

## CHAPTER 5

# THE INVESTIGATION AND FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, after the four research participants have been introduced, all aspects of the investigation and results of all the research participants will be addressed. This is in contrast to the prevailing custom of presenting the full investigation and results of just one research participant, followed by the results only of the other research participants, with their investigation material relegated to various appendices.

There are essentially three reasons for this decision: *First*, it is inherently uneven, in my view, not to treat all the research participants' material in the same way, by giving more exposure to one than the others. It may be tempting to 'cherry pick' the investigation of one research participant and then, to some extent, attempt to 'hide' less convincing research work in appendices. *Second*, it is inherently clearer and easier to compare the investigations and check the results if they are all together in the same chapter rather than distributed through a number of appendices, in which the original descriptions are separated from the findings. This is a particularly pertinent point in an existential-phenomenological study given the phenomenologists' rallying cry of "back to the things themselves". *Third*, it is inherently limiting, in my considered opinion, to use conventional tables demonstrating different steps of the research process. This is because it is not possible to view more than two steps of the process side by side, because of the amount of text involved. The result is that it is not easy to see and follow the flow from one table to the next.

In order to give effect to these considerations, a different way of displaying the investigation and results has been designed. For each research participant, the presentation of the investigation and results will follow the same pattern of steps referred to in the methodology of Chapter 3, immediately under one another, thus:

- Step 1** Obtaining a sense of each transcribed description as a whole experience.
- Step 2** Discerning and numbering meaning units (MUs).
- Step 3** Stating the meaning that dominates each meaning unit. This is a transformed meaning unit (TMU).
- Step 4** Interrogating each transformed meaning unit describing the structure – the *what?* – and the style – the *how?* – of the experience. This is the interrogated transformed meaning unit (ITMU).
- Steps 2 – 4** are repeated for each meaning unit of the research interview.
- Step 5** Synthesising these ITMUs into a descriptive situated structural statement (SSS). This will be displayed at the conclusion of each research participant’s material. The investigation and findings of all the research participants are presented.
- Step 6** Developing from the SSSs of all the research participants together, rather than individually, a general structural statement (GSS), which is equivalent to the previously mentioned Step 7, elucidating a comprehensive structural statement of the experience of insight.

## 5.2 The Research Participants

- **Desmond Tutu** is the Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town and Nobel Peace Prize Winner. He was Chair of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He is deeply respected for his spirituality, humour and speaking the truth to power, both to the apartheid government and to the new democratically elected government, as well as being the voice of the voiceless. This research focuses on his experience of insight in opposing apartheid immediately preceding the Soweto Uprising of 1976 (5.3).
- **Debbie Brown** (a pseudonym) is an area bank manager, wife and mother. This research focuses on her experience of insight as she faces the question of how to respond to her husband’s infidelity (5.4).
- **Roger Penrose** is the Emeritus Rouse Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University and a distinguished cosmologist. He has been knighted and is the recipient of many awards for his scientific work, including frequent collaborations with Stephen Hawking. This research focuses

on his experience of insight as he was wrestling with the question of what happens in a black hole (5.5).

- **Tony Grogan** is the well-known cartoonist for the newspaper the *Cape Times*, and a highly respected artist. He has already been introduced as the research participant in chapter 4, the preliminary study. He is included in this list for the sake of completeness. This research focuses on his experience of insight in the process of constructing a cartoon. The results of the investigation of that preliminary study will be considered in the context of the synthesis into a general structural statement (GSS) of the experience of insight of all the research participants (in sections 4.5 & 4.7).

### 5.3 The Investigation of Desmond's Experience of Insight

In this section Steps 2 - 4 in the methodology will be completed. The text of the transcribed interview is in bold, in order to make a clear distinction between it and the comments upon it.

#### Step 2 MU1

John: **Thank you for this opportunity to ask you about your experience of insight or intuition, as you prefer to call it. I'd be particularly interested, as I said in my letter, to ask about your experience of insight during the 5-day clergy retreat in Johannesburg in May 1976, which culminated in your letter to the Prime Minister, John Vorster. You described it in that letter as your "growing nightmarish fear that unless something drastic is done very soon then bloodshed and violence are going to happen in South Africa almost inevitably", and that was just five weeks before the Soweto Uprising of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976. Is that something that you could talk about?**

#### Step 3 TMU1

Researcher asks subject about his experience of insight or intuition during a retreat which resulted in writing to the Prime Minister, warning of bloodshed and violence just five weeks before the Soweto Uprising of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976.

#### **Step 4 ITMU1**

*What?* Desmond writes a letter to the Prime Minister expressing his “growing nightmarish fear” that unless drastic changes are made to the injustices of the apartheid system bloodshed and violence will erupt.

*How?* This letter came as a result of an insight or intuition during a 5-day retreat, five weeks before the Soweto Uprising of 1976.

#### **Step 2 MU 2**

Desmond: **Yes and no. I’m not quite sure how much detail one has, that one can share with you.**

John: **I understand that because it was a long time ago. But perhaps you could describe in as much detail as you can remember your particular lived experience; the context and what happened before, during and after your insight; what you thought, felt and did?**

#### **Step 3 TMU2**

Desmond is ambivalent; he is not sure how much detail he has that he can share about his experience of insight.

#### **Step 4 ITMU2**

*What?* Desmond’s uncertainty is not about sharing the experience - he readily agreed to the interview - but how much detail he has that he can share.

*How?* Desmond’s shift from the personal “I” to the more general “one” may be an indication of humility acknowledging a mysterious element and that it was primarily an experience of the divine.

#### **Step 2 MU3**

Desmond: I think that I was not peculiar at the time in being deeply concerned and very apprehensive, living as we did in Soweto and being aware of how people were feeling about “the system”.

#### **Step 3 TMU3**

Living in Soweto Desmond was aware of, and deeply concerned about, how Black people felt about the apartheid system. This made him apprehensive about where it would all lead.

#### **Step 4 ITMU3**

*What?* Living in Soweto Desmond was not only aware of, but in many ways shared in, the Black community's experience of systematic apartheid oppression. He recognises that other people were also concerned about where it would all lead, but he acknowledges that he was very apprehensive.

*How?* Desmond had deliberately chosen to live in Soweto and identify with the Black community there. So he experienced, witnessed and empathised with Black peoples' feelings about the apartheid system. This made him not just concerned, as some others were, but very apprehensive about where it would all lead.

#### **Step 2 MU4**

Desmond: You know, the squalor, the deprivation, the daily humiliations that happened.

#### **Step 3 TMU4**

Desmond refers to the appalling physical conditions, the deprivation and the daily psychological humiliations which Black people experienced under apartheid.

#### **Step 4 ITMU4**

*What?* Desmond is aware of the multi-dimensional, all encompassing nature of the system of apartheid; he refers to the physical conditions, educational and other deprivations, and also the daily psychological humiliations.

*How?* Because Desmond had chosen to live and identify with the Black community, rather than become an 'honorary White' in the Deanery in the White Group Area of Johannesburg, he experienced, witnessed, empathised and stood in solidarity with Black peoples' experience under the system of apartheid.

#### **Step 2 MU5**

Desmond: ... and just wondering actually where the heck was God in all of this ...

#### **Step 3 TMU5**

Desmond wrestled particularly with the theological, spiritual and moral questions of where on earth was God in all of this.

#### **Step 4 ITMU5**

*What?* Desmond wrestled with profound issues of theodicy, spirituality and moral outrage about how God could allow this indignity, injustice and oppression.

*How?* Desmond's wrestling with these issues was essential for his own humanity, spirituality and integrity at a personal level, both crucial for his position in the church proclaiming, contrary to the ideology of apartheid, that we are all created equal in the image of God, and vital for his recognition as a spokesman for the Black community becoming increasingly desperate under the apartheid regime.

## **Step 2 MU6**

Desmond: ... **and in a particular way the young people, the students, in the schools who were niggled by the fact that Afrikaans was being rammed down their throats, and at the time seen as the language of the oppressor. Here was the oppressor not just insisting that you learnt their language but pushing your nose into the dust. This oppression, deprivation and daily psychological humiliation was experienced in a particular way by students as a result of being deprived of their own language as the medium of instruction in schools, and being forced to use Afrikaans – the language of the oppressor.**

## **Step 3 TMU6**

This oppression, deprivation and daily psychological humiliation was experienced in a particular way by students as a result of being deprived of their own language as the medium of instruction in schools, and being forced to use Afrikaans – the language of the oppressor.

## **Step 4 ITMU6**

*What?* Desmond, using vivid descriptive images, cites the enforcement of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction as a symbolic example of humiliation: “the oppressor not just insisting that you learn their language but pushing your nose into the dust”.

*How?* Desmond has a particular affinity with young people, and empathy with their struggles. It is significant that he uses such colourful language as “rammed down their throats” and “pushing your nose into the dust”, for this not only portrays the absolute power of the oppressor, but also vividly captures the difficulty for the oppressed of breathing with dust in your nose ... of just surviving ... because it was precisely this humiliation over Afrikaans as the medium of instruction that was to emerge as the catalyst for the uprising.

## Step 2 MU7

Desmond: **I think that there had also been one or two meetings which some of the leadership in the Township had held in our house, because our house is about a hundred or so metres away from the old Mandela house. They often had meetings with Winnie in her house, but sometimes they thought the police were watching, and used our house on one or two occasions ...**

## Step 3 TMU7

There were often meetings of the leadership in Soweto at the Mandela house. On a few occasions, because of police surveillance, these were switched to the Tutus' house because they lived nearby.

## Step 4 ITMU7

*What?* Desmond knew about meetings of the leadership in Soweto, and very occasionally they took place in his house, because of police surveillance.

*How?* Desmond was supportive of these meetings, but not directly involved.

## Step 2 MU8

Desmond: **... you mustn't think that we were in the front line in that kind of way.**

## Step 3 TMU8

Desmond is concerned that the conclusion should not be drawn that they were involved in the leadership meetings or in frontline political activity, like Winnie Mandela.

## Step 4 ITMU8

*What?* Desmond was not involved in the leadership meetings or in frontline political activity.

*How?* So he had no inside track on what the leadership in Soweto were planning which might have influenced his experience of insight, and did not see his role as primarily that of a political activist like Winnie Mandela.

## Step 2 MU9

Desmond: **I went into the retreat, which was for the clergy of the Diocese of Johannesburg, but I had just previously been elected Bishop of Lesotho which was a heart-rending thing for me at the time ... it was very odd, I didn't want to become Bishop of Lesotho.**<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lesotho is a separate mountainous Kingdom, within but not part of, the Republic of South Africa. So if Desmond became the Bishop of Lesotho he would have no voice in apartheid South Africa

### Step 3 TMU9

The five-day silent retreat for the clergy had been arranged previously but it came at a very significant time for Desmond. Two months before he had been elected Bishop of Lesotho so was going to have to leave South Africa just as he realised issues were coming to a head under apartheid, so he felt profoundly reluctant and conflicted.

### Step 4 ITMU9

*What?* Desmond went into retreat feeling deeply conflicted at an intra-psychic level as well as at an interpersonal level. The prospect of leaving South Africa at a time of looming crisis under apartheid caused him intense sadness and distress. He did not want to become Bishop of Lesotho.

*How?* For someone to describe his election as Bishop as “heart-rending” is very revealing. It reveals not just Desmond’s reluctance to become Bishop of Lesotho but also his intense sadness, distress and sense of being torn apart. It was as if having to leave the land of his birth, at what he increasingly felt was such a critical time, was a betrayal of his own discernment and sense of vocation. It felt “heart-rending” at an affective and behavioural level. Perhaps it seemed “odd” at a cognitive level because it was at odds with thoughts that were beginning to take shape for him as a result of the increasing reaction in the Black community to the mounting pressure of the apartheid system; an awareness that would become an important part of his insight.

### Step 2 MU10

Desmond: **I didn’t want to leave the Diocese of Johannesburg, I didn’t want to leave the Cathedral.**

### Step 3 TMU10

Desmond went into retreat with the clergy of Johannesburg feeling strongly that he did not want to leave the Diocese of Johannesburg or the Cathedral.

### Step 4 ITMU10

*What?* Desmond went into retreat with his brother clergy aware that on a personal level he did not want to leave them. He was also conscious that he didn’t want to leave the Cathedral for strategic reasons.

*How?* Desmond went into retreat with his brother clergy aware that he valued his relationship with them at a deeply *personal* level and did not want to leave them. He was also conscious of the *strategic* position he had as Dean of the Cathedral with worshippers of all races, being in the



economic centre of the country. Despite all this, he had to leave for *ecclesiastical* reasons; so he went into retreat with a bewildering sense of loss.

### Step 2 MU11

Desmond: **So I went into this retreat in a welter of emotions, in my own personal situation being aware that I was going to have to leave, but also the deep sense of foreboding ... you felt, that the clouds were gathering.**

### Step 3 TMU11

Desmond went into retreat in a confused mass of surging and conflicting emotions, both at a *personal* level and because he was increasingly aware that things in the country were coming to a head.

### Step 4 ITMU11

*What?* In the weeks following Desmond's election as Bishop of Lesotho, leading up to the retreat, his unhappiness at having to leave the country grew rather than abated; he felt profoundly conflicted and had a sense of impending doom.

*How?* Desmond went into retreat in a confused mass of conflicting emotions, both at an intra-psychic, personal and interpersonal level, as well as at an ecclesiastical, strategic, human and national level because of apartheid. His inner turmoil was partly due to his own personal circumstances but it was also a reflection of the turmoil in the country about which he was so concerned and apprehensive. He realised that he *had* to leave the country in submission to the electoral process, but as he read the mood of the Black community he had a sense that the land of his birth was on the verge of an explosion. Yet instead of naturally owning his feeling by saying "I felt", or even "one felt", he expresses it rather awkwardly in terms of "you felt that the clouds were gathering".

### Step 2 MU12

Desmond: **I can't put it into words as to how you were feeling, I mean you went into the retreat ... but obviously you never know what God's going to do with you [laughing].**

### Step 3 TMU12

Desmond cannot articulate all the feelings that he had as he went into retreat ... not knowing what God would do with him.

#### Step 4 ITMU12

*What?* Desmond was torn apart by the fundamental question of ‘What is God’s will in all of this?’ On the one hand, there was the corporate decision of the Elective Assembly and on the other were his own personal feelings as well as his assessment of the political situation. Desmond could not articulate all his confused and conflicting feelings at the time. He went into the retreat in submission to God ... as he muses on it he adds “obviously you never know what God’s going to do with you [laughing]”.

*How?* There seems to be a transitional quality to his musing about this stage of his experience, reflected in the transition from the more personal and individual “I” to the more generalised and inclusive “you” in the same sentence, as if he could not completely understand his feelings or what happened to him in terms of his experience of insight on a personal level, because he sees it as God’s doing. Perhaps his use of “you” also reflects the more universal quality of the type of experience of insight that he is describing, as a result of God pouring out his Spirit on everyone, rather than claiming something unique.

#### Step2 MU13

Desmond: **And I wasn’t looking for any particular direction or focus ... I mean you are supposed to go into retreat expectantly, giving God this time that we hardly ever do, that God might take the chance of communicating ...**

#### Step 3 TMU13

Desmond went into the retreat without particular expectations, but trying to be generally expectant; to give God his whole time and attention and to be as open and available to God as possible, so that God might have a chance to communicate with him.

#### Step 4 ITMU13

*What?* Desmond did not go into retreat with particular expectations of God or projects of his own, or looking for any particular guidance. He wanted to give God his whole time and attention and to be open to hearing anything God might communicate.

*How?* Perhaps Desmond’s use of the word “supposed” indicates his awareness of his inner turmoil as he went into retreat, both in relation to his personal circumstances as well as his concern and apprehension about what was going on in the country. So it would not have been easy for him to lay aside his own agenda, concerns, tensions, emotions, distractions and questions in order to be “giving God this time that we hardly ever do”. In trying to give himself, his time

and his attention to God, Desmond was wanting to be expectant and open to any insight or word that God might communicate to him.

**Step 2** MU14

Desmond: ... **it seemed like a pressure from God.**

**Step 3** TMU14

Desmond experienced what seemed like a pressure from God.

**Step 4** ITMU14

*What?* Desmond, trying to stay both present and open to God, experienced what seemed like a pressure.

*How?* Desmond was, in faith, trying to be open and available to God and he experienced a shift in awareness ... it seemed like a pressure, an *impact*, a force that pressed steadily, pushed or urged, which seemed to be from God.

**Step 2** MU15

Desmond: **It doesn't seem rational at all ... it isn't anything that you can say categorically "I know that God said to me ..."**

John: **It would be very nice if it were that simple.**

**Step 3** TMU15

Desmond acknowledges that a "pressure" doesn't seem rational and you cannot be categorical about it being of God, or certain about what God is saying.

**Step 4** ITMU15

*What?* Desmond qualifies his evolving spiritual experience acknowledging that sensing a pressure does not seem rational in Western terminology, and that you cannot be categorical about it being of God, or certain about what God is saying.

*How?* Desmond acknowledges the limitations and questions that can be asked of his experience, but lets the reality of the sense of pressure be, just being aware of it rather than trying to control it or reject it as meaningless.

**Step 2** MU16

Desmond: **But it did seem that God was saying, or this particular pressure said, "Write"...**

John: **And that pressure, did it gradually build up during the 5-day retreat, or was there a particular point at which it crystallised for you?**

Desmond: **I think that it came almost instantaneously ... its effect on me was that “you have to do this”.**

**Step 3 TMU16**

Desmond firmly and clearly states that it did seem that God was saying “write”. It came fully formed, almost instantaneously as a categorical imperative.

**Step 4 ITMU16**

*What?* Desmond interrupts my comment, that it would be nice if it were simple, rational and ... by asserting firmly and definitely that it did seem that God, or this particular pressure, said “write”... it came fully formed, almost instantaneously, as a categorical imperative.

*How?* So despite acknowledging the rational limitations in terms of explaining and verifying his spiritual experience, Desmond is quite firm and definite about the fact, the significance, the meaning, the almost instantaneous nature and the categorical implications of his evolving experience of insight.

**Step 2 MU17**

Desmond: **... and I did something that we are told you mustn’t do in a retreat [guffaws of laughter]. I had not intended ... I had always tried to be obedient to this particular injunction, you are not supposed to be doing that kind of “work” thing. But this thing said “you are going to do it, you have to do it” and I hoped that if I was taken to task I would say “don’t blame me!” [laughing]. I couldn’t be disobedient to what seemed to me to be God saying “this is what you are to do”.**

**Step 3 TMU17**

This categorical imperative to “write” over-rode the normal rules of a retreat forbidding “work”, which Desmond greatly respected and always tried to obey. But he could not be disobedient to what God seemed to be saying.

**Step 4 ITMU17**

*What?* Desmond is aware of not complying with the expected norms of retreat practice. The incongruity and humour of disobeying the normal rules of retreat about not working, in order to obey this insistent pressure to write, is vivid for Desmond.

*How?* Contrary to Desmond's normal respect for, and obedience of, the rules of retreat about not working, he experienced the insight to write as an insistent pressure "you are going to do it, you have to do it". He remembers himself almost like a defiant schoolboy being caught out, breaking the rules and saying "don't blame me!" He can enjoy joking and laughing about it because he is aware that it is only a superficial or apparent contradiction of the *letter* of the law; the *spirit* of the rules of retreat is precisely to help a person to come to place of hearing, trusting and obeying God, which is exactly what he was doing, so that the underlying purpose of the rules was being fulfilled. So in that respect it is a healthy playfulness and defiance. He could not be disobedient to what seemed to him to be God saying "this is what you are to do", and so that is why he says "don't blame me".

### **Step 2** MU18

Desmond: **And it is horribly presumptuous, isn't it? It is incredibly frightening, because what do you say to justify that it is from God, and we all know how the Old Testament especially is full of strictures against false prophets ... how are you able to distinguish between what is genuinely from God and what is merely personal predilections, or you're wanting just to do your thing and to stand out.**

### **Step 3** TMU18

Despite his clarity about his own experience of intuition or insight, Desmond is acutely aware of the dangers of presumption, the issues of credibility, and the importance of discernment.

### **Step 4** ITMU18

*What?* Desmond does not answer these questions about the dangers of presumption, the issues of credibility, the importance of discerning authenticity, and the difficulty of verifying what is genuinely from God and what is a personal preference or ambition, but he is acutely aware of them in relation to his experience of insight. He openly and repeatedly articulates them.

*How?* Desmond's awareness of and willingness to raise these epistemological questions assists him to make a realistic appraisal of his own experience of insight. He is very conscious that true prophetic insight is a matter of discerning faith and obedience, rather than claiming complete certainty of divine inspiration.

### **Step 2 MU19**

John: **Was there a particular point at which you knew you had to do this?**

Desmond: **I can't quite recall clearly but it seemed to me once it came, then it was there, you know, there wasn't a matter of any self-doubt ...**

### **Step 3 TMU19**

Desmond can not recall exactly when his experience of insight occurred on the retreat but when it came it was there; there was not any self-doubt about it.

### **Step 4 ITMU19**

*What?* Despite Desmond's awareness and articulation of the dangers of presumption, issues of credibility, importance of authenticity and the difficulty of discerning motives and verifying the genuineness of his experience of insight, he affirms the clear and strong existential quality of his experience: it was "there", there wasn't any self-doubt.

*How?* Desmond cannot recall a particular time or trigger for this experience of insight. Five days of silent, prayerful retreat is significant quality time and there may well have been a gradual settling of the inner turmoil and tension with which he entered the retreat, leading to a developing expectancy (MU13). So there would probably have been a gradual shift of awareness and readiness as he tried to stay present and open to God, but when the pressure and insight to write did come it came "almost instantaneously" (MU16). The existential quality of this experience was so crucial in shaping Desmond's moral stance about writing the letter to the Prime Minister, that he was certain about it and committed to it; he had no self-doubt about it. He received this experience of insight in faith and was determined to be faithful to it.

### **Step 2 MU20**

John: **But you saw, or understood, quite clearly, that you needed to write an open letter, did it come as definitely as that?**

Desmond: **Well, it wasn't originally an open letter ...**

John: **It was to the Prime Minister ...**

Desmond: **It was to him ... in fact, I mean, I think they quite rightly got annoyed when they heard that a journalist ... somebody I knew ... soon after the retreat I saw him and then mentioned the letter, and he was working for the *Sunday Tribune*, and he asked to see it, and said it should be published. I had some misgiving because I knew the courtesies required ... the protocol ... where you had to alert the other person that you were going to**

**publish. I didn't have a chance of doing that, and so the Prime Minister was justified to some extent in being annoyed with me at having done that.**

**Step 3 TMU20**

Desmond's letter to the Prime Minister wasn't originally an open letter. He mentioned the letter to a journalist friend who asked to see it. Desmond gave it to him not intending its publication immediately. Desmond accepts the Prime Minister's annoyance about it.

**Step 4 ITMU20**

*What?* Desmond had said in his letter that he wanted to make it available to the press "preferably with your concurrence", but it was published before the Prime Minister replied, so there was a lack of courtesy and due protocol in the way in which the result of Desmond's experience of insight was executed.

*How?* Desmond let his eagerness over-ride his misgivings and sense of the courtesies required. He accepts the Prime Minister's annoyance about that, without in any way blaming the journalist involved, which is indicative of his honesty and motivation, despite this behavioural flaw in expressing his intuitive insight.

**Step2 MU21**

**John: He described it as putting out political propaganda, didn't he, in his reply to you?**

**Desmond: He dismissed it as though I had been put up to it by the official opposition ... it wasn't something that I had done on my own ... which was part of the sadness of our situation, that he was quite contemptuous ... quite dismissive in that he didn't think that I could have done this off my own bat, and then of course it was the usual thing, you are allowing yourself to be used and somebody's inciting you to do this.**

**John: That must have felt very insulting because you knew how the pressure had built up inside you ...**

**Desmond: Yes ... I just want to say too, the suggestion that we're not smart enough to be able to write a letter like this ... is insulting.**

**Step 3 TMU21**

The Prime Minister's response was dismissive, contemptuous and insulting. He not only questioned the authenticity of Desmond's experience of insight, he also dismissed and denied the validity of the content of Desmond's insight. He even assumed Desmond was not capable of

writing such a letter, and that he'd allowed himself to be incited and used by the official opposition.

#### **Step 4 ITMU21**

*What?* The Prime Minister dismissed the content of Desmond's insight as political propaganda, questioned the authenticity of Desmond's insight as something he could not have done on his own, devalued and refused to acknowledge Desmond's personal experience and convictions expressed in his insight, and in the process ridiculed and insulted Black people as intellectually incapable of writing a letter of this quality.

*How?* Desmond was very aware of expressing his insight in obedience to God's inner prompting or pressure, and the letter had flowed. He was also a trained and able teacher of English and was consciously writing with "all the eloquence [he could] command"<sup>26</sup>. He was also aware of his responsibility to articulate the concerns of the Black community as one of their official spokesmen. So he found the contemptuous suggestion that Black people are not capable of writing such a letter very insulting. It was personally painful for him. He also recognised it as part of the tragedy and irony of the apartheid situation, that his experience of insight was dismissed as political propaganda emanating from the official White opposition.

#### **Step 2 MU22**

**Desmond: One of the odd things, actually ... one of the things that is extraordinary about this letter, is that it wrote itself.**

**John: Really ... tell me more about that.**

**Desmond: I hardly ... the words ... I didn't have to agonise over the words ... they just seemed to come. I wasn't aware that I had to struggle. Now I don't mean, obviously, that one had a hotline, but it was quite odd that once I sat down at a desk ... I can seem to visualise this room ... small cell, and sitting at the table ... a bit of me knowing that I wasn't supposed to be doing this ... but having to say that I think that I would have to be disobedient to this rule in order to be obedient to this higher obligation ... and the letter wrote itself.**

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<sup>26</sup> As Desmond put it in his letter "I write to you, Sir, to say with all the eloquence I can command that the security of our country ultimately depends not on military strength and a security being given more and more draconian power..." (see Appendix B)



### Step 3 TMU22

Desmond didn't have to struggle over writing the letter; in an extraordinary way it flowed and seemed to write itself. Nearly thirty years later Desmond can remember vividly how it was and how he felt as he wrote.

### Step 4 ITMU22

*What?* Not only did the insight to write come unexpectedly, but in an extraordinary way the letter seem to write itself; the words just seemed to come. More than thirty years later Desmond vividly remembers the experience and how he felt as he wrote “ ... the small cell ... sitting at the table ... a bit of [me] knowing that [I] wasn't meant to be doing this ... but having to be disobedient to be obedient to this higher obligation”; to be true to the experience of his insight.

*How?* Desmond was aware of knowing that on retreat he was not supposed to be writing a letter or doing any 'work'. Desmond is not claiming a hotline to God, or divine dictation, and takes responsibility for the way it is phrased; yet he twice asserts “the letter wrote itself”. He experienced it as “odd” and “extraordinary”. Perhaps the fact that the letter flowed easily is an indication of his whole-hearted obedience to the prompting of the Spirit of God, as well as illustrating the aesthetic and extra-ordinary quality of his whole experience of insight.

### Step 2 MU23

John: **It has been described by a number of people as a remarkable letter. Shirley du Boulay, for instance, says: “It is a remarkable letter, heartfelt yet statesmanlike, direct yet never failing to be tactful and courteous, eloquent, informed and precise in its suggestions” [du Boulay, 1988:104]. I noticed that ten times in the letter you say, “I am writing to you, Sir ... ”**

Desmond: [roaring with laughter] **Yes, I thought it was important ... I wanted to be respectful. I was almost kowtowing ...**

John: **It's very respectful ... it's very gracious ... but it's also very clear.**

Desmond: **One was trying to have the doors open, because what I was saying for that time, and for him, would have been very provocative, and annoying. But I have no other word to add to the fact that it did seem like God was saying “that's what you have to do”... and I did.**

### Step 3 TMU23

Desmond was particularly respectful in the tone of the letter, because he wanted to open up communication<sup>27</sup> with the Prime Minister and was aware that what he was saying would make him angry and annoyed.

### Step 4 ITMU23

*What?* Desmond structured the letter in a respectful way around ten repetitions of “I am writing to you, Sir...”, because he was aware that at that time, and for the Prime Minister in particular, it would appear provocative and he wanted to open up communication.

*How?* Desmond went to great lengths in his letter to communicate effectively and respectfully with the Prime Minister, aware that for him, and at that time, it would appear to be very provocative. But he was quite clear in terms of his insight, that God was saying “that’s what you have to do”.

### Step 2 MU24

**John: And would it be fair to say, as Shirley du Boulay says, that it was in fact your first public political action? It was in fact a high profile action, wasn’t it?**

**Desmond: Ja ... I’m not certain ... I can’t be unequivocal about this ... I have to say that I became aware that God had given me as Dean of Johannesburg a platform, and for a while actually the media were very, very supportive, you might say, in that they certainly gave me a fair amount of exposure. I had told myself that “well, our people do not have very many spokespersons around, here is a position of some prominence that will enable me to some extent to articulate our concerns”, and I think that it may very well have been the first most overt political action that one had done.**

### Step 3 TMU24

Desmond was aware that as Dean of Johannesburg he was given an opportunity by the media to be the “Voice of the Voiceless”, but that this may very well have been his first and most overt political action.

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<sup>27</sup> Towards the end of the letter, Desmond writes, “should you think it might serve any useful purpose I am more than willing to meet with you to discuss the issues I raise here, as you say in Afrikaans, *onder vier oë*” (see Appendix B)

#### Step 4 ITMU24

*What?* Desmond had previously sought to express the concerns of the Black community in the press, but expressing this insight in writing this letter to the Prime Minister may very well have been Desmond's first and most overt political action.

*How?* It was a profoundly respectful, statesmanlike and prayerful response of someone seeking to be obedient to God, and conscious of his responsibility to articulate Black peoples' concerns, in what may well have been his first and most overt political action. But his use of "one" rather than "I" may well express his equivocation about whether it was his first public political action. Nevertheless, it was clearly prompted and motivated entirely by his experience of insight.

#### Step 2 MU25

John: **But, when you went into the retreat, you had no idea that you were going to write this letter ... ?**

Desmond: **No ...**

John: **It came quite suddenly ... ?**

Desmond: **A bolt from the blue, as you might say, if you'll pardon the expression ... ja ...**

John: **But you don't remember whether you were praying at the time, or whether it was during the Eucharist, or exactly what was happening at the time?**

Desmond: **No, of course we were in silence, and so you assume that most of the time you were supposed to be praying ... [laughing] ... I wouldn't know. It may be ... you asked earlier on ... "did this thing grow on you or what?" My own recollection is that it didn't ... it may have been like Peter, you know, going up onto the roof, and because he was hungry, food somehow was involved in his vision, and that he had been worrying about the question of the Gentiles. He may not always have been aware that it was in the forefront of his consciousness ... but sort of at the back of his mind he'd been worrying about this, and so well, you're the psychologist, I'm not, God would then make use of a pre-existent condition to help. So it may not always have been in the forefront of my consciousness, but this concern about what was happening in and around our country was present all the time ... it must be present with everybody ... but as you were praying you were not aware that below the surface you were carrying this concern, and God was aware that that was probably a**

**primary concern, more primary than the things that were on the surface of your consciousness, you know ... and so God spoke to the deep thing, and so I wouldn't know. It seemed to me ... that it may very well have been at a time when I was praying.**

**Step 3 TMU25**

When Desmond went into retreat he had no idea that he was going to write this letter. The insight, or intuition, to write came suddenly, unexpectedly and fully-formed while in silence and prayerful.

**Step 4 ITMU25**

*What?* The insight came suddenly and unexpectedly while Desmond was prayerful. He expresses his own understanding of his experience of insight in terms of a possible parallel with Peter's experience recorded in Acts 10 and 11.

*How?* At a physiological level, Peter's physical hunger and the appearance of food in his vision, is perhaps paralleled by Desmond's "growing nightmarish fear" and his instinctual need to express it and his desire to do something about it. At a more contextual and sociological level, Peter is confronted through Cornelius with the question of what God is saying about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles; in a similar way Desmond is profoundly concerned about the relationship between Blacks and Whites; he feels it has reached explosive proportions. Then in terms of natural justice Peter sees clean and unclean food symbolising an entrenched prejudice of Jews (clean) to Gentiles (unclean); this is paralleled by Desmond seeing the injustice and violence of apartheid in ordering the relationship between Whites (privileged) and Blacks (oppressed). So perhaps God spoke to the deeper and often more semi-conscious levels of concern. At an intensely spiritual level of I-Thou encounter, Peter experiences God commanding him to "eat", despite the fact that he has never eaten anything unclean before and it appears to break the Jewish food rules. In a similar way, Desmond experiences God commanding him to "write", despite the fact that he has never taken such an overt political action before and it appears to break the rules of retreat. This reflective musing on the possible parallels with Peter's experience of insight may well have helped Desmond to make sense of his own experience of insight after the event, in terms of a suggestive biblical precedent.

**Step 2 MU26**

**Desmond: It certainly happens usually that I'm trying to be concentrating on God, and God will say "I think you have to talk to so-and-so". When I was not trying to be thinking about**

that, I was saying “Look God, I’m trying to concentrate on You, for goodness sake, let me concentrate on You”, but sometimes when I am going to be writing, a sermon or something ... things occur and I am trying to be in the presence of God, and I get some of these things coming like knowing you’ve got to do something, or here is a wonderful expression to use, and I say “well, I’m sorry I have got to have this distraction” and I don’t know whether it is a distraction or whether it is God saying “that is how I am going to communicate with you”. So it may have been that God was aware of our obsession of what was happening around us, what’s happening in our country, and God said, “well, why don’t you do something about it? ... write to the Prime Minister”. And once that occurred, there didn’t seem to be any question of doubting. It was as certain as anything, that this is what I should be doing, and I was going to do it.

John: **Right. Do you remember which day of the 5-day retreat that came ....**

Desmond: **No, I don’t recall that.**

### **Step 3** TMU26

Often when Desmond is trying just to be in the presence of God, he will sense he has to do something, and doesn’t know whether it is a distraction or whether it is God prompting him. In this case, once the thought of writing to the Prime Minister had come, he was quite certain it had come from God and that is what he had to do.

### **Step 4** ITMU26

*What?* Desmond continues by reflecting on the fact that sometimes he is not sure of the difference between distracting thoughts, when he is just trying to be in the presence of God, and genuine prompting or communication from God to do something. In contrast to that common experience, he was quite sure in this particular case that his insight had come from God and that he had to write a letter to the Prime Minister.

*How?* Desmond wonders whether God, being aware of the strong and deep feelings in the Black community about what was happening in the country, said “well, why don’t you do something about it...write to the Prime Minister”. Once that thought or idea occurred, with a clarity and insistence that he experienced as a pressure, and which he interpreted as an insight or an intuition from God, he was quite certain that was what he should do and was determined to do it.

**Step 2 MU27**

**John: It became very dramatic because it was only about five weeks later that the Soweto Uprising occurred. Do you think that that sort of possibility was part of your consciousness?**

**Desmond: What I seemed to be aware of, and it always sounds melodramatic ... it just seemed to me that people were beginning to feel they'd had it up to here [holding his hand between his nose and mouth] kind of thing. It was going to take almost nothing to spark an awful conflagration. It was just a sense, and I don't think it was anything that was peculiar to me, I'm sure that many people were beginning to sense that the pressure of repression was beginning to be of such an intensity that we wouldn't be able to find relief in some way or other ... that things had to come to a head.**

**Step 3 TMU27**

Desmond was aware that Black people were feeling that they had had as much as they could take, and desperate people resort to desperate means so it was going to take very little to spark a conflagration.

**Step 4 ITMU27**

*What?* The position of Desmond's hand (between his nose and mouth) may be an indication that people could no longer speak, and could only just breathe, so they would be likely to act in a 'last gasp' desperate kind of way. In which case it would be a dramatic way of saying that he and some others had a strong sense that the oppressive and repressive forces of apartheid were so intense that there was bound to be a desperate reaction by the Black community.

*How?* Desmond does not respond to my question in the terms in which it was put, namely whether he was anticipating the details of a *particular outcome*; he responds in terms of his general sense and awareness of *precipitating factors*. Living amongst the people of Soweto, being aware and empathic, Desmond and others had a sense that the people could not take it much longer. Things were coming to a head; there was bound to be a reaction to the violence of the apartheid repression.

**Step 2 MU28**

**Desmond: And I genuinely did believe that it could be averted. When you read this letter now, the proposals that I was putting forward, they are really piffling. I suppose of course**

at the time they seemed to be very radical. Indeed I did believe, and I think I was totally right, that had they even begun to move in the direction in which one was suggesting, the situation would have been diffused. But they might have then become more subtle, you know, in extending White rule, and perhaps that is why God made them into a kind of Moses and Pharaoh situation, hardening hearts,<sup>28</sup> so that if the thing was going to be resolved, a crisis had to occur. That was about the only way they would begin to see sense ... maybe.

#### Step 3 TMU28

Desmond genuinely believed that had the Nationalist Government even started to move in the direction he was suggesting, the situation at the time would have been diffused. But he also acknowledges that the Government might have become more determined and more subtle in applying apartheid, so perhaps if oppression was to be resolved it had to come to a crisis.

#### Step 4 ITMU28

*What?* Desmond's insight not only warned of the bloodshed and violence that was inevitable if the Government continued its present course; he also clearly articulated three key requirements for peaceful change.<sup>29</sup>

*How?* Desmond genuinely believed then, and is convinced even now, that if the Government had moved in the direction of his three key requirements for peaceful change, bloodshed would have been averted. The identification of the Prime Minister with Pharaoh hardening his heart may well have given Desmond a valuable perspective on the Prime Minister's insulting response (MU21), and enabled him to see God's hand in the apparent failure of his obedience to God,

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<sup>28</sup> A reference to the Pharaoh's response to the ten plagues e.g. Exodus 8:15 "when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them". Later it is said "but the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not listen to them" Exodus 9:12. This stubbornness of those in power and "hardening" mentioned no less than twelve times in the context in Exodus, to which Desmond refers, implies a parallel between the freedom of the Jews from slavery in Egypt and the freedom of the Black community from apartheid in South Africa.

<sup>29</sup> Meaningful signs required for peaceful change, articulated in his letter were:

First, accept the urban Black as a permanent inhabitant of what is wrongly called White South Africa, with consequent freehold property rights. He will have a stake in the land and would not easily join those who wish to destroy his country. Indeed he would be willing to die to defend his Mother Country and his birthright.

Secondly, and also as a matter of urgency, repeal the Pass Laws which demonstrate to Blacks more clearly than anything else that they are third-rate citizens in their beloved country.

Thirdly, it is imperative, Sir, that you call a National Convention made up of the genuine leaders (i.e. leaders recognized as such by their section of the community) to try to work out an orderly evolution of South Africa into a non-racial, open and just society (Appendix B).



without grandiosely identifying himself with Moses. Yet, as a realist, he recognises that if Government attitudes and policies in relation to apartheid were going to undergo fundamental change, probably a crisis had to occur.

### **Step 2 MU29**

Desmond: **The trouble with these intuitions or insights is that it looks as if you are arrogant and presumptuous ... yes ... but the trouble is that I knew I was not my own master. At least I [emphasising the I] believed that! [laughing].**

### **Step 3 TMU29**

Desmond reflects that the difficulty with having intuition or insight is that you appear to be arrogant or presumptuous, whereas he experienced it in the opposite terms of submission to a higher authority and obedience.

### **Step 4 ITMU29**

*What?* The inner reality for Desmond of obedience to his experience of insight was the polar opposite of the way it appeared arrogant to many people.

*How?* Desmond implies that his experience of acknowledging the “pressure” of the insight needs to be seen in terms of submitting to a higher divine authority rather than an arrogant or presumptuous initiative of his own. His sense of humour, “at least I believed that! [laughing]”, enables him to cope with the paradox between the outward appearance and the inner reality of his experience of insight.

### **Step 2 MU30**

Desmond: **Again, the whole question of “how do you know this thing is for real?” One may have a sense of a strong conviction, but that is not in itself a reason for believing that a thing is so. I mean the Germans had a very strong conviction that the Jews were causing them a lot of trouble and had got to be cleaned out, and so I think one has to ask, how do you check out that this is real, and not a figment of your imagination ... how do you know? And as you know, it’s been a puzzle.**

### **Step 3 TMU30**

Desmond ponders the whole epistemological question of how you test the reality and validity of an insight.



#### Step 4 ITMU30

*What?* Desmond, in musing on the epistemological question of how you test the reality and validity of an insight, concludes that strength of conviction is not a sufficient criterion, and recognises the danger and destructive potential of a so-called insight being, in fact, a pathological fixation, such as Hitler's paranoia about the Jews, leading to the Holocaust.

*How?* Desmond's awareness of, and willingness to discuss, these puzzling questions, assists him to make a realistic appraisal of his own experience of intuition or insight.

#### Step 2 MU31

Desmond: . **Gideon says “how about making the dew fall on the fleece, and not on the grass” and it happened. And then he says “well, yes ... how about doing it the other way round?”<sup>30</sup> And even when it's done the other way round, there is still not absolute certainty. There is no certainty except to say, “I wouldn't myself want this as a thing, and you just have to, I suppose, trust ... but there is no way of guaranteeing.**

#### Step 3 TMU31

Desmond refers to Gideon seeking a sign of confirmation from God, and reflects that even when God gives a sign which should be absolutely clear, there is still no absolute certainty or guarantee.

#### Step 4 ITMU31

*What?* There is no absolute certainty or guarantee of the validity or reality of the experience of insight.

*How?* Desmond muses that one reality check might be that if the insight itself is not desired, or if there is no personal gain as a result of the insight; he concludes that there is an indispensable element of trust in the experience of insight. The example of Gideon highlights the issue of motivation; whether the sign is desired in order to trust and obey or in order to avoid trusting and obeying (in this case the experience of insight) as was often the case with the Scribes and Pharisees seeking signs<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Judges 6:36-40.

<sup>31</sup> For example, in Matthew 12:38-40, Jesus says “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it ...” Whereas the Fourth Gospel, using the same Greek word, contains seven ‘signs’ e.g. John 2:11. After turning water into wine the comment is “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him”.

## Step 2 MU32

Desmond: **You might say about the letter ... well, the fact that four or five weeks later the nightmare is turned into reality seemed again to confirm it. But you don't have any absolute guarantees.**

## Step 3 TMU32

Desmond says of the letter that subsequent events seemed to confirm his insight but adds there are no absolute guarantees.

## Step 4 ITMU32

*What?* Desmond uses the word “nightmare” to refer to his expression of his insight in the letter to the Prime Minister of his

growing nightmarish fear that unless something drastic is done very soon then bloodshed and violence are going to happen in South Africa almost inevitably. A people can take only so much and no more ... I am frightened, dreadfully frightened, that we may soon reach a point of no return, when events will generate a momentum of their own, when nothing will stop their reaching a bloody denouement which is ‘too ghastly to contemplate’, to quote your words, Sir (Appendix B).

He claims this as apparent confirmation of the truth of his insight, but adds there are no absolute guarantees.

*How?* This predictive insight of “bloodshed and violence” and “events will generate a momentum of their own when nothing will stop them reaching bloody denouement” was horrendously fulfilled in the Soweto Uprising of 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976, which sparked off an uprising of young Black people throughout the country. Interestingly, although Desmond clearly had insight in predicting an explosion, its exact form and nature took him by surprise. So his *awareness* of the situation was limited; his sense of the precipitating factors did not extend to the details of a particular outcome. His *insight* was that he saw that this exact letter must be written by himself to the Prime Minister at this particular time. In biblical terminology it might be described as “prophetic” or as a “word of knowledge”<sup>32</sup>; both are limited fragments, fore-telling or forth-telling God’s perspective, based on God’s character.

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<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

John: **Thank you, Baba. Thank you very much. You must be feeling weary**<sup>33</sup>.

Desmond: **Well, God is good. God has been very, very good and I think they're saying up there** [pointing upwards jokingly, referring to heaven] **“keep him down there, he's such trouble, we can't cope with him up here!”** [laughing yet again].

## 5.4 The Situated Structure of Desmond's Experience of Insight

There are six distinct moments depicting the psycho-logical process of Desmond's experience of insight. These moments could be called sub-structures, since each is an integral unity besides being a moment of the larger structural process. This constitutes **Step 5** (SSS) of the methodology. For the sake of clarity, the focus is first on the initial stages and precursors of his experience of insight, then on the dynamic core of his experience of sudden insight, and finally on the unfolding nature, results and quality of his insight.

### 5.4.1 The Initial Stages and Precursors of Insight.

- Living in Soweto, Desmond was deeply concerned and apprehensive about the level of people's feelings about the physical conditions, deprivations, psychological humiliations and oppression under the apartheid regime (MUs3-4). He also struggled with issues of theodicy (MU5). He felt particularly strongly for young people with Afrikaans being enforced as the medium of instruction in schools (MU6). This quality of empathy and solidarity, awareness, concern and sense of apprehension of an impending crisis (MU11), was a significant preparatory factor for the participant's subsequent experience of sudden insight.

*Structurally, this is insight as disposition: an affective, cognitive and behavioural openness in terms of a way-of-being-in-the-world.*

- Another very significant preparatory factor was a crisis in the participant's own life. He had just been elected Bishop of Lesotho, so he was going to have to leave South Africa at the very time he was beginning to realise that things were coming to a head under apartheid. He describes

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<sup>33</sup> Because at the time he was 75 years old, has prostate cancer and in the full interview had given me two other examples of similar experiences.

it as “heart-rending for me at the time” (MU9). He didn’t want to leave the centre of action (MU10). So his inner turmoil over his personal circumstances multiplied his “deep sense of foreboding” about what was happening in the country: “you felt that the clouds were gathering”. So it is not surprising that he speaks of going “into this retreat in a welter of emotions” (MU11). ***Structurally, this is insight as awareness of, and evolving from, an unresolved issue, question or tension.***

- In the light of the two points above, it is hardly surprising that the participant says, “I can’t put it into words as to how you were feeling, I mean you went into retreat ... but obviously you never know what God’s going to do with you [laughing]” (MU12). Clearly, there is a “holding” quality of the retreat. The structure of each day, the silence for prayer and meditation, the small “cell-like” bed-sitters (MU22) and the containing structure of regular worship all helped to keep Desmond’s focus on God (MU13).

***Structurally this is the unresolved and raw material of insight as requiring containment.***

#### **5.4.2 The Dynamic Core of his Experience of Insight.**

- Desmond was emotionally in turmoil (MU11), mentally distracted and spiritually unprepared, but trying to give himself as he was, his whole time and attention to God (MU13). This is the context in which he experienced what he came to recognise as God’s gracious activity; a gestalt which is more than the sum of its parts, a sudden and fully-formed insight to write to the Prime Minister.

Initially, “[i]t seemed like a pressure from God” (MU14). He also refers to it as “a bolt from the blue” (MU25). The critical mood of the structure in this phase of the research participant’s experience is a *passive* one. He acknowledges the limitations and questions that can be asked of his experience, but allows the reality of the sense of pressure to be (MU15).

***Structurally this is insight as impact.***

Then, “[i]t did seem that God was saying, or this particular pressure, said ‘write’” (MU16). The critical mood of the structure in this phase of the participant’s experience is a *reflexive* one expressed particularly in the word “seem”. It is an intuitive and imaginative process rather than a purely logical and deductive process, of allowing emerging meanings to be. His interpretation of

his experience of insight was that this particular letter must be written by himself to this particular politician at this particular time.

***Structurally this is insight as interpreting.***

Finally, “I think that it came almost instantaneously ... its effect on me was that ‘you have to do this’” (MU16). So it was a categorical imperative, over-riding the normal rules of retreat forbidding any form of “work” (MU17). The critical mood in the structure of this phase of the participant’s experience is an *active* obedient response.

***Structurally this is insight as action.***

- The reality and quality of this existential experience of insight was clear to the participant “once it came, then it was there, you know, there wasn’t a matter of any self-doubt” (MU19). As Desmond was faithful and obedient, a strange thing happened “One of the odd things, actually ... one of the things that is extraordinary about this letter is that it wrote itself”. He struggles to explain it. “I hardly ... the words ... I didn’t have to agonise about the words ... they just seemed to come” (MU22). This seems to be an expression of his faithful and obedient response to his experience of insight. It also illustrates the aesthetic and extra-ordinary quality of his own existential experience of expressing his insight during the retreat.

***Structurally this is insight as key to a self-actualising process.***

### **5.4.3 Desmond’s Reflections on his Experience of Insight.**

The participant’s reflections on the unfolding nature, results and quality of his experience of insight, fall into a series of seven interestingly balanced responses, without being consciously contrived statements.

- He acknowledges the flaw in etiquette which led to the publication of his letter before the Prime Minister had time to respond (MU20).

***Structurally, this is as a result of insight as releasing tension.***

- Yet he is understandably insulted by the assumption that Black people are intellectually incapable of writing such a letter and so having it dismissed by the Prime Minister as political propaganda emanating from the official White opposition.

***Structurally, this is insight as tested in the public realm.***

- He muses on and seems to draw strength from the suggestive parallels between his experience of insight and St Peter’s as recorded in Acts 10-11 (MU25).

***Structurally, this is insight as validated by scriptural precedent.***

- All this is in contrast to his more usual experience of not being sure whether an idea is a prompting from God or simply a distracting thought. On this occasion “there didn’t seem to be any question of doubting. It was as certain as anything, that this is what I should be doing, and I was going to do it” (MU26). Whether or not others judged his actions as divinely inspired was not the primary issue for him. The critical and decisive factor was the reality and existential quality of the experience (MU19) and obedience to God.

***Structurally this is insight as self-authenticating.***

- He makes a clear distinction between his sense of foreboding and awareness of the precipitating factors, and the recognition that his insight did not extend to the detailed outcome of the particular uprising (MU27).

***Structurally, this is insight as particular; as true, but limited.***

- He is aware that, from the present perspective, his “meaningful signs required for peaceful change” seem “piffling”, whereas at the time they seemed “very radical” (MU28).

***Structurally, this is insight as transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things.***

- Yet he still believes bloodshed could have been averted if his warning to the Prime Minister had been taken seriously, but as a realist recognises that if apartheid was to be radically changed, probably a crisis had to occur (MU28,32). In his letter he expresses it as “a growing nightmarish fear that unless something drastic is done very soon then bloodshed and violence are going to happen in South Africa almost inevitably”. This has a luminosity and prophetic quality about it in the light of the Soweto Uprising only five weeks later.

***Structurally this is insight as historically validated.***

- Finally, he is aware of the serious, epistemological questions which assist him to make a realistic appraisal of his own experience of insight, and yet he can joke about “the trouble with these intuitions or insights is that it looks as if you are arrogant and presumptuous ... yes ... but the trouble is that I knew I was not my own master. At least I [emphasising the ‘I’] believed that! [laughing]” (MU29). His humour here and elsewhere (MU17) involves insight highlighting opposites, tensions and conflicting views in such a way as to see them in a new relationship to each other which helps resolve tensions, expose pomposity, or transcend set thought patterns.

***Structurally this is another example of insight, expressed in humour, transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things.***

**May 1976 5.3.3. Desmond Tutu’s letter to the Prime Minister in obedience to his insight**

## 5.5 The Investigation of Debbie's Experience of Insight

The pattern of this investigation follows a similar format to the previous research participant.

### Step 2 MU1

**John: Debbie, I have here an e-mail from you, sent on Monday January 22nd 2001, at 4.19am. It's entitled "Fear and Confusion". I wonder if you would tell me a little bit about the background that prompted you to send this e-mail?**

**Debbie: In May 2000 I had discovered that Mark, my husband [they had been married for 23 years] had been involved in a long-term relationship with somebody for eighteen years, and I had asked him to leave home because there was no way that I saw myself living with him. So in January 2001, at the time when I was on my own, as you know, it was very difficult and I was struggling with it. In November 2000 I went to see a mediator to end our marriage. I believed that there was no way out, and the only way was to dissolve the marriage, to end the marriage and get divorced. I was convinced that it was the way to go, and I don't know that I was comfortable with it, but I was pretty set on my way.**

### Step 3 TMU1

Debbie discovered her husband Mark had been having an affair for eighteen years, and asked him to leave home. She was convinced that divorce was the only way forward, although she wasn't comfortable about it.

### Step 4 ITMU1

*What?* Debbie, after discovering her husband's long-term affair, asked him to leave home.

Despite struggling with living on her own for six months, she felt divorce was the only way to go.

*How?* She was not comfortable with that decision, but she was convinced that it was the only option, because she felt so hurt and angry.

### Step 2 MU2

**John: And then you had a meeting with Mark in early December 2000, and on 20<sup>th</sup> December you wrote an angry letter to Mark, which you didn't send, but which expressed how strongly you felt.**

**Debbie: Yes.**



**John: It was about ending the relationship and the terms on which it should be ended. Do you remember? Didn't you write it as an exercise, suggested in therapy, to express how you really felt?**

**Debbie: Yes, I sat down in front of the computer ... and it was bitterness ... I just poured out all kinds of stuff. It was very, very ... it was me expressing myself with no thought of how much truth was in it ... no consideration ... it was my true feelings but it was not taking into consideration what was probably real ... the things that I chose not to acknowledge or look at ... just all the anger and all the bitterness within me. Oh, yes, so I was going to send him that letter, but I didn't.**

### **Step 3 TMU2**

Debbie wrote Mark a letter, which she didn't send, ending the relationship and pouring out her anger and bitterness in expressing her feelings in an uninhibited way.

### **Step 4 ITMU2**

*What?* As an exercise, suggested in therapy, Debbie wrote Mark a letter to express her feelings about ending the relationship.

*How?* Debbie was, as an exercise, freely expressing her true feelings at the time, of anger and bitterness, with no thought or consideration of any other reality which she chose not to acknowledge.

### **Step 2 MU3**

**John: That was on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2000, and just a month later, on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2001, in the early hours of the morning, you wrote this e-mail to me [showing the e-mail to her], and I am wondering whether you can get in touch with that night, because it would be really helpful if you could describe it as a lived experience of insight, whether it came gradually or suddenly, in which you saw or understood something which has impacted on how you live and relate to Mark. Could you describe ... [she interrupts me at this point, in my key research question].**

**Debbie: [Strongly and with conviction]. It sure impacted on the way I related and lived with Mark, because it was after that we got back together. It is shocking realising how one month earlier I was at point zero, and just 30 days later ... bearing in mind there was all the anger in that letter and afterwards at having to do Christmas on our own [i.e. with her daughter but without her husband]. Everything was so disrupted, my life was in a total**



shambles, man, and it didn't just end at the 20<sup>th</sup> December, because nothing happened after the 20<sup>th</sup> to change my mind ... you know, just a total turnaround and I mean this guy was putting his foot into it just by breathing. I was darned angry with him ... nothing he did helped to alleviate his plight in life. And then, suddenly ... I didn't even speak to him prior to sending you that e-mail ...

John: **No, I don't think you did according to my records.**

**Step 3** TMU3

A month later, Debbie wrote me an e-mail detailing six things that greatly impacted her, and concluding that she wanted to work towards reconciliation.

**Step 4** ITMU3

*What?* I asked Debbie to describe what happened that night as a lived experience of insight.

*How?* Debbie interrupts me with conviction about the impact and significance of that experience of insight expressed in the e-mail, only a month after writing her angry letter, as it led to their getting back together. She had had Christmas without him, and felt her life was in a shambles. She was so angry with him that she regarded him as "putting his foot into it just by breathing". Her change of mind, her insight, came as a result of her internal work without even speaking to him.

**Step 2** MU4

Debbie: **What was I doing on the night I sent you the e-mail? ... I was sitting listening to music. I have speakers attached to my computer and I was listening to Geoff Bullock's music ... it was almost the thing that sustained me ... that kept me going ... this realisation of being held by God, of being loved by God. And that Mark's rejection of me was one thing but I came to realise that I had God helping me in all of this.**

**Step 3** TMU4

Listening to music, Debbie felt sustained, held and loved despite Mark's rejection.

**Step 4** ITMU4

*What?* The experience of a series of insights was enabled and sustained by music.

*How?* Debbie "listened with her soul" (Musica slogan) to the music which communicated and symbolised God's love and acceptance in contrast to her sense of Mark's rejection.

**Step 2 MU5**

Debbie: **And you journeyed with me as I grew to accept who I am ... you helped me to discover myself, and to actually begin to like myself and to stop being rough and hard on myself.**

**Step 3 TMU5**

In therapy Debbie discovered and accepted herself, instead of punishing and rejecting herself.

**Step 4 ITMU5**

*What?* The therapeutic relationship enabled Debbie to discover and accept herself in a new and empathic way.

*How?* This was an essential prerequisite for listening to her feelings and experiencing insight, which came not only through her thoughts but also her feelings and her sense of self...the whole person.

**Step 2 MU6**

Debbie: **But none of that actually tells you about that “light bulb” experience.**

**Step 3 TMU6**

Debbie describes her experience of insight as a “light bulb” experience.

**Step 4 ITMU6**

*What?* The experience of insight for Debbie is like seeing things for the first time or more clearly in a new light.

*How?* It is as if her whole person experiences a “connection” and becomes a filament which is lit up by an electric current.

**Step 2 MU7**

Debbie: **I sat there listening to the music, and the fact that I know that at 4 o'clock in the morning sending people e-mails is really not respecting other people's time, and it doesn't also explain to you what the heck I am doing up at the that time in the morning, thinking and typing e-mails. It's a “nanas” thing to do, to send someone an e-mail at that time in the morning, because you know they're not going to respond because they're sleeping.**

John: **I think it's a very sensible thing to do ... not “nanas” at all. I think it captures something very important about your experience of that night. In fact, I'm not sure I'd be interviewing you now on your experience of insight if you hadn't written and sent that e-**

**mail. So I'm grateful to you. What I am particularly interested in [here I'm returning to the key research question] is if you could describe in details what actually happened ... the lived experience of insight in the context of what happened before, during and after, seeing or understanding it, and if possible focusing on what you thought, what you felt and what you did at the time. I can help you here, because I've got a copy of your e-mail. [Significantly, this is the first and only e-mail Debbie has sent me in three years of psychotherapy with me.]**

**Debbie: It's some time ago, can you refresh my memory by reading it?**

**John: Yes, certainly, I have it here [reading].**

**Sent: Monday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> 2001. 4.19 a.m.**

**Subject: Fear and confusion**

**Step 3 TMU7**

Debbie felt listening to music and sending an e-mail at 4.19 a.m. was not very sensible, in terms of her own very ordered and proper lifestyle.

**Step 4 ITMU7**

*What?* The experience of insight that she wanted to seek reconciliation with Mark came after prolonged listening to music.

*How?* The music relaxed Debbie and enabled her to experience a different way-of-being-in-the-world from her usual defensive rationalism and "proper" way-of-being. She expressed this experience of insight in an e-mail and sent it at 4.19 a.m., knowing it would not be immediately responded to or "judged".

**Step 2 MU8**

**John: [reading Debbie's e-mail]. Dear John, I desperately need to see you. This past weekend has been a time of great confusion and I have been reflecting on events and on what you had said. Firstly, I have to acknowledge that I am so caught up in fear that I have not been willing to even try to envisage the possibility of reconciliation. My failure to understand Mark's fear of rejection I do believe is based on my feeling that he is able to hand it out but is not able to even experience it. Does he not see that he has rejected me, probably in the most vulnerable area of my life?**

### Step 3 TMU8

Debbie reflects and acknowledges that she is so caught up in fear and rejection by Mark, in the most vulnerable area of her life, that she has not been willing to even try to envisage the possibility of reconciliation.

### Step 4 ITMU8

*What?* The insight that Debbie deep down wants reconciliation with Mark has been blocked by her fear, a sense of rejection by Mark and a failure to understand Mark's fear of rejection.

*How?* Relaxing to the music, reflecting on events, and what was shared in therapy enabled Debbie to acknowledge her fear of rejection, which had been made more bearable by pushing Mark away, and to get in touch with her deep-down longings to reconcile with Mark, despite her sense of fear, confusion and vulnerability.

### Step 2 MU9

John: [reading Debbie's e-mail]. **These are a couple of things that greatly impacted on me:**

**1. The passage that you read to me out of CS Lewis's book [On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2000, from "The Four Loves", chapter 6, see footnote 1 of transcript of interview for text] has touched me deeply, and since honesty is so important to me I have wrestled with whether or not it applies to me. I have a sense that it does.** [On 12<sup>th</sup> January 2001, at the end of her session, Debbie had said "I don't know why you read that CS Lewis to me". So this is quite a recent realisation].

### Step 3 TMU9

Debbie felt deeply touched by the CS Lewis quote about the vulnerability of love and has honestly wrestled with it and now has a sense that it applies to her.

### Step 4 ITMU9

*What?* CS Lewis's poetic images enabled Debbie to see that she was preventing her 'heart from being wrung and possibly broken by locking it up, safe in a coffin of self-protective lovelessness' and gain insight into what she is doing to protect herself.

*How?* The discernible stages of this insight are a *passive* sense of being deeply touched by the images, an *active* honest wrestling with the text, and a *reflexive* sense that it applies to her, resulting in emerging self-insight.

### Step 2 MU10

John: [reading Debbie's e-mail]. **2. On Friday** [Debbie later identified this as the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2001. I didn't know anything about this at the time], **I noticed a book titled "All Truth is God's Truth", on your bookshelf, and I could not help but question my reluctance to accept anything that Mark had said as being true. I am only seeing my truth as being real.**

### Step 3 TMU10

Debbie noticed a book entitled *All Truth is God's Truth* and subsequently recognised she was only seeing her truth as being real, while rejecting Mark's truth.

### Step 4 ITMU10

*What?* Debbie had been so hurt and angered by Mark's deceit and lies covering up his long-time affair, that she was reluctant to accept anything that Mark said as being true. So she needed an experience of insight to see what she was doing; namely, only seeing her truth as being real while rejecting Mark's truth.

*How?* The apparently trivial experience of noticing the book title *All Truth is God's Truth* jolted her spiritual awareness that "All Truth ... whether scientific or religious, reasoned or poetic, proved or believed, Debbie's or Mark's ... is God's Truth", and enabled her to become aware of her partiality and the self-insight that she was only seeing her truth as being real.

### Step 2 MU11

John: [reading Debbie's e-mail] **3. On Saturday afternoon** [20<sup>th</sup> January 2001, Debbie in crisis came for an extra therapy session] **when you apologized for being barefooted, I was struck by the natural way in which you and Jill** [researcher's wife] **were relaxing together, and I was strongly reminded of how Mark and I spent our times together. It was pretty much the same. I have forgotten, or quite simply refused to remember, the good we shared together, especially the parts I know of, and not the parts I choose now to focus on.**

### Step 3 TMU11

My barefeet, as I was relaxing with my wife, reminded Debbie of similar good, relaxed times she had spent with Mark which she had refused to remember.

### Step 4 ITMU11

*What?* Debbie was struck by something entirely natural and apparently trivial, namely my bare feet as I was relaxing with my wife. She later became aware that she had angrily refused to remember similar relaxed and good times with Mark.

*How?* Despite being “struck” at the time, it was only two nights later when relaxed through listening to music, that Debbie gained sufficient insight to become aware of her sense of loss of companionship with Mark and the significance of the fact that her anger had blinded her to having enjoyed similar relaxed and good times with him.

**Step 2** MU12

John: [reading Debbie’s e-mail] **4. When I listened to the marriage vows of Tony and Tamara, [close friends recently married], the words that struck me were “in sickness and health”, and I’m almost certain that when I consider Mark’s behaviour, that it was not normal and there has to be some form of “sickness” that causes one to behave in such a manner.**

**Step 3** TMU12

Debbie applies the sickness in the marriage vow “in sickness and in health” to Mark’s affair.

**Step 4** ITMU12

*What?* The phrase in the marriage vows “in sickness and in health” helps Debbie put a label of “sickness” on Mark’s long-term affair.

*How?* This label of “sickness” helps Debbie to see and partly understand Mark’s long-term extra-marital affair, but she does not specifically relate it to her responsibility to keep *her* marriage vows, rather than completely rejecting him for breaking *his* marriage vows.

**Step 2** MU13

John: [reading Debbie’s e-mail] **5. I can get by on my own, however it’s a lonely existence and I do not believe God intends us to live as islands.**

**Step 3** TMU13

Debbie is aware of the loneliness of singleness.

**Step 4** ITMU13

*What?* Debbie’s awareness of loneliness, strengthened by her belief in God’s intention for marriage, may help to overcome her defensive bravado of “I can get by on my own”.

*How?* Debbie’s awareness of her loneliness and belief in God’s intention for marriage may enable her to acknowledge and become more aware of her vulnerable and therefore ‘hidden away’ longing for reconciliation with Mark.

## Step 2 MU14

John: [reading Debbie's e-mail] **6. You said to me that when I was not strategising, I was able to connect with my true feelings** [this was on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2001], **and this has been playing on my mind ever since. I think I am trying to control the situation, thereby avoiding the possibility of being hurt. I am wanting guarantees that it will never happen to me again, and yet the words of that poem that I gave you** [also on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2001, see footnote 2 of transcribed interview for text] **clearly says that there are no guarantees that what we plan will in fact materialise. John, I think I am not allowing God to be God, but rather that I am directing and not trusting.**

## Step 3 TMU14

In therapy Debbie becomes aware of “strategising” as a way of trying to “control” the situation so as not to feel so hurt or get hurt further. Reading a poem, Debbie realises that she is wanting guarantees that rejection will never happen again, thereby not allowing God to be God.

## Step 4 ITMU14

*What?* Debbie became aware in therapy that her way of thinking and acting to avoid being hurt again, involved “strategising” and trying to “control” the situation with Mark in her mind. This awareness was positively reinforced by a poem, full of affect, which enabled Debbie to see that there are no guarantees that we can “control” things, and points to a new way of being-in-the-world; namely, to “live again ... naked in our vulnerability”.

*How?* Debbie's awareness of her “strategising” and trying to “control” the situation helped her to see that she was in effect trying to play “God”. This is reinforced by a poem which not only played an important role in pointing to a new way-of-being-in-the-world, namely “naked in our vulnerability”, but also the whole tone of the poem epitomises, embodies and communicates that spirit of naked vulnerable trust.

## Step 2 MU15

John: [reading Debbie's e-mail] **Angelo, Anne's boyfriend** [Anne is Mark and Debbie's daughter], **asked me what it was that I was hoping to achieve by seeing you, and what it was that I wanted, and this is where the greatest confusion lies** [Debbie didn't answer him at the time and says that if she had it would have been the opposite of the next sentence in this e-mail.] **I THINK that the real reason is that whilst I am incredibly scared, I have wanted to work towards reconciliation.** [Debbie explained that the use of capitals here indicates “a definite and

shocking realization that would register significantly on an indicator scale if her brain activity was being monitored at the time!”]

### Step 3 TMU15

Debbie’s greatest confusion was around what she really wanted. She then comes to the shocking realisation that, despite being incredibly scared, she wants to work towards reconciliation.

### Step 4 ITMU15

*What?* Debbie’s central and shocking experience of insight is that she really wants to work towards reconciliation with Mark.

*How?* Angelo’s blunt but valid question about what Debbie *really* wanted helped to pinpoint and clarify the heart of her problem. It is the conflict and consequent confusion between *protecting* herself, because she is scared to acknowledge her need, and *becoming vulnerable* by fully accepting her need and deep desire for reconciliation with Mark, which had been so ‘buried’ that she was not really aware of it. When it did ‘surface’ later it was as a significantly “shocking” realisation.

### Step 2 MU16

John: [reading Debbie’s e-mail] **I have lost all trust in Mark, and I therefore read different nuances into everything that he does or says, which is why I am so critical of everything he says and does. He really is a nice person, and being the person that I am, I’m sure that if that was not the case I would have left him ages ago.**

### Step 3 TMU16

Debbie is aware that she has lost trust in Mark and being suspicious, she prejudices and criticises Mark and that there is a contradiction here not only in terms of who he is, but also who she is and how they have related together over many years.

### Step 4 ITMU16

*What?* Debbie is aware that she has lost trust in Mark and being suspicious reads different nuances into everything he does or says, which reinforces her criticism of him. She is also aware that this is a distortion of who he is and also who she is, and how they have related together over many years.

*How?* Debbie’s suspicion, criticism and loss of trust in Mark is questioned and limited to some extent by her awareness of her own critical attitude of making him into a “bad” person, rather



than the “nice” person she has known him to be over the years, but who has now disappointed and hurt her.

### **Step 2 MU17**

John: [reading Debbie’s e-mail] **It is now 04h05 and it may be that either I think more clearly in the early morning hours, or I may just be exhausted and tired and all my defences are down.**

### **Step 3 TMU17**

At 4.19 a.m. Debbie is aware that either she is thinking more clearly or she is too tired to strategise and her ‘defences’ are down.

### **Step 4 ITMU17**

*What?* Debbie is “musing” which includes both deep and serious thought as well as doing it in a dreamy and abstracted way.

*How?* Lower ‘defences’ against painful reality and less strategising to attempt to control that reality enables a greater openness to “see” that reality. This opens up the possibility of a new way-of-being-in-the-world, which is a constituent part of the whole experience of insight, and increases the probability of that experience.

### **Step 2 MU18**

John: [reading Debbie’s e-mail] **You know that Anne has said to me, that for the first time we are able to relate on a deep level because I share/show my feelings, and she is able to get close to me. I have probably done the same with Mark, and I appear to be so self-assured, and not the needy person that I actually am.**

### **Step 3 TMU18**

Debbie’s daughter, Anne, says she is able to relate deeply/closely for the first time to Debbie because Debbie shares/shows her feelings. Debbie also recognises that she probably shows her “self-assured” self to Mark, rather than revealing the “needy” person she now considers herself to be.

### **Step 4 ITMU18**

*What?* Debbie recognises some of her contribution to problems in the marriage relationship, in terms of showing her “self-assured” self to Mark, rather than revealing her feelings and needs.

*How?* This experience of insight comes by inference out of her daughter's response to the experience of a deeper relationship as a result of sharing feelings.

**Step 2 MU19**

John: [concluding the reading of Debbie's e-mail] **The fact that I have been accepted and forgiven by God makes me wonder why I am not able to do the same, and why I'm scared of being crucified again, when He would probably do that for me again because He loves me.**

**Debbie.**

**Step 3 TMU19**

Debbie is not able to accept and forgive Mark because she is scared of "being crucified again".

**Step 4 ITMU19**

*What?* It is a real possibility that Debbie could be tormented and broken hearted again by Mark's unfaithfulness.

*How?* Instead of accepting her vulnerability and humanity, Debbie is prone to criticise herself for not being able to be God-like in accepting and forgiving Mark. So her high expectations of herself and her rather idealistic interpretation of her faith may complicate the process, which requires the experiential reality of self-acceptance (as a result of God's acceptance and forgiveness) which would enable her acceptance and forgiveness of Mark.

**Step 2 MU20**

John: **So it seems to me it was a pretty disturbed and pretty sleepless night ... Do you remember it?**

Debbie: **I recall it was ... I wrote to you about my "fear and confusion" ... I remember the things that CS Lewis was writing about<sup>34</sup> because that's pretty much what I was doing, just retreating to within myself and protecting this very sacred person of myself, and not wanting to be vulnerable ... and in my fear of actually making myself vulnerable, I wasn't prepared to go that route ... I was pretty happy to put my heart way way away.**

**Step 3 TMU20**

Debbie struggled with and kept remembering the vivid words of CS Lewis: "Love anything and your heart will certainly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give

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<sup>34</sup> C.S Lewis (1963) *The Four Loves* pp.111-112. London: Fontana

your heart to no-one, not even an animal ... lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable”. She recognised that that was what she was doing, out of fear of making herself vulnerable.

#### **Step 4 ITMU20**

*What?* Debbie’s experience of insight begins with seeing herself portrayed in the mirror of vivid images held up by CS Lewis, so that she gained some insight into what she was doing to protect herself, in contradiction of the vulnerable nature and the risks inherent in love.

*How?* These poetic images are potent for Debbie because she recognizes herself in this mirror; “That’s pretty much what I was doing”. She gains self-insight as well as insight into the vulnerable nature of, and risks inherent in, loving.

#### **Step 2 MU21**

Debbie: **I wasn't thinking about it that night ... it was as if I had done all the deep thinking about it ... all the ... all the blood, sweat and tears about it, like really examined, examined ... Why am I like this? What is it? Why do I want to? ... What am I scared of? ... What makes me so right and the other person so wrong? ... I had gone through all of that ... I had come to see you on the Saturday** [20<sup>th</sup> January 2001. In fact Debbie also referred to the C.S. Lewis quote in therapy on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2000, the week after I had shared it with her, so she had been mulling over it in her memory for some time. She didn’t have a copy of it, yet had felt the power of it and remembered it remarkably accurately. She asked me to read it to her again on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2001] **... so the whole weekend I had to mull it over, to really, really ... ouch, you put me through the wringer, eh!** [nervous laughter].

#### **Step 3**

Debbie describes being “put through the [emotional] wringer”. The hard work of examining and questioning over the course of that weekend was a necessary preliminary to “not thinking about it that night” of listening to music.

#### **Step 4**

*What?* Debbie was not in a cognitive or self-critical mode the night that the insights came together; she was relaxing listening to music in a more reflective mode.

*How?* But being “put through the wringer”, the hard work of self-examining, questioning and demanding considerable integrity of herself was an essential preparation for her experience of insight.

### **Step 2 MU22**

**John: You were talking in your session, about how angry you were feeling ...**

**Debbie: And nothing that I said to you ... there was absolutely nothing that I said to you on that Saturday that had any inkling of this. I mean, I think I was pretty angry on the Saturday.**

**John: Yes, you were. I see from my notes you said "On my way to work this morning I was so angry I could slam my car into something ... to cap it all I forgot my tablets at home ... I don't want to be back with him [Mark] so I'm not prepared to share at a feelings level with him ... "**

**Debbie: Holy Moly, what a total contrast!**

**John: And you were saying in the session: "Why does he want to be back with me? Because he has lost respectability? friends? standing in the community? ... or because he doesn't want to give me the house bond-free? Is that why he needs me? It won't matter if I have no one who truly loves me, that's where I'm at ..." And then I said: "I guess underneath this thinking and strategising it must feel pretty raw". And you weren't able to respond to the underlying rawness at the time. You said: "It's survival now. He expects me to be there. He decides when he wants to see me, and I must be there. He doesn't even respect me ... "**

**Debbie: Self-righteous, ain't I! [laughing]. But that was how I really felt, it was truly how I felt, and I think that is what I had internalised for myself.**

### **Step 3 TMU22**

Debbie's anger 36 hours before her central insight completely blocked out any inkling of this self-insight about wanting reconciliation with Mark. She was so hurt and raw that she was blaming Mark for everything and was not able to see what she was doing.

### **Step 4 ITMU22**

*What?* Any inkling of this insight that Debbie really wanted to seek reconciliation with Mark, was blocked from her consciousness by her anger towards Mark.

*How?* In her anger, Debbie was quite violent towards herself as well as vicious towards Mark, questioning his motives, blaming him for her feelings and distorting what he says and does, with the result that she bluntly states “I don’t want to be back with him”.

### **Step 2 MU23**

**Debbie: And so even though I had spent lots of time mulling over that quote from C.S. Lewis that you read me and really examining it and thinking about it, I knew I had to be ... brave ... I couldn't lock myself up and tell the whole world that I was this delicate little thing ... I wouldn't ever experience life ... I would never enjoy my life ... that is where I was at. It caused me to really think deeply that I take care not to do that. But at no one time ... at no one time ... at no one time ... did I actually think around the lines of the e-mail to you until that morning when I sat down and actually did it.**

### **Step 3 TMU23**

Debbie spent time and energy mulling over the images of C.S. Lewis, experiencing considerable inner turmoil in facing the private and public aspects of her growing awareness of herself, but she never thought positively along the lines of the e-mail before she actually wrote it.

### **Step 4 ITMU23**

*What?* Debbie experienced considerable inner turmoil in facing the private and public aspects of her growing awareness of herself, but her central insight that she really wanted to work for reconciliation with Mark, did not come together as a gestalt in an holistic, lived experience, and was not anticipated in Debbie’s conscious thinking at all before she expressed it in the e-mail.

*How?* So this insight, born out of inner turmoil, is not a logical, cognitive, accumulative, and linear *quantitative* process [importantly she says “at no one time” three times]; there are also factors involving affect and self-acceptance, and “change of heart” that make a *qualitative* difference in the process by permitting, motivating, bringing into focus, and constellating the constituent parts of this lived experience of insight. Yet it is also clearly a cumulative process; Debbie did not have the insight at any “one time”, it comes together as she relaxes and listens to the music over a considerable period of time, and culminates in writing the e-mail.

### **Step 2 MU24**

**Debbie: I was sitting listening to music ... I would compare God's love and Mark's love, and see the difference ... I was so scared of being rejected until gradually through a lot of**

**hard work, I came to accept myself ... warts and all ... it was almost a birthing of a person ... coming into my own.** [When I asked Debbie about this “hard work” she described it as being “just like labour pains”.]

**John: I like the image of birthing that you’re using, and of course it’s the opposite of the “death” as the result of the fear that C.S. Lewis is talking about, when we end up locked in the coffin of our selfishness.**

**Debbie: Yes** [laughing].

### **Step 3** TMU24

Listening to music, Debbie would compare God’s love (accepting) and Mark’s love (rejecting). Gradually, through a lot of hard work (labour), Debbie came to accept herself ... “almost a birthing of a person”.

### **Step 4** ITMU24

*What?* This insight, that Debbie really wanted to seek reconciliation with Mark, involved her accepting herself as she is, warts and all, but loved and accepted by God.

*How?* This self-acceptance, overcoming her fear of being rejected, was hard work over something like six hours. She describes it as “labour pains” resulting in “almost a birthing of a person ... coming into my own”. It was the opposite of the lonely “death” described by C.S. Lewis, locked in the “coffin of your selfishness”. It was facilitated by listening to music (relaxing) and meditating on God’s love (accepting that she is accepted).

### **Step 2** MU25

**John: It sounds as if the music was quite important ...**

**Debbie: The music was very calming, very soothing ... it was Geoff Bullock's orchestral music, it's called a "Symphony of Hope" [arranged and conducted by Paul Terracini CD 1021] ... there are no lyrics to it ... it was just the music. It's like waves of calmness that just flow over me. Because when I listen to that music I'm not in touch with listening to words, not focusing on words of somebody else ... so you have to focus on your own words.**

**John: And what do you mean by “focus on your own words”?**

**Debbie: You know, John, rather than focus on what the composer or songwriter is picturing out there, I refocus it for myself and make it my own. There will be some parts that resonate for me and I want to dream on, and sometimes I even think, ‘no, I wouldn’t put it that way’, and put my own words to it ... the way I would feel that music must be.**

**John:** So when you say, “the way I feel that music must be”, maybe you’re talking more about connecting with feelings, and putting some words to the feelings. Is that it?

**Debbie:** Yup. Yes, I’ll give you an example. Last night I sat listening to Josh Groban, and a sense of wonder and calm came over me. I can sit there for hours, and most of his music is in Spanish, I think, I can’t understand a word of it. There’s a lot of English songs as well, and some of the songs ... the words ... are what I would like somebody to say to me ... and it’s almost as if I get to a place where I feel I know those words really are for me. And that’s exactly what I did last night ... and you know what, I feel happy within myself ... waves of peace.

**John:** So, are you saying it is not happening at a verbal conscious level?

**Debbie:** No! [very firmly, meaning it is not happening at a verbal conscious level]. It’s happening at a feelings level.

**John:** It is connecting with inner words, at a deeper perhaps subliminal level?

**Debbie:** Totally ... totally. You’re on a different plane ... you’re at a different dimension. You’re at that place inside yourself. The music is just calm and it’s almost a meditative state ... you can centre down deep within yourself and go to a place where you don’t normally go to ... it sounds strange, eh ... I mean to me it’s strange to give expression to it ... to say to you that it’s like really connecting with yourself at a level where in your normal busy life, you wouldn’t.

**John:** It sounds like connecting at a sort of soul level ...

### **Step 3** TMU25

Debbie experiences the music as waves of calmness. She then “refocuses” the composer’s message and makes it her own ... “the way I feel it must be ... for me” until she reaches a meditative state and is able to centre down deep within herself and connect with her soul/inner being/different dimension which helps a qualitative change in insight.

### **Step 4** ITMU25

*What?* Debbie experiences the music as crucial and elemental in her experience of insight. It is significant that the music is called a “Symphony of Hope” because it was this crucial element of *hope* that needed to be rekindled in Debbie for her to experience the insight that she really wanted to seek reconciliation with Mark.



*How?* So the music must have expressed and evoked this *hope* in Debbie. In terms of her mood and appropriation of the music, the *verbs are in three distinct* voices, which together harmonise to bring about her central insight. There is a *passive* element in “waves of calmness that just flow over me”. There is also an *active* element “I re-focus it for myself and make it my own”, and “put my own words to it”. She also listens, *reflexively*, not in a critical or detached way, she appropriates the words and the music in a meditative way in order to get in touch with her self and her real desires and feelings at a deeper, or “soul”, level of being.

### Step 2MU26

John: **Or here’s an image ... I think it was prompted by what you said a few moments ago about the music being the thing that sustained you ... that kept you going ... the realisation of being held by God, or being loved by God** [MU4. But as I worked on the Meaning Units in this interview, I realised that it was Debbie’s description “it was almost a birthing of a person” [MU24] that stood out as catalytic of this image. In fact, I commented at the time “I like the image of birthing that you are using”]. **Perhaps the music is like the mother holding you as a baby in her womb and you are aware of the rhythm of her heartbeat, and the melody of her voice ... and you are contained and nurtured and sustained ... maybe you are experiencing being “held” by the music, just as you are “held” by mother, and “held” by God in the womb of the Spirit ... so perhaps you are connecting with a consciousness of being “held” before words, logic and rationalisations are learned?**<sup>35</sup>

Debbie: **Absolutely! But the image almost makes me feel sad ... I was born thirteen months after my brother, and I don’t think my mother had very much time to focus on this new baby that was growing and probably kept her sick, because she had this precious little boy, and I would always tell her I was a mistake ... that’s why it makes me feel a bit sad. When I was pregnant with Anne, it was probably the grandest time for me ... an amazing time ... I know exactly what that sensation was like when her arms would move across my tummy, and I would play games, I would sit in a bath of water, my tummy submerged, and then I’d knock on the bath, and because the soundwaves would go through all the water ... then you’d see how my tummy moved ... then I’d just knock on the bath and talk to this baby, and it moved ... and so I played with this child before she was born, man. She was**

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<sup>35</sup> It is recognized that this long comment is inappropriate in a research interview. It is perhaps more appropriate for a therapist than a researcher and this will be commented on in Section 3.7.1 and 7.18



**just so precious, so incredibly precious, from the time she was conceived ... I'd like to think that somebody felt that mad about me, when I was in the womb ... that being held thing ... I know it from the point of the person holding, because I held that child. It is a great need of mine to feel safe, to be held, and I needed Mark to hold me, for me to feel safe emotionally, just as I need God to hold me safe.**

### **Step 3 TMU26**

Debbie agrees that the music is like mother holding one as a baby in her womb, or like being held by God in the womb of the Spirit, but the image makes her feel sad because when she was born she didn't feel wanted or "held". She felt she was a "mistake". By contrast, Debbie's experience of "holding" Anne was wonderful, because Anne was so wanted and so precious from the time she was conceived.

### **Step 4 ITMU26**

*What?* This image and experience of birthing, evokes real feelings of sadness for Debbie about being second-rate and unwanted compared to her older brother as a baby. In contrast Debbie remembers warm feelings of how she 'held' her daughter in her womb, 'played' with her and how incredibly precious she felt her to be. This prompts Debbie to express her own intense longing to be loved, cherished and held in a similar way.

*How?* The image and experience of birthing evokes in Debbie affective levels of feeling, both sadness and joy, remembering, intense longing and need. This enables a greater sense of self, and self-awareness, at a cognitive level which seem to be pre-requisites for her later self-insight of her need to feel safe emotionally and to be "held" by Mark.

### **Step 2 MU27**

**John: So, for you, being held by Mark, being held by the music, is very much like being held by God?**

**Debbie: Yup. Music relaxes and releases me ... nothing that anybody could say or do would have the same effect of enabling me to "chill".<sup>36</sup> I come to real peace within myself listening to different instruments, rhythms and the melody. Many times the words of his songs [the symphony was an arrangement of the music from a number of his religious songs] tied in with the feelings I was in touch with.**

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<sup>36</sup> A slang expression defined by the Encarta World English Dictionary as to "calm down, to stop being angry or tense" 1999, Bloomsbury, London

**John: So the music was connecting with your feelings before or underneath your words, your logic and your rationalisations?**

**Debbie: Yes, and you [with emphasis] know how I like to be logical ... need to be logical ... about everything. I need to rationalise ... I need to be able to explain things, and I think I said to you in that e-mail it must be the wee hours of the morning that's got all my defences down.**

**John: Yes, you did, but it sounds as if it was the music in these wee hours that relaxed and released you, as you put it. Was it any particular part of the music, instrument or song that was special for you?**

**Debbie: No, it was all of it ... the total [with emphasis] effect ... I was overwhelmed by the love and mercy of God. Quite frankly, I was in a very peaceful place. I think it's like getting out of the snail's house and being a slug almost, because you are without the covering of your shell ... your protection ... and I think sending that e-mail, I didn't have to send it to you ...**

### **Step 3 TMU27**

The total effect of the music mediating the love and mercy of God “holds”, relaxes and releases Debbie to “chill” and puts her in touch with deeper needs and more vulnerable desires than simply the hurt feelings which gave rise to her eviscerated logic, rationalisations and self-protective strategies. This “slug” (the essential yet vulnerable Debbie) rather than the “snail” (the protected Debbie in her shell and defined by her logic and rationalisations) was able to express and naturally share her insights in the e-mail to me.

### **Step 4 ITMU27**

*What?* The total effect of the music enables Debbie to calm down, to stop being angry and to relax. This is essential for realising her insight, expressing it and communicating it to me in an e-mail.

*How?* The total effect of the music mediating the love and mercy of God ‘holds’ Debbie and enables her to calm down, to stop being angry and as she relaxes she gets in touch with deeper needs and more vulnerable feelings and desires than just the hurt reactions which gave rise to her logic, rationalisations and self-protective strategies. So she’s able to get out of her protective shell, and become more vulnerable, more human and more able to communicate honestly in the e-mail.

## Step 2 MU28

Debbie: **I didn't even know what prompted me to send it to you ... I could have deleted the whole thing ...**

John: **Well, you did start the e-mail with "I desperately need to see you", and we did meet the next day.**

Debbie: **OK ... yes, I did desperately need to see you ... I desperately needed to speak to you because at that point ... at that point ... you remember I said to you when I lost my kitten, Tigger, I had to speak to someone ... I had to verbalise it ... I desperately needed to speak to you.**

## Step 3 TMU28

Debbie is not sure why she sent the e-mail. She could have deleted it, but she realises she desperately needed to verbalise what was going on in her. Perhaps she needed affirmation/assurance about her emerging insight.

## Step 4 ITMU28

*What?* Debbie is not sure why she sent the e-mail, but she desperately needed to verbalise it. Deleting it would have been like deleting the emerging insight, as a parallel to burying Tigger and the evidence, and then carrying on as if nothing had happened.

*How?* Debbie didn't fully understand why she was sending the e-mail, or what the implications were, but she was aware of desperately needing to verbalise her emerging insight, in testing its validity and seek help in what to do about it.

## Step 2 MU29

Debbie: **And this was at four in the morning, and I was pretty relaxed at that time. Up until this point I had this freedom ... I didn't have to do anything right ... I could go to sleep when I wanted to ... I could do what I liked ... I could sit up all night if I wished ... I was a free spirit at that point. I was calm ... I was truly calm, John, I really was. And that was why I desperately needed to tell you, because ... quite frankly, who the heck was I to think that I was so cool and that there was nothing wrong with me? ... and, most importantly, maybe I should work hard at reconciliation. I think I headed the e-mail "Fear and Confusion" because I needed someone to say "you can put your toes into cold water again". Fear would have prevented me from even contemplating it. The question of how**

**does all this work out on a practical level raises “fear and confusion” for me ... most of all a fear of rejection.**

**Step 3 TMU29**

Debbie was relaxed and had a sense of freedom and calm. Then fear and confusion began raising some distress, self-doubt and concerns about her insight. She needed reassurance. She was most afraid of Mark’s rejection and how this insight about working hard for reconciliation would work out in cold reality.

**Step 4 ITMU29**

*What?* Debbie’s experience of her ‘emerging insight’ and the new thinking that flowed from it at this point involved considerable fluctuations of feelings; both calm and confusion, freedom and fear, relaxation and rejection (her deepest and most central fear), as she faced the practical implications of giving birth to this insight in practice.

*How?* Debbie needed someone with whom to test and validate her emerging insight, to gentle her self-criticism and to encourage her over her fear of rejection from Mark, as she contemplated working at reconciliation in practice.

**Step 2 MU30**

**Debbie: And the only way I can protect myself from that is to reject Mark before he rejects me. I really am a very scared person. I feel more comfortable in front of strangers because they don’t know me. I feel safer ... safe from rejection ... rejection is the big thing. So I become the Mrs Brown person ... who doesn’t have to operate on a feelings level, but just says “sorry, sir, the bank can’t give you the money”. Jesus risked being rejected ... I’ve had to learn so much about not [with great emphasis] being Mrs Brown.**

**John: Yes, in the e-mail you say “I’m wanting guarantees that it [rejection by Mark] will never happen to me again. I’m not allowing God to be God. I’m directing and not trusting.**

**Step 3 TMU30**

This birth and new life involves a new way-of-being-in-the-world for Debbie; risking *not* using her usual self-protective strategy of rejecting Mark before he rejects her, and *not* hiding her feelings behind the “Mrs Brown persona”, the impersonal and withholding manager at the Bank.

**Step 4 ITMU30**

*What?* Debbie realises her self-protective and controlling strategies are self-defeating; “rejecting Mark before he rejects me” is like aborting her emerging insight, thoughts and feelings that she

wants to work towards reconciliation. She also realises that her “Mrs Brown persona” as the bank manager enables her to operate and make decisions without involving her feelings.

*How?* Debbie realises that her emerging insight that she wants to work towards reconciliation with Mark, cannot be achieved by controlling or rejecting, but only by risking, trusting and relating with feeling. This may be helped by her desire to follow Jesus who she knows “risked being rejected”.

### **Step 2 MU31**

John: [continuing to quote what Debbie says in her e-mail] **I think that the real reason is that whilst I am incredibly scared, I have wanted to work for reconciliation.**

Debbie: **Did I say that? Can you see, that wanting to work for reconciliation was touching that different level, John ... that was getting to the heart of where it was, and it's that thing that you know ... know it, but logically, you really want to rationalise it away ... all of those things ... this is stupid, everybody will think that I'm a total idiot. I mean, I am Mrs Brown, and I do all the right things ... I don't do stupid things ... I am way too clever to do all of those stupid things ... it's a real “nanas” thing to do ... there's just no reason to it ...**

### **Step 3 TMU31**

At one level Debbie wanted to rationalise this insight away out of fear, both because she wasn't convinced it was “logical” or sensible and because other people will think she is stupidly needy and dependent on Mark. Wanting to work for reconciliation was for Debbie touching a different level, getting to the heart of what she wanted and what she knew to be real and true for her.

### **Step 4 ITMU31**

*What?* Debbie's central insight involved the recognition that at the same time as being incredibly scared, at the core of her being Debbie was wanting to work for reconciliation with Mark.

*How?* This experience seemed to be at a “different level” of knowing; deeper, and truer, than her fears; not stronger, but more vulnerable and so, in terms of her old way-of-being-in-the-world, it does not make any logical sense at all. This “different level” seems to imply a different way-of-being-in-the-world.

### **Step 2 MU32**

John: **You also mention two things in the e-mail, after referring to the C.S. Lewis quote ... you say “on Friday [12<sup>th</sup> January 2001, i.e. ten days before her experience of insight and sending**

the e-mail] **I noticed on your bookshelf a book entitled** [at this point Debbie gasps and blurts out the title fractionally before I say it] **‘All Truth is God’s Truth’** [there is a conviction and excitement in her voice, compared with my more matter-of-fact tone] **and I could not help but question my reluctance to accept anything that Mark had said as being true’**. **Do you remember where it was you saw that book?**

Debbie: **It’s on the bookshelf, up there somewhere** [pointing] **... it’s either black writing on a white background ... or white on a black background ...**

John: **You’re right!** [she had pointed to the exact place. I have approximately 4 000 books in my study/consulting room on all four walls]. **Here it is ... Holmes, Arthur *All Truth is God’s Truth*** [Eerdmans 1977. It is a slim and unobtrusive paperback]. **It’s black writing on a white background. Now, I didn’t know anything about that, and I expect I was saying something frightfully important at the time** [Debbie laughs out loud at this point as if releasing tension] **... but much more importantly you were gazing at my bookshelf and at some level of consciousness, you picked something up which spoke to you, and said something much more important than what I was saying at the time.**

Debbie: **But it’s true ... you know something ... I looked at ... I don’t know why that struck me ... I’m not quite sure why it did ... I didn’t know what you were saying to me ... but obviously ...**

John: **In my notes of that hour, there is no reference to it, so obviously you didn’t say anything about it ...**

Debbie: **No, it’s one of those things ... you see something, it is like shocking ... Wow! ... it was one of those “Wow!” things ...**

John: **But it stayed with you and it was important enough for you to mention it as the second thing in the list of things in the e-mail.**

Debbie: **Yes, because if I, in my logical approach to it now, would say to you it’s one of those shocking things ... it’s one of those things that you would notice and remember ... it’s not at a level where we’re talking ... it’s at the deep side of you ... and I am one of those people that see one of those things and say, “Wow!” ... that’s big, and not knowing that I would use it again ... it’s just one of those deep things for me ... and yet it was that thing when I was operating at that deeper level ... it was that, part of that, which just connected.**

### Step 3 TMU32

This particular experience of insight through seeing the title of a book, contributes to the central insight. Debbie is struck in a powerful and direct way by a book entitled *All Truth is God's Truth*. It made a considerable impact on her, making her question her reluctance to accept anything Mark had said as being true. But the full implications and significance of this insight didn't come to Debbie until ten days later while listening to music.

### Step 4 ITMU32

*What?* This particular experience of insight, that in order to protect herself Debbie is 'labelling' Mark as a "liar", is eidetic; it is direct, powerful and primary; the opposite of the indirect, disempowering and secondary rationalisations and self-protective strategies to which Debbie has just referred [in MU31].

*How?* Debbie doesn't know why the book title *All Truth is God's Truth* struck her. It seems to have jolted her spiritual awareness, and shocked her. So she experiences insight as *impact* (often characterised as a "Wow!", "Aha!" or "Eureka!" experience). Debbie also didn't know at the time that the book title would come back to her later, and connect with such significance, challenging her reluctance to accept anything that Mark had said as being true. She also experiences insight as *interpreting*; the meaning and significance of the experience is like hearing an echo within, of the un-thought known.

### Step 2 MU33

Debbie: **So as I said in the e-mail, I had to question my reluctance to accept anything that Mark has said as being true. I knew I was only seeing my [emphasised] truth as being real.**

John: **Did you realise that in the session, or did you think about it later? Or was it when you were listening to the music that night that the implication of the title of the book came to you?**

Debbie: **No ... no ... not in the session. It was while I was listening to the music. I was so fed up, I would never have acknowledged any of that. While I was listening to the music, I was operating at a different level.**

John: **Then did it come to you suddenly while listening to the music, or gradually over a number of minutes?**

Debbie: **I think it wouldn't have been all that suddenly ... just slowly, just gradually ...**



### Step 3 TMU33

This experience of seeing *All Truth is God's Truth* made her question her reluctance to accept anything that Mark had said as being true. She knew she was only seeing her truth as being real. But she was so fed up she couldn't acknowledge any of that. It was ten days later, listening to the music and operating at a "different level" that gradually she was able to acknowledge the fuller significance and implications of this experience, and it became an important insight, contributing to and strengthening her central insight that she wanted to work with reconciliation with Mark.

### Step 4 ITMU33

*What?* Debbie saw the title *All Truth is God's Truth*. It was ten days later that she had the insight that she was only seeing *her* truth as being real. She came to *see* this gradually while listening to music.

*How?* First she experiences insight as *impact*, the influence of the life world on the self. It was ten days later that she experienced insight as *interpreting*, the influence of the self on the life world. Each is what it is only in terms of the other, as interwoven strands of a single fabric. The experience of insight here is of Debbie letting the life world differences *be*, in letting them touch her at the same time as entertaining the emerging meanings and letting them *be*, as they gradually came to co-constitute a larger whole of meaning.

### Step 2 MU34

John: **In your e-mail you mention "on Saturday afternoon, when you apologised for being barefooted, I was struck by the natural way you and Jill [my wife] were relaxing together and I was strongly reminded of how Mark and I spent our times together. It's pretty much the same, I'd forgotten or quite simply refused to remember, the good we shared together, especially the parts I know of, are not the parts I choose now to focus on". So it seems to me that there's another fascinating little detail that spoke to you ...**

Debbie: **Yes, something happened and I'd phoned you, and said "John I really need to speak with you", and you very graciously agreed to see me and you were bare-feet, and it's something that is pretty much a detail like seeing the book on your shelf, which I almost noticed but I did not notice it ...**

John: **Let me just interrupt you there. That's a fascinating phrase "which I almost noticed but I did not notice it". Can you say a little more about that?**



Debbie: **I would notice something, and I wouldn't be rude enough to say it, I'd just keep it, so I won't notice it ... I won't mention it ... I won't acknowledge it at that point. It would be something that I had noted.**

John: **So it was stored away ...**

Debbie: **Yes ...**

John: **When you saw my bare feet, did you make the connection with good relaxed times that you spent with Mark straight away that Saturday afternoon, when you came to see me? or was it later? ... or was the memory and connection evoked by the music you were listening to on the evening you wrote the e-mail?**

Debbie: **It was definitely not that Saturday, because if your toes had reminded me of Mark I would have stamped on them, because I was very angry with him ... it was really when I sat down with that music ... I don't quite know what finally ... finally got me to see things differently.**

### **Step 3 TMU34**

Another little experience of insight, or “reality check” came through seeing my bare feet, and again this contributes to the central insight. Debbie was “struck” by the natural way my wife and I were relaxing together and was only later (36 hours later) strongly reminded of similar times with Mark and realised she had refused to remember the good times they had shared together.

### **Step 4 ITMU34**

*What?* To protect and strengthen herself in rejecting Mark, Debbie refused to remember the good and relaxing times they shared together. Debbie was “struck” by the natural way my wife and I (with barefeet) were relaxing together but she did not make the link of similar times with Mark. It was an “oversight” at this stage; in fact her use of language suggests that if the recognition of the “insight” had surfaced she would have “stamped on” it, because she was very angry with Mark.

*How?* Barefeet suggest not only relaxation and good times together, but also vulnerability so, under the influence of the music, she comes to recognise and value as a quality in her husband a vulnerability that she herself has lacked up to this point. Again Debbie experiences insight as *impact* and insight as *interpreting* thirty-six hours later. The experience of insight is of Debbie letting the life world differences *be* at the same time as entertaining the emerging meanings and letting them *be*.

## Step 2 MU35

Debbie: **But you know, John, God’s timing was absolutely perfect ... because that was the morning Mark’s dad died. Mark phoned me about six o’clock in the morning, after I’d sat up all night and typed that e-mail, and sent it to you at about four in the morning ... that was a big day ... I’d never, ever, have sent you that e-mail if Mark had ‘phoned first ... I would have just left it, because a part of me would have said “no” ... I think it would have been a situation of my getting back to the point of not being held and that I’d rather forced myself on him, and he might feel he was forced to hold me, and now that he is hurting ... so I have to be this big hero or something ... so I wouldn’t have dared put into action what I was saying in the e-mail or even send it to you.**

John: **I knew that the timing was very close, but I didn’t realise that it was as close as that. And did Mark’s dad die during the course of that night?**

Debbie: **Yes. Shocking. I’d like to think that he knew that we weren’t going to get divorced.**

## Step 3 TMU35

Debbie’s experience of “God’s timing” (synchronicity of “inner” and “outer” worlds) was an important confirming factor for her of the truth and importance of her insight about her desire to work for reconciliation. She would never have sent the e-mail or dared to put it into practice if Mark had rung first (just two hours earlier) because of her awareness of her insecurity and her need to be held combined with her fear of forcing herself on Mark when he is hurting by suggesting working at reconciliation.

## Step 4 ITMU35

*What?* Debbie had a strong sense of synchronicity, reinforced by an experience of transcendence over hearing about the death of Mark’s Dad, which confirmed her central insight about wanting to seek reconciliation with Mark, and helped make it possible.

*How?* Debbie is very clear that she would never have *sent* the e-mail containing her insights to me if Mark had phoned first, out of fear of taking advantage of his vulnerability. She would not have *acted* on her insights in this e-mail but would have continued her ‘false self’. So Debbie’s central insight, that she really wanted to work for reconciliation with Mark, was dramatically enhanced and practically empowered by this experience of synchronicity and transcendence between “inner” and “outer” worlds.

**Step 2 MU36**

**John: So a lot [with emphasis] of things were going on that night challenging your way of being-in-the-world, not just your way of thinking, when you were listening to the music?**

**Debbie: Yes. And when I'm in that place when I really look at things ... when I'm in touch with myself at that funny level ... those things are pretty meaningful ... because it's like I'm able to connect with my Self<sup>37</sup> at my feelings level ... not on a superficial level ... not on a level where one normally relates from ... at a deeper level of my Self. So that's how come I would probably recall those things, because those are things that happen at a deeper level for me ... and remembering the times we spent together, the things that you kind of put in that deeper place ... [a very long pause] ... Yeah, pretty fascinating. So that's what I identified ... so, in all, that e-mail, when I was sending you that, I was at that deeper place ... and I was really in touch with who I was ... I was not uncomfortable ... I don't think I was uncomfortable at all ... I was more shocked at all the realisations I was ... [pause] ... coming to, I think ... or that I even ... [pause] ... picked them out, I think ...**

**John: Were you deliberately mulling things over? ... like trying to solve a problem? or making a list of all the issues? ... or did the things that you expressed in the e-mail just come to you? You've just said you were "shocked" at all the "realisations" you were coming to, but you also say that you "picked them out". Perhaps different ones came in different ways?**

**Debbie: Things came to me, and it's pretty much the same when I'm writing my journal ... I'm often surprised when I read them afterwards at how clearly I've expressed my feelings about things ... when I'm upset or angry. When I'm writing my journal I'm not the logical, ordered, organised Debbie ... I'm the other Debbie ... if I can say that without sounding like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde [laughing].**

**John: So you're not trying logically to solve a problem ...**

**Debbie: Nothing ... nothing ...**

**John: You're not even making a list of all the issues so that you can solve them?**

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<sup>37</sup> I originally transcribed this Self here with a small "s", but decided to ask Debbie about it because she had pronounced it with considerable emphasis. She was quite clear that it was "not the little self but the Self God meant us to be". I am aware that there may be a lack of consistency in this transcribed interview, but believe that the use of "Self" most accurately reflects Debbie's self-understanding, which after reflection and a very long pause, she found "pretty fascinating".

Debbie: **Nope ... I'm just doodling on ... I'm just emptying ... and then later when you read it, you say "Wow!", where did I come on that? You see, I don't even know that I intended sending that e-mail to you. So basically I was writing from my Self to my self and then I don't know why I put an e-mail address in it [laughing] ... it's the same as when I write in my journal, thinking that I'd be the only one to read it. Since I regard you as the other side ... the other self ... so you could get it.**

John: **Well, I feel very privileged.**

### **Step 3** TMU36

Debbie says it is particularly meaningful for her when she is able to "connect with her Self" ("the Self God meant us to be") which she experiences at a deep feelings level, sometimes in therapy, sometimes listening to music, and sometimes in journaling. She was in touch with her Self when composing the e-mail; surprised and shocked at realisations to which she was coming. She is aware that this is similar to writing her journal as she is "often surprised later to see how clearly I've expressed my feelings". This happens when she is not the logical, ordered, organised Debbie, but when she is reflecting meditatively without a particular intention and in an unguarded way in touch with her feelings, needs and desires.

### **Step 4** ITMU36

*What?* Meaningful self-insight occurs for Debbie when she connects with her Self in touch with her feelings, needs and desires and occurs particularly in therapy while listening to music or writing her journal.

*How?* Debbie's self-insight is not a result of a consciously organised, ordered or logical process of self-criticism, or self-examination but is facilitated by an intentional yet relaxed, playful, unguarded, unselfconscious process of meditative reflection which creates space to be surprised by something from the "Self" comparable to dreaming.

### **Step 2** MU37

John: **I'm wondering whether, with the benefit of hindsight now, and the distance and perspective in which you can see things ... I'm wondering whether you feel that night listening to music, mulling things over and coming to a series of insights which you expressed in the e-mail to me, was a fairly critical turning point?**

Debbie: **That was [strongly emphasised] a big-time turning point ... that was. It was almost like ... [pause] ... a flower finally getting out of its tight little bud-form ... it was a big**

**turning point, it was like a flower opening up ... I think it's something like that, because it was the [emphasised] turning point, it was what I really wanted, what I truly, truly felt ... it was actually overcoming the fear, and being brave enough to actually stand and make that statement, and say "I will do this" [this was said quite loudly and firmly, like a declaration of being-in-the-world ... then dropping her voice, Debbie continued] ... you almost don't have an option, you have to do it ... knowing very much that for this very respectable, organised, ordered person that I am ... that is "nonsense". And that type of turning point is "nonsense" in the light of my whole life that I live ... does it make sense of my always logical, always rational, always thought-out way of being? ... no, it didn't make sense.**

**John: But as you look back now, following the reconciliation, following Mark coming back home, following the renewal of your marriage vows in June 2001 ... and we're nearly two years later now, how do you feel about that decision ... was that a moment of madness or a moment of profound sanity?**

**Debbie: To you I'd say it's one of the most sane things I did ... actually listening to and daring to do that. It is probably ... it is scary at the time ... it is probably ... I think I likened it to who am I not to be crucified just a tad, if Jesus did the big crucifixion ... I don't quite know if I said that to you?**

**John: You do say in the e-mail "the fact that I've been accepted and forgiven by God makes me wonder why I am not able to do the same, and why I'm scared of being crucified again, when he would probably do that for me again".**

### **Step 3 TMU37**

The central insight to seek reconciliation with Mark was a critical turning point for Debbie involving a big change in terms of her way-of-being-in-the-world, ("like a flower finally getting out of its bud form ... opening up"), revealing what she really wanted, what she truly felt and what, in terms of being true to her inner being, she "had" to do. It seemed highly risky in terms of her previous way of being-in-the-world, yet running the risk of being 'crucified' again resulted in a 'resurrection' in her way-of-being-in-the-world.

### **Step 4 ITMU37**

*What?* This central insight was a critical turning-point for Debbie, involving understanding of what she really wanted, courage to risk rejection by Mark and recognition of a categorical imperative contrary to her normal, respectable and self-protective way-of-being-in-the-world.

*How?* Debbie acknowledges that her series of insights expressed in the e-mail represent a critical turning point, as well as a blossoming in her relationship with Mark. She recognises the significance of a series of “shocks” culminating in the timing of Mark’s telephone call about his dad’s death. This is *insight as impact*; the influence of the life-world on the self. She is also very aware of the on-going organic process of being true to her understanding of what she really wanted and truly felt. This is *insight as interpreting*; the influence of the “Self” on the life-world. She also acknowledges that contrary to her normal self-protective way-of-being-in-the-world and fear of rejection by Mark, she *has* to take the risk (almost a categorical imperative) encouraged by a sense of authenticity and awe of these insights of putting all this into practice. This is *insight as action*; being true to these new emerging meanings and significations of the Self and the life-world, which is a new way-of-being-in-the-world.

## Step 2 MU38

Debbie: **He would ... he would ... and that was because you know, John, two years ago I wouldn’t have likened it to a flower experience, I would have likened it to wood being burnt ... St John of the Cross has this famous metaphor of the log of wood being transformed into fire. It comes into one of Thomas Green’s books ... do you have it?** [pause to find it].

John: **Yes, here we are in Thomas Green’s *Opening to God* (1977 p.81 . Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press). [Reading]: “True knowledge of God goes hand in hand with a painful self-knowledge ... as the wood burns, it becomes blackened, it cracks and steams, and all the knot holes and flaws are exposed. If the log could speak, it would cry out: ‘My seeking to become fire was a mistake! I am now worse off than when I started – black, ugly and flawed. I was better off before’. The log is the soul, and the fire is God, and the truth, of course, is that the log is not worse off than it was before. All the ugliness and defects were present before, but they were concealed. The only way the log can become fire is to be revealed honestly and openly as to what it is in itself.”**

Debbie: **Yes, it’s painful to me ... when the wood burns, it gets sore ...**

## Step 3 TMU38

Two years ago the experience was not like a flower opening gently; it was like wood (the human soul) being burnt painfully (experiencing heat and revealing flaws and knots) as it is transformed into fire (God), for true knowledge of God involves painful self-knowledge.

#### Step 4 ITMU38

*What?* Debbie's experience of insight involved painful self-insight. Two years later she describes it as being a natural and expansive process like a flower opening, but at the time it was a crucifying and painful reductive process, like wood being burned and transformed by fire.

*How?* In terms of Debbie's faith, understanding and experience, crucifixion precedes resurrection; being burned comes before opening like a flower. This may give her hope and help her endure the painful process of personal flaws and weaknesses, as well as relational 'knots' being exposed before being transfigured by fire.

#### Step 2 MU39

**Debbie: the flower doesn't get sore ... now it feels like the flower in full bloom ... when I asked Mark about the whole question of confidentiality in this research, he said how freeing it is not to have to hide, lie or cover up. That's really something for him to say, isn't it, after eighteen years of covering up. That is why we are both happy for our names and details to be known<sup>38</sup>. We're quite clear about that. As you know, I'm a very private person, yet we are both so different about it now ... they can know at the office that if you prick me I'll bleed ... I'm OK with that. Mark says to me "you really are on a different level". You see Mark would always say, when I got home from work "won't you please get undressed and let Debbie arrive at home and leave Mrs Brown and her stockings and pearls aside ... " I would be dressed for work ... almost as if I feel I'm respected for the way I dress. I kind of have authority.**

**John: Are you talking about "power dressing"?**

**Debbie: Yes, probably. I have always been like that ... the thinking and analytical person rather than the feeling person ... Mark wants the feeling person to arrive at home ... that's why he asks me to get undressed. Mark is a very feeling person.**

#### Step 3 TMU39

But now it feels to Debbie as if the flower of their relationship is in full bloom, so there is no need for confidentiality in this research ... after 18 years of Mark deceiving her and others.

Debbie also has a different way-of-being-in-the-world, more open, less false; a more vulnerable Debbie, less 'the bank manager Mrs Brown'; more feeling, less analytical.

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<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that Debbie and Mark say they are "both happy for our names and details to be known" it was judged more appropriate, in consultation with my supervisor, to give them pseudonyms.



**Step 4 ITMU39**

*What?* The end result of Debbie's experience of insight, two years on, is that she as a person, and her relationship with Mark, feel like a flower "in full bloom".

*How?* To maintain this involves, for Debbie, the challenge of living consistently with more openness, less covering-up; more vulnerability and feeling, less power and analytical thinking; a different way-of-being-in-the-world in relationship with Mark.

**Step 2 MU40**

**John: Is there anything else that you want to say about this experience of insight? This experience of insight does seem to me to be a very profound and important experience for you, that your life would be very much the poorer if you had in fact clung to those defences.**

**Debbie: Yes, and I would have been that much the poorer for not taking that risk, because it was ... it was ... actually being brave enough to do it, and I think if you have those insights you can do it [pause] ... and the comfort in it is really that even if you do it and it doesn't work, you can say, if you're OK with it, "I made a mistake"... [after a pause she adds, in an almost inaudible voice] ... I suppose. [Then in her normal voice again.] But it wouldn't be the most natural thing if you're a very careful person, and I know how careful I can be with myself ... it takes a bit ... more than a bit ... it takes some courage to do ... but you will know ... you will know that it's right ... coming to that knowledge is shocking ... it is shocking in an almost scary way ... and as I've said to you, I have to tell somebody ... it is shocking how real it is to you, it is ... the stuff you'd actually write down, it is that shocking ... and because it's so real, it helps you to risk it. For me, that is it. It is real ... it is real ... I am actually very blessed, because imagine ... imagine if I didn't even bother with those feelings. Firstly, I wouldn't even be with Mark ... or sitting here talking to you, secondly I would probably have been like that person who packed themselves away, and just lived in that plain, safe place of Hell.**

**John: Are you referring to the way C.S. Lewis puts it ... ?**

**Debbie: Yes ...**

**John: He says "The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love, is Hell".**

**Debbie: Yes.**



### Step 3 TMU40

The experience of insight and the shocking reality of the self-knowledge involved, enabled Debbie to know it was important to “risk” putting it into action, provided that she could get beyond her need to be “right” and was able to say “I made a mistake”. For a careful person like Debbie, it took some courage but “because it is so real, it helps you to risk it ... imagine if I didn’t even bother with those feelings”. In retrospect she experiences herself as “blessed”; she is in relationship with Mark and rescued from a self-protective lovelessness.

### Step 4 ITMU40

*What?* Debbie recognises she would be much poorer if she had not taken the risk of putting her insights into action.

*How?* In struggling with the risks of putting her insight into action, Debbie is very aware of the interaction between her self and the life-world. She is aware it requires *courage* of the self to act; and she is encouraged by the reality and clarity of the series of shocks of the life-world on her self. Paradoxically she realises that taking this risk is also helped by the *humility* of the self to be able to admit to making mistakes, facing painful self-knowledge, and confronting the alternatives of not acting.

### Step 2 MU41

Debbie: **And like the wood ... he [St John of the Cross] uses that analogy in your relationship with God, but that is one aspect. But like the wood there are all those knots and all those things they were always there [with emphasis] ... it was just hidden ... I couldn’t see it ... and that was how my relationship with Mark was ... having gone through the pain, through the fire ... the love was still the same, we were still married, we were still two people who loved each other ... there was always chinks and knots in between ... and having gone through the pain, through the fire ... we have just become a different form really ... that’s where it’s at.**

John: **So although St John of the Cross uses the wood in the fire as an image of the painful self-knowledge that goes hand-in-hand with a true relationship with God, you’re saying it’s also true of the relationship between you and Mark?**

Debbie: **Yes, for any meaningful relationship ... any meaningful thing ... it is that. My relationship with you, John, where I share ... you have seen all my knots ... I have shared with you all those things, I have told you all of the ugly parts of my life, and so whether you**

have come to experience it as this wood, for me it is because I connect with you ... I have this freedom to just be me with you ... I have the freedom to be me with Mark, I have the freedom to be myself with God ... God knows me, but I need that freedom in all of life, in all relationships, truly connecting ... that is why everything is so ... it was like seeing your book on the shelf, it was like noticing your barefeet ... it was one of those things ... it'll stay with me ... yeah, yeah ...

### **Step 3** TMU41

The knots and ugly parts were always there in the wood; they were just hidden. Having gone through the pain and fire, Debbie and Mark's relationship has taken on a different form; Debbie is less controlling now and has greater freedom to relate meaningfully, to really connect, and to be herself with her therapist, Mark and God ... in all relationships.

### **Step 4** ITMU41

*What?* As a result of Debbie's experience of insight and acting on it, she has greater freedom to be herself, enjoys more vital connectedness with others, and finds life more full of significant meanings.

*How?* The weaknesses in Debbie and Mark and the complexes in their relationship were largely hidden; hence the 'shock' of discovering Mark's affair and the need for insight. Debbie is aware that suffering played an important and transformative part in her insight, and in putting it into practice she is becoming less controlling and more able to relate in a meaningful and vital way.

### **Step 2** MU42

**John:** Here's the last question. I'm wondering whether you found it difficult putting these insights into practice, and what's helped you to move from insight to action?

**Debbie:** Was it difficult? Yes ... in a way of being scared. Yes, it was difficult because this is going out on the ocean with one oar. OK, you've been rejected, so from that perspective it was difficult. Other than that, I think if I weren't scared of a lot of things I would probably achieve a heck of a lot [laughing]. What was my fear? Essentially I think that my biggest fear was that I was finally going to lose this man that I really loved ... so maybe even my fear was also a huge motivation to take action. I just think of that now ... maybe I was scared.

### **Step 3** TMU42

It was difficult for Debbie to put insight into action because she was scared of being rejected and of not being in control of the process, but she recognises that her biggest fear was of losing the man she really loved, and that fear was a huge motivation to put insight into action.

### **Step 4** ITMU42

*What?* It was difficult for Debbie to put insight into action because it involved giving up her “control” which was the way she handled her fear of “rejection”.

*How?* Debbie realised her biggest fear was that she might lose Mark and that, despite the deep hurt of his long-term affair, she really loved him, needed him and wanted to be with him. So she was also hugely motivated by this fear to take action.

### **Step 2** MU43

**John: Perhaps some of those insights you were working towards in therapy ... ?**

**Debbie: Yeah ...**

**John: But they couldn't have come together without the music, and your co-operation that night. And some of those insights in a sense you've continued to work with in therapy. Is that a fair way of putting it?**

**Debbie: That is accurate, yeah. And once I'm aware of it ... it's always there and I remind myself of it. That's how I work with it. For example that bit in the e-mail about the marriage vows of Tony and Tamara “in sickness and in health” ... and considering Mark's behaviour as a form of “sickness” [MU12] ... that's not how I see it now ... at that time it wasn't worked through ... for me to see it as a “sickness” ... perhaps it should be a “weakness” ... but that was my way of trying to get my mind around it, to say “it's OK” ... the way I needed to package it for myself at the time and to try and understand it logically [emphasised]. But now I have more insight, now I can be more vulnerable [emphasised] about it and see my part in it all. My controlling ... and the effect on Mark of being so “proper” ... you know the Mrs Brown person ... in fact, I wish I could be a bit more “sluttish” and comfortable being myself! I'm not quite sure I can pull it off being a slut!**

**John: Well, Debbie, you're not doing badly! [We both laugh.] Thank you very much.**

**Debbie: Thank you. I don't know whether you should be thanking me ... but it just helps. When I get in touch with those real “Wow!” moments in my life, it just makes my life that much more special, because it's in remembering that ... yeah ... so thank you, John.**

### **Step 3** TMU43

Debbie's experience of insight was, and is, an ongoing process. Some insights Debbie was working towards in therapy, but they "came together" in the early hours of the morning, listening to music with her soul, experiencing both the agony and the ecstasy. But these "wow" moments, and ongoing awareness, make her life more meaningful. She gives an example of an insight in process, when she refers to Mark's adulterous behaviour as "sickness" in terms of the marriage vows as a way of "packaging it for myself at the time". But now she has more insight, and can be more vulnerable and see her part in it all ... particularly her controlling ... being so 'proper' ... and having such high expectations. She wishes she could be a bit more relaxed, less frigid, more 'ordinary' and natural, and less concerned to be 'good' and 'right'.

### **Step 4** ITMU43

*What?* The experience of insight for Debbie is not an event, but a series of events and an ongoing process. She gives an example of an insight in process, comparing her initial angry reaction to Mark's affair by throwing him out of the house, to seeing it as his "sickness" in their marriage vows, and then later being able to see her part in it all.

*How?* Debbie's initial reaction of throwing Mark out of the house was a way of expressing her hurt and anger by controlling the situation. Seeing Mark's infidelity as a form of "sickness" was her attempt to understand it logically, and formed an important part of the softening up process. Now she is less controlling and protective of her 'wound', more reflective and more able to be vulnerable and see her part in the co-determined relationship with Mark, and is clear about her desire to work at reconciliation with Mark.

## **5.6 The Situated Structure of Debbie's Experience of Insight**

Again the format of this section follows the pattern of the previous research participant and constitutes **step 5** (SSS), of the methodology.

The structure of Debbie's experience of insight has unique characteristics which are summarised as eight distinct moments depicting the psycho-logical process. It would be reasonable to call these moments 'substructures', since each is an integral unity besides being a moment of the larger structural process. Despite Debbie's mention of times, she does not experience these

“moments” in a linear way. Time is connected to her subjectivity; it circles back and forth, overlaps, criss-crosses, divides and spirals. In Alapack’s delightful phrase “In life all we have are moments” (private communication).

### **5.6.1 The Initial Stages and Precursors of Debbie’s Self-insight.**

- The participant was deeply hurt and very angry at discovering her husband’s long term affair (MUs 2,3,22,34). It confirmed her fear of rejection (MU30) and she felt she could not trust him over anything (MU16). It exacerbated her desire to be in control to avoid further hurt (MU14,30) and she struggled with loneliness as well as questions about her own adequacy as a wife (MUs 12,13). All this made it ‘unthinkable’ for her to get in touch with what became her insight; namely, her more vulnerable and deeper feelings, needs and desires; her true Self; including her desire to work for reconciliation with Mark (MUs 8,15,31,36).

*Structurally, this is insight blocked by disposition; an affective, cognitive and behavioural self-protective defensiveness in terms of her way-of-being-in-the-world.*

- In the sequence of eight strands in the build-up to the participant’s insight there is a pattern of her being “struck” by poetic images (MUs 20,21), a blunt question (MU15), a book title (MUs 32,33), wedding vows (MU12), barefeet (MU11), suggested interpretations in therapy (MU14) and a poem (MU14), but not being able to allow the full meaning or significance of these life-world events to emerge. She experienced ‘insight as impact’, but she was not able to “see” or understand their significance (MU22). They did not “come together” or “add up” (MU23); she did not get to the point of ‘insight as interpretation’.

*Structurally this is life-world events and issues raising questions, challenging her modus vivendi and impacting Debbie, prompting her towards insight, prior to her ability to interpret them.*

### **5.6.2 The Dynamic Core of the Experience of Insight.**

- The theme of being “held” in the therapeutic relationship emerges as an important structure in enabling the participant to get in touch with her true self, her underlying vulnerable feelings, and to move towards experiencing insight as interpreting (MUs 5,11). It enabled her to feel safe enough to explore thoughts, feelings and to share her sense of anger and vulnerability (MUs 2,7,8). It was a “holding” relationship that helped her in listening to her real needs and desires

(MU28). It was a necessary part of the structure in enabling her to experience insight but it was not sufficient on its own.

During the night of listening to music which calmed and relaxed her (MUs4,25), so that she could experience being “held” by the music (MU27), she had a sense of God’s unconditional love accepting her, despite her husband’s rejection of her (MU24). By focusing on the rhythmic, harmonious<sup>39</sup> and aesthetic<sup>40</sup> quality of the music, she got in touch with deep feelings, real needs and previously unacknowledged desires (MU27). She came to see and accept herself in such a way that it seemed like a birthing of her “true Self” (MUs25,36). So the shocking and striking experiences are the influence of the life-world on the self; this is *insight as impact*. The “Wow” and “Aha!” experiences are the result of the influence of the “Self” on the life-world; this is *insight as interpreting*.

***Structurally this is the counterpoint to the challenges, impact and questions; it is the holding, gentling and loving acceptance that enables Debbie to relax, respond and entertain the emerging meanings rather than trying to resist or control them; it results in insight as interpreting.***

- A pattern emerges of passive, active and reflexive elements in Debbie’s experience of insight. Sustained by the total effect of the music and interacting with it (MU33) six of the eight life-world events which had made an *impact* on the participant, came to be *interpreted* by her. In each she has a *passive* sense of being struck, touched or reminded; an *active* sense of questioning or working with it; and a *reflexive* sense of applying it to herself, of connecting, seeing and understanding (e.g. MUs 9,10,11,32). There are differing levels of awareness and potency in her insights, but the pattern remains the same in each; the exceptions, numbers five and six in the eight strands in the build-up to her insights, prove the rule because the pattern of *passive, active* and *reflexive* is not completed.

This pattern is also reflected and recapitulated in the way the participant listens to the music. There is a *passive* element in which she experiences the music as waves of calmness flowing over her (MU27); an *active* element in which she will put her own words to it (MU25); and a *reflexive* element in which she refocuses the music for herself and makes it her own (MU25).

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<sup>39</sup> From the Greek *harmozein* ‘to fit together’ (Rooney 1999, p. 855).

<sup>40</sup> From the Greek *aisthethai* ‘to perceive’: to be sensitive to, or to feel beauty (Rooney 1999, p. 26). So the English *anaesthetic* literally means ‘without feeling’.

***Structurally this pattern of passive, active and reflexive moods is what enables the process of negotiation from insight as impact (passive) to insight as interpreting (reflexive); to embodying the insight (active); it represents a movement from denial to acceptance, from blindness to insight, from being indecisive to effective action.***

- There appears to be a critical success factor for insight as interpreting in Debbie's experience. In the *passive* mood, meaning insists on having its own way and insight amounts to an allowing, even a suffering, of the emerging meanings. In the *active* mood, the research participant risks being creative and ventures meaning; she imagines. In the *reflexive* mood, she muses, meditates and applies it to herself. So she was able to let what *impacted* her *be*; instead of trying to control it. At the same time she was able to entertain the emerging meanings that she was *interpreting* and letting them *be*; instead of trying to control them. It is the synchronisation of these three experiences that emerges as the critical success factor in the structure of her experience of insight.

***Structurally one critical success factor for insight is the synchronisation of the passive, active and reflexive moods in the whole experience of insight.***

- "Being held" is a *sine qua non* in the structure for Debbie's experience of insight. This critical success factor was, in turn, entirely dependent upon, and made possible by, the participant's experience of being "held", by the music (MU4) and by God that night (MUs 26,27). She was also "held" in therapy (MU5) and sent the e-mail detailing her insights in the early hours of that morning to the therapist. So "being held" emerges as an important triangular modular main frame structure in her experience of insight.

***Structurally being held by the music, by God and by the therapist combine, inter-relate, complement, support and strengthen one another; together they constitute a gestalt, a holding whole which is more than the sum of the parts.***

### **5.6.3 Living it out: Insight as Action.**

- Several factors enabled the participant to live out her insight. Firstly, her strong sense of synchronicity and experience of transcendence over the timing of hearing about the death of Mark's dad, which dramatically enhanced the experience and confirmed the truth and



significance of her insight as well as practically empowering her to live it out (MU35). Secondly, the clarity and sometimes intensity together with the authenticity and aesthetic quality of these experiences of insight challenge her to remember and to risk putting her insight into action (MUs 4,25). Thirdly, there is the factor of trust or faith as well as courage to risk what is essential in living out her insight. She has to overcome her anxiety and fears, not deny them (MUs 37,40); the fear that if she didn't act on her insight she might lose her husband increased her motivation (MU42). Her Christian faith permeates this process and frequently helps (MUs 4,24,26), but on other occasions her slightly idealistic interpretations of her faith, combined with her high expectations of herself, hinders (MU19). Finally, another factor or constituent element in the structure enabling her to live out her insight is contained in two complementary luminous images: the log of wood being burned and turned into fire (MUs 38,41), and the flower "getting out of its tight little bud form" (MUs 37,39). The first describes painful experiences and relates to the impact of her life-world on the self; insight as impact. The second describes the delightful blossoming of the individual and relates to the expression of the Self on the life world; insight as interpreting. Both images are a necessary part of the structure making possible insight as action; the first continues to shed light on her ongoing process of learning to accept her vulnerability and the second challenges her to be true to her Self (MU43).

***Structurally three aspects of her learning experience challenge her to live true to her insight: the timing, clarity, authenticity and aesthetic quality of her experiences of insight; growing experiences of trust, faith and courage; and two complementary luminous images.***

### **5.6.3 The Results and Recurring Quality of Debbie's Experience of Insight**

- The result of the participant's transforming experience of insight was that she was able to engage in a process of reconciliation with Mark, and after five months they renewed their marriage vows. On this whole process she comments: "It's one of the most sane things I did ... actually listening to and daring to do that" (MU37). Now Debbie's way-of-being-in-the-world is significantly different. She is usually able to be less controlling and more vulnerable with others, has greater freedom to be in touch with her feelings and to be true to herself, so she enjoys more vital connectedness with others and finds life fuller of significant meanings. She experiences



lapses back into her old patterns of self-protective behaviour at times, fearing rejection, but usually quickly recognises this and is able to share her fear and vulnerability, and move on.

## 5.7 The Investigation of Roger's Experience of Insight

The format of this final interview follows the pattern of the two previous research participants, as do the steps in the research methodology.

### Step 2 MU1

John: **Roger, some time ago when I was watching a video of “A Brief History of Time” I was very struck by your contribution and comments about having an animated conversation with Ivor Robinson interrupted by crossing the road, and I wondered whether you could get in touch with that experience of insight, and its recovery later that day, and how you perceived mathematical truth directly through the process of “seeing” or insight?**

### Step 3 TMU1

Interviewer asks research participant to describe a particular experience of insight.

### Step 4 ITMU1

*What?* Interviewer asks research participant first part of interview research question, but fails to put the whole question (as in Section 3.6.3).

*How?* Interviewer felt a little intimidated and so failed to spell out the details of the request, namely: “what happened before, during and after; what you thought, felt and did?”

### Step 2 MU2

Roger: **Well, I'll do my best with these questions, whether they satisfy you, I don't know. I can describe that occasion. And what it was about, you see, this has to do with the issue of gravitational collapse. There was a certain amount of discussion of the question of what happened, when a massive body, perhaps a star, had exceeded its limit – if a star gets too massive and it uses up its fuel to keep it hot, and it cools down to a certain level, it starts to collapse.**

### Step 3 TMU2

Roger explains that the insight had to do with issue of gravitational collapse and what happens in that process.

### Step 4 ITMU2

*What?* The question under discussion was what happens when a massive body starts to collapse.

*How?* Roger will do his best to respond to researcher's question but doesn't know if it will satisfy. It was recognised at the time that if a star gets too massive and has used up its fuel to keep it hot and it cools down to a certain level, it starts to collapse.

### Step 2 MU3

Roger: **There is a theoretical limit on how big a star can be if it's cold, and the thing is that many stars are known which are greater than this limit, the question is, what happens to them? According to Einstein's general theory of relativity, there is a minimum size that an object of a given mass can have, it's called the Schwarzschild Radius, and I think that Einstein, as many other people, had thought you'd never get anything down to that scale, so they didn't worry about it particularly.**

### Step 3 TMU3

There is a theoretical limit to how big a star can be if it is cold. The question is what happens to a star when it reaches this limit.

### Step 4 ITMU3

*What?* Many stars are known which are greater than this limit. The question is, what happens to them?

*How?* According to Einstein's General Theory of Relativity there is a minimum size that an object of a given mass can have, but he like many people thought you'd never get down to that scale, so didn't worry about it particularly.

### Step 2 MU4

Roger: **But when quasars were observed – these are these very bright, as we now know, galactic centres which send out an enormous amount of light and radiation in various forms. These objects are so powerful that people found it very puzzling, and they also change in a brief time-scale, which tells you they must be very small, and estimates were**

made to indicate that these objects would have to be something, getting down to the kind of size this limit that people talk about, the Schwarzschild Limit.

**Step 3** TMU4

When quasars were observed, estimates indicated that they would have to be getting down to this Schwarzschild Limit.

**Step 4** ITMU4

*What?* The discovery of quasars raised questions that had been previously been regarded as unimportant.

*How?* So an “oversight” was challenged by the emergence of new and puzzling data as well as estimates that required new understanding and insight.

**Step 2** MU5

Roger: **John Wheeler in the US particularly realised the importance of this issue, because it’s a place where Einstein’s general relativity starts to play a very serious role, whereas up to that point one didn’t have to worry about it too much.**

**Step 3** TMU5

John Wheeler realised the importance of this issue.

**Step 4** ITMU5

*What?* John Wheeler particularly had the insight to recognise that, with the discovery of quasars, Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity started to become very significant.

*How?* John Wheeler recognised the importance of this discovery of quasars and had the insight to take seriously the consequences of the emergence of new data and estimates which flowed from the data. He particularly understood that what had previously been regarded as insignificant had to be completely re-examined in the light of the new scale that was getting down to the crucial point of collapse, the Schwarzschild Limit.

**Step 2** MU6

Roger: **I should have explained that there was a model of what happens when a star collapses, which is due to Oppenheimer and Snyder, which was produced just before the Second World War, and they had just studied exactly spherical collapse, so if you assume the body is exactly spherically symmetrical, it collapsed into this singular state in the centre (i.e. where the dimensions of space and its linked dimension of time simply disappear), that**

**is where the densities become infinite and the curvatures become infinite, and it goes wrong in the middle. And this is a great catastrophe, if you like, so you don't know what to do with it when that happens.**

**Step 3 TMU6**

There was a model of what happens when an exactly spherical star collapses.

**Step 4 ITMU6**

*What?* The accepted understanding at that time of gravitational collapse was based on the model of Oppenheimer and Snyder, according to which an exactly spherically symmetrical star would collapse into a singular state in the centre.

*How?* The collapse at the centre implies the dimensions of space and time simply disappear. There was little understanding of, or insight into, this catastrophic event at the time. (This is now known as a black hole.) It is precisely this problem that arouses Roger's curiosity and on which he focuses his attention. He does this in the face of issues that seem completely overwhelming.

**Step 2 MU7**

Roger: **Many people believed that if you were in a more realistic situation, where a celestial body was irregular, maybe rotating, that instead of reaching a singular state, it would swirl around and maybe come spewing out again. Some Russian work by theoretical physicists seemed to confirm that in a general case you wouldn't get this singular occurrence.**

**Step 3 TMU7**

Many people believed that in a more realistic situation a celestial body would not collapse into a singular state.

**Step 4 ITMU7**

*What?* Many cosmologists believed that in a more realistic situation where the body was irregular and maybe rotating, it would not reach a singular state of collapse but that the matter would swirl around and maybe come spewing out again.

*How?* Some Russian work by theoretical physicists seemed to confirm that you wouldn't get this singular occurrence, but clearly Roger was keeping an open mind on this issue, which was to lead to his insight. Had he accepted the results of these theoretical physicists he would not have come to his insight.

### Step 2 MU8

Roger: **But anyway, I was thinking about this question in relation to other problems to do with singularity – the Big Bang being the other main example that one knows about. The standard symmetrical models produced told you that there was this initial singular state, sort of like the other side of the picture, you have the initial, the beginning, and this is in a sense the end, that if you tried to follow this collapsing star in you would encounter this singular state at the end, which would be the end of time, as far as you're concerned.**

### Step 3 TMU8

Roger was thinking about this question in relation to the Big Bang theory and other theories/problems.

### Step 4 ITMU8

*What?* Instead of just accepting the standard symmetrical models comparing the initial Big Bang singular state at the beginning of time with the singular state of collapse at the end of time, Roger was focused on the problems and unanswered questions to do with singularity.

*How?* Roger was thinking about this question in relation to other problems to do with singularity. So relational perspectives and lateral thinking played a role in his approach. Instead of accepting the status quo, Roger has an attraction to mystery, a questioning curiosity and an ability to tolerate and work with unresolved issues prior to insight.

### Step 2 MU9

Roger: **Now, the question is, if this is just an artefact of the symmetry, or if you have a more general collapse, would you avoid the singularities? And I'd been thinking about these things for other reasons, partly to do with cosmology and partly to do with other issues in general relativity.**

### Step 3 TMU9

Roger questioned whether singularities were based on the symmetry and would not occur in a more general collapse.

### Step 4 ITMU9

*What?* Roger wondered, if you had a more general collapse, in a more realistic situation, whether you would avoid the singularities. This is an indication of the type of questioning that he was doing which prepared the way for further thinking.

*How?* Roger was thinking about these things for other reasons, partly to do with cosmology and partly to do with other issues in general relativity, so he was coming at the question obliquely or in terms of relational perspectives and lateral thinking, refining his understanding of the issues and questions (an enfolding) that would prepare the way for his experience of insight (an unfolding) in terms of his developing understanding.

**Step 2** MU10

Roger: **I started thinking about this collapse problem and the problem there was, how do you characterise an unstoppable collapse? What we now call a black hole, where objects fall in and they can't get out, in a sense. So you want to characterise somehow the fact that the collapse has reached a point of no return.**

**Step 3** TMU10

Roger was wondering how you characterise an unstoppable collapse.

**Step 4** ITMU10

*What?* Roger wanted to characterise a gravitational collapse that has reached a point of no return.

*How?* Finding a way to characterise this situation seemed crucial to Roger.

**Step 2** MU11

Roger: **And the question was, if you could characterise that in some way, could you prove that it would lead to this singularity? So I needed some way of characterising this which didn't depend on the symmetry, it had to be a *qualitative* [with emphasis] characterisation.**

**Step 3** TMU11

Roger wondered if you could characterise it in some way, and would you then be able prove that it would lead to this singularity?

**Step 4** ITMU11

*What?* Roger's continuous questioning with an open mind has now clarified the central question. He realized that he needed some way of characterising this unstoppable collapse which didn't depend on the symmetry.

*How?* He realised that the crucial attribute required was that he needed to find a *qualitative* characterisation.

**Step 2 MU12**

Roger: **The trouble with this particular story is that since I did forget the actual occurrence [laughing] initially, I can't really tell you in detail what my thought processes were, so in some sense it's not a good example; in another sense it's quite a striking one, you see.**

**Step 3 TMU12**

Roger did forget the actual occurrence of his insight initially, so can't say what his thought processes were in detail, but because he was able to recall the insight later it is quite a striking example of an insight recovered.

**Step 4 ITMU12**

*What?* Roger has described in detail the context of this experience (the ground). But he did forget the actual occurrence, process and content of his nascent or virtual insight (the figure).

*How?* The context (ground) is so salient that although he cannot remember the content (figure) of the experience, it emerges later as figure from the ground of his feeling. So it is an interesting and unusual example of an insight re-membered, or perhaps re-imagined.

**Step 2 MU13**

Roger: **I was vaguely thinking of this kind of issue, in the autumn of 1964, and Ivor Robinson had come to visit, who is an Englishman who'd gone to live in the US, and if you'd met him you would know ... he's someone who is extremely verbal, and was engaging me in voluble conversation.**

John: **So you were involved in a pretty *animated* conversation ... ?**

Roger: **Well, yes one's always in an animated conversation with him ... he has a wonderful way with the English language, they all love him in America because he is somewhat exceptional in this respect [chuckling]. Anyway, we were talking away about something, I really can't remember exactly what, I'm afraid ...**

John: **But it wasn't particularly on this subject ...**

Roger: **No, it wasn't on this subject, because it's not quite his sort of thing ...**

**Step 3 TMU13**

Roger was vaguely thinking about issues of unstoppable gravitational collapse while involved in a lively conversation on a different subject with a highly articulate colleague.



#### Step 4 ITMU13

*What?* Roger was thinking about one subject while engaged in an enlivening conversation on another subject.

*How?* Perhaps Roger's inner self or creative aspect of his personality, "anima"<sup>41</sup>, was stimulated, inspired or enlivened by this "animated"<sup>42</sup> conversation. This seems to be so, despite the fact that the subject of the conversation was not on the same topic on which he was ruminating, namely how one characterises an unstoppable gravitational collapse in a qualitative way.

#### Step 2 MU14

Roger: **Anyway, it was quite near to where my office was, I seem to remember, Birkbeck College in London where I was at the time, and I remember we had to cross this side-street. It wasn't a main road but one had to look out for traffic on the way across, and so the conversation stopped for that bit, and then when we got to the other side it started up again.**

John: **Were you aware as you were crossing the road that something was happening?**

Roger: **Well, evidently during those few moments, an idea occurred to me so at the time I was, you see, but the point was that I had to reconstruct this afterwards, because the conversation as we got to the other side blotted out whatever had occurred to me on crossing the street, so I just kept on talking to him ...**

#### Step 3 TMU14

While crossing a street and looking out for traffic, the conversation stopped. Evidently, in those few seconds, an idea occurred to Roger, but was lost as the conversation resumed when they got to the other side.

#### Step 4 ITMU14

*What?* Within a few seconds lull in the conversation an idea, or image, evidently fleetingly, occurred to Roger, but was blotted out as the conversation resumed.

*How?* Roger had to reconstruct this understanding of what had occurred afterwards because he had no conscious memory of what had happened, but something had come through fleetingly in the silence, as they crossed the street. Because he could not be simultaneously attentive to

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<sup>41</sup> "Anima" in Jungian psychology the inner self or the feminine aspect of the male personality, from Latin 'anima' meaning 'breath, soul, spirit' (Encarta World English Dictionary, Bloomsbury 1999)

<sup>42</sup> "Animated" lively or busy from the Latin 'animare' 'to give life to'(Encarta World English Dictionary, Bloomsbury 1999)

everything, some thoughts could not gain salience and they receded from consciousness, disrupted by the conversation resuming as they got to the other side of the street.

### Step 2 MU15

Roger: **And then after some while he went off and I was left with this odd feeling of elation, that I could not account for, that somehow something good had happened, you see [chuckling]. And that's about all.**

John: **Was this a general sort of bodily feeling of elation?**

Roger: **Yes, one can feel depressed about life or cheerful about life ... there wasn't something specific about it. It was just something good, just a feeling good, [chuckles] you see, that's all it was ...**

### Step 3 TMU15

When his colleague left, Roger was aware of an unusual feeling of elation, that he could not make sense of, that somehow something good had happened. There wasn't anything more specific about it.

### Step 4 ITMU15

*What?* Roger was left with an unusual general sense of feeling elated, that he could not account for, as if somehow something good had happened. His happiness appears to be one of the primary or universal emotions<sup>43</sup>.

*How?* If it had not been for this "odd feeling of elation" whatever had occurred to Roger as he crossed the street would probably not have been recovered. It seems that this general sense of feeling good in his body was the only remaining conscious trace, sensory pattern or representation of what had happened, apparently underneath conscious survey.

### Step 2 MU16

Roger: **... He'd gone and I thought "why do I feel like this?" you see, [chuckling], rather than just thinking "this is nice" I began to think – I tend to do this, if I feel one way or another - I like to analyse to try and find out what it is that has made me feel that way. On this particular occasion I was somehow a little bit disturbed – sort of paradoxical to say I was disturbed and elated at the same time – I couldn't account for it, but I was trying to find what the source of this was.**

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<sup>43</sup> Damasio (2000).

### Step 3 TMU16

When Roger was alone he wondered “why do I feel like this?” As he tried to analyse what had made him feel as he did, he became aware that paradoxically he was a little disturbed and elated at the same time. He couldn’t understand why.

### Step 4 ITMU16

*What?* Roger tried to analyse why he felt as he did and what had made him feel both disturbed and elated at the same time.

*How?* When Roger was alone he became conscious that he not only felt elated, which was his primary feeling, but that somehow he was also a little bit disturbed as a secondary feeling. He thought it was paradoxical to experience both feelings simultaneously and was trying to understand why. If he had experienced a good idea, or image, it would be natural to feel elated and natural also to feel disturbed about not being able to remember it.

### Step 2 MU17

Roger: **So I went through all the things that had happened to me in the day, and I couldn’t think of anything that would have been good enough to produce this elated feeling. After eliminating numerous inadequate possibilities I finally came to this occasion of crossing the street, and as I stayed with that feeling I managed to bring to mind what that was, and it was the thought that had occurred to me while crossing the street about how to characterise this collapse in a general way.**

### Step 3 TMU17

Roger reviewed his day but couldn’t think of anything that might account for this elated feeling until he came to the occasion of crossing the street.

### Step 4 ITMU17

*What?* Roger reviewed all the things that had happened to him during the day, and couldn’t think of anything good enough to produce his elated feeling. After eliminating numerous inadequate possibilities he finally remembered crossing the street and managed to re-member the insight that had occurred while crossing the street.

*How?* When Roger came to the occasion of crossing the street he has a sense that something corresponded with his elated feeling. As he stayed with that feeling, he then re-membered the virtual insight that had fleetingly occurred to him while crossing the street, about how to characterise this collapse in a general way, so re-membering his insight was dependent upon

Roger's curiosity and ability to value and analyse his feelings in seeking to recover his insight and the meaning and significance of his experience.

### Step 2 MU18

Roger: **Now I have to say that some of this is reconstruction and I can't completely clearly remember that this is *exactly* [with emphasis] what it was, judging from what it could have been and the sort of thought I could have had at that time which had momentarily elated me, by providing the solution to the problem that had been buzzing around at the back of my head! Apparently it was the needed criterion that I subsequently called a "trapped surface".**

### Step 3 TMU18

Roger acknowledges that some of this (MU7-9) is reconstruction, and he can't completely remember exactly every step, but it provided the solution to the problem that had been preoccupying him. He subsequently called it a "trapped surface".

### Step 4 ITMU18

*What?* Roger's re-construction of his re-remembered insight provided the solution to the problem of how to characterise an unstoppable gravitational collapse, that had been preoccupying him for some time. He subsequently called it a "trapped surface".

*How?* Roger acknowledges that some of this is reconstruction and he cannot completely remember exactly every step, but clearly his experience of insight was not just an isolated intellectual calculation but reveals an experience of a mind that is profoundly connected to bodily feeling and imaginative capacity. The experience of insight 'stands out' from the 'ground' or horizon of the problem that had been buzzing around in the back of his head. This "buzzing" suggests the sound and pollinating activity of bees that have not yet settled so as to be identified.

### Step 2 MU19

Roger: **As the collapse occurs, you see, the material goes inside what is now called the "Event Horizon" – these terms weren't used at the time – but that is the Schwarzschild Radius, the size at which if something is smaller than that it gets trapped, and that's what happens in the spherically symmetrical case. So I wanted somehow to characterise this region in which things get trapped, but where you don't assume that it's symmetrical. So I conjured up this notion of a "trapped surface". I was thinking in space/time terms so it's**

basically four-dimensional, but let me just describe it in more ordinary terms; if you imagine that surface is an instantaneous flash of light, so you have a spherical region which flashes, instantaneously – now, where does that light go? You see, if it was a sphere in ordinary Euclidean space there will be an in-going flash and there will be an out-going flash. Now the in-going flash will have an area locally which gets smaller and smaller, the surface of the flash will get shrunk down, and the out-going one, the area will get larger and larger. Now, what happens when you are just inside the Schwarzschild Radius is that the in-going flash still shrinks down, imagine the sphere is surrounding whatever matter has gone through, so it's just outside the matter, the in-going flash will still shrink down but the out-going flash also shrinks down, so what you find is that the area gets smaller even though they're trying to go out. You see, basically, the picture is that they're trying to go out but they can't because they're too far in, you see, so this was my characterisation, what I called a “trapped surface”.

### Step 3 TMU19

Roger explains how he wanted to characterise the region in a black hole in which things get trapped, where you don't assume it is symmetrical. He was thinking in space/time four-dimensional terms, but in the simplest terms the picture is that flashes of light are trying to get out, but they cannot because they are too far in. His insight was to characterise this as a “trapped surface”.

### Step 4 ITMU19

*What?* The “trapped surface” insight provided the qualitative characterisation Roger was looking for, in terms of what is happening in a black hole when you don't assume it is symmetrical.

*How?* The “trapped surface” insight is an image of Roger's imagination. He says he “conjured up this notion of a ‘trapped surface’”. It is a very clear but simple image of what he had deduced he was looking for, namely a “qualitative characterisation”, with remarkable revelatory and heuristic power; an inspirational insight.

### Step 2 MU20

Roger: **If you find a surface for which the in-going and out-going flashes of light both have locally decreasing areas, then that is sufficiently strange a situation that it may signal that you get a singularity. This is my reconstruction of it, because I can't say that I can**

**remember exactly what went on, because I was more interested in what I was doing than the psychology of the event. Sometime later in the day, I remember just going to the blackboard, and it didn't take me long to sketch out a proof of the fact that you had to go singular in this way, basically from things that I'd known about before.**

**John: So that proof followed quite easily, did it?**

**Roger: Yes, it didn't take me long to form the outline of a proof of the theorem that I had been looking for, although it was few months before the proof was formulated in a completely rigorous way<sup>44</sup>.**

### **Step 3 TMU20**

Later that same day, as a result of this insight of a “trapped surface”, Roger went to the blackboard and it didn't take him long to sketch out a proof of singularity from things he had known about before the experience of insight.

### **Step 4 ITMU20**

*What?* Roger recognised that a surface for which in-going and out-going flashes of light, strangely both have locally decreasing areas, may indicate that you get a singularity. The same day as Roger had his insight about the “trapped surface” he was able quite easily and quickly to sketch out a proof. It was a few months before the proof was formulated in a completely rigorous way.

*How?* The reconstruction of the insight was partly made possible by Roger's wisdom in recognising that a surface for which in-going and out-going flashes of light both have locally decreasing areas, is a sufficiently strange situation that it may signal that you get a singularity. This indicates a close relationship between Roger's wisdom in terms of his growing understanding of the problem, and the experience of eventual insight. It also illustrates the way in which insight sees the relationship between things, sees potential significance, sees meaning and results in understanding. The proof flowed from things Roger had known about before the insight, but would not have been possible without the insight. Roger was more interested in the result, the solution to the problem, than the psychological process. But clearly rigorous and abstract reasoning in the form of proof flows from the *insight* and the *imaginative feeling* of what happens in a black hole.

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<sup>44</sup> The rigorous proof was published by Penrose in 1965 as Gravitational collapse and space-time singularities. *Phys. Rev. Lett.*, **14**, 57-9.

### Step 2 MU21

Roger: **It wouldn't have followed if you'd told that to anybody, you see, but I'd been thinking about this type of thing and also thought about it in two other different contexts, so I had a certain amount of expertise internally which I'd developed for other reasons, so that expertise was already there in a sense. So when I say it didn't take me long, it wasn't that I could develop all this technique at that point, to prove the thing; most of that was already there, so although I didn't have the cleanest or neatest argument at that time, I could more or less see how these singularities were in fact inevitable.**

### Step 3 TMU21

Roger had been thinking for a while about this sort of issue, in two other different contexts, so he had developed expertise he was able to draw on and could more or less “see” how these singularities were in fact inevitable.

### Step 4 ITMU21

*What?* Roger acknowledges that he didn't have the cleanest or neatest argument at the time but says he could more or less “see” how these singularities were in fact inevitable.

*How?* What Roger could “more or less see” as inevitable was a result of evaluating the working knowledge of the time, involved a long process of developing conceptual thought and the recognition that he needed a *qualitative* way of characterising the problem. So his mind was being prepared for this intricate process of evolving insight, but it was not until he had the topological image of the “trapped surface” (MU22) that what he could “more or less see” became an eventual “insight”.

### Step 2 MU22

Roger: **You see, it's not in the same place as the “trapped surface” is here, so to say, and the singularity is in the middle somewhere, so you had to produce some type of what's called a topological argument which is more like an existence theory, so something must go wrong somewhere, you don't know where it is, so I wouldn't be able to point to where the singular states were, but it has to be somewhere.**

### Step 3 TMU22

Roger did not know where the singularity was so he had to produce a topological argument.



#### Step 4 ITMU22

*What?* The singularity was not in the same place as the “trapped surface” but it had to be somewhere.

*How?* Roger did not know where the singularity was, so he had to produce a topological argument which is more like an existence theory that shows it has to be somewhere.

#### Step 2 MU23

Roger: **So there are other aspects of originality, if you like, in this discussion, which was not just a “trapped surface”, but the “trapped surface” was the *key* [emphasised] idea. People still use these things, they talk about “trapped surfaces”, when they want to know if a black hole is likely to come about, and so on.**

#### Step 3 TMU23

There are other aspects of originality, but the “trapped surface” was the *key* idea.

#### Step 4 ITMU23

*What?* The insight of the “trapped surface” was the *key* idea.

*How?* As the “key” idea, the “trapped surface” insight unlocked and enabled other aspects of originality and expertise that Roger had developed to emerge.

#### Step 2 MU24

Roger: **There is a fair amount more to the story, but that was the thing that started me off. I should say that this whole line or way of thinking of this kind of problem was not the way other people were thinking about it. You see, the sort of thing that people would have done to study this gravitational collapse problem would have been maybe to impose a lesser symmetry, suppose it’s axial symmetric and spherically symmetric, and then put in some massive equations and try to put it on the computer and work out what was going to happen, and so on. And that was beyond what they could have done at that time on computers anyway – I mean, nowadays they can do these things ...**

John: **So the “trapped surface” was the new idea ...**

Roger: **It was the new idea that I needed, if you like, at that point. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if some unimportant *other* elating experience had happened to me during that day. Perhaps I should never have recalled the “trapped surface” idea at all!**

John: **And it sounds as if it was an elegant idea, in that it really produced something very significant.**

Roger: **Yes, yes, I think so – there were other things one could have thought of ... but it was really, I suppose the right thing to think of at that stage. Yes** [laughing happily].

### **Step 3** TMU24

This whole way of thinking was different from the way other people were attempting to study the problem of gravitational collapse, through feeding massive equations into computers (an algebraic approach). So the “trapped surface” was a new, elegant and pictorial insight (a geometric approach) which was the right thing for Roger to think of at that time and at that stage of understanding.

### **Step 4** ITMU24

*What?* Other people were attempting to solve the problem of gravitational collapse algebraically. This is the ‘ground’ upon which Roger’s completely different way of geometric thinking ‘stands out’, existentially, as ‘figure’.

*How?* There is an intriguing *outward* representation of what is happening *inwardly* for Roger. Something occurred to him as he crossed the street. As he cut across the flow of traffic that something also cut across the flow, or line, of other people’s way of thinking about the problem at that time. Roger muses that if some unimportant *other* elating experience had happened to him during that day he might never have recalled the “trapped surface” insight at all. He concludes that it was the appropriate and indispensable insight at that particular stage of his thinking.

### **Step 2** MU25

Roger: **Your use of the word “elegant” reminds me that in inspiration and insight *aesthetic* [emphasised] criteria are enormously valuable in forming our judgments. In the arts one might say that aesthetic criteria are paramount, whereas it could be argued that in mathematics and the sciences, such criteria are merely incidental, the criterion of *truth* [emphasised] being paramount. However, it seems to be impossible to separate one from the other in insight. My impression is that the strong conviction of the validity of a flash of inspiration or insight, is very closely bound up with its aesthetic qualities. A beautiful idea has a much greater chance of being a correct idea than an ugly one. At least that has been my experience, both in relation to the conviction that would be felt with ideas that might**

possibly qualify as “inspirational” and with the more “routine” guesses that would have to be made as one feels one’s way towards some hoped-for goal.

**Step 3** TMU25

Roger’s experience is that *aesthetic* criteria are very valuable in forming judgments about the *truth* and *validity* of an insight, not just in the arts but also in maths and science.

**Step 4** ITMU25

*What?* A “beautiful” idea in the context on “inspirational insight” might be sensed as attractive or elegant, fascinating or economic in explication. It would be likely to be appreciated as having qualities of clarity, simplicity or heuristic power. In the context of “routine guesses” the idea might well just be felt to be new, challenging, or as throwing fresh light on something, linking well with something else, or opening up a new approach.

*How?* In Roger’s experience a strong conviction of the validity of a flash of inspiration or insight is very closely bound up with the sort of aesthetic qualities outlined above, all of which are sensed and appreciated or experienced as a *feeling perception*<sup>45</sup> which is key for insight. Something “beautiful” produces a good feeling of pleasure or delight, even sometimes ecstasy. Something “ugly” produces a sense that it is unsatisfactory, awkward, or having no heuristic power, or even a feeling of aversion.

**Step 2** MU26

**Roger: Rigorous argument is usually the *last* [emphasised] step! My guess is that even with the sudden flash of insight, apparently produced ready-made by the unconscious mind, it is *consciousness* that is the arbiter, and the idea would be quickly rejected and forgotten if it did not “ring true”.**

**Step 3** TMU26

Roger considers rigorous argument to be the last step in the process of achieving one’s goal.

Before that, even a powerful insight produced by the unconscious mind would be rejected if it did not “ring true” to the conscious mind.

**Step 4** ITMU26

*What?* Roger considers consciousness to be the arbiter of the value of an insight.

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<sup>45</sup> Aesthetics is derived from the Greek *aesthesthai*, ‘to perceive’. It is also the source of the English ‘anaesthetic’ which literally means ‘without feeling’ (see also footnote 39).

*How?* Roger's sense is even a sudden flash of insight produced by the unconscious mind would be rejected if it did not "ring true" to the conscious mind. Something that "rings true" is essentially a feeling, a sense, which permeates the thought process.

### Step 2 MU27

Roger: **Curiously, I *did* [emphasised] actually forget my trapped surface idea, but that is not at the level that I mean. The idea broke through into consciousness for long enough for it to leave a lingering impression in terms of a feeling of elation which I was able to recover. I am supposing that if it had not had some aesthetic quality to it, it would not have reached any appreciable permanent level of consciousness at all.**

### Step 3 TMU27

Roger says he forgot his insight but was able to recover it later.

### Step 4 ITMU27

*What?* Roger understands the recovery of his insight that he had forgotten, in terms of the image of the "trapped surface" having become conscious for long enough for it to leave a lingering impression precisely because of its aesthetic quality.

*How?* Roger considers the recovery of his insight was possible because its aesthetic quality left a lingering impression at some level of consciousness, in terms of a feeling of elation with which he was able to re-connect later.

### Step 2 MU28

John: **Do you usually, like Albert Einstein, think in terms of images?**

Roger: **Yes, almost all my *mathematical* [emphasised] thinking is done visually, and in terms of non-verbal concepts. The difficulties that thinkers like Einstein, Galton and Hadamard have had with translating their thoughts into words is something I frequently experience. I've written about this in *The Emperor's New Mind*<sup>46</sup>. Often there are simply not the words available to express the concepts that are required. The main polarity in mathematical thinking seems to be analytical/geometrical. I am very much on the geometrical end of things, but the spectrum amongst mathematicians is a very broad one. Whereas analytical thinking seems to be mainly the province of the left side of the brain,**

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<sup>46</sup> Penrose, R. (1999). *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds and Laws of Physics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 548-550.

**geometrical thinking is often argued to be on the right side. So it's a very reasonable guess that a good deal of conscious activity actually does take place on the right!**

**Step 3 TMU28**

Almost all of Roger's mathematical thinking is done visually, and in terms of non-verbal concepts, because often words cannot express the required concepts.

**Step 4 ITMU28**

*What?* The main polarity in mathematical thinking is analytical/geometrical or left/right brain activity.

*How?* Roger is very much on the geometrical and right-brain activity end of the spectrum. His image of the "trapped surface" illustrates this.

**Step 2 MU29**

**John: Yes, and you are implying that that kind of geometrical thinking and the use of images to express concepts was important ... perhaps even crucial ... in your insight of the "trapped surface" as the key to the problems you were exploring?**

**Roger: Yes, this idea of the trapped surface also had to be within the context of this particular way of thinking about the problem, which was already something a bit unusual, and it's partly because more of the people who were working on these astrophysical problems didn't even know the kind of topological arguments that I had some familiarity with, partly because I had the pure mathematical background, partly I just like to think geometrically; this is just the way I tend to think, and most people didn't. You see, most people would work out the equations and try and solve them, *explicitly* [with emphasis], somehow, and that's just not the way to do this problem.**

**Step 3 TMU29**

These astrophysical problems required a topological and geometrical approach rather than a purely analytical algebraic one.

**Step 4 ITMU29**

*What?* Roger's crucial insight of the "trapped surface" was within the context of a different way of thinking of these astrophysical problems from the way most people were thinking.

*How?* Roger was familiar with topological arguments both because of his pure mathematical background and because he likes and tends to think geometrically. Whereas most people would approach the problem algebraically by working out the equations and trying to solve them

*explicitly*, which Roger says is just not the way to solve this particular problem. So Roger's natural geometric way of thinking proved an invaluable asset at this point, enabling his insight of the "trapped surface".

## **Step 2** MU30

**Roger: Because it's an existence theory, you have to show ... a sort of an example I can give you, although it's not exactly what one uses here, is the "hairy ball" theorem. If you take a sphere and you imagine it growing hair, and if you imagine combing the hair on that sphere so that it lays down flat everywhere, so that it doesn't have a singularity - a crown - there's no way of doing it, you see. This is the theorem, that if you try to comb the hair on this hairy ball there's got to be some point - a crown - so there has to be at least one such point on the sphere, essentially there are two, but they may go together, and this is a good example of a topological existence theorem. You know that somewhere something goes wrong, but you've no idea where it is. So this problem with the gravitational collapse was similar; what you could show is that if there's a trapped surface then somewhere there's got to be this singularity. You don't know where it is, but it's got to be there somewhere. There are some other assumptions which go into this, about energy being positive and so on, which has to do with focusing of light rays, but the key thing was that you have a trapped surface, and without something like that you can't prove anything.**

**John: That's very helpful, thank you.**

## **Step 3** TMU30

As an example of this topological existence way of thinking, Roger explains the "hairy ball" theorem. In a similar way, if there is a "trapped surface" then somewhere there is going to be a singularity.

## **Step 4** ITMU30

*What?* As an example of a topological existence way of thinking, Roger explains the "Hairy Ball" theorem, where there has to be a "crown".

*How?* In a similar way, with gravitational collapse, if there is a "trapped surface", then somewhere, without knowing where, there has to be a singularity. So Roger uses a comparatively simple image which both illustrates an extremely complex problem, and demonstrates the centrality and heuristic power of the key image of a "trapped surface" in solving the problem.

### Step 2 MU31

Roger: **But it's not unusual for me to have some thought buzzing away in the back of my head, and I can be talking to somebody about something else, and it can still be buzzing, you see. So it's there, but it's more a kind of slight distraction than anything serious going on. So it probably needed the period of silence, you see, for me to be able to relate to this - who knows.**

John: **You're referring to the silence as you crossed the road?**

Roger: **Yes. If I was talking, it would be difficult for this kind of thing to make itself present. It's a bit hard to go much further in this instance, exactly what thought processes were going on, what else ... it might have been something that reminded me of something, or was it just that the silence then allowed this thing was buzzing away then to come back. I think it was more like that really – that it was buzzing away and maybe somehow fitting itself together into this picture of a trapped surface.**

### Step 3 TMU31

It is not unusual for Roger to be cogitating in a slightly distracted way even when conversing about something else. The interruption in the flow of conversation with a moment of silence probably enables the thought to become conscious; in this case, as a picture of a “trapped surface”.

### Step 4 ITMU31

*What?* It is not unusual for Roger to be cogitating in a slightly distracted way (even when conversing about something else) and this seems to be a precursor to his insight.

*How?* Roger often has some thought buzzing away in the back of his head. Silence and the ‘potential space’ it opens up probably enables the buzzing thought to become more conscious. Roger also feels that the buzzing thought, in becoming more conscious, may somehow have fitted itself together with other thinking into the picture of a “trapped surface”.

### Step 2 MU32

John: **But it sounds as if you experience something like this from time to time, because you talk about getting in touch with the feeling, being quiet and going over the events of the day, and so on?**



Roger: **Yes, tending to be analytical. I suppose it's partly wanting to understand things. I get troubled if I can't fit things together. It's curious – I have this conversation with my wife sometimes – because she often worries about people's reactions, she doesn't know why somebody responds in a certain way, and I think, well, people, what can you expect! [we laugh together]. I'll never understand people, whereas *these* kinds of questions, one does have a hope of understanding.**

John: **Well, that's a very typical difference between husband and wife.**

### **Step 3** TMU32

Roger tends to be analytical in his thoughts and feelings because he wants to understand things. He gets troubled if he cannot fit things together, whereas his wife worries about people's reactions.

### **Step 4** ITMU32

*What?* Roger tends to be analytical<sup>47</sup> of his thoughts and feelings because he wants to understand things and gets troubled if he can't fit things together.

*How?* He gets troubled because he has a sense of hope of increasingly understanding the nature of the universe and the way things fit together. Images are particularly valuable for showing the relationship between things.

### **Step 2** MU33

John: **You've written about this particular experience in *The Emperor's New Mind*?**

Roger: **Yes, it is in there. There's not more than I've said here, rather less, I think.**

John: **And it sounds as if the feeling of elation was absolutely key in leading you to reflect and analyse and so on.**

Roger: **Yes, it certainly is, which is quite interesting, I suppose, because it must have meant that I realised that this was a good idea, somehow, it wasn't just that the idea came, I must have realised that this, in some sense, solved the problem.**

### **Step 3** TMU33

Roger tends to be analytical of his thoughts and feelings, because he wants to understand things. The feeling of elation in this case was not only indicative of the idea but also that he realised that it was a good idea that solved the problem.

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<sup>47</sup> Analytical comes from the Greek *analuein* to unloose, dissolve into elements, from *luein* to loosen (Rooney 1999, p. 61).

#### Step 4 ITMU33

*What?* The feeling of elation was absolutely key in prompting Roger to reflect and analyse in order to find the cause of his sense of elation.

*How?* Roger is interested that the feeling of elation in this case was not only indicative of the fact that he has had an idea, but also that he realised that it was a good idea that solved the problem, even before he knew what the idea was. This is an indication of his anticipatory disposition. It also reveals the evolving nature of his insight, from a sense of being “troubled” when he cannot fit things together, sustained by a sense of “hope” that things do fit together, and a sense of curiosity and strong desire to “understand”, to a mental search for an appropriate pictorial idea/image/insight<sup>48</sup> which will integrate or “fit things together”.

#### Step 2 MU34

John: **I am interested in the difference between “invention” and “discovery” in this context of insight. It is referred to by a chap called Paul Davies, in *The Mind of God*<sup>49</sup> who quotes you quite a bit – not directly, as God! [we both explode in laughter]**

Roger: **I certainly hope not [emphatically].**

John: **He talks about the Mandelbrot Set as not being an “invention” of the human mind, more like a sort of “discovery” like coming across Mount Everest.**

Roger: **Yes ... I find it incomprehensible that anyone could suppose that the Mandelbrot Set, this exotic fractal-like<sup>50</sup> structure [there was a rising sense of excitement in his voice at this point] is not as much “out there” as Mount Everest is, subject to exploration, in the way a jungle is explored. In fact, much more comes out of the structure than is put into it in the first place. One may take the view that in such cases the mathematicians have stumbled on “works of God”. I’ve just finished another book, *The Road to Reality*. Do you know about it?**

John: **No, I don’t know it.**

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<sup>48</sup> The word **idea** comes from the Greek *idein*, meaning to see. The word **image** comes from the Latin *imago* which is the source of our English word imagine. So both words have their roots in “seeing” and “inwardly seeing” in imagination, so are profoundly related to the experience of **insight**.

<sup>49</sup> “The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning” P.Davies (Simon & Schuster 1992).

<sup>50</sup> Fractal is a repeating geometrical pattern; an irregular or fragmented geometrical shape that can be repeatedly subdivided into parts, each of which is a smaller copy of the whole (Rooney 1999, p. 738).

Roger: **This is a monster book which is over a 1 000 pages long.** [He pulls out a copy that he is correcting for the printers, and turns to a drawing of the Mandelbrot Set].

John: **Stunning! isn't it?**

Roger: **Yes, it is. Remarkable. And all that's already there, you see, it's a question of blowing up finer and finer regions, and even this doesn't quite capture what continues right on into the middle, and it's an incredible set and a very, very simple definition. All that structure is there** [there was a quieter tone of awe or wonder in his voice at this point].

### Step 3 TMU34

Roger regards mathematical truth, such as the exotic fractal-like structure of the Mandelbrot Set, not as an “invention” of the human mind, but as much *out there* to be “discovered and explored” as Mount Everest is.

### Step 4 ITMU34

*What?* In the context of *mathematical* truth Roger regards insight as “discovery” of reality *out there* as was the case with Benoit Mandelbrot as opposed to the “invention” of a clever mind.

*How?* Roger's experience of insight and discovery in mathematics is of stumbling on the reality of “works of God” of incredible beauty. Roger's insight is infused with feeling tones of excitement, awe and wonder. A discovery in this context is almost synonymous with an insight of what is there. What is remarkable and mysterious is that the human mind is able to get insight into, and comprehend, these secrets of nature as in the Mandelbrot Set.

### Step 2 MU35

John: **Yes, and you're quoted here by Paul Davies [1992:153]: “When one sees in mathematical truth, one's consciousness breaks through into this world of ideas and makes direct contact with it. This is made possible by each one having a direct route to truth, consciousness of each being in a position to perceive mathematical truths directly, through this process of ‘seeing’”.**

Roger: **This is an excerpt from *The Emperor's New Mind*<sup>51</sup>. I also get into a lot of trouble from people who I think somewhat may have misunderstand what I'm saying there, I don't know. Yes, basically it was the sort of experience which I found when I was an**

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<sup>51</sup> p.428. The title “The Emperor's New Mind” is of course a play on the fairy tale of “The Emperor's New Clothes” and Roger is like the small boy who dares to suggest that the “Emperors” of strong artificial intelligence, who assert that it is only a matter of time before electronic computers will be doing everything a human mind can do, have no clothes.

undergraduate doing mathematics. I was expecting to find a lot of people I could relate to, and they would think the same way as I did, but I found that everybody thought in a different way, really, and I would barely understand what they were saying. I found it very difficult to follow their train of thought, but nevertheless I could “see”, or guess, what they were getting at, and I’d have my own route to that; so somehow there were different ways of mental processes which can guide you towards something, but the thing itself has a reality of its own, which one comes to in one’s own way. Something I was trying to say, a sort of window into the platonic world<sup>52</sup>, which is a way of looking at it. They thought I was saying, ‘well you know we mathematicians have this way of seeing things which you mortals don’t’ [laughing]. I wasn’t trying to say that at all. Some did have that kind of reaction to it, which was a complete misunderstanding.

### Step 3 TMU35

Roger’s own experience is that people do have different mental processes, or routes, which guide them in “seeing” a mathematical truth; but the truth itself has a reality of its own.

### Step 4 ITMU35

*What?* Roger’s experience is that mathematical truth has a pre-existing reality of its own.

*How?* Roger’s experience is that people do have very different mental processes or routes<sup>53</sup>, which guide them in consciously ‘seeing’, having insight, or understanding a mathematical truth. But it make it very difficult for him to follow other people’s train of thought, so Roger had to “see” or guess what they were getting at in his own way. So the consciousness of each person was in a position to perceive mathematical truths directly, but differently, through a conscious process of “seeing”.

### Step 2 MU36

**John: I must say, your experience while crossing the road reminds me of the famous experience of the French mathematician, Henri Poincaré, boarding the bus and reporting “at the moment when I put my foot on the step, the idea came to me”.**

**Roger: Yes, I suppose it does have something in common with that. It may have been similar, because he may have been babbling to his colleagues, as he was stepping onto the**

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<sup>52</sup> The reference is to the philosophy of Plato, especially the theory that both physical objects and instances of qualities are recognisable because of their common relationship to an abstract form or idea (Rooney 1999, p. 1445).

<sup>53</sup> No implication of superiority or inferiority is implied, although one process or route might be easier or more appropriate than another (e.g. MU28).

**bus, there was a moment of silence and then it came through to him. He does say that he hadn't time to verify the idea as upon taking his seat he went on with a conversation already commenced but he felt a perfect certainty about it. So it is possible that it was something similar. It's true ...**

**Step 3 TMU36**

Roger agrees that his experience of insight while crossing the road has something in common with Henri Poincaré's experience of insight while boarding the bus; for both of them the conversation was interrupted and the insight came through a moment of silence before the conversation was resumed.

**Step 4 ITMU36**

*What?* Roger's experience of insight while crossing a street is similar in some central respects to Poincaré's experience of insight while boarding a bus.

*How?* For both, conversation was interrupted and the insight came rapidly as a flash of insight through a moment of silence before conversation was resumed; (but Poincaré felt a "perfect certainty" about his insight whereas Roger felt a sense of "elation" and only later that day recovered his insight with certainty).

**Step 2 MU37**

**Roger: Because there's another example. I remember being driven by a colleague, this was in the US and it was from San Antonio I think, to Austin, because I had a year there, and my wife was with the other party, chatting away in the other car, and this colleague of mine was a rather silent gentleman, who didn't talk much, and so I could think about things going on in my mind.**

**John: What came to you then?**

**Roger: Well, this had to do with Twister Theory, which was one of the things which I have spent a lot of my life trying to do. It's a way of describing space-time, which is a completely different representation. I had all sorts of reasons for thinking I wanted something like this, which came from physics and mathematics, but I didn't know what it was, it was just some alternative description of space-time. It was this image that I'd had in my mind from a thing that Ivor Robinson had done. He'd found some solution of the Maxwell Equations, an electro-magnetic field which propagates in an interesting way, and the geometric structure of this thing I'd worked out previously, and so I had a picture of that, but the key**

**thing was basically counting how much freedom this picture had. I knew this picture which was something I'd drawn often. So basically while there was this time of silence I counted how much freedom there was – I can't really explain - it has a certain property which is what I was looking for. I was looking for something where you had a space which was divided in two, and the two halves were in some sense mysterious and the bit in the middle was the thing you could get your hands on. And that's just what these configurations had, and I realised this by counting how much freedom there was in the configuration. And then when I got home I got very excited and realised that this was what I wanted, and it turned out to have just the right mathematical property.**

**Step 3** TMU37

Roger's reflection on the similarity with Poincaré's experience of insight coming through in a moment of silence reminds him of another experience of his own. He was travelling by car with a rather silent colleague, so had time to reflect on what was going on in his mind.

**Step 4** ITMU37

*What?* Roger remembers another experience of insight relating to a different and new way of describing and representing space/time.

*How?* Roger had the time and opportunity "to think about things going on in his mind".

Perhaps this refers to what he has previously described as "buzzing away at the back of my head" (MU18). So he is looking inward to his own mind, getting insight into what was buzzing away. He had an image in his mind of a geometric structure which propagates in an interesting way from previous work that he had done. So he knew exactly what he was looking for in the configuration. The key thing was counting how much freedom this image had, and he was able to do this in the silence of a car journey. When he got home he was very excited because it turned out to have just the right mathematical property he was looking for.

**Step 2** MU38

**John:** Was it a similar experience of elation or excitement to the "trapped surface" insight?

**Roger:** Yes, certainly it would have had. If something else had occurred then, and had put it out of my mind. It might have been a bit hard to do that. If it had I certainly would have felt that ... yes ... there's no doubt about that. So *I was very excited* when I got back and I had some time to myself when I could figure out how to describe this thing, and everything sort of developed from there, so that was actually a big point in this whole Twister theory.

**It was the origin of it. I wrote a mathematical article about it, about the ideas. It was for a Birthday Volume in honour of Ivor Robinson, curiously enough ... the same man who was walking with me in London when I had the “trapped surface” idea. So I referred to it as a “Robinson Congruence”, and it was the geometrical way of thinking about the “Twister”.**

**Step 3 TMU38**

If something had interrupted this process and put it out of Roger’s mind, he thinks he certainly would have been left with a similar feeling of elation to the forgotten “trapped surface” insight (MU15,27). In fact, he was very excited as he had time to figure it out; it proved to be the origin of his whole geometrical “Twister” theory.

**Step 4 ITMU38**

*What?* When Roger got home he was very excited, because his insight turned out to have just the right mathematical property. So his insight was a “discovery” of reality out there, rather than a clever invention (MU34) and it proved to be the origin of his whole geometrical “Twister” theory.

*How?* Roger’s insight again came through an image, but he had to count how much freedom the image had. This is more like the careful exploration of the reality of Everest than something conjured up. The quality of the mathematical property of the image resulted in Roger getting very excited. This ‘excitement’ seems to have had a different quality to it from the ‘elation’ and ‘disturbed’ feeling he experienced before he re-membered the “trapped surface” image.

However, *if* something had put it out of his mind (difficult as that would have been!) he is sure he would have felt as he did before re-membering the “trapped surface” image.

**Step 2 MU39**

**John: So this is another example of you naturally thinking in terms of images and models?**

**Roger: Yes, very much so. I think that’s quite distinctive about the way I think, compared with most mathematicians.**

**John: It’s also true of Stephen Hawking, isn’t it?**

**Roger: Yes, he’s pretty visual. Yes, he’s certainly good at that. He’s probably more even-handed in his way of thinking, I suspect. I’m more lop-sided, being more visual; I tend to translate most of my analytic thinking into visual thinking. [He shows me examples of this in his latest mammoth book, which he’s drawn himself.] They are algebraic expressions, but somehow you can see what they are all about in these pictures, whereas if you write them in**



ordinary algebra they look like an awful mess. So it brings out the relations between things in a much more manifest way.

John: Yes, indeed. And this way of visualising things has always been part of you?

Roger: Yes, I have always tried to think that way. I think it's one of the main divisions you find in mathematical thinking. I noticed this when I was an undergraduate. The majority of people were not all that visual. A few were, and I was certainly one of the visual ones, and some could cross the board and go either way. But on the whole it's what they found most difficult. The geometry lectures were the ones that most people found difficult. I didn't – I found them easy. It's a curious thing, I noticed that if somebody wanted me to give a talk, say to school children or to people who were not mathematicians, or something, they'd say, 'put in lots of pictures', so yes, that's fine. It strikes me as slightly odd, you see, if you're going to talk to mathematicians, pictures in some respects don't help at all. I think there's a big selection effect; this is just my theory, that the trouble with the pictorial way of thinking is it's very hard to examine, and it's very hard to unravel.

John: So your instinctive way of thinking is visual and then you work back to the analytical?

Roger: It depends, it might be the thing you want to say is geometrical, but then you've got to say it, you can't just draw a lot of pictures. You have to write down the logical reasoning, so the picture by itself is not sufficient, though it may be helpful. It used to be regarded as non-rigorous, but I think that's less true now. These things tend to come and go in waves, but you find that even in some of the most respected journals you'll find a lot of complicated looking pictures to describe phenomena which are hard to describe in any other way.

### Step 3 TMU39

Roger's natural and distinctive way of thinking is in terms of visual images and geometrical models. He translates most of his analytic thinking into visual thinking but acknowledges that the picture by itself is not sufficient; it may be helpful at a particular point because it brings out the relation between things more clearly but he regards it as necessary to write down the logical reasoning.

#### Step 4 ITMU39

*What?* Roger has a quite strong and distinctive ‘right brain’ way of thinking. He tends to ‘see’ things in terms of visual images, pictures and geometrical models, like his ‘trapped surface’.

This image described what could not be expressed algebraically and made it possible to see the relation between things, as the singularity was likely to occur.

*How?* Roger naturally thinks in terms of images and geometric models, so he tends to translate most of his analytic thinking into visual thinking using pictures, so his experiences of insight also come in this distinctive form of visual images. As an undergraduate he was slightly puzzled by the differences in the way people thought. He found geometry lectures easy whereas most people found them difficult. Since then he has grown in confidence in his distinctive way of thinking and recognises its particular strengths. But he also acknowledges the weaknesses. The picture by itself is not sufficient; you also have to do the rigorous analysis of it and write down the logical reasoning involved in a proof. So there is often a two-step process, for Roger, of insight followed by rigorous argument (see also MU26).

#### Step 2 MU40

John: **You’re correcting this or another edition, are you?** [we were looking at his book *The Road to Reality*].

Roger: **It’s another printing; what a horror thinking about another edition, quite terrifying! The trouble is, it’s a very comprehensive book about mathematics and physics and how they inter-relate, or how these things drive each other, in an attempt to find out how the world works at the deepest physical levels; that’s what it is about. But it’s difficult to get it all right.**

John: **And one of the things that Paul Davies argues here, from some of your stuff in fact, is that what is remarkable is that human beings are actually able to carry out this sort of code-breaking operation. That the human mind has the necessary intellectual equipment to unlock the secrets of nature.**

Roger: **Yes. There is something – I like to use the word “understanding”, as encapsulating what you can do with conscious thought and what a computer can’t do, if you like. A computer just doesn’t possess any of this quality ... you can make it pretend to, you can imitate it to some degree, but it certainly doesn’t understand anything it’s doing, and it doesn’t understand because it’s not conscious, and that certainly in normal usage the word**

“understanding” implicitly entails “conscious awareness”. It’s a bit hard to say that you can understand anything without being aware of it, somehow. So I take that as one of the key roles that consciousness plays – somehow it enables us to have this quality, but I’m not saying I know what it is, I don’t know what it is, but it gives us this quality, which a purely computational system doesn’t have. And you certainly see this in *Shadows of the Mind* like in this chess position, which is not mine. Particularly in view of Deep Blue, this chess match they had against Gary Kasparov, which it won. There’s a chess position, there may be several of them, but there’s one particular one, which if you give it to a human being it’s completely obvious what you do, you don’t have to be a good chess player, you just have to know vaguely how to play chess. Whereas if you give it to Deep Blue it makes a completely stupid move. And you can easily understand not only that this move is stupid, but why it makes a stupid move. The thing is that in this position there’s a row of pawns which go across the board, there’s a sort of barrier which goes from one side to the other. And white has several extra pieces, and the black has only got the king, wandering around. And it’s completely obvious, as long as you keep that barrier intact, there’s no way you’re going to lose, you see. Whereas one of the white pieces can be taken by a pawn, and once you do that you open the barrier up and the pieces can flood through and you’ve lost. So it’s just that common-sense reasoning; you can see, that it’s stupid to take this piece. You can give it to any chess computer, I don’t know whether it’s still true, but it certainly was up to and including Deep Blue. So it’s a good indication that they’ve got no understanding of chess. It’s a nice example to show that the way a chess player, not even a good chess player, someone who just vaguely knows the rules, will see and understand that aspect of it. I gave that example in *Shadows of the Mind*. William Hartstone, I think ... that was part of a Turing test. They were trying to devise problems which would distinguish between human and computer, and it was more or less a clean division; they could tell every time [chuckles]. That’s why in *The Emperor’s New Mind* I dared to suggest that the emperors of strong Artificial Intelligence have no clothes.

### Step 3 TMU40

Roger’s latest book *The Road to Reality* is an attempt to find out how the world works at the deepest physical levels. He likes to use the word “understanding” to encapsulate what human awareness and conscious thought can do in contrast to what a computer can do. In his book *The*

*Emperor's New Mind* Roger argued that the “Emperors” of strong Artificial Intelligence have no clothes.

#### **Step 4 ITMU40**

*What?* Roger argues that a computer can make super-fast complicated calculations but cannot have insight, conscious awareness or understanding of what it is doing. He illustrates this with a chess position in which Deep Blue makes a “completely stupid move”.<sup>54</sup> The crucial difference is that any form of logical, analytical thought process makes use of existing concepts, which means that it is by definition, ‘outdated’. For it to be ‘new’ something else is needed.

*How?* This “something else” in Roger’s experience of insight was being able to work with internal images and to perceive the relationship between things rather than just a rational, logical analysis. Roger reflects that they are distinctively human qualities to be curious, to explore the ‘Road to Reality’, to be aware, to be creative, to have insight, to be conscious and to seek to understand. Comprehensive thinking and human understanding include the complementary functioning of both left and right hemispheres of the brain; both analytical and perceptual thinking; both logical, linear thought and creative, playful insight.

#### **Step 2 MU41**

**John: Yes, I appreciate your emphasis on “understanding”, and your distinction between human and strong Artificial Intelligence, as opposed to Minsky’s contention that our minds are “computers made of meat”. Would you like to comment on the significance of that in terms of your experience of insight?**

**Roger: Ah, well yes, you see when a physicist or a mathematician experiences a sudden “Aha” insight, I believe that it is more than just something conjured up by a complicated calculation. It is a mind making contact for a moment with objective truth, “out there” as Mount Everest is. Another more recent example would be my playful mathematical construction of two shapes that tile the plane in the manner of Escher tessellation, but which can tile it only in a non-periodic way. I didn’t really “invent” them ... I “discovered” them without any expectation that they would be useful. To everybody’s astonishment, particularly mine [laughing] it turned out that three-dimensional forms of these tiles may underlie a strange new kind of matter. Studying these “quasi-crystals” is now one of the**

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<sup>54</sup> Presumably this is because this particular eventuality had been programmed into a computer by a human being and represents an **oversight**, which the computer was unable to ‘see’ and correct.

**most active research areas in crystallography!** [chuckling]. **So playful mathematics and insights can have un-anticipated applications “out there”... I do have to admit to a life-long sense of wonder towards the mystery and beauty of being.**<sup>55</sup>

### **Step 3** TMU41

Roger believes that when a physicist or mathematician experiences an insight it is more than something conjured up by a complicated calculation. “It is a mind making contact for a moment with objective truth.”

### **Step 4** ITMU41

*What?* Roger’s experience as a mathematician, experiencing a sudden “Aha!” insight, is that it is more than just something conjured up by a complicated calculation. It is a mind making contact for a moment with objective truth “out there” as Mount Everest is. So insight is not just a linear analytical calculation, but a holistic, gestalt, perceptual experience. Insight sees not just what is explicit, but what is tacit and implicit; so not just what is ‘there’ in an isolated way, but the connection or relation between things.

*How?* Roger gives another more recent example of a playful<sup>56</sup> mathematical construction of two shapes that tile the plane in the manner of the Escher tessellation, which can tile it only in a non-periodic way. He says he did not “invent” these tiles, he “discovered” them, without any expectation that they would be useful. Astonishingly it turned out that three-dimensional forms of these tiles may underlie a strange new kind of matter. So, relaxed and playful mathematics and a sense of wonder towards the mystery and beauty of being can lead to insight which can have unanticipated applications in external reality.

### **Step 2** MU42

Roger: **But in terms of my insight crossing the road ... it must have been quite quick, because it didn’t take that long to cross the road** [again, chuckling]. **I wasn’t dawdling or in the classical pose of “The Thinker”** [chuckling].

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<sup>55</sup> As this interview clearly reveals, we must add “infused with humour”, as Martin Gardner expresses it in his Foreward to *The Emperor’s New Mind*.

<sup>56</sup> “Playful” here implies having fun as he plays mathematical games, as opposed to serious, intentional, analytical and focused mathematics. “Play” in Winnicott’s (1974) understanding is revelatory and leads to surprises.

John: **What intrigues me is that I had thought, before being able to talk to you about it, that focussing on the traffic had somehow distracted you from your line of thought, your insight ...**

Roger: [Interrupting] **I don't think so, no.**

John: **It now seems to me to be the other way round. The fact that you were crossing the road stopped the conversation for you to ...**

Roger: [Again interrupting, because I suspect I think and speak too slowly for him, and Roger has got caught up in telling the story.] **Yes [emphatically], yes it was that ... that's right ... It's certainly embarrassing to think that poor old Ivor was somehow stopping me [we both laugh]. I'm sure that's how it was ... there was a moment when other distractions were removed. That's certainly true of the "Twister" thing, being able to have this ... more relaxed time when my mind could run freely ... of course it doesn't always work ... it usually [emphatically] doesn't work! [chuckles].**

### **Step 3** TMU42

Roger is clear that his insight crossing the road must have been quite quick because he wasn't dawdling, and that focussing on the traffic had not distracted him from his insight but had stopped the distracting conversation enabling him to experience a momentary insight.

### **Step 4** ITMU42

*What?* The experience of insight crossing the road must have been rapid and fleeting.

*How?* There was a moment of silence when other distractions, particularly of conversing, were removed. This was also true of his experience of insight of the "Twister" during a long period of silence in a car journey. Relaxed time, when his mind could run freely, is particularly valuable. He can create or make use of the right conditions for insight, but cannot control or command the results.

### **Step 2** MU43

John: **Do you find that when you are relaxed, maybe in a bath or something like that, things come to you?**

Roger: **Can be ... especially when shaving although I have to say what is much commoner are little thoughts ... you can think of big things, which do make a big difference, but much [emphatically] commoner are little bits which add up. I may be trying to think my way through some problem ... I just can't make up my mind whether to go this way or that way**

... and then after thinking about it for a while, maybe going to bed, and the next day one of them has become the more obvious way. I remember talking to a friend of mine who explained something similar. He said it's like being on holiday in a wonderful mountainous area, and you don't know which one is the highest one. And the next day it's completely obvious which one is the highest. Somehow you work it through and something becomes obvious. It's not as though suddenly "*ping*" [with onomatopoeic emphasis] and that one's gone; it's more an acquaintance with the subject and you begin to feel you know which way to go. It's a confidence which builds up, and that can be several steps, and after a while you have worked out your way and you know your route to the thing. Then it becomes quite clear what the right answer is.

### Step 3 TMU43

In Roger's experience much more common than these significant insights which make a big difference are the small shifts which add up or indicate the way forward. He sees it in terms of an understanding of the subject, a confidence which builds up until it becomes clear what the next step is.

### Step 4 ITMU43

*What?* In Roger's experience, much more common than significant "Aha!" insights which make a big difference, are small shifts which add up or indicate the way forward.

*How?* Significant "insights" as well as "little bits that add up" often occur while relaxed, playful, just wondering (as in MU41,42) or doing something which is not too intellectually demanding, like crossing a road, shaving and so forth. These occur in the context of a clear intentionality when he is trying to think his way through a problem. Roger's understanding of the "little bits that add up" is that as his understanding of the subject grows, a confidence builds up and connections are made until it becomes "obvious" what the next step is, so things may become clearer overnight.

### Step 2 MU44

John: **Do you see that as some sort of unconscious mulling that is going on?**

Roger: **It's hard for me to say what's going on!** [laughing]. [Then he mentions some person's name which was not known to me and is not clearly audible on the tape] **certainly made attempts at this. Have you read his writing on this?**

John: **No, I haven't.**



Roger: Ah, he certainly tried to analyse it in terms of unconscious thoughts linking together, and so on. I'm not sure whether I would go along with his descriptions. I think of the unconscious as throwing up ideas which are certainly not random, they are ideas which have a much better chance of being right, but nevertheless the unconscious doesn't have the judgment to know whether it really is any good or not, so that's where the conscious mind has to pick up on it, to see if it fits. And that's it, you see. So that's the picture I have.

John: That certainly fits with my understanding at this stage.

Roger: I see [chuckling disarmingly]. Yes, and somehow these judgments are vital. You have got to be able to sit back and have a sensible view, whereas the unconscious mind can be very weird and wonderful ... I've never had an idea in a dream which made any sense ... in terms of the kind of insights we are talking about. I can dream things, and I can think, that was a wonderful thought, and the next day ... *what!?* [laughing uninhibitedly] ... they never hang together ... maybe other people's do ... maybe in other areas it could do, but in mathematics it's too tight and it's got to make logical sense ... it may be an input for it. Certainly if you want to get yourself out of a rut, and you are thinking in some way ... something else may stimulate you.

John: Perhaps dreams are usually more about what's going on inside me, rather than what's going on in the external world?

Roger: I guess that's probably a good way of thinking about it ... Yes, yes.

John: Roger, thank you very much indeed. I greatly appreciate this opportunity to interview you, and I've got some South African proteas here for you and your wife.

Roger: It's a very great pleasure. Oh, thank you ... what a treat [looking at the proteas] ... I hope it's been useful to you.

### Step 3 TMU44

Roger thinks of the unconscious as throwing up ideas which are not random, since they have a much better chance of being right, but the conscious mind has to discern whether it is helpful or appropriate. He has never had a dream which has made any sense in terms of the kind of logical and mathematical insights under discussion.

### Step 4 ITMU44

*What?* Roger has never had a dream which has led to scientific insight or has made any sense in terms of the tight logical and mathematical insights under discussion.

*How?* Roger thinks of the unconscious as throwing up ideas which are not random, since they have a much better chance of being right, and may help to get one out of a particular rut in thinking, or be an input into the process of insight. So ideas and images may germinate in the embedded process of the unconscious, but the unconscious can't evaluate the concepts it throws up adequately. He is clear that the conscious mind has to discern whether the idea or image is helpful or appropriate. This is his view of the mutual and complementary relationship between conscious and unconscious processes; between reflection and insight.

## **5.8 The Situated Structure of Roger's Experience of Insight**

In explicating the essential situated structure of Roger's experience of insight, the focus is first on the initial stages and precursors of his experience of insight, then on the dynamic core of Roger's experience of sudden insight, and finally on the unfolding nature, results and quality of his insight, including his reflections upon his experience. Together these encompass the distinct moments which depict the psycho-logical process of Roger's experience of insight. These moments could be called substructures, since each is an integral unity besides being a moment of the larger structural process. This constitutes Step 5 in the methodology.

### **5.8.1 The initial stages and precursors of insight.**

- Roger follows the scientific method and builds on the intellectual tradition. He clarifies the central issue as one of gravitational collapse (MU2). He refers to Einstein's general theory of relativity and the Schwarzschild radius, but he, like many people, thought it would never get down to that scale, so did not worry about it particularly (MU3). The discovery of quasars raised new questions. So an "oversight" was challenged by the emergence of new and puzzling data as well as estimates that required new understanding and insight (MU4). Wheeler recognised the importance of this and understood that what had previously been regarded as insignificant, had to be completely re-examined in the light of the new scale that was getting down to the crucial point of collapse, the Schwarzschild limit (MU5).

*Structurally this is insight as disposition; a scientific openness, involving cognitive, affective and behavioural openness in terms of a way-of-being-in-the-world.*

- Roger questions the current scientific models. One, due to Oppenheimer and Snyder, dealt with what happens when an exactly spherical star collapses into a singularity at the centre. There was little understanding of, or insight into, this catastrophic event at the time (it is now known as a black hole). It is precisely this problem that arouses Roger's curiosity and on which he focuses his energy and attention. He does this and perseveres in the face of issues that seem completely overwhelming (MU6). Many cosmologists believed that in a more realistic and practical situation where the body was irregular, and maybe rotating, it would not reach a singular state of collapse, but that the matter would swirl around and maybe come spewing out again. Some Russian work by theoretical physicists seemed to confirm this, but Roger was re-examining this received assumption. Had he accepted the results of these theoretical physicists he would not have come to his insight (MU7). He was thinking about this question for other reasons and in relation to other problems and unanswered questions to do with singularity, so relational perspectives and lateral thinking played a role in his approach (MU8). Instead of accepting the status quo, Roger has an attraction to mystery and a questioning curiosity. In the process he was generating links and refining his understanding of the issues and the questions that would prepare the way for his experience of insight (MU9).

***Structurally this is a precursor to insight as awareness of, and focus upon, problem areas and asking critical questions about unresolved issues, and tensions in a realistic and practical situation instead of accepting commonly received assumptions.***

- As a result of the above, Roger realised that he needed to somehow characterise the fact that the gravitational collapse is unstoppable; that it has reached a point of no return (MU10). He also recognised that he needed some way of characterising this which didn't depend on the symmetry. So the crucial attribute required was that it had to be a *qualitative* characterisation (MU11). So he has now clarified the central question and has an ability to contain, tolerate and work with complex unresolved issues prior to insight.

***Structurally this is a precursor to insight as clarifying the crucial question, as a result of finding the appropriate problem decomposition, and finding a way of containing and working with the raw material of insight.***

### 5.8.2 The dynamic core of Roger's sudden experience of insight.

Roger did forget the actual occurrence, thought-processes and content of his insight initially, so acknowledges in some respects it may not be a good example. However, later he was able to recall the content of his insight, so it is an interesting experience of insight with an unusual structure, and quite a striking example of an insight re-remembered, or perhaps re-imagined (MU12).

- Roger was vaguely thinking about these issues of gravitational collapse while involved in a lively and stimulating conversation on a different topic with a highly articulate colleague (MU13). While crossing a street and looking out for traffic the conversation stopped. In those few seconds of silence an idea, or image, evidently fleetingly occurred to Roger, but was blotted out as the conversation resumed. Roger had to re-construct this understanding of what had happened afterwards because he had no conscious memory of what had happened (MU14). When his colleague left, Roger was aware of an unusual general sense of “elation”, that he could not account for, as if something good had happened (MU15).

***Structurally, this is insight as ‘impact’. If it had not been for this “odd feeling of elation”, the insight that had occurred to Roger as he crossed the street would probably not have been recovered.***

- When Roger was alone he became conscious that he not only felt elated, which was his primary feeling, but that somehow he was also a little bit disturbed. He thought it paradoxical to experience both feelings simultaneously and was trying to understand why (MU16). So Roger reviewed all the things that had happened to him during the day and could not think of anything good enough to produce his elated feeling, until he finally remembered crossing the street and had a sense that something corresponded with his elated feeling. As he stayed with that feeling, he re-remembered the virtual insight that had fleetingly occurred to him while crossing the street (MU17), providing the solution to the problem that had been “buzzing around at the back of my head”. It was the qualitative characterisation that he crucially needed, which he called a “trapped surface”(MU18). It is a very clear but simple image of what he had deduced he was looking for, with remarkable revelatory and heuristic power; an inspirational insight in terms of what is happening in a black hole when you do not assume it is symmetrical (MU19). Roger

acknowledges that this is a re-construction of his experience (MU18) and this was partly made possible by recognising that a surface for which in-going and out-going flashes of light both have locally decreasing areas, is a sufficiently strange situation that it may signal that you get a singularity (MU20). This indicates a close relationship between Roger's wisdom, in terms of his growing understanding of what is happening in a black hole, and his eventual experience of sudden insight.

***Structurally, this is insight as 'interpreting'. In staying with the feelings, Roger allows the meanings to emerge, connections to be made, and especially the relationships between things to become clear to his visually orientated way of thinking, so that an understanding can develop.***

- Roger had analytically deduced a plan of action enabling him to turn a large novel problem into a smaller tractable one (MU11), but here it becomes evident how he actually acts in the course of things that are unfolding. (Later Roger speaks of the value of aesthetic criteria in this process of interpreting, as well as consciousness as the final arbiter, but this will be examined in more detail in section 5.8.3 where Roger reflects on his experience of insight.)
- Later that same day, as a result of this insight of a "trapped surface", Roger went to the blackboard and it did not take him long to sketch out a proof of the theorem that he had been looking for about singularity. The proof flowed from things he had known about and expertise he had developed before the insight, but would not have been possible without the insight. It was a few months before the proof was formulated in a completely rigorous way (MU20). There were other aspects of originality but the trapped surface was the *key* idea (MU23) which unlocked the whole puzzle.

***Structurally this is insight as key to a self-actualising process. It is insight in action.***

This completes the essential elements of Roger's gestalt experience of sudden insight, which began as *impact* evidenced as an elated feeling, which then needed to be re-membered and *interpreted* before it could become the key to *action*.

### **5.8.3 Roger's own reflections on his experience of insight.**

Roger's reflections will be considered under the following eleven points:

- Roger modestly reflects, “there were other things one could have thought of ... but it was really, I suppose, the right thing to think of at that stage. Yes [laughing happily]” (MU24). Before he even knows that he has had an insight he “was left with this odd feeling of elation, that I could not account for” (MU15). He also says “the idea broke through into consciousness for long enough for it to leave a ‘lingering impression’ in terms of a feeling of elation which I was able to recover” (MU27).

***Structurally this is insight as releasing the tension of enquiry resulting in elation.***

- In addition, Roger reflects that the feeling of elation before the insight became conscious “is quite interesting, I suppose, because it must have meant that I realised that this was a good idea, somehow, it wasn’t just that the idea came, I must have realised that this, in some sense, solved the problem” (MU33). This is confirmed in his conscious experience of insight, which was the origin of his whole Twister theory. “I got very excited and realised that this was what I wanted, and it turned out to have just the right mathematical property” (MU37).

***So structurally the strong affect of elation indicates not only the occurrence of an insight of which he is not yet conscious, but also that at some subliminal level he was aware that the virtual insight solved the problem.***

- Roger reflects that “there are other aspects of originality, if you like, in this discussion, which are not just a trapped surface, but the trapped surface was the *key* [emphasised] idea” (MU23). As the *key* idea, the trapped surface unlocked and enabled other aspects of originality and expertise that Roger had developed to emerge and fit together in terms of understanding if a black hole is likely to come about. “What you could show is that if there’s a trapped surface then somewhere there has got to be this singularity” (MU30).

***Structurally this is insight as key to unlocking a self-actualising process of paradigm-building enabling other knowledge, expertise and understanding to fit together.*** It is like the missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle that enables one to complete the whole. Another way of expressing it is that ***structurally, insight is particular: true but limited.***

- Roger is particularly clear that his “whole line or way of thinking of this kind of problem was not the way other people were thinking about it” (MU24). He explains this as “partly because I had a pure mathematical background, partly I just like to think geometrically ... most people

would work out the equations and try and solve them *explicitly* [with emphasis], somehow, and that's just not the way to do this problem" (MU29).

***Structurally this is insight as transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things and trying to solve things.***

- Roger reflects, "my impression is that the strong conviction of the validity of a flash of inspiration or insight, is very closely bound up with its aesthetic qualities. A beautiful idea has a much greater chance of being a correct idea than an ugly one. At least that has been my experience" (MU25). He also thinks "it is consciousness that is the arbiter", and even a sudden and powerful flash of insight "would be quickly rejected and forgotten if it did not 'ring true'" (MU26). He likes "to use the word 'understanding' as encapsulating what you can do with conscious thought, and what a computer can't do ... it doesn't understand because it's not conscious" (MU40).

***Structurally this is insight as self-authenticating through its aesthetic qualities, with consciousness, understanding, and perhaps conscience as the final arbiter.***

- In the scientific context, insight as self-authenticating is not sufficient or acceptable. Scientific insight clearly has to be proven and then tested by the scientific community and validated or rejected as erroneous. Roger acknowledges that it was a few months before the proof resulting from his insight was formulated in a completely rigorous way (MU20). He also regards mathematical truth, such as the exotic fractal-like structure of the Mandelbrot Set, not as an "invention" of the human mind, but as "out there" to be "discovered", explored and verified as Mount Everest is (MU34).

***Structurally this is insight as tested in the public realm and historically validated or rejected.***

- Roger's conviction is that mathematical truth has a pre-existing reality of its own, but his experience is that people do have very different mental processes or routes which guide them in consciously 'seeing', having insight, or understanding a mathematical truth directly (MU35). He regards the main polarity in mathematical thinking to be analytical/geometrical (MU28).

***Structurally this is insight as each person is in a position to perceive mathematical truths directly, but does so in many different ways, according to their particular strengths.***



- Roger says that “another more recent example would be my playful mathematical construction of two shapes that tile the plane in the manner of Escher tessellation, but which can tile it only in a non-periodic way. I didn’t really ‘invent’ them ... I ‘discovered’ them” (MU41). ***Structurally this reveals insight as more than something conjured up by a complicated calculation. It is a mind making contact for a moment and discovering ‘objective’ truth; ‘out there’ as Mount Everest is.***

- Roger insists, “I didn’t really ‘invent’ them ... I ‘discovered’ them without any expectation that they would be useful. To everybody’s astonishment, particularly mine [laughing] it turned out that three-dimensional forms of these tiles may underlie a strange new kind of matter ... so playful mathematics and insights can have unanticipated applications” (MU41). This “playfulness”, this “sense of wonder”, complements the powerful, analytical, intellectual and focused attention Roger brings to problems he sets for himself. The complementary and mutually enhancing nature of these different modes of conscious and unconscious thought result in a more comprehensive and holistic approach. But Roger has made it clear that insight has to “ring true” to conscious understanding.

***Structurally this reveals insight as embedded and as germinating in “playful” mathematical games and constructions, nourished by Roger’s sense of “wonder” and “mystery”, and emerging unexpectedly with surprising results and un-anticipated applications.***

- Roger reflects that, in his experience, much more common than significant “Aha!” insights which make a big difference, are the little bits which add up to indicate the way forward (MU43). Significant “insights” as well as “little glimpses” often occur while relaxed and playful (MUs 41,42), or just wondering in silence (MU37). They also occur while doing something which removes distractions, but is not too intellectually demanding, like crossing a road, shaving and so forth (MUs 42,43).

***Structurally, significant ‘insights’ may be different from Roger’s experience of little ‘shifts’ in understanding, but they crucially complement one another and seem to occur under remarkably similar conditions, in his evolving process of understanding. Moreover they are both integral to Roger’s analytic and synthetic abilities when confronting the unknown.***

- Roger’s relationship and interaction with Ivor Robinson is clearly stimulating despite their different areas of interest (MU13). Roger’s mathematical article on his Twister theory, which he called a “Robinson Congruence” in a birthday volume in honour of him (MU38), as well as his delightful reference to him as “poor old Ivor” (MU42), attest to the richness and warmth of the academic scientific community. This is significant because it is a particular example, which reveals Roger’s insights as embedded in a web of relationships, interactions and an intellectual context in which he is steeped.

*Structurally, this reveals Roger not as an isolated, singular individual, from inside whom new ideas and insights miraculously arise, ex nihilo. Roger is continually engaged in a kind of ‘conversation’ with a collection of other scholars and researchers.*

In conclusion, I want to emphasise that in finding “moments” of the structure and identifying registers of human functioning, I am not wanting to suggest that they are separate faculties operating at different times; the process-dynamic-structure is seamless.

## **5.9 The General Structure of the Experience of Insight**

The Essential Situated Structures of **Desmond’s** experience of insight (5.3.2), **Debbie’s** experience (5.4.2), **Roger’s** experience (5.5.2) and **Tony’s** experience of insight (4.6.1), have been described. At this point, those situated structural statements are synthesised into a general structure of the experience of insight which is not dependent on the specific person, content of insight, situation, or context, but holds true for all the research participants. This is, in effect, the same as **Step 7** The Comprehensive Structure, since all of the research participants’ experiences are comprehended in this general structure.

The data in the transcribed interviews reveal common components in each research participant’s experience of insight. This gives a general structure of the experience of insight which is described in the ten constituent components which are enumerated below. These individual constituent components are understood in terms of the grasp of the *whole* experience of insight. Each component is expressed as a statement which seeks to elucidate the necessary and irreducible core of that component, which is reflected in the experience of all four research participants. Taken together, these ten components comprise the general structure of the experience of insight. These are the researcher’s own descriptions based on the findings of this

research, but it is acknowledged that the words ‘impact’ and ‘interpreting’ in two of the findings (Sections 5.6.4 and 5.6.5) have been influenced by Fuller (1990). In addition, the wording in Sections 5.6.9 and 5.6.10 has been influenced by the work of Lonergan (1983).

#### **5.7.1 The Unresolved Issue**

**The experience of insight arises out of a person’s awareness of, and engagement with, a problem, unresolved issue, question or tension.**

#### **5.7.2 The Openness Required**

**The experience of insight concurs with the person’s way-of-being-in-the-world, where there is a sufficient disposition of openness: affective, cognitive and behavioural.**

#### **5.7.3 The Unresolved Issue ‘Confronted’ and ‘Contained’**

**The experience of insight requires that the unresolved issue and the raw material for insight be adequately ‘confronted’ and ‘contained’ by the person, so that the issue involved can be clarified in a sufficiently reflective way.**

#### **5.7.4 The ‘Impact’: a Passive Experience**

**The experience of insight involves ‘impact’ which comes suddenly and Unexpectedly. It is the influence of the life-world on the self: a passive experience.**

#### **5.7.5 The ‘Interpretation’: a Reflexive Experience**

**The experience of insight requires ‘interpretation’ or empathetic understanding of the ‘impact’, which may take time but becomes conscious suddenly. It is the influence of the self on the life-world: a reflexive experience.**

#### **5.7.6 The “Aha!” Experience**

**The experience of the ‘moment of insight’ releases the tension of enquiry in the “Aha!” experience and motivates, enables and empowers action. It is the key to a self-actualising process: an active experience.**

#### **5.7.7 The Changed Perspective**

**The experience of insight involves transcending the usual or dominant way of**

seeing things.

#### **5.7.8 The Self-Authenticating Experience**

**The experience of insight is self-authenticating; the result of insight is tested in the public realm and is historically validated or rejected.**

#### **5.7.9 The New Understanding**

**The experience of insight results in an understanding which possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application.**

#### **5.7.10 The Recurring Quality**

**The experience of insight not only occurs but keeps recurring; it is not an end in itself, but rather a fresh beginning; at each recurrence, understanding develops and action is enabled ... until a new problem, unresolved issue, question or tension emerges, requiring fresh insight.**

### **Conclusion**

Having explored these rich, vivid and varied descriptions of the experiences of the research participants' insights, and then applied detailed and systematic analysis in order to discern these ten constituent components of the general structure of insight, it is essential to move to the next step in the process. In the next chapter, which is the discussion of the findings, these findings will be illustrated in the diverse experiences of each of the research participants, then tested and discussed in relation to their significance in terms of the nine different approaches to the experience of insight which formed the framework of the literature review in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 6

# THE DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

### 6.0 Introduction

The ten findings of this study, introduced in the previous chapter (Section 5.9), represent the ten constituent components<sup>57</sup> of the general structure of the experience of insight which cohere as a whole. The first three (discussed in Sections 6.1-6.3) progressively describe the initial stages and precursors of insight. The next three (as discussed in Sections 6.4-6.6) represent the dynamic core of the experience of insight and are characterised by a passive, a reflexive and finally an active experience. The final four components (discussed in Sections 6.7-6.10) describe the unfolding nature, results and recurring quality of the experience of insight.

A general structure of this particular, holistic nature of the experience of insight does not appear in the literature. It is regarded as important that the distinctive value of the particular findings, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, should be seen and evaluated in relation to this holistic, dynamic general structure.

The framework of this chapter will consist of two essential parts. First, each of the ten constituent components will be illustrated by the experience of all four research participants with particular attention to the varieties and limits of their experiences, encompassed within that particular research finding. The second part draws on the literature review, and includes definitions of insight (Section 2.2), as well as incorporating relevant material developed in the nine approaches to the experience of insight (see Sections 2.3-2.11). This will reveal connections with, and support for, each component of the research findings; also to reveal points at which the research findings question or challenge a particular approach or its metaphysical presuppositions.

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<sup>57</sup> from the Latin *componere*, literally ‘to put together’.

## 6.1 Finding 1. The Unresolved Issue

**The experience of insight arises out of a person’s awareness of, and engagement with, a problem, unresolved issue, question or tension.**

It is important not to overlook the obvious: if a person is not aware of, or engaged with, a problem, unresolved issue, question or tension at some level, there can be no insight. The nature of the problems requiring insight, the scope of the questions and the severity of the issues for the research participants, all vary.

For **Desmond**, it was the ‘issue’ of the oppression of apartheid. He was “deeply concerned”, but does not claim to have any special understanding or unique insight. In fact living in Soweto he could hardly help “being aware of how people were feeling about ‘the system’” of apartheid (MU3). He refers particularly to the squalor, the deprivation and the daily humiliations (MU4). It raised the question for him of theodicy: “where the heck was God in all of this” (MU5). This involved considerable ‘tension’ for him and called for political and spiritual insight.

For **Debbie**, it was the ‘question’ of how to respond to her husband’s long-term affair. She had thrown him out of the house (MU1). She was deeply hurt, extremely angry with him and, in particular, felt acutely rejected by him (MUs 1, 2, 3). She came into therapy because of this problem, believing that divorce was the only answer (MU1), but unsure about her own real needs and feelings, so the primary requirement was for more self-insight (MU5).

For **Roger**, it was the ‘problem’ of determining whether gravitational collapse would be likely to occur. He was aware of the implications of Einstein’s general theory of relativity (MU3), but it was not until quasars were observed that the seriousness and importance of the Schwarzschild limit was recognised (MU4) and the issue of gravitational collapse became a practical problem (MU5). So the situation called for mathematical and cosmological insight.

For **Tony**, it was the ‘tension’ of living in an unjust society. As an artist, employed by the *Cape Times* newspaper, he faced the challenge and opportunity of producing a cartoon commenting on the news five days a week. He was very aware of the need, and his responsibility to raise consciousness of socio-political realities through his artistic insight.

In the light of these varied experiences of awareness of, and engaging with, a problem, unresolved issue, question or tension, it is relevant to re-examine the nine approaches to insight developed in the literature review. Four aspects are relevant:

(1) Virtually all of the definitions of insight referred to in the literature review (Section 2.2) include the awareness of a ‘problem’. For example, Mayer’s (1995, p. 3) definition is: “the term *insight* has been used to name the process by which a problem-solver suddenly moves from a state of not knowing how to solve a problem to a state of knowing how to solve it”. As noted, significantly and appropriately, he does not claim that insight provides a solution, but the right solution path. This is perfectly illustrated in **Roger’s** ‘key’ to the solution, namely the ‘trapped surface’ (MUs 23, 24) and is true, in different ways, of the experience of all the research participants.

(2) The puzzle problem approach of cognitive psychology to insight, epitomised by the nine-dot problem, essentially has four weaknesses in relation to this proposition that insight arises out of the awareness of a problem. First, it has to be acknowledged that a number of these puzzle problems are relatively trivial in terms of the quality of insight required for solution. In addition, there is an ongoing debate about which puzzle problems require insight (defined in terms of restructuring of the problem), for solution. Second, because these problems are given to research participants under ‘laboratory conditions’, the levels of affective involvement, problem analysis and motivation for solving the problems may be much more superficial than existential or practical problems in real-life situations (Dunbar 2000). This is clear in the experiences of **Desmond, Debbie, Roger** and **Tony**. Third, because of time limitations in such experiments, there is little meaningful opportunity for any form of ‘incubation’ and research subjects are often not able to apply information from structurally analogous situations. Finally, and most importantly, in view of people’s individual differences, skills, abilities and experiences, as, for example, in the four research participants, it seems highly unlikely that there is any such thing as “a universal insight problem”.

(3) The distinction, developed by Getzels (1964) between *presented problem solving* and *discovered problem finding* is important here, with creative breakthroughs and paradigmatic shifts belonging to the latter category and usually taking very much longer for insight, as in Darwin’s experience. It is not an absolute distinction, but **Desmond, Debbie** and **Tony** were essentially presented with problems to solve through insight, whereas **Roger’s** experience was



more of a discovered problem to which he found a solution through insight. The case-study approach of ‘great minds’ experiencing insight also illustrates the importance of awareness of a problem, frequently a ‘discovered’ problem, as being essential for insight.

(4) Both the inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy and the body-mind-spirit continuum approach of spirituality to insight, clearly affirm, in theory and in practice, that insight arises out of an awareness of a problem or unresolved issues. Bion (1970, p. 58) even describes it as a “blindness” that is a prerequisite for seeing. **Debbie’s** experience clearly illustrates this, as does the classic case of Saul/Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus in which he was literally ‘blinded’ before being ‘enlightened’ (Acts 9). Andrei, who became Metropolitan Anthony of Sourazh, mentioned in Section **2.11.6.1**, also regarded Christianity as a “disgusting, loathsome, horrible thing” (Bloom 2005), before the living Christ appeared to him. The whole Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s process was required because of an awareness of multiple problems and unresolved issues in the transition from apartheid violence to democracy in the New South Africa. In confronting those issues, *ubuntu*, a crucial insight in African spirituality emerged as a critical factor: our human interconnectedness-towards-wholeness.

The significance of this finding may best be encapsulated by the nuances of the word *elementary*; it is both ‘rudimentary’ in the sense of involving only the most simple, undeveloped and obvious fact, and ‘fundamental’ in the sense of being the most basic or elemental component part of the experience of insight. The significance of this finding is supported by all of the approaches to insight but is more specific and inclusive than most of them.

## **6.2 Finding 2. The Openness Required**

**The experience of insight concurs with the person’s way-of-being-in-the-world where there is a sufficient disposition of openness: affective, cognitive and behavioural.**

This finding changes the focus from the problem requiring insight to the person experiencing insight, and in particular the indispensable requirement of openness in the person’s way-of-being-in-the-world. The research subjects reveal in their interviews that their personalities and situations in life are very different. Their contexts, the nature of their work, relationships,

commitments and experiences all vary. Yet, despite this diversity, they all had to come to a disposition of openness in their way-of-being-in-the-world before insight was possible.

**Desmond's** disposition of openness was particularly evident at an affective and cognitive level for those suffering under apartheid. Living in Soweto (MU3) was his deliberate decision, rather than living in the official residence for the Dean in the leafy suburbs of Johannesburg. His vivid descriptive images about the enforcement of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction: "here was the oppressor, not just insisting that you learnt their language but pushing your nose in the dust" (MU6), expresses the depth of his empathy and solidarity with the students, precisely over the issue that was to emerge as the catalyst for their uprising. However, his disposition of openness was less clear, in fact highly conflicted, at a personal level in terms of becoming Bishop of Lesotho. He describes it as "heart-rending" (MU9) as it involved profound inner turmoil which he could hardly put into words (MUs 10, 11, 12). In MU12 there seems to be a transitional quality to his musing, reflected in the change from the personal "I" to the more generalised "you" in the same sentence, which is unusual for him as a person whose first career was a teacher of English. It seems as if he cannot completely own or express his feelings. Yet, in faith, he struggles to maintain a disposition of openness to God, to give himself, his time and his future to God so "that God might take the chance of communicating" (MU13).

**Debbie** was initially "pretty set" on divorce (MU1). Because of her hurt and anger, there was not much openness at any level; she felt she needed to protect herself. She recognised that she regarded her husband as "putting his foot into it by just breathing" (MU3). She needed to develop this 'disposition of openness' at an affective level (MUs 3, 22, 34) which included accepting herself in a new and empathic way (MU5) and at a behavioural level (MUs 14, 30), because she had developed a strategy of protecting herself by "rejecting Mark before he rejects me" (MU30), in order to come to a clearer and authentic cognitive decision about her future, based on true self-insight of her real feelings, needs and desires, rather than simply fighting the 'problem'. Her experience reveals particularly clearly that a 'sufficient', rather than a perfect 'disposition of openness' is required for insight, and she became considerably more open as a result of her insight. So it is suggested that there is a "tipping point" in the process, which for her was reached during the night of listening to music. The evidence is that, as a result of her insight that she wanted to work towards reconciliation with her husband (MU15), she became more aware of the effect and extent of her suspicion, criticism and loss of trust in her husband.

This is in terms of making him into a “bad” person rather than the “nice” person she had known him to be over the years, but who had now disappointed and hurt her (MU16).

For **Roger**, this ‘sufficient disposition of openness’ was evident at an affective, cognitive and behavioural level. At an affective level this was in terms of his sensitivity and ability to analyse his relation as well as being open to his slightly disturbed feeling (MUs 15-16). At a cognitive level, he was able to build on the intellectual tradition of Einstein and Schwarzschild (MU3), as well as recognise an “oversight” with the discovery of quasars (MUs 4, 5), so he was open to new data and issues and able to discern that it was a qualitative characterisation that he required (MU11). At a behavioural level, he was consistently true to the scientific method and sufficiently open to question current scientific models (MU6) and re-examine received assumptions (MU7).

For **Tony**, this ‘openness’ was evident in his scanning of news to gather information and raw material for insight (MU1) and selecting an issue about which he felt passionately (MU2). This bears witness to his ‘disposition of openness’ on a behavioural, cognitive and affective level. The latter is not insignificant for: “Kierkegaard insists **passion** must give *perspective* and *validity to knowledge*” (Alapack 2008 in private communication; emphasis as in original). According to Kierkegaard, it does not depend merely upon *what* one sees, but *how* one sees: “all observation is not just a receiving, a discovering, but also a bringing forth ... how the observer is constituted is decisive .... A person’s inner being, then, determines what he discovers” (Kierkegaard 1990, pp. 59-60).

In the light of these very different experiences of the research participants coming to a ‘sufficient disposition of openness’ for insight, it is appropriate to reflect on the relevance of the approaches to insight developed in the literature review. Seven reflections are worthy of note:

(1) None of the definitions of insight referred to in the literature review in Section 2.2 specifically mention this ‘disposition of openness’. The result of such existential openness is referred to, but not the condition, as in Webster’s New World Dictionary (Guralnik 1984) which defines insight as “seeing and understanding the nature of things clearly especially by intuition”. Haptic vision, as described by Pattison (2007) in Section 2.9.4, creates an ‘openness’, a yielding and ‘reflective kind of knowing’, which can lead to a quality of wonder and compassionate involvement in the subject matter.

(2) The holistic approach of gestalt psychology to insight is clear about the importance of removing “mental blocks” and the danger of “functional fixedness”, when what is required is a novel use of an object (see Section 2.3.1, Figures 4 & 5). However an existential ‘disposition of openness’ goes well beyond these early gestalt objectivist conceptions, by insisting on a network of meaning forming not just within the cortex, but “in the lived dimensionality of the existential space of possibility” (Fuller 1990, p. 164). This ‘disposition of openness’, as the experience of all four research participants so clearly reveals, needs to be involved, alert, responsive; it includes, as Fuller (1990, pp. 2001-2002) expresses it:

the breadth of being already disposed to available meanings, the depth of imagining the possibilities meaning has coming to it, the immediacy of a present releasing of and being touched by meaning, precisely as these temporal dimensions of the self play into one another at the moment.

This is a very accurate summary of **Debbie’s** detailed description of coming to a ‘disposition of openness’ as she listened to, and interacted with, the music on the night her experiences came together as an insight. This is very different from, and goes well beyond, the puzzle-problem approach of cognitive psychology, which emphasises the importance of intellectual ability and flexibility, in problem analysis and mental representation, as essential preparation for insight. As valuable as this cognitive aspect is, it is often emphasised at the expense of motivational, affective and behavioural aspects of ‘openness’ and is almost invariably linked to a natural scientific and quantitative approach, which is inadequate in so many real-life situations as the experiences of the research participants demonstrate.

(3) The creative approach of genius, dreams, design and invention to insight highlights the fact that creative persons are pre-disposed to being independent, unconventional, even bohemian, and are likely to have wide interests, considerable openness to new experiences, flexibility or flow and boldness in risk taking (Simonton 2000). It is not unreasonable to see considerable similarity in practice, between such creative persons and the philosophical description of a ‘disposition of openness’ in the approach of existential-phenomenological psychology. The creative person’s way-of-being-in-the-world, rather than just in the head, is likely to be reflected in his/her creative expressions, products and designs, as is evident in **Tony’s** cartoons.

(4) In the representational approach of models of insight, Finke (1995, p. 275) emphasises the value of “imaginative explorations” and draws attention to the importance of a playful, creative

and generative space; a delightful description of a ‘disposition of openness’. This is supported by, and exemplified in, **Roger’s** playful mathematical construction, unexpectedly leading to a discovery that may underlie a strange new kind of matter (MU41). His experience also reveals the significance of the existential understanding of the ‘disposition of openness’ as not just an inner subjective experience; it is always and already existentially beyond itself in the world. The value of studying creativity and the quality of its ‘openness’ in Gruber’s evolving systems model is firstly, that it emphasises “the many moments of insight in a creative life, rather than supposing the heart of the matter lies in one great creative leap” (Gruber 1995, p. 400); and secondly, that it reveals insights as “part of a coherent life”, such as **Desmond’s**, **Roger’s** and **Tony’s** as expressing “the functioning of the creative system rather than its rupture” (Gruber 1995, p. 400). This is not the same as an existential understanding of the ‘disposition of openness’, affective, cognitive and behavioural, in terms of a person’s way-of-being-in-the-world, but it is as close as it gets from a natural scientific perspective.

(5) The case study approach of great minds experiencing insight, as is illustrated in **Roger’s** experience above, clearly reveals the crucial importance of this ‘disposition of openness’. Perhaps one of the most unusual examples is that of Feynman (Section 2.5.3), who was ‘sufficiently open’ to a casual remark by a disillusioned colleague, about the situation being so confused that “it might even be V and A, rather than S and T, it’s so messed up” (Seifert et al. 1995, p. 94), that he jumped up exclaiming: “Then I understand EVVVVVERY-THING!” His colleagues thought he was joking; in contrast, he realised that he now had insight into and understanding of a law of nature that nobody else knew.

(6) The inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy to insight deepens, and clarifies in some respects, the understanding of this ‘disposition of openness’. The ability to listen deeply and make sense of the patient’s unconscious communications is fundamental. It involves a willing receptiveness and responsiveness, involving both apprehension and comprehension. In terms of elucidating the ‘disposition of openness’ required for insight, it is apprehension that is important. An example of my failure as a therapist to apprehend **Debbie’s** sense of rejection in therapy because of the position of the chairs, is given as part of my learning curve in Section 6.11.17. Apprehension has been variously described as “evenly suspended attention” (Freud 1912), “bare attention” (Coltart 1992), “generative uncertainty” (Ivey 1997), “free floating” and “poised attention” (Reik 1954), a “state of contemplation” (Jung 1946b), “reverie” and “intuition” (Bion

1962,1970). It is critically important to recognise that in all these formulations the capacity for a ‘disposition of openness’ is enabled and sustained primarily by an emotional sensitivity, rather than a purely intellectual process, because this openness is so easily and rapidly foreclosed or overwhelmed by emotional reactions and responses.

(7) The body-mind-spirit continuum of spirituality to insight both extends this ‘disposition of openness’ to a transcendent level, and grounds it in a meditative and ‘mindful’ discipline, as is evident in **Desmond’s** experience in retreat and **Debbie’s** experience listening to music. De Chardin’s synthesis of the material and physical world with the world of mind and spirit emphasises the significance of the threshold of reflection in which humankind discovers that we are “evolution becoming conscious of itself” in Huxley’s striking phrase (in de Chardin 1959, p. 221). Begbie’s (2001) musical example of playing middle C and the string an octave above starting to vibrate even though it has not been struck, provided it is *open* (as described in Section **2.11.6.3**) vividly illustrates the significance of this existential ‘disposition of openness’. This is also dramatically lived out by Mrs Cynthia Ngewu (Section **2.11.6.4**). She is *open* to meeting with the murderer of her son, *open* to the possibility of forgiveness, *open* to relating it to her spirituality of *ubuntu*, and *open* to putting it into practice despite the fears and risks involved.

So this second finding changes the focus from the problem requiring insight to the person desiring insight and needing a ‘sufficient disposition of openness’. The experiences of all four research participants reveal in a variety of ways the importance of affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects of openness, in terms of a person’s way-of-being-in-the-world, for true life experiences of insight. The constituent component of insight expressed in this finding goes beyond the definitions of insight. While some of the other approaches to insight value openness and haptic vision, particularly the creative and case-study approaches, none express it so clearly or explicitly, with the possible exception of the approach of psychotherapy and spirituality. These at their best elucidate important implications of this ‘disposition of openness’ as involved, alert, responsive and empathically attuned to life-world possibilities of significance and meaning.

The significance of these first two findings may easily be overlooked, as I have to acknowledge occurred initially in my own experience as researcher. This oversight is reflected upon in Chapter 7, Section **18 (1)**, as part of my own learning curve in relation to understanding **Desmond’s** experience of insight.



### 6.3 Finding 3. The Unresolved Issue ‘Confronted’ and ‘Contained’

**The experience of insight requires that the unresolved issues and the raw material for insight be adequately ‘confronted’ and ‘contained’ by the person, so that the issues involved can be clarified in a sufficiently reflective way.**

This finding expresses a progression of the first two findings and includes both the problematic issues requiring insight and the nature of the parameters necessary for the person’s response to result in the experience of insight. So the indispensable requirement of the ‘disposition of openness’ in the person’s way-of-being-in-the-world, needs to include the ability to adequately both ‘confront’ and ‘contain’ the particular problem, question or unresolved issues. Clearly, the research subjects each ‘confront’ and ‘contain’ their unresolved issues and raw material for insight in very different ways.

Living in Soweto, **Desmond** was ‘confronted’ daily by the reality of the oppression of apartheid. What he found difficult was to ‘contain’ these issues, particularly in the light of his own emotional turmoil about having to move to Lesotho. Evidently, he experienced the retreat as profoundly ‘containing’; in the silence he became more ‘reflective, receptive and prayerful’ (MUs 12, 13) and experienced God speaking to him in a way that ‘clarified’ his problem (MU16).

It was very different for **Debbie**. It was extremely difficult for her to ‘confront’ the real issues in herself because she was so caught up in her anger, blaming her husband (MU22) and overwhelmed by her own sense of rejection and shame (MU8). In her community, it is generally accepted that a woman has to do whatever it takes to keep her man. So she needed to be ‘contained’ or, to use her own word, “held” in therapy (MUs 5, 28), by the music and by God (MUs 4, 27, 35), before she could appropriately ‘confront’ the unresolved issues in herself in a sufficiently gentle and ‘reflective way’. Listening to music, which relaxed her (MUs 29, 33, 36), played a crucial role in enabling this.

In contrast, **Roger**, in the scientific field, is able to ‘confront’ problem areas (MU4) and ask critical questions about unresolved issues (MU3), as well as recognise tensions in a realistic and practical situation (MUs 9, 10), instead of just accepting commonly received assumptions (MU7). Working within the framework of the scientific model, facing issues that seemed completely overwhelming (MU6) he was nevertheless also able to ‘contain’ and ‘clarify’ these



complex cosmological issues in a ‘sufficiently reflective way’ to enable him to recognise that he: “needed some way of characterising this which didn’t depend on the symmetry, it had to be a *qualitative* (with emphasis) characterisation” (MU11). It is arguable that it was precisely this that prepared him and ‘opened’ the possibility for him to experience his fleeting insight of the “trapped surface” in a black hole; as well as to re-cognise, or perhaps to re-image or re-member, his insight as he recovered it later in the day (MUs 12, 14-18).

In a completely different field, **Tony**, in the process of constructing Cartoon 5, explored and ‘confronted’ different dimensions and perspectives of the issues around land (MUs 2-6) and juxtaposed that issue with other issues, events and priorities in terms of the Arms Deal (MUs 7-8). The result is that the raw material of his insight is ‘contained’ by this thoughtful process of conceptualising (MUs 15-17). He recognises that: “the process is the thing” (MU18). He also recognises that things often “pop up” when he is most relaxed, ‘contained’ and ‘reflective’: “in a bath ... lying in bed, or musing on things ... I do like to keep a pencil at the bedside just in case” (Appendix A).

In the light of these distinct and diverse experiences of the raw material for insight being adequately ‘confronted’ and ‘contained’ by the four research participants, so that the issue or problem can be ‘clarified in a sufficiently reflective way’, it is pertinent to review the literature on insight. Six perspectives are salient:

(1) None of the definitions of insight mention this requirement in the dynamic structure of the gestalt of insight. However Smith (1995, p. 232) helpfully distinguishes between *insight as an understanding*, which can be acquired in a variety of ways and which may emerge either gradually or suddenly, and the *insight experience* which he defines as “the sudden emergence of an idea into conscious awareness”. So the experience of insight is not just a step forward on the path to a solution; it is unexpected and abrupt and involves re-structuring or seeing the problem differently for a solution (see Section 2.2.3). However, since none of these constituent components are sufficient in themselves for the holistic experience of insight, it is interesting to note that Smith’s (1995, p. 232) definition of *insight as an understanding* is entirely compatible with this particular finding. In which case, it strongly suggests that there is a connection between the two reflected in this finding. A significant consequence of this is the way that it highlights and clarifies the relationship between the small shifts of awareness and the sudden experience of insight; the glimpses and hunches as part of understanding, and the unexpected

clarity and conviction of the holistic experience of insight. The small shifts of awareness are constituted by this third component on its own; the sudden experience of insight flows from this component as part of the whole structure, consisting of the ten constituent components, of the experience of insight. This appears to be true of **Roger's** experience: his 'understanding' was that he needed a *qualitative* characterisation (MU11); his 'insight' of the 'trapped surface' fulfilled that requirement perfectly (MU23). It is also evident in **Debbie's** experience: during the night of listening to music she experienced a number of 'understandings' (MUs 9-11, 14) and 'partial understandings' (MUs 12, 43), which culminated in the unexpected 'insight' that she wanted to risk seeking reconciliation with her husband (MU15). It will be necessary to return to this point later in Section **6.11.8**, on the significance of the quality of understanding in the experience of insight.

(2) The existential approach of phenomenological psychology to insight does not speak specifically about the need to 'confront' and 'contain' as a requirement for insight. But it does speak of insight as 'impact' and "letting life-world differences *be* in letting them touch us" (Fuller 1990, p. 178). This finding clarifies what is required to let them *be*. It is necessary to 'confront' the problems/issues at sufficient depth and to encounter the true significance of their *being*, rather than denying or dismissing them as insignificant. At the same time it is important to be able to 'contain' the 'raw material for insight' and the problematic issues rather than being overwhelmed by them so that the nature of their *being* 'can be clarified in a sufficiently reflective way'. The importance of this finding in clarifying the existential understanding of what it means to let life-world differences *be* as they touch us, is particularly vividly illustrated in **Debbie's** experience. There is considerable evidence that creativity tends to be associated with, or arise out of, a certain amount of psychopathology (e.g. Eysenk 1995, Jamison 1993, Ludwig 1995). Creative potential seems to require challenges or problematic experiences, which may, importantly, develop perseverance and maturity in the face of obstacles (Simonton 1994). There is evidence of personal growth for all the research participants through their struggles for insight, as well as through the results of their insights (see Section **6.11.12**).

(3) Cognitive psychology emphasises the need to 'confront' but is silent on the need to 'contain', probably because it is already so contained and limited to laboratory contexts, as opposed to what may be overwhelming problems in real-life situations. The creative approach clearly requires this finding and may well benefit from a more general application of this finding

in practice, than is reflected in the literature on creativity. The case-study approach of ‘great minds’ experiencing insight illustrates the significance of this finding. At least two years before his famous insight on the step of the bus, Poincaré “suspected that there ought to be certain generalisations of elliptical functions of a single complex variable ... but he did not know exactly what they were or whether these solutions ever existed” (Miller 1992, p. 398). But the evidence is that he was able to both ‘confront’ and ‘contain’ this unresolved issue in ‘a sufficiently reflective way’ so that it could be ‘clarified’ subsequently; in fact it occurred as a sudden unexpected insight on the step of the bus.

(4) The inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy to insight provides clear experiential evidence of the need for issues to be both ‘confronted’ and ‘contained’ appropriately for insight. The concept of the *container/contained*, and the vital emotion-laden relationship that it represents, is the way in which Bion (1962a,1962b) conceives of thinking. ‘Containment’ is necessary for frustration to be translated from the raw, sensory experience of infantile life, into mental content that carries some meaning. Yet it is important to recognise that it is frustration and pain that provide the impetus for thoughts to develop, hence the need for ‘confronting’. Todres (1990), as argued in Section 2.10.4.2, describes the concept of ‘confronting’ for self-insight, in terms of the need to thematise the quality of a problematic and significant self-other relationship, that was previously embedded in an un-clarified emotional existence. He describes the concept of ‘containing’, in terms of recognising a level of personal agency and responsibility in perpetuating the problem and then being able to articulate and actualise a more complex self-image/project. The value of this delineation of self-insight is clearly illustrated in **Debbie’s** experience, although Todres does not use the wording of ‘confronting’ and ‘containing’.

(5) Clearly dreams need to be taken seriously, and ‘confronted’ rather than dismissed, if they are to be explored both in terms of their visual imagery and feeling tone for their significance and meaning. At the same time, there may be nightmarish, frightening or threatening elements in a dream, that need to be ‘contained’ rather than ‘repressed’ so that their significance can be ‘clarified in a sufficiently reflective way’.

(6) The body-mind-spirit continuum approach of spirituality to insight involves the ability to ‘confront’ personal, existential and ultimate questions of meaning, significance, purpose and values; and at the same time to ‘contain’ the lack of definitive certainty: the ambiguities, anxieties and ambivalences that arise in such a quest. The significance of this is particularly

clear in **Debbie's** experience. Otto (1958) famously stressed the uncanniness and ambiguity of numinous experience in the phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, in which *mysterium* refers to a reality which is 'wholly other'; implicit in *tremendum* are the qualities of 'awfulness', 'overpoweringness' and 'urgency'; and *fascinans* refers to the fascination of "something that allures with a potent charm" (Otto 1958, p. 31). So numinous experience in spirituality needs to be adequately 'confronted' and 'contained' if the experience of insight is to be constructive rather than destructive of the personality (Casement & Tracy 2006). The importance of this is evident in **Desmond's** experience of "pressure" (MU14) which, as a categorical imperative, could evoke problems for a less mature person. It is also clear in **Debbie's** experience, which initially provoked considerable "fear and confusion", as revealed in the subject heading of her e-mail at 4 am (MU7).

So this third finding, specifying the qualitative parameters required for the experience of insight, completes the progressive description of the initial stages and preconditions for insight. It has been discovered to be highly significant, in very different ways, in the experience of all four research participants. Yet it is not explicitly stated in any of the approaches to insight, although it is clearly both implicit and significant in the phenomenological, creative, case-study, psychotherapeutic and spirituality approaches. So it is submitted that this finding serves a valuable purpose in formulating and expressing these necessary qualitative parameters of 'confronting' and 'containing' the raw material for insight unequivocally. The implications of this finding will be discussed further in Chapter 7.4 as part of the distinctive value of the findings of this research.

#### **6.4 Finding 4. The 'Impact': A Passive Experience**

**The experience of insight involves 'impact' which comes suddenly and unexpectedly. It is the influence of the life-world on the self: a passive experience.**

The previous three constituent components describe the pre-conditions necessary for the experience of insight. This and the next two constituent components (Sections 6.5,6.6) focus on the central dynamic core of the actual experience. They are like the three primary colours of the spectrum, red, green and blue, from which all other colours in the experience of insight can be

blended and are derived. The form, nature, strength and quality of the ‘impact’ in this constituent component vary greatly; it is very different for each of the research participants.

For **Desmond** the ‘impact’ came ‘suddenly and unexpectedly’, as a “bolt from the blue” (MU25): “it seemed like a pressure ... it doesn’t seem rational at all” (MUs 14, 15). He experienced this “pressure” as a force that presses steadily, pushes or urges. In response to the question of whether the sense of pressure built up gradually, he responds, “I think that it came almost instantaneously” (MU16). It made a significant ‘impact’ on him.

In contrast to Desmond’s single experience of ‘impact’ as a “pressure”, **Debbie** speaks of the “shocking” nature of her experience of these ‘impacts’ no less than ten times (MUs 3, 15, 32, 35, 36, 40), and of being “struck” six times (MUs 11, 12, 32, 34). She was “struck” and “greatly impacted” by poetic images (MUs 9, 20, 21), a blunt question (MU15), a book title (MUs 10, 32, 33), wedding vows (MUs 12, 43), her therapist’s bare feet (MUs 11, 34), suggested interpretations in therapy and a poem (MU14), but at that point she was not able to “see” or understand their significance (MUs 21, 22), despite these ‘sudden and unexpected’ experiences of the life-world ‘impacting’ on the self.

**Roger**’s experience was almost the polar opposite of Debbie’s repeated and powerful experiences of ‘impact’; he nearly missed the ‘impact’ altogether. It was so brief and subtle, it was subliminal, that he had no conscious memory of what had happened (MU14). He was left with an unusual general sense of “elation” that he could not account for, as if something good had happened (MU15). He also, at the same time, felt a “little bit disturbed”, which he regarded as paradoxical. He “couldn’t account for it” (MU16). Perhaps he was “disturbed” about not being able to remember it; at least it would have acted as a reminder to take his experience of subliminal ‘impact’ seriously, rather than discount what he could not “account for”.

**Tony**, in complete contrast to Roger’s non-verbal, subliminal ‘impact’, was struck by “a rich irony” of the new ANC government having to remove squatters because it was so reminiscent of what used to take place under the old apartheid regime: “So it obviously fixated my attention immediately” (MU2). While he was imagining appropriate visual symbols, images, ideas and metaphors for delivery (MU6) he was “struck” by the idea of “delivery vehicles”; it made an ‘impact’ on him (MU8).

At this point, it is fitting to reflect on this finding derived from the experiences of all four research participants, in the light of the approaches to insight developed in the literature review. Six points are worthy of mention:

(1) Almost all of the definitions of insight, mentioned in the literature review, do include the element of suddenness and unexpectedness (e.g. Coleman 2006, Duncker 1945, Guralnik 1984, Mayer 1995, Seifert et al. 1995, Siegler 2000, Smith 1995, Wertheimer 1959). Yet in every case that suddenness refers to the moment of ‘interpretation’ or realisation of the insight, which is the crucial and distinctive feature of the next component in this structure of the experience of insight. The ‘impact’ here in this research finding is prior to ‘interpretation’, although the time-scale may vary greatly as is the case in the experience of all four research participants.

(2) The recognition of the significance of the experience of ‘impact’ as ‘the influence of the life-world on the self’ is unique to the existential approach of phenomenology. The emphasis on the fact that it is a ‘passive experience’ is a finding of this particular research. As Heidegger (1971a, p. 7) put it: “something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us”. Merleau-Ponty (1973b, p. 137) expresses it even more precisely: “My perception is the impact of the world upon me”. This ‘impact’ is a felt sense of things. The ‘impact’ depends upon the degree of incongruity between the emerging significance of the life-world event and the person’s assumptions. This is illustrated particularly clearly in **Debbie’s** experience. She describes herself as “struck” on no less than six different occasions (Section 5.6.1). She experienced insight as ‘impact’ but was not able to see or understand their significance (MUs 22, 23). This is an example of the way in which faithful description can *open* up the experience further, rather than attempting to *close* it with an explanatory theory. Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995, p. 344) refer to this ‘impact’ in the subconscious network, as being “like the final shout that releases the avalanche” and link it to a detailed incubation model of creative insight involving three levels: conscious attention serial process, semiconscious filters and subconscious processing entities, with all three levels functioning synchronously (Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer 1995, pp. 341-342). There is undeniable value in such a formulation, but the danger is that the more accurately and comprehensively a given mechanism is developed, the more the distinctly human experience of insight is lost in abstractions, unless very great care is taken. Schooler’s (1995) metaphor of an explosion for insight and the value of distinguishing between



the event, the explanations and the experiences of that explosion is valuable, and certainly includes considerable ‘impact’.

(3) The creative approach of genius, dreams, design and invention to the experience of insight clearly supports this finding of ‘impact’ in insight. While many dreams require careful exploration of a variety of possible meanings, the sudden and unexpected ‘impact’ experience of Feldman’s insight into his dream in the shower (Section 2.6.4) is not uncommon. Smith, Ward and Finke (1995) and Ward, Smith and Vaid (1997) have provided evidence of the value of visual imagery, geometrical and imaginative thinking in the creative approach which is highly susceptible to sudden and unexpected insight. This is strikingly evident in **Roger’s** experience of his “trapped surface” (MUs 17-19).

(4) The case-study approach of great minds experiencing insight provides the most compelling evidence of sudden and unexpected ‘impact’. The simple fact that the precise moment, place or activity, such as stepping onto the bus (Poincaré in Section 2.8.1), the very spot on the road (Darwin in Section 2.8.2), and crossing the street **Roger** (MU14), at which the insight occurred is specifically mentioned, in the first-person description of experiences of insight, bears witness to such an ‘impact’. Another example is **Debbie** excitedly locating the exact position of a book on my bookshelves eighteen months after being struck by the title *All Truth is God’s Truth* (MU32). The significance of the experience of such a ‘moment of impact’ is highlighted in the technique used in films of dramatically slowing down the ‘moment’. This technique seems to be based on, even if in slightly exaggerated form, the human experience of such ‘moments’.

**Roger’s** experience of a ‘recovered insight’ as a result of tracing the first sense of excitement to the precise moment of crossing the road, and then staying with that feeling before experiencing the image of the “trapped surface”, is strong evidence of the bodily ‘impact’ and influence of the life-world on the self. It also reveals both the continuity and discontinuity between ‘impact’ and ‘interpreting’ which will be explored further in the next section.

(5) Impact is clearly a crucial factor in the inter-subjective approach of psychotherapeutic practice, where the analyst/therapist is trained to be particularly alert to the slightest flicker of change in the patient and may enquire about its significance. It is also highly salient in the approach of spirituality with the cardinal value of reverence for the Other, and awareness of the influence of the life-world on the self, grounded in such disciplines as prayer, mindfulness, meditation and breathing as an aid to living in the present moment. Yet the significance of



‘impact’ prior to ‘interpretation’ is not mentioned in most approaches to the experience of insight. The suddenness and unexpectedness mentioned in the definitions, characterising the gestalt restructuring of the problem, the approach of cognitive psychology and the representational approach of models, all refer to what happens in the “Aha!” moment of insight. No mention is made of a person being ‘struck’ by anything prior to that moment, despite the fact that it is such an obvious characteristic in the experience of all four research participants. This strange oversight is perhaps a result of focusing too exclusively on the mechanism of insight, rather than the person, together with the details of the structure of the experience and the significance of the meaning of the insight.

(6) A final comment about characterising this constituent component as ‘a passive experience’ is appropriate, because it could be argued that this is a ‘receptive’ experience. Against that it seems clear that such receptivity as is required is in fact described by the second finding: the pre-condition of a ‘disposition of openness’. The evidence seems to be that, despite that openness in **Desmond, Roger** and **Tony**, the ‘impact’ came suddenly, unexpectedly and was experienced passively without any particular receptive activity. **Desmond** describes it as a “bolt from the blue” (MU25). **Debbie** noticed these ‘impacts’ but did not understand them; the evidence seems to be that repeated ‘impacts’ as a passive experience were required before she could effectively ‘interpret’ them. **Roger** was hardly aware of the ‘impact’ and forgot it (MU27), while **Tony** is passively “fixated” by the ‘impact’ (MU2).

So the evidence is unambiguous: ‘impact’ is a passive experience in the sense of the person ‘not actively taking part’ since the word comes ultimately from the Latin *pati*, ‘to suffer’. However, it does need to be conceded that this nuance of the word ‘passive’ is different from the more traditional sense of ‘expressing action done to the subject’ or of ‘being influenced by something external’. It’s significant difference is seen in the next constituent component of the core dynamic of the experience of insight, which is a reflexive experience. The significance of the ‘moment of impact’ is discussed further in Chapter 7.5 as one of the distinctive values of the findings of this research.

## 6.5 Finding 5. The ‘Interpretation’: A Reflexive Experience

**The experience of insight requires ‘interpretation’ or empathetic understanding of the ‘impact’, which may take time but becomes conscious suddenly. It is the influence of the self on the life-world: a reflexive experience.**

This fifth finding embraces a significant variety of ‘interpretations’ of the ‘impact(s)’ by the research participants; not just differences of content but differences of kind or character, considerable differences in terms of time required, as well as different modes of understanding. Yet in each case this variety clearly illustrates ‘the influence of the self on the life-world’ and the fact that this is ‘a reflexive experience’.

**Desmond** reflects: “It did seem that God was saying, or this particular pressure said, ‘write’” (MU16). The mood of this component is essentially a reflexive one, expressed particularly in the word “seem” (see also MUs 14, 19, 22, 26). This occurred while he was prayerful (MU25). It points to an intuitive and imaginative process of allowing emerging meanings to *be*. Yet it not only occurred extremely rapidly, it also had the character of a categorical imperative: “I think that it came almost instantaneously ... its effect on me was that ‘you have to do this’” (MU16). His interpretation was that this particular letter must be written by himself, to this particular politician, at this particular time. This could be described as an ‘empathic understanding’. It was certainly the influence of the self/Self on the life-world: a reflexive experience.

**Debbie’s** experience was very different. She had been “shocked” and “struck” (MUs 11, 12, 32, 34) by things ‘impacting’ her over a number of months, but they came to be interpreted over a period of some five to six hours one night, as she was listening to music. She was sustained and relaxed by it as well as interacting with it (MU33). Under the calming influence of the music, she was able to let what “impacted” her *be*; instead of trying to fight it, control it, or repress it. At the same time, she was able to entertain the emerging meanings that she was “interpreting” and let them *be*; instead of trying to control them (MUs 23, 33, 34). She enumerated and described her cumulative ‘interpretation’ that night in an e-mail at 4.19 a.m. It “*was* [strongly emphasised] a big time turning point” (MU37), but she regarded it as occurring “slowly, just gradually” during that night (MU33). So this may well illustrate a combination of a process of understanding as defined in component (see Section 6.3) as well as insight in terms of the three

constituent components at the dynamic core of the experience of insight (see Sections **6.4,6.5,6.6**), in terms of interpretations or empathic understandings of the ‘impacts’.

**Roger’s** experience of ‘interpretation’ was fundamentally different in kind, not just content, because it was re-membered bodily, and is in some ways the most remarkable finding in this component. He says “as I stayed with that feeling I managed to bring to mind ... the thought that had occurred to me while crossing the street about how to characterise this collapse in a general way” (MU17). His ‘interpretation’ of his recovered insight reveals firstly, the value of his recognition that he required “a *qualitative* [with emphasis] characterisation” (MU11) which may have played a part in enabling him to re-member his subliminal experience. Secondly, it shows the power of the emergent quality of the gestalt of insight. Thirdly, it reveals that ‘interpretation’ is insight into what is required, what is of value, and wholes of meaning. Fourthly, his ‘interpretation’ shows the value of some aesthetic quality for the insight to “ring true” in consciousness (MU27). Finally, it gives significance to the theatre of the body; the importance of the feeling of what happens, even in what could be argued as the most sophisticated ‘intellectual’ experience of insight of the four participants. The fragile, vulnerable and precarious nature of the process of re-membering his feelings is revealed by his wondering “what would have happened if some unimportant *other* elating experience had happened to me during that day” (MU23); yet this was the “key” to a firmly established, cogent and rigorous scientific proof. It will be valuable later later to draw on neurobiological research underpinning these findings (see Section **7.17**).

**Tony’s** experience of ‘interpretation’ was a much more ordinary and familiar one. After the ‘impact’ of having his attention alerted by an irony (MU2) and being “struck” by an appropriate vehicle for the Arms deal, he had a flood of ‘interpretations’ in the form of associations, reflections, meanings and allusions, that came to mind (MU8). Essentially his creative process of ‘interpretation’ was a reflexive experience. ‘Interpretation’ for him was insight into what was required, what was of value, and wholes of meaning for his “Cartoon **5**”.

It is appropriate at this point to reflect on these very different experiences of the research participants, illustrating this particular constituent component of insight in the light of the nine approaches to insight developed in the literature review. Six points are particularly worth commenting on:

(1) This finding is an expression of the existential approach exemplified by Fuller (1990) but, in the light of **Debbie's** experience, Fuller's (1990, p. 172) assertion that 'impact' and 'interpreting' are "not two separate behaviours but rather two ways of considering the same psychological reality", has to be questioned. The evidence of this research points to the conclusion that they are certainly two inter-related constituent components of the core experience of insight, but they may become conscious at very different times. Perhaps the word "continuously" would express Fuller's intention more precisely than the word "simultaneously". **Roger's** experience, although different (Section 5.8.2), also raises the same question.

(2) **Roger's** detailed description of his personal experience is much richer and more revealing than any of the work of the cognitive psychologists who provide evidence that "high feelings of warmth predict failure to solve un-cued insight problems, but do not predict failure on un-cued non-insight problems" (Davidson 1995, p. 145) indicating that 'interpretation' in insight cannot be predicted before it occurs. Sternberg and Lubart (1995, pp. 556-557) acknowledge that "exclusive reliance on cognitive models may rule out one of the most important factors for creative insight, which is not an ability so much as an *attitude towards life*" (italics added). The significance of this is clearly evidenced in the experience of all four research participants.

**Desmond** is totally committed to justice and peace in ending apartheid (MUs 3-6, 11). **Debbie** is determined to find a solution to her problem with which she can live. **Roger** confesses to a "life-long sense of wonder towards the mystery and beauty of being" (MU14). **Tony** acknowledges that a cartoonist's "*attitude to things is pretty important*" (MU18). He felt he was at his best in the apartheid era: "because I felt that I was very much more passionate about issues at stake then" (Appendix A). It is this "*attitude towards life*" that justifies the word 'empathic' in this finding.

(3) Insight involving 'interpretation' is a significant and integral aspect of the creative approach in which 'the influence of the self on the life-world' is particularly clear. In the 'interpretation' of dreams it is not just a question of symbolic interpretation, but 'empathic understanding' of the feeling tone on the 'impact' of the dream. In design and invention, whether generated by an idea, or visualised in the mind in three dimensions, or expressed on paper in two dimensions, some 'interpretation' and transformation is required if the creative potential is to be realised in another medium in the execution of the insight.

(4) The case-study approach of great minds experiencing insight, particularly as illustrated in the experiences of Poincaré, also strongly supports each phrase of this research finding. On one occasion, which is remarkably similar to **Roger's** experience, Poincaré's "mind was preoccupied with very different matters. One day as I was crossing the street the solution of the difficulty which had brought me to a standstill came to me all at once" (Poincaré 1952, p. 54). His reflections also closely resemble **Roger's** 'key' (MUs 18, 21) to unlocking other calculations. It is submitted that this particular finding captures these experiences more adequately than any other approach.

(5) In the inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy, there is a difference between so-called insight as interpreting psychoanalytic theory and insight as interpreting analytic intuition. This difference has been reflected upon in terms of Hanna's experience in the film of "The English Patient" in Section 2.10.6. In a therapeutic relationship, both complementary and invitational forms are valuable. Interpreting psychoanalytic theory is in essence an 'understanding' as defined by Smith (1995, p. 232) and reflected in Section 6.3 on its own, as opposed to this finding (Section 6.5) as a constituent component of the core experience of true 'insight' or analytic intuition.

(6) Finally, it is submitted that **Desmond's** experience of insight, and, to a lesser extent, **Debbie's** would not be adequately understood without the body-mind-spirit approach of spirituality. It would be only too easy, in terms of the imagery of van Wyk Louw's poem (1962, p. 12) to find circles everywhere believing that the sphere is comprehended (see Section 2.12.9). This is not based solely on whether or not the research participant names God as part of their experience, as is the case with **Desmond** and **Debbie**, because spirituality has not been defined in those terms, but has been construed as a person's sense of meaning, values and life purpose (Daaleman & Van de Creek 2000) or in one word: *ubuntu*. It is also because this finding is expressed in terms of 'interpretation' and 'the influence of the self on the life-world', so it clearly applies to **Roger** with his commitment to *The Road to Reality* (2004) and "life-long sense of wonder towards the mystery and beauty of being" (MU41), and also to **Tony** with his passionate commitment to justice (MUs 2-4) and integrity of his artistic expression (Appendix A).

Perhaps it is true that life is not so much measured by the breaths that one takes, but by the ‘moments’ that take your breath away. The significance of the ‘moment of interpreting’ is discussed further in Chapter 7.6 as one of the distinctive values of the findings of this research.

## 6.6 Finding 6. The “Aha!” Experience

**The experience of the ‘moment of insight’ releases the tension of enquiry in the “Aha!” experience and motivates, enables and empowers action. It is key to a self-actualising process: an active experience.**

This is the third constituent component that completes the dynamic core of the experience of insight. Particular attention will be given to the variety of ways, in the experience of the research participants, in which this component is ‘key to a self-actualising process’. As previously, the discussion of this research finding begins with the evidence on which it is based in the experience of the four research participants, before it is broadened to consider the support and challenges to this finding from the nine other approaches to the experience of insight.

Sometimes the ‘tension of enquiry’ is released in slightly eccentric or somewhat inappropriate ways, as in Archimedes legendary ‘streaking’ from the baths. Probably there is something of this in **Desmond’s** flaw in etiquette. In his eagerness and excitement he gave his letter to a journalist, which led to its publication before the Prime Minister had had time to respond, despite having “some misgivings because I knew the courtesies required” (MU20). The evidence that the experience of insight motivates, enables and empowers action is clear in his sense of a categorical imperative: “its effect on me was that ‘you have to do this’” (MU16). This is particularly striking in view of the fact that he repeatedly raises the epistemological question of “how do you know this thing is for real ... and not a figment of your imagination ... how do you know?”(MU30). He insists that he is usually *not* sure whether an idea is a prompting from God or simply a distracting thought (MU26). It is significant that his experience of insight not only motivated him at a verbal level, but so inspired and empowered him at every level of his being – ‘body, mind and spirit’ – that he could express it in a very interesting way: “One of the odd things, actually ... one of the things that is extraordinary about this letter is that it wrote itself ... I didn’t have to agonise about the words ... they just seemed to come” (MU22). So his

experience fully justifies the finding that the experience of insight is ‘key to a self-actualising process’. This is clear confirmatory evidence of the integrity and validity of his insight to write this particular letter to this particular politician at this particular time. The significance of this is highlighted by his acknowledgment that “it may very well have been the first most overt political action that one had done” (MU24).

**Debbie’s** very different experience over a long period of several months came to a head one night listening to music. She refers to “Wow!” moments five times (in MUs 32, 36, 43) indicating her excitement or amazement. It is her version of the “Aha!” experience. Her change in attitude towards her husband was not in any way anticipated. She insists: “At no one time ... at no one time ... at no one time ... did I actually think around the lines of the e-mail to you, until that morning until I sat down and actually did it” (MU23). Insight is evidenced as ‘releasing the tension’ of her problematic situation and internal conflict by seeing a whole series of things, especially things in herself (as listed in an e-mail), in a new light. The clarity of insights arrived at in this way enabled her to take concrete decisions and actions in the life-world. It was the ‘key to a self-actualising process’ that became embodied; it was not just an abstract concept, which would not have enabled her to overcome her natural anxieties as well as her understandable fears (MUs 8, 15, 20, 29). She says: “I’m able to connect with my Self at my feelings level ... not on a superficial level ... not at a level where one normally relates from ... at a deeper level of myself” (MU16). She regards the night listening to music as: ‘key to a self-actualising process’: “That was [strongly emphasised] a big-time turning point ... that was. It was almost like ... [pause] ... a flower finally getting out of its tight little bud form ... it was the turning point, it was what I really wanted, what I truly, truly felt ... it was actually overcoming the fear, and being brave enough to actually stand and make that statement, and say ‘I will do this’” (MU37). Contrary to her normal self-protective way-of-being-in-the-world she is encouraged by the authenticity of her experience of insight to put it into practice, “because it is so real it helps you to risk it” (MU40). This is insight as ‘key to a self-actualising process; an active experience’.

It seems likely that **Roger** had a proleptic sense of his “Aha!” experience in his feeling of elation before he knew exactly what the idea/image/insight was; he reflects that he must have realised that it was a good idea, which solved the problem (MUs 24, 33). Perhaps the sense of being a little bit disturbed (MU16) was calling his attention to the need to recover this “lingering



impression” and make his experience of insight conscious. So he reviewed his day and recollects: “I finally came to the occasion of crossing the street and as I stayed with that feeling, I managed to bring to mind what that was” (MU17): “the trapped surface was the *key* [emphasised] idea” (MU23). As the key idea, it unlocked and enabled other aspects to emerge and fit together in **Roger**’s developing understanding: “I had a certain amount of expertise internally which I’d developed for other reasons ... it wasn’t that I could develop all this technique at that point to prove the thing” (MU21). He concludes “... but the key thing was that you have a trapped surface, and without something like that you can’t prove anything” (MU30). So it was ‘key to a self-actualising process; an active experience’.

**Tony** reflects that “sometimes you are lucky and something comes to you in a flash like that. You know that’s a happy inspiration. But most of these cartoons come as a result of quite a long process of associations, and then it’s more a sense of relief when it finally comes together” (MU8). So what he calls a “happy inspiration” releases the tension of enquiry and **Tony** is motivated as he begins the process of expressing his developing insight in cartoon-form (see Section 4.5). He recognises that it triggers further associations, fresh energy, further allusions and ideas (MUs 9-15). As it developed he “took quite a lot of *delight* in using those comic devices of speed ... lines ... and dust and what have you. The car suspended ... flying over the surface of the road like that ...” (MU15). He is motivated, delighted and empowered. It is ‘an *active* experience’. It is also a ‘self-actualising process’ in which, as he expresses it, “your general attitude to things is pretty important” (MU18).

So this finding, which completes the dynamic core of the experience of insight, is clearly evident in the experience of all four research participants. It is now relevant to reflect on this evidence in the light of the approaches developed in the literature review. Six reflections are particularly pertinent:

(1) The value of the existential approach of phenomenology is particularly clear in this finding in three respects. Firstly, it enables and values the interrogation of the experience of insight in a way that reveals not only that particular problems, unresolved issues and questions are resolved, but that the quality of our human existence is increased by insight, which is symbolically expressed in the “Aha!” experience. Secondly, it also has the capacity to do justice to the structural dynamic of the gestalt. ‘Seeing’ this is precisely what motivates, enables and empowers action; it is what creates the crucial dynamic of a ‘self-actualising process’. Thirdly,

it also emphasises the importance of the fact that the significance of our lives are affirmed in our choices and in risking decisive action. This is evident in the experience of all the research participants, but is perhaps particularly clear in **Debbie's** insight to risk seeking reconciliation with her husband. She describes the new quality of her life as “like a flower finally getting out of its tight little bud form” (MU37), an intriguing referenced to her previous self-protective mode, and a vivid organic picture of her personal ‘self-actualising process’.

(2) The puzzle-problem approach of cognitive psychology provides empirical evidence, cited in Davidson (1995), that correctly solved insight problems show an abrupt and dramatic increase in warmth ratings from 1-10 when a solution was reached, confirming the “Aha!” experience. However, imagine the impossible for a moment, that these warmth ratings could be applied to **Roger's** experience of insight. The evidence might well have been most confusing in detecting the significance of his elated feelings; the conclusion could well have been that with an incremental increase of 1-5 he was solving a routine, *non-insight* problem. This is not intended as a flippant dismissal of cognitive psychological research, but as a gentle reminder of its limitations.

(3) In the approach of great minds and dedicated lives, Gruber (1995, p. 399) demonstrates that “insights, whether they are small steps or great leaps, are part of a coherent life”, expressing a person’s “organisation of affect and purpose as well as his or her organisation of knowledge”. This aspect of the ‘self-actualising process’ for the research participants is developed further in Chapter 7.7. The ongoing, focussed energy which Darwin exhibited, is particularly evident in the minds and dedicated lives of **Roger** and **Desmond**, who are in their seventies, and the significance of the experience of insight in the unfolding context of their lives. This is considered in Chapter 7, Sections 11 and 12.

(4) It is widely recognised that in daily life metaphors and analogies are an important source of knowledge and understanding, as illustrated particularly in the experiences of **Debbie** and **Tony**, which may induce conceptual change as a result of an experience of insight. This is also reflected in the recognition of out-of-focus pictures or patterns of dots, as in ‘The Face in the Snow’ (Section 2.9.3 Figure11). It is also reflected in the interpretation of dreams; as Feldman (1989, p. 281) put it: “My insight in the shower transformed a dream image into a tool to work with”.

(5) The inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy to insight is particularly clear about the significance of the transformative power of insight. “Since Freud’s time, insight has been perceived as the cornerstone of the psychoanalytic theory of structural change” (Crits-Christoph et al. 1993, p. 408) and insightful interpretation has been described as the “supreme agent in the hierarchy of therapeutic principles” (Bibring 1954, p. 763). In addition, the most important finding in the study of Kivlighan et al. (2000) was the relationship between client insight and symptom reduction. This is a very clear indication of the significance and therapeutic power of insight in psychotherapy, and is entirely consistent with the finding that ‘the experience of insight motivates, enables and empowers action which is key to a self-actualising process’. This is particularly clear in **Debbie’s** experience, who says of her insight: “because it is so real, it helps you to risk [putting the insight into action]” (MU40). Moreover, it is the experience of almost every analytically orientated psychotherapist that clients experiencing self-insight through dreams find that they are not only motivated by them, but also find that such insights are ‘key to a self-actualising process’. Since insight in the therapeutic approach involves a conscious awareness of wishes, defences and compromises that have interacted to produce emotional conflict, the finding that insight results in releasing the tension of enquiry, even at an unconscious level, is also salient.

(6) The body-mind-spirit continuum approach of spirituality to this component of the experience of insight is particularly pertinent in this context of the experience of insight motivating, enabling and empowering action because it is especially sensed in the energy of the body and the spirit, sometimes prior to the conscious mind. This is not just true of **Desmond’s** experience, which may be described as a ‘spiritual’ experience, but it is also true and is illustrated in **Roger’s** experience, which may be described as a ‘scientific’ experience of insight. Both **Desmond’s** and **Roger’s** experience clearly reveals that insight may be experienced in the energy of the body, or the awareness of the spirit, before becoming conscious in the mind. Certainly, as **Roger** remarks: “rigorous argument is usually the *last* [emphasised] step!” (MU26).

This continuum approach, like the experience of insight itself, is non-dualistic and involves the call and invitation to live in accordance with the person’s true self or spirit; as opposed to a false self (*à la* Winnicott 1965). This is particularly significant in the context of a person’s values and making difficult decisions in life such as **Debbie** was faced with in relation to her husband’s unfaithfulness. Four factors in her experience of insight motivated, enabled and empowered her

to risk putting her insight into action. First, the clarity, authenticity and aesthetic quality of experiences of insight challenged and motivated her to risk putting her insight into action, empowering her to overcome her fears, rather than denying them: “because it is so real it helps you to risk it” (MU40). Secondly, she had a strong sense of synchronicity and experience of transcendence over the timing of hearing about the death of her husband’s dad (MU35). This was beyond her control, so it dramatically enhanced the experience and confirmed the truth and significance of her insight as well as challenging her to live it out. Thirdly, she recognises her fear that if she did not act on her insight, she might lose her husband; this increased her motivation (MU42). Her Christian faith permeates her whole process of facing her fears and frequently helps (MUs 4, 24, 26), but on other occasions her slightly idealistic interpretations of her faith, combined with her high expectations of herself, hinders the process (MU19). Finally, she had two complementary luminous images: one was the log of wood being burned and turned into fire (MUs 38, 41), depicting painful experiences relating to the influence of the life-world on the self. The other was the flower “getting out of its tight little bud form” (MUs 37, 39), describing the delightful blossoming and expression of the self or spirit; the influence of the Self on the life-world. Taken together, these four factors describe in considerable detail the nature and quality of her experience of insight as a ‘self-actualising process’.

The significance of insight as ‘key to a self-actualising process’ is discussed further in Chapter 7.7 as one of the distinctive values of the findings of this research.

This chapter began with an examination of the research findings comprising the first three constituent components (Sections 6.1, 6.2, 6.3) of the pre-conditions necessary for the experience of insight. At this point, the investigation of the three constituent components (Sections 6.4, 6.5, 6.6) of the dynamic core of the experience of insight is complete. The focus of attention now shifts to the four constituent components (Sections 6.7, 6.8, 6.9, 6.10) characteristic of the nature of the insight that is experienced.

## 6.7 Finding 7. The Changed Perspective

**The experience of insight involves transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things.**

This research finding appears on the face of it to be obvious, a matter of common sense and therefore perhaps hardly worth mentioning; but such a dismissive judgment runs the risk of overlooking the significance of the *fundamental* quality and character of this constituent component of the experience of insight: it is both basic and central as the following detailed evidence reveals.

**Desmond** is aware that, from the present perspective, his “meaningful signs required for peaceful change” seem “piffling”, whereas “at the time they seemed to be very radical” (MU28). He also says “the trouble with these intuitions or insights is that it looks as if you are arrogant and presumptuous ... yes ... but the trouble is that I knew I was not my own master. At least I [emphasising the “I”] believed that! [laughing]” (MU29). So his humour, as well as his insight about diffusing the impending crisis, brought about by the dominant ideology of apartheid, are evidence of ‘transcending the usual way of seeing things’. It is noteworthy that he says: “I think that I was not peculiar at the time at being deeply concerned and very apprehensive ... aware of how people were feeling about the ‘system’” (MU3). This finding does not require that insight is a unique experience, although it may be so in the great discoveries, but that ‘insight involves transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things’. His humour (MUs 17, 29) involves insight highlighting opposites, tensions and conflicting views in such a way as to see them in a new relationship to each other, which helps resolve tensions, expose pomposity and transcend set thought-patterns and the ‘dominant way of seeing things’.

**Debbie’s** way-of-being-in-the-world, as a result of discovering her husband’s long-term unfaithfulness, was predominantly marked by hurt, anger, fear and a desire to be in control in order to protect herself (MU3); this ‘dominant way of seeing things’ was radically challenged and transcended by her insight (MU37). As a result, she says that “now I have more insight, now I can be more vulnerable about it and see my part in it all. My controlling ... and the effect on Mark of being so ‘proper’” (MU43).

**Roger** is particularly clear that his “whole line or way of thinking of this kind of problem was not the way other people were thinking about it” (MU24). He explains that most of the “people who were working on these astrophysical problems didn’t even know the kind of topological arguments that I had some familiarity with, partly because I had a pure mathematical background, partly I just like to think geometrically; this is just the way I tend to think and most people didn’t. You see, most people would work out the equations and try and solve them *explicitly* [with emphasis], somehow, and that’s just not the way to do this problem” (MU29). As previously observed, there is an intriguing outward representation here of what is going on inwardly in **Roger’s** mind: he is cutting across the flow of traffic as he crosses the road, just as his thought processes are cutting across the flow of conventional thinking.

**Tony**, after looking for an issue about which he feels passionately, seeks to find a new angle or different perspective on the subject through humour, irony, lampooning or juxtaposing it with another issue. The whole value and effectiveness of a cartoon depends upon the expression of an insight that, to some extent, ‘transcends the usual or dominant way of seeing things’.

In the light of the evidence for this finding, discovered in the experience of all four research participants, it is appropriate to re-examine the approaches to insight developed in the literature review. Five aspects are noteworthy:

(1) The definitions of insight include “seeing and understanding the inner nature of things clearly” (Guralnik 1984). This is the core of many definitions of insight; but, as there is nothing about ‘transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things’, this finding in this respect, goes beyond the normal definitions. Insight problems in gestalt psychology and cognitive psychology, all gain their character and potency as problems precisely because ‘the usual and dominant way of seeing things’ does not lead to their solution. That is precisely why strategies for solving the problems include such terms as ‘removing mental blocks’ and ‘restructuring’ the givens of a problem or ‘finding a problem analogue’. The fact that most cognitive psychologists reject the *business-as-usual* perspective and prefer the *prepared-mind* perspective (Section 2.5.1) implicitly indicates that insight involves ‘transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things’. Gick and Lockhart (1995) draw attention to the two aspects of surprise and suddenness in the “Aha!” experience of insight and argue that the extent of the surprise will depend on the degree of incongruity between the original representation(s) and the representation that solves the problem. So, for example, a “joke sets up an expectation that does not fit with what is

generated by the punch line, and humour is found in the resolution of the incongruity” (Gick & Lockhart 1995, p. 203). So, often there is not only the satisfaction of having solved the problem, or riddle, but also the sense of having transcended the power of dominance, the tyranny of the phenomenon of the automatic. This is clear confirmation, from several different approaches, of this finding.

(2) In the phenomenological approach, ‘interpreting’ involves liberating possibilities of significance, understanding involves ‘venturing meaning’ and discovering involves whether it ‘rings true’. This is precisely what **Debbie** was involved in during her night of listening to music. There is a creative freedom and openness in such existential insight, which ‘transcends the usual or dominant way of seeing things’. In the approach of creativity, a genius is by definition someone whose outstanding talent, exceptional intellectual ability or creative achievements ‘transcend the usual’. Dreams clearly transcend the usual conscious and ‘dominant way of seeing things’. Reference has been made to the reverie or dreamlike state of Kekulé (Section 2.5.3) and Poincaré (Section 2.8.2) and the role this played in their experiences of insight. It is possible that **Roger**, who was “vaguely thinking” (MU13) about the issue of singularity and describes it as “buzzing around in the back of my head” (MU18), was close to a reverie or day-dream like state as he crossed the road. Dreams often have a different logic and usually require some interpretation as in the case of Feldman’s dream (Section 2.6.2). Design and invention owe their significance precisely to their ability to ‘transcend the usual way of seeing and doing things’. Simonton (1999a & 2000) has adduced evidence that creative people are disposed to be independent, unconventional, and are likely to have wide interests, flexibility and boldness in risk-taking. That is certainly true of both **Desmond** and **Tony**; their passionate involvement in issues of justice emphasises those qualities.

(3) In the case study approach of great minds, paradigmatic shifts in thinking are the most obvious and dramatic examples of the result of insight confirming this finding. One hundred and fifty years after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, it is easy to underestimate the personal struggles, the relational difficulties, the religious attacks and the professional disputes involved for Darwin in challenging the dominant view of creation and the origin of man. Reflecting on Darwin’s experience of insight, Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995, p. 344) conclude that “the development of the evolutionary paradigm was the result of a lifetime spent elaborating the implications of an insight that was itself a result of a protracted series of partial



understandings”. There are some parallels here with **Desmond’s** experience of insight resulting in writing to the Prime Minister. In taking a strong public stand against the dominant ideology of racism he suffered extraordinary attacks, humiliations and ‘dirty tricks’ by the apartheid regime; even now he continues to be criticised by the new government by challenging reverse racism in South Africa and in Zimbabwe, by Mugabe for example. It is the exceptional human being, such as **Roger** and **Desmond**, who throughout his or her life retains a hunger, a humility, a curiosity, a passion, a sense of wonder and humour, which transcends the dominant way of seeing things.

(4) In the inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy, the little insights in the course of therapy, the gradual shifts in understanding and the struggle of gaining an increased sense of meaning, testify to the time and energy required to ‘transcend the usual or dominant way of seeing things’.

**Debbie’s** experience illustrates this vividly. Analytical intuition has been shown to be faster, more accurate and more sophisticated than analytical thinking (Hammond, Hamm, Grassia & Pearson 1989). Reber (1989) deduced that knowledge acquired and held implicitly is always more complex than can be explicated, so verbalisations appear to lag well behind the actual depth of our intuitive understanding. Taken together, these conclusions support the finding that insight transcends not only *what* is usually seen, but also *how* it is usually seen. Intuitive insight is, as Jung (1971 p. 454) put it, “not *contrary* to reason but beyond reason”, as **Desmond’s** experience testifies. Both Bion with his ‘binocular vision’ and Jung with his ‘transcendent function’ were aware of the need for correlation between conscious and unconscious data in order to arrive at analytic insight.

(5) Finally, the evidence of the body-mind-spirit continuum approach of spirituality is considered. Just as Darwin transcended the usual or dominant view of creation in *The Origin of Species* (1859), so de Chardin transcended the usual and dominant view of evolution in his *Phenomenon of Man* (1959), as argued in Section 2.11.1. His insight, a synthesis of evolutionary science and spirituality, so transcended the dominant view that it was not even accepted initially by the Roman Catholic Church of which de Chardin was a priest of the Jesuit Order; his work was published posthumously.

This finding is also confirmed by the crucial insight of *ubuntu* in African spirituality, so movingly articulated by Cynthia Ngewu, and powerfully argued by Krog (2008a) as the single, crucial and foundational insight underlying all three of the innovations of the TRC process (Section 2.11.6.4). This is contrary to the predominantly *individualistic* view of the Western

world. The TRC was not only chaired by **Desmond**, but was also movingly epitomised on television by his weeping for victims, and even on occasion for the perpetrators, as an expression of *ubuntu*.

In conclusion, clearly there is an essential quality of insight which transcends the usual or dominant way of seeing things. This is not only evident in the experience of each one of the research participants, and confirmed in the approaches of creativity, case-study of great minds, psychotherapy and spirituality; the essential truth of this finding is not questioned by any of the approaches to insight, even when its essential significance and fundamental quality is not fully appreciated.

## **6.8 Finding 8. The Self-Authenticating Experience**

**The experience of insight is self-authenticating, the result of insight is tested in the public realm and is historically validated or rejected.**

As with the previous research finding, this finding may, at first glance, appear to be so obvious as to be hardly worth listing. Yet the value of this descriptive approach of existential phenomenology, to the very different experiences of all four research participants, is that it reveals a wealth of detail and subtle nuances of meaning in seeking to understand the variety of ways in which insight is self-authenticating.

**Desmond** acknowledges that he is usually not sure whether an idea is a prompting from God or simply a distracting thought (MU26). By contrast, on this occasion, “there didn’t seem to be any question of doubting. It was as certain as anything” (MU26). In fact he experienced it as a categorical imperative, “Its effect on me was that ‘you have to do this’” (MU16). The reality of this existential experience of insight was ‘self-authenticating’: “once it came, then it was there ... there wasn’t a matter of any self-doubt” (MU19). In addition, the aesthetic quality of this spiritual experience had a powerful self-authenticating effect, for he says: “one of the things that is extraordinary about this letter is that it wrote itself ... I didn’t have to agonise about the words ... they just seemed to come” (MU22). This evidence of ‘the experience of insight as self-authenticating’ is particularly significant in the light of his self-awareness expressed in “it is

horribly presumptuous isn't it?" (MU18) and his repeated awareness of the problems and questions related to epistemology, validity, rationality and authenticity (MUs 15, 18, 30, 31, 32). Whether or not others judged his actions as divinely inspired was not the primary issue for Desmond. The critical and decisive factor was the reality and existential quality of the experience (MU19) and his obedience to God: "I couldn't be disobedient to what seemed to me to be God saying 'this is what you are to do'" (MU17). But he is understandably insulted by the assumption that Black people are intellectually incapable of writing such a letter and so having it dismissed by the Prime Minister as political propaganda emanating from the official White opposition (MU21). In his letter to the Prime Minister, Desmond expressed his insight as a "growing nightmarish fear that unless something drastic is done very soon then bloodshed and violence are going to happen in South Africa almost inevitably" (Section 5.3.3). This has a luminosity and a prophetic quality about it in the light of the Soweto Uprising only five weeks later (MU32), and the fact that in the ten months following June 16<sup>th</sup> at least 660 people were killed, most of them under 24 years old. Sadly it was indeed 'historically validated'.

**Debbie** says of her experience of insight, "God's timing was absolutely perfect" (MU35), because two hours after sending the e-mail detailing her insights Mark phoned to say his dad had died. Debbie is very clear that she would never have sent the e-mail to me if Mark had phoned first, out of fear of taking advantage of his vulnerability, nor would she have trusted or acted on her insights, but would have continued her 'false self' (MU35). So Debbie's central experience of insight, that she really wanted to work for reconciliation with Mark, was self-authenticating and dramatically enhanced and practically empowered by this aesthetic experience of synchronicity and transcendence. Debbie, when asked about her reconciliation with Mark, inviting him back home and renewing their marriage vows before a full congregation in church, said two years later: "It's one of the most sane things I did. Actually listening to (her insight) and daring to do that" (MU37).

**Roger's** experience of insight is not only verified by the mathematical proof; the experience and the process also have a 'self-authenticating' quality. He recognises that he must have realised that this was a good idea, even before he knew what the idea was (MU33). So the sense of insight as 'self-authenticating' not only follows, but appears to be so integral to the whole experience of insight, that it may even proceed the conscious "Aha!" experience of insight, when its full value is recognised. This is a significant extension of the usual understanding of this

constituent component of insight and one that is not likely to be established in a laboratory setting, and is not, as far as I am aware, previously reflected in the literature, but it clearly emerges here in real life experience. He also supposes that if the idea/image<sup>58</sup> of the ‘trapped surface’ “had not had some aesthetic quality to it, it would not have reached any appreciably permanent level of consciousness at all” (MU27). He reflects: “A beautiful idea has a much greater chance of being a correct idea than an ugly one. At least that has been my experience” (MU25). He also thinks, “it is consciousness that is the arbiter” and even a sudden and powerful flash of insight “would be quickly rejected and forgotten if it did not ‘ring true’” (MU26). He likes “to use the word ‘understanding’ as encapsulating what you can do with conscious thought, and what a computer can’t do ... it doesn’t understand because it’s not conscious” (MU40). Roger’s scientific insight has to be verified by proof and then tested by the scientific community and so validated or refined. It did not take him long to form the outline of a proof of his insight; “although it was a few months before the proof was formulated in a completely rigorous way” (MU20).

**Tony** reflects that, in contrast to the slow delivery of Land, “it’s all systems go for Arms delivery, and I took quite a lot of delight in using those comic devices of speed ... lines ... and dust and what have you. The car suspended ... flying over the surfaces of the road like that” (MU10). His aesthetic sense of delight is evidence of the ‘self-authenticating’ quality of his experience of insight as he gives expression to it in the cartoon. Tony’s public record as a cartoonist with the *Cape Times* was particularly tested and historically appreciated and validated during the dark apartheid years, when there were many emergency regulations restricting the taking of photographs of security forces, reporting on names of detainees and so forth. In particular he found parody a very effective form of ridicule and criticism, precisely because “it’s actually very difficult to prove the allusions that you are making in a court of law, because hopefully cartoons are fairly subtle. At least I hope that the cartoons I devise can be read on these different levels” (Appendix A). That was certainly ‘historically validated’.

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<sup>58</sup> The word **idea** comes from the Greek *idein*, meaning to see. The word **image** comes from the Latin *imago* which is the source of our English word imagine. So both words have their roots in “seeing” and “inwardly seeing” in imagination, so are profoundly related to the experience of **insight**.

At this point, as previously, it is appropriate to review the literature in the light of this finding of the experience of all the research participants. Five points are particularly salient:

(1) As has been noted, several definitions of insight include “by intuition” (Guralnik 1984) or “to see clearly and intuitively ...” (Rooney 1999). In this context *intuition* is “the immediate knowing of something without conscious use of reasoning” (Section 2.2) and is self-authenticating. Hill (1987) distinguishes *classical intuition* as a holistic judgment that integrates diverse sources of information (Section 2.2.2). It is precisely in this sense that intuition in insight can be said to be truly ‘self-authenticating’, as is particularly clearly illustrated in the very different experiences of both **Desmond** and **Roger**, and provides the *basis* upon which inferences and deductions can be drawn, enabling the insight to be ‘tested and validated in the public realm’. This finding appears to challenge the conceptual framework of intuition in cognitive psychology, and is examined further in Chapter 7.16.

(2) The continuing value of gestalt psychology’s understanding of insight in a holistic, structural and dynamic way is illustrated by the significance of this finding: just as a pattern may be recognised as ‘complete’ or a tune as ‘perfect’ (with not a line or a note out of place in terms of the whole, as, for example, in Shostakovich’s Piano Concerto # 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement), at the same time it is entirely reasonable, indeed important, that this personal experience of insight should be ‘tested and validated in the public realm’, as has been the case with Shostakovich. In the existential approach of phenomenological psychology, the experience of insight is deepened; it is not just that there is not a note out of place, we begin to tap our feet with the music; we are existentially involved, as the responsive feeling of elation in **Roger’s** experience testifies. Insight as ‘impact’ and ‘interpreting’ is an invariantly required co-organiser of meaning in its structured truth as a life-world event. It is insight into what is required, what is of value, what is meaningful and even what is reality. It is entirely consistent with the philosophical understanding of the *non-inferential* nature of intuitive and insightful apprehension and as such it affirms and confirms this finding that ‘the experience of insight is self-authenticating’. In this experience of insight, *past* experience, *present* meaning, and *future* possibilities come together, they are in accord, or in a chord, which ‘rings true’; it is an ecstatic experience of time’s three dimensions. In this self-authenticating experience of insight, the self and the world complete and complement one another. The *duality* of the self and the world is no longer the *dualism* of the subject and object. This is particularly clear in **Debbie’s** experience as she listened to music.

This is why insight cannot be realistically understood just as a mechanism, but only on the much deeper level of a human experience involving the meaning of the human being's potentialities, including the individual's unique pattern of abilities.

(3) The creative approach of genius, dreams, design and invention provides important evidence of the value of this research finding. However baffling dreams appear to be initially, as possible interpretations are explored there often occurs a significant, sometimes a very powerful sense, that a particular experience of insight into the meaning of the dream is 'self-authenticating'. Such was Feldman's experience in the shower, when he exclaimed out loud: "The ride is not inside, it's outside" (Feldman 1989, p. 275). The experience of insight is generally thought by scholars to be a significant and integral aspect of creativity, but the specific role that it plays in the creative process is hotly debated. The evidence in this thesis is that the role that insight plays in experience will vary both with the person and the particular creative process, rather than following any particular process or mechanism. So it may not be possible to argue that the experience of insight in creativity is *always* self-authenticating, although it usually is. As **Roger** expresses it: "the strong conviction of the validity of a flash of inspiration or insight, is very closely bound up with its aesthetic qualities" (MU25). That is his experience. It is of particular significance in the context of creativity that this is so, "both in relation to the conviction that would be felt with ideas that might possibly qualify as 'inspirational' and with the more 'routine' guesses that would have to be made as one feels one's way towards some hoped-for goal" (MU25). That this applies to both the more 'inspirational' and the more 'routine' is particularly evident and important; as is illustrated in **Tony's** experience as he follows his associations, hunches and trusts and takes delight in the creative process (MUs 15-16). It is certainly not possible to argue that the results of creative insight are always validated at the time in the public realm; too many musicians, such as Mozart, and artists, such as Gauguin, have died in poverty with the value of their creative work largely unrecognised by their contemporaries, only to be acclaimed by later generations; so they are, in the wording of this component: 'historically validated'. Schooler et al. (1995), like many others, use the analogy of relating insight to recognising out-of-focus pictures or patterns of dots (e.g. Figure 11, in Section 2.9.3). The sudden shift from no sense of what is depicted, to complete clarity, certainty and sense of coherence about what *is* depicted, corresponds to, and affirms the finding, that 'the experience of insight is self-authenticating'.



(4) The case-study approach of great minds experiencing insight furnishes abundant evidence of the value of this research finding as well as the variety of ways in which insight is ‘self-authenticating’. For example, Feynman, jumping up from the stool, cried out: “Then I understand EVVVVVERY-THING!” (Section 2.5.3). This “law of nature” was subsequently rigorously ‘verified’ in the scientific and ‘public realm’. Poincaré (1921, p. 388) recounts that as he boarded the bus “the idea came to me without anything in my former thoughts seeming to pave the way for it”. He did not have time to verify it but insists “I felt a perfect certainty. On my return to Caen, for ‘conscience’ sake I verified the results at my leisure” (Section 2.8.1). Darwin is quoted as saying “I can remember the very spot on the road, whilst in my carriage, when to my *joy* the solution occurred to me” (F. Darwin 1892/1958, p. 43, italics added). So great minds experiencing insight clearly experience insight’s ‘self-authenticating power’ in a similar way to **Roger**, who after counting how much freedom his picture of Twister theory had, “got very excited ... it turned out to have just the right mathematical property” (MU27).

(5) The inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy to the experience of insight is one of great respect. The psychotherapist may suggest an interpretation, but will not force it precisely because of respect for the transformative quality and ‘self-authenticating’ power of the client’s own experience of insight. Winnicott (1971, p. 66) shared: “I often relieve my mind by writing down interpretations that I actually withhold. My reward for withholding interpretations comes when the patient makes the interpretation herself, perhaps an hour or two later”. So he makes “a plea to every therapist to allow for the patient’s capacity to play, that is to be creative ... The patient’s creativity can be only too easily stolen by a therapist who knows too much” (Winnicott 1971, p. 67). Clearly this was not the case with **Debbie**; perhaps because her therapist did not ‘know too much’. Her insights came together with self-authenticating power when she was on her own listening to music. Jung also makes a plea for the analyst to play creatively in what he calls “a state of contemplation, in which ideas pass before the mind like dream images ... such a moment often works like a revelation” (Jung 1946b, p. 116). Such a ‘revelation’, also described by Jung as ‘transcendent function’, is the equivalent of a self-authenticating insight. Such experiences of insight are tested and validated in the inter-subjective therapeutic relational field that patient and therapist share, which in this case is the appropriate ‘public realm’. The research of Kivligham et al. (2000), involving trained judges evaluating the clients’ responses and insights, provides clear evidence of the experience of insight being tested and validated in the



public realm, confirming this finding. Another very different but significant piece of research is that of Todres (1990), who found that the experience of self-insight by the client always carries a greater sense of freedom. This is essentially because self-insight is, as Todres argues, ‘sense-making’, and enables emotional healing in terms of inner truth, self-acceptance and personal agency. In this way, self-insight carries a greater sense of freedom, which is profoundly ‘self-authenticating’. This is certainly confirmed in **Debbie’s** experience of self-insight (MUs 20, 24, 29-31, 36). She sums up her greater sense of freedom in an image: “That *was* [strongly emphasised] a big-time turning point that was. It was almost like ... [pause] ... a flower getting out of its tight little bud form” (MU37). Mrs Ngewu’s insight, haltingly expressed, is not only a significant example of insight as ‘self-authenticating’, but it was also profoundly ‘tested in the public realm and historically validated’ in the TRC. It played a crucial role in convincing the other mothers of the Gugulethu Seven to meet with the *askari*<sup>59</sup> Mbele, so that *he* could start to change/heal/recover his humanity, so that *all* of them could walk their interconnected paths towards healing and wholeness.

However, two aspects of this finding are not explicitly evident in the literature, and stand out as worthy of further consideration. First, it is of considerable interest that, arising out of the richly detailed descriptions of the experience of the four research participants, there is such a profuse variety of ways in which the experience appears to be ‘self-authenticating’. Second, it has been argued from **Roger’s** experience of a feeling of elation, that he realised that this was a good idea even before he knew what the idea was (MU33). So the sense of insight as ‘self-authenticating’ not only follows, but is so integral to the whole experience of insight, that it may even be present at some level before the conscious “Aha!” experience of insight when its full value is recognised. In the light of the significance of both these aspects of this research finding, it became clear that the experience of the other research participants should be interrogated to discover whether this ‘self-authenticating’ quality was also an integral part of their experience of insight, rather than just a final or subsequent conviction. This investigation and the findings are described in Section 7.9, as one of the distinctive values of this research.

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<sup>59</sup> A guerrilla who secretly changed loyalties and spied for the South African Police Force

## 6.9 Finding 9. The New Understanding

**The experience of insight results in an understanding which possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application.**

This is the third constituent component characteristic of the nature of insight. This component clarifies two of the findings that flow from the experience of insight. Again this finding has a certain deceptive simplicity about it. So, in order to value its pertinence, it will be appropriate to demonstrate that it is clearly discovered in the experience of the research participants, and to explore to what extent it is supported by the theories of the nine approaches to the experience of insight, and whether it goes beyond them. In addition it may be beneficial to illustrate something of the ‘significance’ and ‘relevance’ to which it refers, in the lives of the research participants as well as some of the persons referred to in the literature.

**Desmond** went into retreat “in a welter of emotions, in my own personal situation ... but also the deep sense of foreboding ... you felt the clouds were gathering” (MU11). He did not know what to do. As a result of his insight, what was previously an insuperable problem, becomes an incredibly simple and obvious matter of obedience in terms of writing the letter (MUs 16,17). The fact that Desmond is now widely regarded as an icon, both of the resistance to apartheid in ‘speaking truth to power’ and in the role of reconciliation and forgiveness in the peaceful transition to democracy in the new South Africa, is evidence of the way that this insight, which was probably his first and certainly his “most overt political action” (MU24), resulted in ‘an understanding which possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application’. This ‘significance’ and ‘relevance’ of his ‘understanding’ and resulting actions grew in the following years to the point where he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. So it was natural that he should be appointed as the Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Indeed it continues, for it is a matter of record that Desmond has persisted in ‘speaking truth to power’ ever since, at a national level to the ANC government, and at an international level.

**Debbie** reveals that her experience of insight has resulted in ‘an understanding which possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application’, in terms of two complementary images, enabling her to continue to live out her experience of insight under different conditions: the burning log transmuted to fire (MUs 38, 41), and the bud

blossoming into a flower (MUs 37, 39). The first describes the painful self-insight, the suffering, the transformation and endurance required to form an authentic relationship. The second describes the delightful self-awareness, the growth, the blossoming and full expression of the individual necessary for an authentic life. So her understanding is that her growth is both a very painful process and a very natural process; both a reductive process and an expansive process; both exposing flaws to transform them and a revealing of unexpected beauty. So her experience of insight has resulted in an ‘understanding’ which lives on in these compact, luminous images (MU43).

**Roger**, before he could solve his problem, needed a moment of inspiration, but once he understood, as a result of his insight, he had crossed a divide (MU20). What previously seemed an insuperable problem now becomes clear, even simple and obvious as a “trapped surface” (MUs 23, 24). However laborious the first occurrence of an insight may be, subsequent repetitions and applications occur almost at will. This is the universal characteristic of insight and it constitutes the possibility of learning, and increasing understanding, as insight is added to insight. So now in the warp and woof of advancing mathematical and cosmological understanding, Roger’s proof ‘possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application’.

**Tony** comments on the power of cartoons, particularly during periods of censorship, precisely because of the memorable connections and subtle allusions they form in people’s minds, and the change of understanding and way of seeing things that can result from a good cartoon. This is evidence that the experience of insight results in ‘an understanding which possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application’. He is also clear that something funny or entertaining makes the cartoon more memorable and readable (MU7). “At least I hope that the cartoons that I devised can be *read on these different levels*” (Appendix 1).

It is now appropriate to interface this finding with the relevant literature. Eight perspectives are particularly pertinent:

(1) A number of definitions of insight do include the element of ‘understanding’ (Section 2.2), for example, the definitions in Webster’s New World Dictionary (Guralnik 1984), “seeing and understanding the inner nature of things clearly” and the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology (Coleman 2006) “clear and deep understanding or perception”. Smith (1995, p. 232) also defines

insight as “an understanding”, Ansborg (2000, p. 143) as “a new understanding” and Dominowsky and Dallob (1995 p. 37) as “comprehension”. However none of them give any indication that such an understanding ‘possesses a significance greater than its origin or a relevance wider than its original application’. It could, of course, be argued that such a conclusion is taken for granted in the word ‘understanding’. Yet precisely because of the sudden and sometimes dramatic nature of the experience of insight, it is often regarded as a phenomenon in itself, rather than including this ‘greater significance’ and ‘wider relevance’; so it is not inappropriate for what is implicit to be clarified and made explicit. The use of the word ‘understanding’ in this finding follows the Encarta World English Dictionary (Rooney 1999) and implies firstly the ability to grasp a meaning or gain a sense of something, secondly the interpretation of or inference from something, and thirdly an empathic knowledge of a person or situation. All of these depend as much on emotional intelligence as on cognitive intelligence. ‘Understand’ comes from the old English *understandan*; “the underlying idea is ‘to be close to’” (Rooney 1999). So ‘understanding’ implies an empathy, a receptivity, rather than simply an intellectual acuity<sup>60</sup>.

(2) The existential approach of phenomenological psychology to the experience of insight, insists that insight is an invariantly required co-organiser of a network of meaning in the lived dimensionality of the existential space of possibility. In the context of such an inter-active, developing, dynamic and existential view it is impossible to conceive of an experience of insight that does *not* have a ‘significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application’. While conventional psychology has emphasised the *past*, and gestalt psychology introduced a *present* dimension, *future* existential possibilities are characteristic of phenomenology. This forward looking dimension is particularly in **Desmond’s** experience of insight, which might appropriately be described as prophetic. It is also evident in **Debbie’s** experience of insight regarding her future relationship with her husband.

(3) In a completely different way, the approach of cognitive psychology also supports this finding and employs the terminology of ‘verification’ or ‘validation’ in this context; it is a conscious effort to explicate, evaluate and elaborate the result of the insight and to incorporate it into a larger body of understanding, as illustrated in **Roger’s** experience of insight revealing the ‘key’ to solving the particular problem by liberating other relevant knowledge. In similar vein,

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<sup>60</sup> Acuity comes from the Latin *acuere* ‘to sharpen’ and *acus* ‘needle’.

the philosopher Lonergan (1983, p. xii) insists that “every insight unifies and organises” our understanding or, to articulate it inversely, “a single insight is expressed in many concepts” (Lonergan 1983, p. 14). So, when concepts are described as ‘coherent’, it is fundamentally a statement that they hang together from a single insight. This is a clear confirmation of this finding. However it is important to enter a *caveat* at this point. With the mention of ‘concepts’ there is a danger of interpreting the word ‘understanding’ in this finding in an almost exclusively intellectual sense in cognitive psychology. It is part of the Western philosophical tradition of intellectualising the experience of insight. Even a researcher of Davidson’s experience, records the finding that “highly intelligent subjects performed better on all types of problems than the average ability subjects” (Davidson 1995, p. 141). The use of the word *all* is revealing. It reflects the limited nature of the 24 problems presented to the subjects in that particular research. It also reveals the limited value of this type of cognitive research for investigating the nature of the *lived experience* of insight.

(4) It is arguable that in the approach of creativity, genius and dreams tend to emphasise the major shifts and paradigmatic changes in understanding that occur through insight, whereas often in design and invention creativity tends to occur in a series of smaller shifts, hunches, glimpses and intuitive experiences of insight. Nevertheless the difference, as has been argued (in Section 2.6.8.1), is a matter of a single isolated component (as in Section 6.3), rather than the same component integrated as a constituent component of the whole experience of insight, as is illustrated in **Tony**’s experience. The approach of creativity generally is consistent with this finding. Feldman’s dreams leading to insight into “co-incidence” resulted in helping to transform his way of understanding developmental processes, which also became an important part of a broader body of scholarly work demonstrating that major developmental changes not only occur, but are also central features of what it means to be human (Section 2.6.8.1). This is a clear example of insight resulting in ‘an understanding which possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application’.

(5) In the representational approach of models of insight, Campbell’s (1960) use of the evolutionary paradigm to explain the growth of knowledge in general, of which creativity and insight are special cases, throws some light on, and gives some support to, this finding. For an experience of insight results in a ‘selected’ understanding, which is then ‘retained’ for transmission to the next generation and is often accepted and used without question

demonstrating that it possesses a significance and relevance transcending its origin. This is already true for cosmologists with respect to **Roger's** insight of the 'trapped surface' (MU23). In a very different model, an interpsychic representation of insight, Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995, p. 344) conclude: "In reality most creative ideas, especially of a discovered kind, are the result of multiple cycles of preparation, incubation, insight and elaboration, with many feedback loops". It is precisely these ongoing cycles and feedback loops that enable, and result in, the quality of understanding described in this finding.

(6) The case-study approach of great minds experiencing insight, as illustrated in the mathematical discoveries of Poincaré (in Section 2.8.1) and the evolutionary theory of Darwin (in Section 2.8.2), provide classic examples of this finding. Poincaré's discoveries have become part of the texture of the minds of mathematicians at least. Darwin's understanding of evolution continues to develop and to be debated at some level, in most people's minds; the point holds even in the most vehement denial of evolution. As previously noted (in Section 2.8.3.1), many of these insights of great minds which have changed our world have also become part of the warp and woof of our own pattern of thinking and daily understanding.

(7) The inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy very clearly and obviously illustrates this finding. In psychotherapy, as for example in the experience of **Debbie**, it is usually a cumulative series of insights that result in increased understanding. This is evident precisely because of the unfolding and expanding quality of the understanding which is experienced as having increasing significance and growing relevance as different aspects of the client's life and relationships are explored in the on-going process of psychotherapy and the 'potential' of this understanding becomes 'empowered'. For, as Todres (2002) convincingly demonstrates, self-insight points to an understanding and experience of "being more than", or of "being as possibility", precisely because of the way self-insight implies an understanding that links parts into wholes.

(8) The body-mind-spirit continuum approach of spirituality to the experience of insight has a particularly clear contribution to make in terms of this finding. To take a simple but profound example, Frankl's experience in the Nazi concentration camps at Auschwitz and Dachau convinced him that hunger, lack of sleep, brutality, inferiority, and so on were not the determining factors: "But ultimately and essentially they are a spiritual attitude. For in every case man retains the freedom and the possibility of deciding for or against the influence of his surroundings" (Frankl 1973, p. 98). That insight resulted in an understanding about the crucial

significance of *meaning in life* which ‘possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application’ in a prisoner of war camp. This greater significance and wider relevance is clearly evident in the experiences of insight of **Desmond**, **Debbie** and **Roger** and the results in the unfolding of their lives and influence.

In conclusion, it is submitted that not only is this finding clearly discovered in the experience of all four research participants, but that, in addition, the explicit and implicit support of all the approaches to insight developed in the literature review, places this finding beyond contradiction. Yet it is not articulated as clearly, fully and explicitly in the literature as in this research finding. The significance of the quality of ‘understanding’ in insight is discussed further in Section 7.8 as one of the distinctive values of the findings of this research.

### **6.10 Finding 10. The Recurring Quality**

**The experience of insight not only occurs, but keeps recurring; it is not an end in itself, but rather a fresh beginning; at each recurrence, understanding develops and action is enabled ... until a new problem, unresolved issue, question or tension emerges, requiring fresh insight.**

This is the final constituent component of the experience of insight which in fact completes the cycle of insight, and at the same time re-connects with the first constituent component. This is because, inevitably, the time will come when a different problem will arise in the current understanding, necessitating another ‘experience of insight arising out of a person’s awareness of, and engaging with, the problem, unresolved issue, question or tension’.

**Desmond** refers to the proposals he put forward in his letter to the Prime Minister as “really piffling. I suppose at the time they seemed to be very radical” (MU28). He also recognises that “if the thing was going to be resolved, a crisis had to occur. That was about the only way they would begin to see sense ... maybe” (MU28). This is evidence of his recognition of the truth that the insight to write to the Prime Minister is not an end in itself and, although it did not achieve the desired result, the Soweto Uprising became a fresh beginning in the Struggle for Justice. So ‘at each recurrence understanding develops and action is enabled ... until a new problem emerges’. In fact, this particular struggle for justice, in terms of a democratically



elected government of South Africa, continued for another eighteen years. Now, of course, there are new problems requiring further experiences of insight.

**Debbie**, in her e-mail, lists a series of six experiences of insight (MUs9-15) which have a cumulative effect in terms of recognising her desire not to file for divorce, but to seek reconciliation with her husband. This is patent and unequivocal evidence that the experience of insight not only occurs, but keeps on recurring, it is not an end in itself, but rather a fresh beginning: at each recurrence understanding develops and action is enabled. Evidently, some experiences are more powerful than others in promoting understanding and action. But the timing, clarity, authenticity, aesthetic quality and cumulative effect of her experiences of insight challenge her and enable her to live true to her insight.

**Roger's** experience of insight illustrates the truth of each phrase of this final finding particularly clearly and fully. The opening phrase 'Insight not only occurs, but keeps recurring', illustrates the recurrent nature of insight and is evident in at least three different and interesting ways. First, despite the fact that he had no conscious memory of it, what had occurred, recurred. He was able to re-member it, re-imagine or re-constitute it (MUs 12, 14, 17, 27). Second, in a different sense, his insight 'keeps recurring' in the experience of others because it is still used to determine whether a black hole is likely to occur (MU23). Third, insight recurs in the sense that he has experienced many different insights. Besides the 'trapped surface' he refers to two others in the interview; the origin of his twister theory (MU37) and his playful mathematical construction resulting in the discovery of tiles that may underlie a strange new kind of matter (MU41). The next phrase, insight 'is not an end in itself, but rather a fresh beginning', reveals that his insight provided the necessary impetus for a fresh beginning since "it didn't take me long to sketch out a proof of the fact that you had to go singular in this way, basically from things I'd known about before" (MU20). In the third phrase 'at each recurrence understanding develops and action is enabled', he acknowledges that it was a "few months before the proof was formulated in a completely rigorous way" (MU20), but repeatedly emphasised that the insight of "the trapped surface was the *key* [emphasised]" (MUs 23, 18, 29, 30). The final phrase 'until a new problem, unresolved issue, question or tension emerges, requiring fresh insight', demonstrates the scientific methodology and the whole sweep of scientific progress, as well as his personal experience (MUs 8-11).

**Tony's** experience of producing cartoons five times a week over many years for the *Cape Times* is yet more evidence, of a different nature, that 'insight not only occurs, but keeps on recurring; it is not an end in itself but rather a fresh beginning'. Tony reflects that: "Sometimes you are lucky and something just comes to you, in a flash like that ... But most of these cartoons come as a result of quite a long process of associations" (MU16). This is evidence of the necessity of both the 'little steps' of preparation and the 'giant leap' of insight. Tony's experience also illustrates this finding, that 'at each recurrence [of insight] understanding develops and action is enabled'. This is seen particularly clearly in relation to Cartoon 5 (MUs 14-15). However, a cartoonist is never short of new material; there is always some folly, corruption, problem, irony or conflict crying out to the trained ear and eye of the cartoonist, for insightful expression.

At this point, having clarified this final finding in the experience of all four research participants, it is appropriate for the last time to review the literature in order to assess the significance of this finding. Five aspects are relevant:

(1) Understandably this finding goes beyond all the definitions of insight, yet it is a crucial component of the nature and structure of the experience of insight. Mayer's (1995, p. 3) definition of insight as: "the process by which a problem solver suddenly moves from a state of not knowing how to solve a problem to a state of knowing how to solve it", comes closest to the part of the finding that 'insight is not an end in itself but rather a fresh beginning', since Mayer does not claim that insight provides a solution, but the right solution path. What is distinct about this finding is the *recurrent* nature of insight when previous understanding has proved inadequate in developing fresh understanding and enabling appropriate action.

(2) The existential approach of phenomenological psychology to the experience of insight gives strong support to this finding on three grounds. The first reason is because, as argued, insight is both 'impact' and 'interpreting', determining one another circularly and reciprocally, there is an ongoing process, so insight keeps recurring and, at each recurrence, understanding develops and action is enabled. The second reason is because there is a unity of time's three dimensions, past, present and future which reciprocally determine one another, and enable past experience, present meaning and future possibilities to come together and influence one another in the recurring experience of insight. The third reason is because 'meaning' and 'self' are understood as circularly determinative of one another, and experienced as 'feeling' which is not just an inner experience, but is always and already existentially beyond itself in the world. So 'feeling',

defined in this way, is “the *breadth* of being already disposed to available meanings, the *depth* of imagining these possibilities meaning has coming to it, and the *immediacy* of a present releasing of and being touched by meaning” (Fuller 1990, pp. 201-202, italics added). It is this *breadth*, *depth* and *immediacy* that ensure that ‘the experience of insight not only occurs, but keep recurring’ and that the self and the world complete and complement one another, so that ‘understanding develops and action is enabled’.

(3) The approach of creativity makes three important contributions to this finding. Firstly, in the course of a creative work, whether it be musical composition, visual art, writing, sculpture, design or invention, there are often ‘presented problems’ solved by a number of small but necessary flashes of insight and sometimes there are interconnected insights in the development of the creative work (e.g. Baughman & Mumford 1995, Gardner 1988, Smith & Dodds 1999). This is consistent with, and illustrated in, **Tony’s** experience, which is clear evidence supporting this finding in that he was able to produce insightful cartoons five days a week for many years. Secondly, there is considerable evidence that insight in creativity is an activity that develops and matures over the course of a life span (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, Lindauer 1993a, Simonton 1989, 1991a, 1997a), despite particularly strong evidence of peak creativity in the second and third decades of people’s lives, particularly of the genius (Lehman 1953, Lindauer 1993b). This life span development and maturation of creativity is also strong evidence supporting this finding that ‘at each recurrence understanding develops and action is enabled’. Thirdly, there are some creative people who experience images that, in a specific way, enable their creativity. So, for example, Feldman (1989, pp. 281-282) records: “My insight in the shower transformed a dream image into a tool to work with ... it has remained an important part of my mental landscape every since”. In fact this “tool”, according to Feldman (1989, p. 287), enabled him “to produce a virtual torrent of small transformations and to produce them in coherent, organised ways”. Such a “tool to work with” is reminiscent of **Roger’s** description of his insight of a ‘trapped surface’ as a “key”, and is clearly in the words of this finding ‘not an end in itself but rather a fresh beginning’.

(4) In the representational approach of models to the experience of insight, Campbell (1960) used the evolutionary paradigm to explain the growth of knowledge in general, of which creativity and insight are special cases. Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995, p. 336) have developed this in their systems view of insight, arguing that: “the creative process involves a

recurring circle from person to field to domain and back to the person, paralleling the evolution pattern of variation (person), selection (field), and retention (domain)". Again the cyclical pattern of creativity and insight emerges, confirming this finding. This is particularly clear in the scientific field and methodology, and is evidenced in **Roger's** experience. The case-study approach of great minds, such as Poincaré's experience of insight, illustrates this finding in considerable detail (see Section 2.8.1). Gruber (1995, p. 416) analyses the seven steps in Poincaré's own account of his experience of insight: "three include sudden illumination – on the bus, on the cliff, and in the street. Another is described as freighted with intuitive thought. The remaining three are characterised as conscious and deliberate work". So 'the experience of insight 'keeps recurring; it is not an end in itself but rather a fresh beginning' for conscious and deliberate work; 'at each recurrence understanding develops and action is enabled'.

(5) In the inter-subjective approach of psychotherapy to the experience of insight, "insight has been perceived as the cornerstone of the psychoanalytic theory of structural change" (Crits-Christoph et al. 1993, p. 408). Such insight often involves a conscious awareness of some wishes, defences and compromises and usually "follows a slow, gradual accretion of self-knowledge" (Moore & Fine 1990, p. 99). In the therapeutic process, Todres (2002) finds that particular self-insights were important, but their credibility, meaningfulness and freeing power lay in the developing understanding of the personal narrative that had been forged as their context in the process, as is also evident in **Debbie's** experience. So this approach to the experience of insight provides luminous and cogent practical examples of this finding.

(6) In the body-mind-spirit continuum approach of spirituality to the experience of insight, de Chardin (1959) argues that the experience of insight is increasing and irreversible because "internal vision is essentially the germ of a further vision which includes all the others and carries still further on" (de Chardin 1959, p. 231). This is graphic confirmation of this finding and is illustrated in **Desmond's** unfolding experience and life. An exceptionally clear and powerful example of this finding was the whole TRC process (Krog 1998, 2008a, b & c, Tutu 1999). It facilitated an ongoing series of experiences of insight enabling fresh beginnings, understandings and actions (Section 2.11.6.4). The need to restore the interconnectedness of the South African communities which had been torn apart by apartheid is, of course, ongoing. So it is fair to conclude that 'the experience of insight not only occurs, but keeps on recurring; it is not an end in itself but rather a fresh beginning; at each recurrence understanding develops and

action is enabled ... until a new problem, unresolved issue, question or tension emerges, requiring fresh insight’.

(7) It may be helpful, at this stage, to clarify six different ways in which the experience of insight may recur. Firstly, similar insights may recur in slightly different ways, or be ‘seen’ from different angles, to enable the person to ‘get the picture’. This was classically evident in the experience of **Debbie’s** insights, focussing in from different angles on her need and desire to pursue reconciliation with her husband. Secondly, substantially the same insight may recur when the person has no conscious memory of its first occurrence. This was evident in **Roger’s** experience of the ‘trapped surface’; he was able to re-member it or re-imagine it (MUs 12, 14, 17, 27). Thirdly, a person may experience an insight, only to discover later that it has been experienced and articulated by someone else previously. So for example, vivid and life changing as Andrei’s experience of insight into the presence of the living Christ was, it is not a unique experience; millions of people down the ages would claim a similar experience. Fourthly, the same person may, of course, have recurring experiences of a number of completely different insights even in different domains. This is also evident in the experience of **Roger** who specifically refers to his experience of insight in terms of “Twister theory” (MU37) and his playful mathematical construction of “quasi-crystals” (MU41). Fifthly, a well established insight may recur in a secondary way and be ‘seen’ by a person, applying it in a different field. There appear to be elements of this in Begbie’s insights (see Section 2.11.6.3) of the difference between the visual and acoustic space applied to theological understanding. Finally, a single insight may recur in terms of “coherence”, the quality of being logically or aesthetically consistent, with all the separate parts fitting together to form a harmonious or credible whole. The essential component of such coherence is that it all hangs together by virtue of a single insight, which recurs.

In conclusion, this finding is patently evident in the experience of all four research participants. There is, of course, some common sense support for this finding, but the recurrent and cyclical nature of insight goes beyond all the definitions of insight. Existential-phenomenological psychology provides the strongest support for this finding. Cognitive psychology is implicitly consistent with this finding. The approach of creativity makes three important contributions to this finding, namely, that glimpses and flashes of insight occur and recur in the development of creative work, that insight in creativity develops and matures over the course of a life-span and



that images in insight play an enabling role as a ‘tool’ or ‘key’ in creativity. The representational approach of models of insight confirm the cyclical evolutionary pattern confirming this finding. The inter-subjective approach and the approach of spirituality provide luminous and cogent practical examples of this finding.