four methods I use to understand the process of embodied cognition/knowing, three are underpinned by these principles: (1) I used my phenomenological experience of mind/body/self intersubjectivity both in the field and during and after personal interactions with participants, applying Focusing to deepen this awareness during the later stages of my research. (2) Focusing was also integrated into my interview practice, as discussed in detail below, and contributed to (3) the interpretation phase. The fourth, my use of existing ethnographies, provided additional material to contextualise my fieldwork.

### ***Triangulation***

I have drawn on existing ethnography and my own observations to identify the research field and possible interview topics, while interview data, observation and auto-ethnography have in turn informed the emergence of my hermeneutic analysis. Using several complementary approaches to data gathering in this way is often called methodological triangulation (see, inter alia, Flick, 2006: 289; Richie & Lewis, 2003: 44: 73).

Massey is highly critical of triangulation, claiming that "many misleading and invalid claims are made" in its name (Massey, 1999: 183). Massey's critique proposes that the term 'triangulation' is an inappropriate description of how social scientists use multiple methods because it is based metaphorically on land surveying, which has a different epistemological and ontological stance. As a result it can lead to "claims of convergence, truth, validity, control of bias, completeness and so on looking far more solid than they really are" (Massey, 1999: 194). Further, the claim that triangulation can in some way validate (see inter alia, Schwandt, 1997: 163) implies the existence of a fixed social reality, a notion that most social theorists refute.

However, Richie notes that this is a "longstanding debate" (Richie & Lewis, 2003: 43) and many researchers have embraced the concerns expressed by Massey. Several authors emphasise that triangulation should be used to provide a richer understanding that is "not necessarily a more certain one" (Richie & Lewis, 2003: 44) while Flick emphasises triangulation as an alternative to validation that increases the scope, depth and consistency of research (Flick 2006: 390). The origins of the term are indeed unfortunate, but given that the qualitative research texts I use are aware of the issues and avoid implausible claims for triangulation, and I see no problem in adopting it.

## **METHODOLOGY IN PRACTICE**

My involvement with the environmental protest movement spans over fifteen years and I was involved at the UK's first road protest camp at Twyford Down (1991-1994), the London M11 link road protest (1993-1995) and Newbury (1995-1996). This background gave me an understanding of protest site activism and helped build rapport with research participants.

### ***Sample Selection and Size***

My Eco-Paganism literature review noted that Eco-Pagans can be categorized using two typologies: Letcher identified those explicitly involved in contemporary Paganism (traditionalized) and the more eclectic detraditionalized (non-aligned) Eco-Pagans (Letcher, 2004), while I distinguished between 'protest camp' and 'urban' Eco-Pagans. Although individuals do move between these fluid typologies, they are useful in providing a synchronic structure for my analysis which I present as a scatter diagram (figure 6). I sought interview participants in physical spaces, via organisations (for example The Pagan Federation - see 'Web Sites' references), the Internet (e-mail discussion groups and web sites) and through word of mouth.

### ***Ethnographic Sites***

Because there are very few protest sites in the UK at any one time, my ethnographic sample was self-limiting. I used several sources to locate sites including protest organisations such as Road Alert and Earth First! (see 'Web Sites' references), e-mail discussion lists (see 'E-mail discussion lists' references) and word of mouth. I visited all current (2004 -2007) road protest sites in England, Scotland and Wales, and two that are no longer active. My first visit took place in February 2004 with a week at site A<sup>3</sup>. In October 2005 I gave up the tenancy on my flat, placed my property in storage and went to live at protest site B. This became my main ethnographic location and I spent just over three months living there full-time. In January 2006 I moved back into a house but continued to live part-time at site B for several months, gradually reducing my time there as I moved into the interpretation phase. I remain in close contact with site B to date (January 2008). I visited site C for a few days in February 2006; I visited site D twice for a total of eight days (July 2006 and January 2007) and site E on several occasions between June 2006 and September 2006 for a total of nine days. I explore my personal experience of this research in Chapter 7, " 'You're not studying it - you're living it': An Autoethnography".

---

<sup>3</sup> To help preserve the anonymity of my participants I label these sites alphabetically in the order I visited them.

Site A was located in ancient woodland just outside a South Wales town. During my visit there were a total of about 12 people living in two small encampments and there was strong local support for the campaign. The protest lasted for about 3 months and now been evicted. Site B was a long term encampment on a narrow strip of land which was part of a local park in a suburban town in southern England. It was notable in that it included an ancient burial site. The number of full-time residents varied over the two years of my involvement from 2 to about 12. Although local support was strong, site B has been targeted by arson and other attacks. At the time of writing (January 2008) site B remains threatened by a road widening scheme. Site C was a Somerset protest to stop the felling of an estimated 200 trees for a retail development. The camp, which lasted about 6 weeks, consisted of a few very basic tree platforms and, briefly, part of a squatted factory. Numbers varied widely from one to 30 protesters and local support was mixed. It has now been evicted. Site D was established in June 2002 in a patch of woodland on the edge of a Scottish town and at the time of writing is ongoing. Numbers on-site varied but there were 6 to 8 living there during my visits. There was strong local support for the campaign but this has waned over time. Site E is an ongoing road protest in southern England established during May 2006 in several patches of woodland - some ancient - on the edge of a town. There are two camps and again numbers on-site varied, but during my visits the main camp had an average of ten residents while the second had 5. Local support has varied over time. Sites B, D and E had some well built low-impact dwellings and communal spaces.

Protest site Eco-Pagans are often itinerant, so I also attended key protest marches and events such as the first Climate Change Camp (August 26th to September 4th 2006) and the Earth First! Summer Gatherings in 2004, 2005 and 2006. This provided the opportunity to meet protest site Eco-Pagans, deepened my understanding of protest culture and built on my existing credibility, thereby contributing to rapport. Some urban Eco-Pagans attend events organised by The Pagan Federation or specific Traditions like British Reclaiming or the Druid Network (see 'Web Sites' references). I attended several such events each year between in 2004 and 2007. In addition, my long-term involvement with the Dragon Eco-Pagan Network provided access to potential participants from across the typological spectrum. (See 'Web Sites' references).

### ***Participants***

I chose the urban/protest site axis to identify participants because my literature reviews and initial fieldwork suggested that this was more significant than the traditionalized/detraditionalized axis. I undertook twenty-three interviews in a variety of contexts, including protest sites, organised events and private homes. I interviewed people from a range

of geographical locations representing a wide selection of different types of Eco-Pagan to allow comparison, as follows:

Urban Eco-Pagans:

6 women.

4 men.

Protest site Eco-Pagans:

5 women.

8 men.

The gender differences reflect the situation in the field, as women are slightly more common than men amongst urban Eco-Pagans while men are more prevalent than women on protest sites. Four of the protest site interviews (three women and one man) took place during the pilot stage of my research but I include them as there was no major change in my research agenda. There are slightly more protest site interviews as I wanted to complete a full study of all the Eco-Pagans on site B (eight people, four of each gender), without compromising the breadth of the study. This sample, when integrated with my other strategies, has allowed me to achieve theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### ***Pilot Phase***

At the outset of my research I assumed that ritual was fundamental to Eco-Pagan practice, a conclusion based on personal experience and my literature review. I therefore developed a workshop based methodology for exploring Eco-Pagan ritual using the work of Edgar, Strobel and Halprin (Edgar, 2004; Halprin, 2002; Strobel, 2000). I planned to 'warm up' with Edgar's imagework, which seemed ideal as it uses what Pagans call 'visualisation', so would be familiar to participants. Strobel's 'Performance Hermeneutics' has been used to analyse Deep Ecology ritual (Strobel, 2000), while Halprin's therapeutic work serves as a useful adjunct as it focuses more explicitly on embodied knowledge as revealed through movement and creative expression.

My initial protest camp fieldwork made it clear that this approach was inappropriate: First, it became apparent that conventional ritual practice was far less significant than I or others had believed;<sup>4</sup> second, it was entirely impractical to run the kind of workshop I proposed on a protest camp. In retrospect this latter limitation should have been obvious, but I assumed that protesters would take the time to participate. I could have used this approach with urban Eco-Pagans, but that would mean applying very different methodologies with different research populations, thereby compromising any comparisons I might wish to make. I therefore decided to develop an entirely different approach.

---

<sup>4</sup> The reasons for this are discussed in my fieldwork chapters.

## The Focusing Interview

Postmodern and feminist ethnographers emphasise the importance of relationship in interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1998: 51), and the semi-structured interview is the key technique of the latter. Feminist influenced interviewing "requires openness, emotional engagement, and the development of a potentially long-term, trusting relationship between the interviewer and the subject" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 36). Semi-structured<sup>5</sup> interviews are also called depth, in-depth, focused, unstructured, nondirective, open-ended, or active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Fontana & Fey 1994; McCracken, 1988), and what I call a 'Focusing interview' is based on this model. Whereas the structured interview seeks precise data that explains behaviour according to a pre-established pattern, the semi-structured interview attempts to understand complex behaviour in a more open way. According to feminist ethicist Raymond such open-ended questions "maximise discovery and description" (Reinharz, 1992: 18) and many ethnographers agree (Flick 2006: 149).

In their discussion of the 'depth interview', Reason and Rowan explain the importance of personal engagement and care. Because the "interviewer is genuinely concerned with the interviewee as a person", a greater level of rapport is achieved. The interviewee, sensing the interviewer's attitude, "seeks to respond in appropriate depth". In contrast with a more conventional interview, where the researcher asks the questions and the participant responds, this New Paradigm approach, in common with some feminist methodologies, invites sharing. Depth interviews have an open time frame and the interviewee may dialogue the interviewer, "exploring intent, seeking clarification" and "actively participating in the process of seeking understanding" (Reason & Rowan, 1981: 203). The effectiveness of this approach has been demonstrated by empirical research from humanistic psychology: Jourand's work shows that the best way of getting someone to tell you something about themselves is to share the same kind of information about yourself, and this is especially true when the topic is intimate or personal (Rowan, 1988: 47. Also see Rice and Ezzy, 1999). As Oakley pithily put it, there is "no intimacy without reciprocity" (Oakley, 1981: 49). My own experience bears this out: One woman commented on my interview style, saying she liked it and found it easy to fully respond to my questions. Focusing enhances the effectiveness of the semi-structured interview because it engenders an attentive open attitude that facilitates the empathetic rapport required.

---

<sup>5</sup> Rice, P. and Ezzy, D. (1999) dislike the term 'semi-structured interview' as they think it implies "that the important issues in qualitative interviews are a watered down version of structured interviews".

If, as Gendlin claims, the embodied implicit underpins *all* explicit meaning, then any interview approach would be advised to take it into account. A depth interview - and, perhaps, especially what I call a Focusing Interview - can enable the respondent to carry forward a felt sense to "*complete and form*" (Gendlin, 1964; author's emphasis) an implicit meaning into one which is explicit and verbal. It is important to recall that implicit and explicit meanings are fundamentally different: implicit meaning is preconceptual and so does not in any sense conceal explicit meanings. This understanding supports the theoretical framework that underpins existing practice in semi-structured interviewing, which emphasises that "meanings are continually constructed and reconstructed in interaction" (Rice and Ezzy, 1999: 54). I do not seek to unearth an explicit knowledge that my respondent has hidden within them: "Respondents are not ... repositories of knowledge - treasuries of information awaiting excavation" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 4). Explicit, verbal meaning emerges from the dialogical process of the interview and so respondents "are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 4). Gendlin allows us to understand more clearly *how* this process occurs.

Todres suggests that applying Gendlin's insights can inform discussions on "the 'truth values' of qualitative research" (Todres, 2007 [1999]: 30) and outlines the four phases where it can be applied as "the informants task, the interviewer's task, the task of analysis, and the task of the reader" (Todres, 2007 [1999]: 36). Although I do not use Todres terms, his approach illuminates my own. Bacon suggests that Focusing works well as an integral part of the depth interview (Bacon, pers. comm., 2006) where it has two aspects: (a) I Focused during and (optionally) after the interview and, (b) where appropriate, I facilitated the respondent in using Focusing to access their embodied knowing. I began by explaining that because I was interested in accessing "what the body knows", I used an unusual interview technique and I might invite them to pay particular attention to how their body felt. I explained that it can be quite hard to put embodied understanding into words and suggested using metaphors, sounds, movements or anything else that might help.

### **1) Interviewer Facilitates**

Todres points out that participants use "a process of 'lived body' referencing" to authenticate the "'truth value'" of the words they use in an interview (Todres, 2007 [1999]: 37) and notes the value of Focusing to enhance that process. By clarifying the "process by which an informant brings phenomena to language" Gendlin provides the researcher with "the opportunity for a rigorous connection to the fullness of the phenomenon-as-experienced" (Todres, 2007 [1999]: 37-38). Todres offers useful theoretical underpinning, but does not specify in detail how Focusing might be applied to an interview, and my

discussion with Dr. Bacon informed the practical aspects of the approach I developed.

Fisher notes that "felt meaning" is "called forth" when we interact with something whose symbolic character arouses a feeling in us (Fisher, 2002: 56). An effective question will do exactly that, calling forth a felt sense and helping the respondent to articulate an explicit meaning. It was important that participants engaged with how they *felt* about a situation and carefully phrasing questions helped:

"How was that for you?" or "How did you feel then [and/or] when that happened?" (Cornell, 90: 1996).

In most cases I then invited the participant to become aware of how these feelings might be expressed in the body as a felt sense:

Do you sense any bodily feelings or sensations related to that experience/ this place/that moment? (Harris, interview topic guide, 2007).

I also used such phrases more generally, for example to help them access their felt sense of the protest site or tree or wood they were defending:

How do you feel about the site/the wood/this place? (Harris, interview topic guide, 2007).

More explicit Focusing often helped a participant articulate a felt sense about their spiritual practice. During the pilot phase of my interviews a participant would sometimes find it hard or impossible to articulate their embodied knowing of a spiritual practice, and would say something like "I can't really put it into words ...". In the Focusing Interview I invited participants to become aware of their felt sense and this often enabled them to articulate their embodied knowing.

## **2) Interviewer Focuses**

Before asking my first question I practised what Cornell calls 'attunement', which is a simple process of bringing awareness into your body (Cornell, 1996: 97). Cornell – a practising therapist – claims that this process enhances the therapists intuition, allowing them to become aware of material that is "not from your logical mind" and suggests that it is possible to become aware of "felt senses in your body that are not yours" (Cornell, 1996: 4-5. Cf. Madison, 2001: 12, quoted above). Todres likewise writes of an "interembodied experience" that emerges between the interviewer and the participant that provides an "embodied understanding" of their interaction. While Todres claims that he can confirm the existence of this "interembodied experience" by sharing



some of the implications of his own "embodied understanding", he notes that "it remains a large task to consider the extent to which this can happen" (Todres 2007 [1999]: 39). I agree on both counts, so while "interembodied experience" can emerge in an interview, I chose not to share my embodied understanding given the issues of validity this could raise.

In practice this approach proved to be quite powerful, as exemplified in my interview with 'Zoe',<sup>6</sup> an urban Eco-Pagan. This long interview had been valuable, and I had asked all the questions on my interview guide. But as I concluded the interview I had a bodily prompting - a felt sense - that I had missed something. My process is apparent in the transcript:

Adrian: Wow! Thank-you, That was super! [Zoe: Yeah?] Yeah, really interesting. Um. [LONG PAUSE] Ah. [LONGER PAUSE] Er, mm, er. [Adrian makes a few muttered noises]. Something that isn't down here [on my interview guide]. Something about connected, connection. [Zoe: Mmmm.] 'Cos we talked about connecting, earlier. [Zoe: Mmm, yeah.] [LONG PAUSE]

I spend another half a minute trying to get to the meaning of my felt sense until I say:

We've already talked about connecting to a place. [Zoe: Mmm.] I have a sense that there's something more there. [Zoe: Mmmm.] [LONG PAUSE] How - Do you feel your body has a particular role when you're connecting to a place?

What followed was one of most valuable sections of an already rich interview which I explore in more detail in chapter 8, 'Listening to the Threshold Brook: Urban Eco-Paganism', but without a sensitivity to the "embodied understanding" expressed by my felt sense that there was more to be said, I would never have asked the question.

Because I Focused from the start, I had an empathetic attitude towards the interview process that sometimes profoundly shifted the dynamic. Much of our spiritual experience is not rational, so any impression that I wanted 'rational' responses would close down the whole conversation, but Focusing helps create a space that encourages the freedom to communicate non-rational, spiritual feelings using more poetic modes of expression. Although the felt sense is usually articulated in a word or phrase, it can begin as a gesture, facial expression, movement or other bodily response, so the Focusing interviewer must be especially attentive to such details (Bacon, pers. comm., 2006). After the interview, I sometimes chose to Focus on the interview itself or some handle that

---

<sup>6</sup> The names of most participants referred to have been changed.

emerged. In practice I did not find this added very much to what had already emerged, but it did help me settle after one particularly emotional interview.

**Topic Guides and Recording**

Arthur and Nazroo strongly recommend using topic guides that act as "an *aide-memoire* which guides the researcher during fieldwork and ensures some consistency in fieldwork approaches" (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003: 115). In practice topic guides are used flexibly to "enhance rather than inhibit responsive questioning" (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003: 136). Although I did not use topic guides for my initial interviews, I subsequently found them useful for the reasons Arthur and Nazroo suggest and developed several for use with different participant groups.

Although I used a cassette recorder to tape the interviews, I carefully noted any non-verbal elements that might be important. Gorden notes four kinds of non-verbal communication:

Proxemic communication is the use of interpersonal space to communicate attitudes, chronemics communication is the use of padding of speech and length of silence in conversation, kinesic communication includes any body movements or postures, and paralinguistic communication includes all the variations in volume, pitch and quality of voice (Gorden, 1980: 335).

Chronemic and paralinguistic elements are apparent on the tape recording and could be noted later, but other non-verbal aspects of the interview needed to be noted at the time on my topic guide. I briefly described the location and context of the interview, and provided space where I could note proxemic and kinesic aspects of communication next to a key word to remind me of when it occurred.

Word/Phrase	Interpersonal space	Movement, gesture or posture
<p>Every where...            maybe here.</p> <p>—————</p> <p>I DON'T KNOW            WHY THAT IS.</p>	<p>COANS            FORWARD</p>	<p>GESTURES TO <u>CHEST</u></p>

## **Fig. 6: Topic guide showing notes on chronemic and paralinguistic aspects of the interview.**

Because my research often took place at protest sites, it was not always possible to undertake a Focusing interview. In one such case ('Adam') I used the "ethnographic interview" described by Spradley "as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants" (Spradley, 1979: 58-59).

### ***Interview Transcription***

My interview transcriptions were verbatim and because spoken sentences rarely have the grammatical structure that a written sentence has, I used punctuation to show timings (chronemics) not structure or meaning:

- A comma, means a very short pause. Just a moment - as long as you would give a comma if you were reading a sentence out loud.
- A full-stop shows that a spoken sentence has ended and at the same time indicates a pause longer than a comma.
- [Pause] means a brief pause - the length of a long breath. I use ... when a sentence fades off and this will also mean there is a brief pause.
- [Long Pause] means a longer pause of up to three long breaths.
- I use a hyphen - when there is a break in the flow of meaning in a sentence but no pause.

### **IObservation**

Although my embodied hermeneutics developed during - and out of - the so-called 'fieldwork' phase (a notion I problematizes in my autoethnography chapter), the fundamental principles were apparent throughout. As an active Eco-Pagan I had a "complete membership role" (Adler & Adler, 1998: 97) which embraced a Heuristic research recommendation that the researcher "get inside the question, become one with it" (Moustakas, 1990: 15). Jackson cogently suggests that to understand "bodily praxis" the researcher must inhabit the same world as the other person:

Participation thus becomes an end in itself rather than a means of gathering closely observed data which will be subject to interpretation elsewhere after the event (Jackson, 1989: 58).

Although such involvement may be ideal, retaining a reflexive perspective is crucial, so I initially strived to retain what Douglas calls the 'theoretic stance' (Douglas, 1970: 22) as opposed to the 'natural

stance' I might adopt outside the research context. My experience has, however, blurred this conventional notion of having a 'research stance' and a 'natural stance' to the point where a reflexive attitude has become second nature.

Though the term 'observation' implies visual data gathering, "all of the senses can also be fully engaged in this endeavor, from smell to hearing, touch, and taste" (Adler & Adler, 1998: 80). I extended this notion beyond the outdated five senses model to include, amongst other perceptual modes, proprioception and intuition, developing my sensitivity to what Brooks Gardener describes as the "Click! Experience" – those moments where a comment, action or feeling reveals its deeper emotional significance (Adler & Adler, 1998: 81). I followed Mehan & Wood's recommendation that initial observations be descriptive and quite general, shifting to selective observations as my research questions became more focused (Mehan & Wood, 1975). Throughout this process my observations were supported and integrated with the other aspects of my methodology, as this is when observation works best: Used "as part of a methodological spectrum that includes ... strategies such as depth interviewing or participant observation, it is the most powerful source of validation" (Adler & Adler, 1998: 105).

### ***Participant Observation of Ritual***

The discussion above is relevant to my role as participant observer of Eco-Pagan rituals, but there were several additional points to consider, notably the difficulty of recording what occurs in the ritual while fully participating in it. In practice, there are usually several opportunities to unobtrusively look round the group and count the number, age and gender of participants, and I took time out soon after a ritual to draw a simple map of the ritual space and note who was there, what they did, and how I felt during the ceremony. After a ritual any paraphernalia and offerings were usually left for long enough for me to take notes and/or photographs if appropriate. On one occasion I followed up a ritual with interviews with participants, but as my research proceeded it became apparent that formal ritual was less relevant than I had assumed, so I did not repeat this.

### **Autoethnography**

Autoethnography describes the process of the ethnographer creatively exploring his or her own experience in order to illuminate the research and "questions the dualism of the insider-outsider paradigm" (Wallis, 2004: 197). In a sense my research has been autoethnographic from the start, as it originated from my experience of a "somatic, physical knowing" in Eco-Pagan ritual (Harris, 1996: 151); I have thus always been a key 'respondent' in my research. This is particularly important

given the tacit nature of embodied knowledge and the embodied hermeneutics I developed, because I was able to observe my embodied knowing and thereby better understand the experience of my (co)participants. In this way I became a sensitive instrument tuned to the subtle nuances of the research material. Furthermore, my exposure to hermeneutics, New Paradigm Research and feminist methodologies revealed that abandoning the illusion of the objective, faceless interviewer required personal exposure and openness to learn about myself as I try to understand others (Crapanzano, 1980). This realization is intimately related to embodied hermeneutics, as a researcher using an embodied methodology "must recognise the multiple subject positions that are invoked by the presence of their own body and the materiality of their fieldwork" (Ahmed, 2004: 286). Although I have already discussed such embodied reflexivity in theoretical terms above, it will become fleshed out in my autoethnography chapter.

Autoethnography can also challenge conventional notions of what counts as knowledge and offer alternative ways of knowing. As Tierney says "autoethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders" (Tierney, 1998: 66). For Ellis and Bochner a fundamental aspect of the power of autoethnography is that it can enable the reader to "feel the truth" of the writers stories and so "become coparticipants" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 745). By evocatively expressing my embodied ways of knowing I enable the reader to come to their own felt sense of that knowing. Todres suggest that through aesthetic forms of writing the reader can be "intuitively empowered ... to engage with the phenomena in a more direct and personal way" (Todres, 2007 [1999]: 41), thus providing an "experientially evocative" (Todres, 2004: 24) "texture" that enhances our understanding of thematic "structure" (Todres, 2007: 47). Whereas most of this thesis presents an analytic approach to structured data, I intend my autoethnographic chapter to provide a more intuitive, felt understanding of my research through an aesthetic "texture".

## **IINTERPRETATION and VALIDATION**

### ***Interpretation***

Most discussions of working with qualitative data speak of analysis, a term originally found in hard sciences like chemistry, where it means "to break down a whole into component ... parts" (Schwandt, 1997: 5). Schwandt, who portrays this widespread procedural approach as quite mechanical and grounded in behaviourism, prefers other models, notably hermeneutics. Hermeneutics engages the researcher in a *dialogue* with the material to create an interpretation. This contrast

leads me to consider Denzin's emphasis on the *art* of interpretation (Denzin, 1998: 313), which portrays the field worker as a storytelling *bricoleur* weaving a narrative from the field notes. As a corrective perhaps, Flick, having been somewhat critical of Denzin's apparent dismissal of method (Flick, 2006: 407), concludes that qualitative research requires both "art *and* method" (Flick, 2006: 408). Hermeneutics is indeed a method and an art, so Flick's stance reflects my own. On the one hand, I am, like Denzin, concerned with what story the data can tell, but on the other I apply an embodied hermeneutic method.

The hermeneutic circle describes a process where interpretation is not limited to a fixed 'post-fieldwork' phase. For example, my recognition of the interpretative value of 'wilderness effect' theory came during fieldwork and emerged from a sensitivity to patterns of experience. At the stage where my only relationship was with a corpus of text, not a body of flesh, more conventional hermeneutic methods, such as considering language use and context, became valuable. However, I retained an embodied hermeneutics throughout. In practice some of the conventional approaches of qualitative data analysis, like coding text for themes, were useful, but my approach always emphasised context and sought to synthesise themes into related patterns of meaning. The concept of 'themes' is often left vague, but I based my understanding on van Manen's model of themes as "like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes" (Van Manen, 1990: 90).

### ***In Practice***

Because my embodied hermeneutics evolved during my research, some of my early interpretation strategies were more *ad hoc*, but in the main there were three phases: I transcribed the tape verbatim, noting pauses, pacing and any emphasis on words, which inevitably meant listening several times to write the words exactly as they were spoken. Gendlin's research showed that hesitation and vagueness often accompanied the search for a felt sense, so it is important that I transcribed hesitations, pauses and fill-in phrases. I took notes during this phase. I then listened again while adopting a Focusing attitude, which provided an intuitive sense of what was being expressed. Again I took notes. Then I carefully read the transcript, looking for themes, relationships and patterns, and highlighting sections of text with different colours. My fieldwork notes were too extensive to apply this process, but as the material was from my own lived experience it was adequate to re-read my notes, again looking for themes, relationships and patterns, and transcribe relevant sections. In common with the majority of qualitative researchers, this process began early on, influencing my process in a series of hermeneutic cycles

that culminated in the interpretations presented in 'Section II: Fieldwork'.

Most interpretation relies on rational analysis whereas I used *both* rational analysis and my intuitive felt sense of the meaning of the text. Listening to the recording allowed me to be sensitive to the pace of speech, the tone and volume of the voice, and subtle verbal nuances that a transcription would miss unless it were so precise as to be almost unreadable. Even then, the actual experience of listening to the tape is more sensual - more *embodied* - than reading a transcription: The text of a transcription can only have the words; "Birds singing in the background". The 'text' of a tape recording actually has the sound of the birds singing, which helped me to get a much richer sense of the context of an interview. During the transcription and, especially, the Focusing phase, I sometimes got a very tangible bodily sense of what the participant was talking about. The words describing their feelings evoked a felt sense in me that provided a deeper understanding of their experience. This often felt odd, even slightly disturbing, as if I were stepping into the other person's mode of awareness as it was at a given moment.

Finally, having thematically coded the text of all interviews, field notes and interpretative comments, I began to explore related patterns of meaning using Mind Maps from which I developed my interpretations.

### **Validation**

Cresswell lists eight "primary strategies" to ensure validity: Triangulation, member-checking, rich, thick descriptions, explicitly stating the researchers stance or possible "bias", presenting material that runs counter to the interpretation, extensive time in the field, peer debriefing and the use of an external auditor (Cresswell, 2003: 196). If we allow my long term involvement with Eco-Paganism as "extensive time in the field", I use all of these strategies.

Furthermore, Todres illustrates the value of Gendlin's felt sense in providing "intersubjective validity" (Todres, 2007 [1999]: 31). Gendlin shows that our "bodily-participative-knowing" is "not just reasoned but recognised" in a "lived process by which languaging and embodying interact" (Todres, 2007 [1999]: 34). Focusing is thus more grounded than many phenomenological approaches because it is rooted in an identifiable felt sense that is embodied: As Madison says, the felt sense "is not a theory. It is *there*" (Madison, 2001: 7). In addition the felt shift provides an unmistakable confirmation of the integrity of our intuitions: For Todres the recognition of rightness that is expressed in a felt shift provides the "source of accountability" (Todres, 2007 [1999]:40) that Caputo referred to above as the 'rightness' of an interpretation: "That is

what we are looking for. That puts into words what we have all along understood about ourselves" (Caputo, 1987: 81).

## **Conclusion**

I am concerned with an embodied hermeneutics and a hermeneutics of embodiment: the former is *grounded* in embodiment, while the latter is focused on *understanding* some aspect of embodiment. While my current methodology encompasses both, I can envisage embodied hermeneutics being applied to a situation where embodiment was less primary. The embodied hermeneutics I have presented develops the work of Bacon, McGuire, Moustakas, and especially Gendlin and Todres, to provide a consistent methodology that fulfils the criteria set out by New Paradigm Research and the feminist methodologies discussed above. It also fits the requirements of the methodology of mind/body/self intersubjectivity proposed by McGuire, as it can readily be taught and has both "precision and rigour" (McGuire, 2002: 209). In practice it is a powerful and flexible means of researching embodied knowing which builds on existing research to make an original contribution to social science methodology. The power of this approach will become apparent in the fieldwork chapters, to which I now turn.