

CHAPTER 7

THE DISTINCTIVE VALUE OF THIS RESEARCH

This chapter contains a comprehensive and integrative reflection upon the findings of this thesis. It addresses the value and distinctive contribution of the work. The chapter also offers reflection on the way the researcher is inserted in this quest, how and what he learned through the process, his limits, shortcomings and omissions. This act is done for the sake of balance. It also might be useful to future researchers who want to adopt a similar way of addressing a phenomenon. The structure of this chapter on the distinctive findings of this research, will be undertaken in terms of twenty main themes.

7.1 The Value of the Structure of the Experience of Insight

The ten findings of this qualitative research go explicitly beyond previous findings. Moreover they depict the coherence of the part-wholes that constitute the whole structure. It is submitted that this emphasis on the integral quality of insight is inherent in the very structure of the experience of insight and constitutes an important and distinctive value of the findings of this research. It also does justice to the holistic and unitive experience of insight and its integrative effect. The evidence gathered emerges from a plethora of walks of life: spirituality in politics, decisions in personal life, mathematical discovery in cosmology and socio-political cartoon commentary. Highlighting insight in this fashion makes a particular contribution to addressing the metaphysical presuppositions about the phenomenon of insight which appear to have been previously ignored, or at least not explored or articulated explicitly in the literature.

7.2 The Value of the Selection of Research Participants

As described in Section 3.5.5 I invited a variety of people whom I knew had interesting,

significant and different experiences of insight to be research participants. There were three main advantages to this approach which enabled:

- An opportunity to research some substantial experiences of insight which have not previously been investigated academically.
- An ongoing inter-personal relationship of trust within which highly personal and vulnerable experiences could be shared, and lived meanings discovered, thematised and interpreted which facilitated:
 - An empathic understanding of **Desmond's** spirituality, pithy responses and quite condensed thought processes in the interview, as well as becoming accustomed to **Debbie's** unusual and vivid ways of expressing herself.
 - Feedback and discussion of the interview experience, the findings and, for two of the research subjects particularly, a more profound and explicit understanding of their previously implicit lived meanings of their experience of insight.

A diverse group of participants with very different experiences of insight, allowing for:

- A reasonable balance in terms of sex, race, culture and education.
- A variety of contexts and physical conditions, within which insights were experienced (including in prayer on retreat, in therapy and listening to music, in silence crossing the street, while staying with feelings and while mulling over the news).
- A range of forms of insight (including an intuitive sense, a bodily feeling, mental images, cartoons, words, associations, irony and analogy, as well as sudden and more gradual experiences, involving both small, but significant, shifts of awareness and 'giant leaps' of insight).
- A diversity of types of insight (including foresight in justice and peace, self-insight 'inner space' and relational issues, scientific and mathematical insight in cosmology 'outer space' and insight in socio-political commentary).

In Alapack's language, (1972), I am a "preferred researcher". I stand on a platform from which it is possible to stride into many domains in which insight is experienced. But such a springboard also requires care in its use. So I had to bracket my personal presuppositions, and hold in abeyance knowledge gained outside of, and prior to, the data collections. Such a reduction, of course, is never perfect. I wish to express some shortcomings. There were two

particular disadvantages or potential problems of this approach which were:

- I sometimes failed to clarify my dual roles and be rigorously disciplined as researcher, especially in relation to **Debbie**, who had been in psychotherapy with me for sixteen months; the research interview was eighteen months later.
- Having had the privilege of working closely with **Desmond** for a number of years, I became aware of a tendency, in interpreting the interview, to go beyond what was actually revealed, especially in terms of biblical illusions, his sacramental understanding and his condensed account of his experience of his retreat, assuming people were familiar with the structure of retreats.

In order to raise my awareness, clarify my position as researcher and overcome these dangers I wrote two brief reflections: one on the significance and influence of my relationship with **Desmond** for the role of the researcher and the other, on the role and position of the researcher compared to that of the therapist. Both proved helpful.

To repeat, guarding and holding the boundaries was flawed, but it is submitted that this does not entirely vitiate the gains my privileged relationship with these research participants gave me.

7.3 The Value of ‘Disposition of Openness’ for Insight

The term ‘disposition’ makes a significant contribution to the understanding of a person’s awareness of a problem out of which the experience of insight may arise. It is not just an inner subjective experience; it is always and already existentially beyond itself in the world. This is particularly clear in the research findings of the very different experiences of **Desmond** and **Roger**. Without this ‘sense’ or ‘feeling’ or ‘awareness’, no problems would be discovered, much less solved, or even recognised as solved. This ‘disposition of openness’ is required at a cognitive, affective and behavioural level for insight to occur, as the contrasting experiences of **Debbie** and **Roger** illustrate particularly clearly. Insight is not just an intellectual achievement, as it has so often been portrayed in the past, in the Western tradition. Such a ‘disposition of openness’ goes well beyond removing ‘mental blocks’, ‘problem analysis’ or the ‘prepared mind’; it is involved, alert, responsive and empathically attuned to life-world possibilities and significance of meaning. So, it is submitted that the first two research findings and constituent

components required for the experience of insight, are more specific and inclusive in this respect than any of the other approaches to the experience of insight presented in the literature.

7.4 The Value of ‘Confronting and Containing’ for Insight

This research finding, that the problematic raw material for insight needs to be adequately ‘confronted’ and ‘contained’ so that the ‘issue, question or problem can be clarified in a sufficiently reflective way’, does not appear in the literature. Yet it has three significant contributions to make to the understanding of insight. Firstly, it adds value to the ‘disposition of openness’ and clarifies the existential-phenomenological understanding that “insight is letting life-world differences *be* in letting them touch us” (Fuller, 1990, p. 178); because it specifies what is required to let them *be*. It is possible to be ‘open’ to an issue and be overwhelmed by it, because it cannot sufficiently be ‘contained’; it is also possible to be ‘open’ to a problem without ‘confronting’ it at sufficient depth to grapple with it constructively at a structural level in order to ‘restructure’ it. Both of these complications are illustrated in **Debbie’s** experience (MUs 3, 5, 20, 23, 25). Secondly, there is an important way in which both the opposites of ‘confronting’ and ‘containing’ need to be “held”. This is also illustrated in **Debbie’s** experience. She needed to be “held” in therapy (MUs 5, 28), by 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’. It is as if the two requirements of ‘confronting’ and ‘containing’ are like the two hinges of a door; they need to be properly aligned if the door is to ‘open’ easily, without remaining jammed ‘closed’. Thirdly, it sheds light on the relationship between the small, but focussed, shifts of awareness in terms of increasingly understanding an issue and the ‘giant leap’ that takes place in the experience of insight. The third component (Section 6.3) *on its own*, that the “problematic raw material ... be adequately ‘confronted’ and ‘contained’ by the person, so that the issue, question or problem can be clarified in a sufficiently reflective way” is a reasonable definition of what is required for the shifts of awareness in increasingly understanding a problem, and is illustrated in **Roger’s** experience of understanding that he required a “*qualitative* characterisation” (MU11). The same third constituent component *as part of the whole*, describes the vital part of the ‘giant leap’ that occurs in the experience of insight and is illustrated in

Roger's experience of insight of the “trapped surface” as the “key” (MU23) which unlocked the problem for him.

7.5 The Value of the ‘Moment of Impact’

The ‘impact of the life-world on the self’ is the first of three constituent components worth noting (Section 6.4) at the dynamic core of the experience of insight. The other two being ‘interpreting’ (Section 6.5) and the “Aha!” experience (Section 6.6). The suddenness and unexpectedness in all the other approaches refers to what happens in the “Aha!” moment of insight. No mention is made in the literature of a person being ‘struck’ by anything prior to that moment, despite the fact that in this study it is such a clear characteristic of the very different experiences of all four research participants (Section 6.4). This strange oversight is perhaps a result of focusing too exclusively on the possible unconscious processes and mechanisms of insight, rather than focusing with particular care on the details of the conscious experience of the person. It may also be evidence of a lack of a sophisticated view of consciousness, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued so long ago, and is now supported by neuroscience, since “The full and lasting impact of feelings requires consciousness, because only along with the advent of a *sense of self* do feelings become known to the individual having them” (Damasio 2000, p. 36, italics added). The characterisation of the three constituent components at the core of the experience of insight as a passive experience (Section 6.4), as a reflexive awareness and experience (Section 6.5, see also Section 6.11.6) and as an active, self-actualising process and experience (Section 6.6, see also Section 6.11.8), is a finding of this particular research, which is not, as far as I am aware, specifically reflected in the literature.

The significance of this passive ‘moment of impact’, is supremely demonstrated in **Roger's** experience; he had no idea of the content of his insight which was recovered from a lingering feeling of elation. This provides evidence of at least four salient features of the experience of insight, which do not seem to have been clearly identified or brought together in the literature. First, the power of the emergent quality of the gestalt of the experience of insight to persist at some semi-conscious level in a way that was recoverable several hours later. Second, the value not just of a *true* representation, which might be expected in the sciences, but of some *aesthetic*

quality in the experience, causing a feeling of elation, indicating that the idea elegantly solved his problem, even before he knew what that idea was. Third, the significance of the theatre of the body, in which the feeling was experienced, and not solely the theatre of the mind at the back of which ideas had been vaguely buzzing, prior to the moment of silence as **Roger** crossed the road. Fourth, the importance of ‘the feeling of what happens’, to echo Damasio’s (2000) title, because the recovery of a highly sophisticated mathematical discovery with far-reaching cosmological implications, depended entirely on connecting with that lingering feeling in an empathic, as well as an analytical, way.

So **Roger’s** unusual, but highly significant experience, suggests that the experience of insight requires a more richly nuanced description of the different modalities than is generally expressed in the literature. The passive experience of the ‘impact’ appears to have an emergent as well as aesthetic quality, both of which are essential for the reflexive awareness involved in ‘interpreting’. The findings indicate that ‘impact’ and ‘interpreting’ occur in both body and mind interactively and interdependently. On this point, existential phenomenology, in which Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 236) highlighted the body’s sensitivity to things as ‘reverberating’ to all sounds and ‘vibrating’ to all colours, **Roger’s** experience and neuroscience are at one. Damasio (2000, p. 129) sums it up: “Only a fraction of what goes on mentally is really clean enough and well lit enough to be noticed, and yet it is there, not far at all, and perfectly available”. The significance of this coherence between this qualitative research and neurobiological research will be examined in greater detail in Section 7.17.

7.6 The Value of the ‘Moment of Interpreting’

This ‘moment of interpreting’ is very rich and involves all three ecstasies of time. So, for example, **Roger’s** *alreadiness* embraces all his developed mathematical capacities and a life-time of openness, curiosity and wonder at the mystery of being, enabling his ‘interpreting’. His ability to be *present* with his feelings, to value and explore them, together with his sharp analytic ability, also enables his ‘interpreting’. His ability to imagine, to image meaning, to venture *future* possibilities of meaning and to reconstitute the significance of his experience, is enabling of the creative dimension of ‘interpreting’ in insight. So time’s three dimensions, past, present

and future, interpenetrate and vibrate in the ‘moment of interpreting’ like a musical chord (Section 2.6). In fact, the analogy can be taken further. For in tonal music a cadence brings about a harmonic resolution. An example of a perfect cadence takes the form of two tones, each set over a chord as shown below in Figure 12:

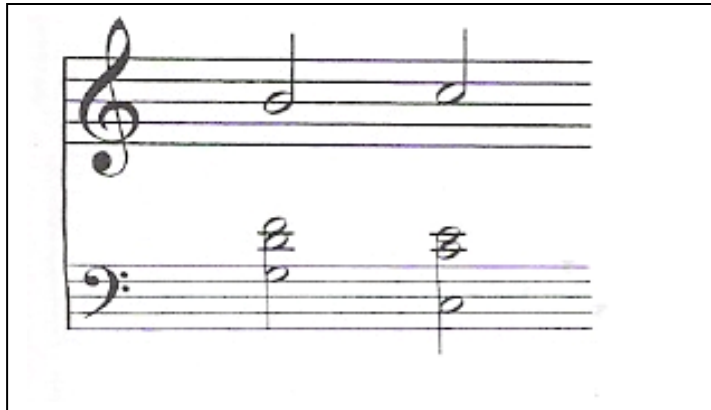


Figure 12 A Perfect Cadence (cited in Begbie 2004:45)

The first tone, as Begbie describes it, “has a ‘pointing beyond’ quality, an incompleteness”, a tension requiring resolution, like an incomplete ‘interpreting’. The second tone provides this resolution and has a “dynamic quality related to the previous tone, this time of attraction, a quality of ‘pulling in’” (Begbie 2000, p. 45) a harmonic resolution, like a satisfying and true ‘interpreting’ in insight, bringing resolution to the issue or problem at a structural level.

Desmond experiences a “pressure”, an ‘impact’, a force that brings about a shift in his reflective awareness. In contrast to the other research subjects, he almost immediately ‘interprets’ and understands his experience as an intensely spiritual I-Thou encounter, a sense of being under authority (MU29) to “write” to the Prime Minister to speak truth to power. It is clear that his retreat has physically, mentally and spiritually provided the space for this sudden and distinct transition. Interestingly, he uses the same word, “pressure”, to describe what he experienced and ‘interpreted’ to be from God (MU26), as in his description of the situation under apartheid, “the pressure of repression was beginning to be of such an intensity ... that things had to come to a head” (MU27). Perhaps it is not entirely fanciful to wonder whether one was the echo of the other.

However, in the light of **Roger's** experience described above, and **Debbie's** experience of considerably greater delays between the 'moment of impact' and the 'moment of interpreting', 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 certainly are two closely inter-related constituent components of the dynamic core of the experience of insight, and may be experienced almost simultaneously, as evidenced in **Desmond's** experience, yet they are different in at least three fundamental respects. Firstly, 'impact', 'the influence of the life-world on the self', is a *passive* experience whereas 'interpreting', 'the influence of the self on the life-world', is a *reflexive* experience of awareness. Secondly, they are not necessarily experienced simultaneously; they may become conscious at very different times. Thirdly, as **Debbie's** experience illustrates, there are significant *varieties* in the *reflexive* phase of 'interpreting': from wrestling, examining and questioning herself, to a more relaxed and reflexive mode of listening to music. So it is difficult to see how they could possibly be "two ways of considering the same psychological reality". That they do "determine one another circularly, reciprocally" as Fuller (1990, p. 172) argues appears to be true, but that they do so "simultaneously" is not supported by the evidence of these research findings.

7.7 The Value of Insight as 'Key to a Self-Actualising Process'

This is part of the third constituent component that completes the dynamic core of the experience of insight. That the tension of enquiry is released in the "Aha!" experience is well documented and generally agreed, but what emerges quite strongly in this research, yet seems strangely overlooked in the literature, is that the experience of insight is 'key to a self-actualising process; an active experience', in which the insight becomes embodied and enacted. That is why it could be recovered from a bodily feeling by **Roger**. He himself describes it as the "key" which unlocked the whole problem and enabled him, in a 'self-actualising' way, to draw on other knowledge and understanding that he had developed.

The same is true for **Desmond** in a different way. He experienced the "pressure" bodily; its effect was a categorical imperative "you have to do this" (MU16), but that was not all, he was so

inspired and empowered at every level of his being – ‘body, mind and spirit’ – that he felt that the letter “wrote itself”. He “didn’t have to agonise about the words ... they just seemed to come” (MU22). It is a ‘self-actualising process’ which is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that it was his first and most overt political action (MU24).

For **Debbie** listening to, and interacting with, the music verbally and bodily was ‘key to a self-actualising process’ that also became embodied. She says “I’m able to connect with my Self⁶¹ at my feelings level ... not at a level where one normally relates from ... at a deeper level of my Self” (MU36). So it was a ‘self/Self-actualising process’ like “a flower finally getting out of its tight little bud form” (MU37). The authenticity, aesthetic quality, synchronicity and transcendent character of her experiences of insight empowered her to work at reconciliation with her husband, fully aware of the problems: “because it is so real, it helps you to risk it” (MU40).

Tony was ‘struck’ by an irony that “obviously fixated my attention immediately” (MU2). It began a ‘self-actualising process’ of drawing **Cartoon 5** (see Section 4.5), triggering further associations, fresh energy, and more allusions and ideas (MUs 9-14). He took considerable “delight” in this process (MU15). So it is submitted that, yet again, his insight is ‘key to a self-actualising process; an active experience’.

7.8 The Value of the Quality of ‘Understanding’ in Insight

The quality of understanding in the experience of insight is revealed in this research as critical at three significant ‘moments’: first, in the small but focussed shifts of awareness as part of a preparatory phase before the experience of understanding; secondly, in the ‘interpreting’ or understanding of the ‘impact’ in the ‘moment’ of insight; and thirdly, in the integration of the result of the insight with other knowledge, experience and expertise.

The first significant ‘moment’ is the subject of the first three constituent components of the structure of insight, and is recapitulated in the key words ‘awareness’, disposition of ‘openness’

⁶¹ As previously noted in the interview (MU36), she was quite clear that it was “not the little self but the Self God meant us to be”.

and adequately ‘confronted’ and ‘contained’, so that the issue, question or problem can be ‘clarified’. **Desmond’s** responsiveness to the effects of the oppression of apartheid and **Roger’s** recognition that he required a *qualitative* way of characterising what was happening in a black hole, are particularly clear examples of the small but focussed shifts of awareness in the developing quality of understanding which is essential preparation for the experience of insight. The extent of the painful struggle involved in incrementally increasing the level of understanding, as a result of ‘impacts’ of the life-world before insight, is illustrated both in **Debbie’s** and **Desmond’s** experience. The systematic and sustained focus, time and attention to detail required in these shifts of awareness is illustrated both in **Tony’s** and **Roger’s** experience. So this preparatory understanding is a necessary, but not in itself sufficient, condition for the experience of insight. The quality of this understanding is critical, and from the experience of the research participants clearly involves cognitive, affective and behavioural elements.

The second significant ‘moment’ is the subject of the fourth, fifth and sixth constituent components, or substructures, of the structure of insight and is recapitulated in the key words of ‘impact’, ‘interpreting’ and ‘insight’. **Desmond’s** understanding was “almost instantaneous” (MU16) and involved a categorical imperative to write to the Prime Minister straight away; there was no doubt about it, despite the fact that the actual experience of insight “didn’t seem rational at all” (MU15) to him, the message was pellucidly clear and made absolute sense. So the precise nature of understanding is significant: he could not explain it, but he had no problem in understanding it. He clearly sensed it, hence the use of the phrase “empathic understanding of the ‘impact’” in the fifth constituent component of insight. **Debbie** had initially kicked against the pricks of the various ‘impacts’ without coming to a satisfactory understanding of the way forward in relation to her husband. While relaxed and interacting with music most of one night, she surprised herself by ‘interpreting’ at least six ‘impacts’, mainly involving self-insight, which she expressed in an e-mail at 4.19 a.m. The significance of her insight was confirmed two hours later by the synchronicity of timing in hearing the news of the death of her husband’s father (MU35). Yet the e-mail had been headed “Fear and Confusion”. So her experience of insight was clear enough, but the implications of risking working for reconciliation made her feel vulnerable, afraid and confused about how to put it into action. Hers was an embryonic understanding, not a clear and settled one. It needed nurturing and maturing in therapy, but she was able to act on it over a period of months. **Roger’s** subliminal experience of insight was re-

membered as a result of staying with his feelings (MU17); it involved a crucial empathic quality of understanding and reconstruction which provided the ‘key’ to his highly sophisticated mathematical understanding.

The third significant ‘moment’ of understanding results from the integration of the insight with other knowledge, skills and experience. This involves the last four components of the structure of insight with the key words describing this quality of understanding as ‘tested’ and ‘transcending’; it possesses ‘significance’ and enables ‘action’. **Desmond’s** letter to the Prime Minister (Section 5.5.3) embodies an understanding with all these qualities. It is precisely this, humanly speaking, that underlies his experience that the letter “wrote itself”, so he did not have to agonise over the wording; it flowed from his insight and embodied his significant understanding of the impending crisis, far transcending that of the Prime Minister’s. **Debbie**, two years after her initial experience of insight, having renewed their marriage vows, had come to understand her insight as “one of the most sane things” she had ever done (MU37). **Roger’s** ‘trapped surface’ provided the key, unlocking other knowledge and expertise he had developed, to his growing understanding, enabling him to sketch out a proof that same evening. Elsewhere he argues that “the quality of understanding”, which he regards as the crucial distinction between the artificial intelligence of computers and the human ability to understand, “is not something that can ever be encapsulated in a set of rules” (Penrose 1999, p. xx). The phrase ‘empathic understanding’, as an alternative to ‘interpretation’ in this research finding, clarifies that the understanding that results from insight does not emanate from a set of rules, nor purely a cognitive, automatic or mechanistic process, but requires conscious awareness and involves ‘the influence of the self on the life-world’. **Roger** concludes: “Understanding is, after all, what science is all about – and science is a great deal more than mere mindless computation”. (Penrose 2005, p. vii)

So the final quality of understanding is composed of three strands, like those of a rope. The first strand is composed of the small, but significant, focussed shifts of attention in which something new is learned which is of particular value and prepares the way for the possibility of insight. It is evident that this concurs with the first three components of the structure of insight, namely the unresolved issue (Section 5.7.1), the openness required (Section 5.7.2) and the unresolved issue ‘confronted’ and ‘contained’ (Section 5.7.3).

The second intertwined strand is the emergence of something totally new and of indispensable value, expressed in the insight itself. Clearly this is composed of the next three structures of the experience of insight, namely the ‘impact’, the influence of the life-world on the self: a passive experience (Section 5.7.4), the ‘interpretation’, the influence of the self on the life-world: a reflexive experience (Section 5.7.5) and the “Aha!” experience, the key to a self-actualising process: an active experience (Section 5.7.6).

The third intertwined strand, which reveals the final strength and quality of the understanding, is dependent upon the application of the insight and its integration with other knowledge, skills and experience. This comprises the changed perspective, transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things (Section 5.7.7), the self-authenticating experience which is historically validated or rejected (Section 5.7.8), the new understanding which possesses a significance greater than its origin and a relevance wider than its original application (Section 5.7.9) and finally the recurring quality of insight in which understanding continues to develop and action is enabled (Section 5.7.10).

7.9 The Value of Insight as ‘Self-Authenticating’

Roger’s experience of elation indicated that, at a subliminal level, he realised that this was a good idea, even before he knew what the idea was (MU33). This raised the possibility that the ‘self-authenticating’ quality of insight may be so integral to the whole experience of insight that it may precede the conscious “Aha!” experience when its full value is recognised (see Section 6.8). So it was determined to examine this possibility in the very different experiences of the research participants. The findings of this investigation reveal four probable strands in this integral ‘self-authenticating’ experience of insight:

First, the sudden and unexpected nature of the experience of insight seems to contribute not only to drawing attention to what is happening, but marking it as significant and possibly authentic.

Desmond’s experience came as a “bolt from the blue” (MU25), “[i]t came almost instantaneously” (MU16). For **Debbie**, it was “not all that suddenly” (MU33), but it was

completely unexpected and it all happened within a few hours on a single night. **Roger** experienced something completely unexpected in a moment of silence as he crossed a road (MUs 14, 31) and **Tony's** attention was “immediately” caught by an irony (MU2).

Second, a distinctly existential sense of the clarity and quality of the experience is recognised as part of the authenticity of the experience. **Desmond** had a clear sense of “pressure” (MU14) which had an unequivocal quality about it, in contrast to his more usual experience in which he is not sure about whether it is a distracting thought or God speaking to him (MU26). **Debbie** was “struck” by a number of experiences characterised by a sense of clarity, intensity and aesthetic quality that denoted authenticity (MUs 4, 25). **Roger's** experience was initially almost imperceptible, there was no sense of “pressure”, he was not “struck”, it was as light as a feather – an “odd feeling of elation that [he] could not account for” (MU15) as well as feeling “a little bit disturbed” (MU16). He had no conscious memory of what happened. **Tony's** experience of the irony was that it “fixated” his attention (MU2).

Third, the direct effect of the experience of insight is part of this integral experience of authenticity. **Desmond** experienced it as a categorical imperative (MU16). Not only was there no doubt about it (MU26), there was also a complete lack of self-doubt (MU19). **Debbie's** cumulative experiences had the effect of inducing her to want to work at recommitting to her marriage (MUs 29, 31, 37). **Roger's** experience had the effect of prompting him consider his feelings and review his day in an analytical way (MU16, 17). **Tony** experienced a whole series of associations flowing from the irony which had “fixated” his attention (MUs 3-15).

Fourth, there is a confirmation which arises out of enacting the insight which is ‘self-authenticating’. For **Desmond**, it was the remarkable experience that the “letter wrote itself” (MU22), he did not have to agonise over the wording, despite the fact that he was writing to the Prime Minister. For **Debbie**, it was the transcendent experience of synchronicity over the timing of hearing about the death of her husband's father (MU35). For **Roger**, it was the image/idea of the ‘trapped surface’ which was the “key” that unlocked the whole puzzle (MUs18, 23) and enabled him later that same day to sketch out a proof (MU20). **Tony** experienced and expressed his “delight” in using comic devices of speed (MU15) in highlighting the contrast between the 4x4 carrying arms and the broken down land delivery van.

So it is submitted that this ‘self-authenticating’ quality of the experience of insight is integral to the whole experience rather than simply the climax or consequence of the experience.

7.10 The Value of the ‘Recurrence’ of Insight

Evidence has been adduced to substantiate this finding of the recurring quality or nature of insight (Section 6.10) which is compatible with, but goes beyond, cursory references to the recurring phenomena of insight. What is distinctive about this research is the variety of ways in which insight recurs, as evidenced in the experience of the four research participants. There appear to be at least six different ways in which the experience of insight may not only occur but recur:

First, something that originated as an insight, but is received by a person in a second-hand manner, may suddenly become crystal clear and be re-experienced as an insight in a more conscious, complete, or practical and profound way. This seems to be true of **Debbie’s** experience when she noticed a book entitled *All Truth is God’s Truth* on my bookshelves. Initially, she was struck by that arresting early Christian insight and would probably have regarded it as true in a general sense; only later did she experience the insight that she was only seeing her truth as being real in relation to her husband (MU10).

Second, substantially the same insight may recur in slightly different ways, or to be ‘seen’ from different angles, to enable the person to ‘get the picture’. This was classically evident again in the experience of **Debbie’s** insights. She lists no less than six different experiences of insight in her e-mail and includes a number of others in the interview, which all point in different ways, to her desire to seek reconciliation with her husband.

Third, again, 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 (MUs12, 14, 17, 27).

Fourth, the same person may, of course, have recurring experiences of a number of completely different insights even in different domains. This is 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).

Fifth, a well established insight may recur in a secondary or analagous way and be applied to 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. An example of this occurs in Krog’s (2008d, p. 12) argument that the single crucial insight underlying “all three of the innovations”, in the structuring of the South African TRC process, “can be traced back to attempts to restore the inter-connectedness of a community”. This inter-connectedness-towards-wholeness is the essence of *ubuntu* (see Section 2.11.6.4).

7.11 The Value of the ‘Experience’ and the ‘Fruit of Insight’

Despite the invitation and selection of research participants known to me, it was not anticipated that, in addition to the interview material, the participants would each express the creative product of his or her insight and in very different ways. This provides the opportunity for another perspective not afforded in most research approaches to insight, namely the means to examine not only the experience, but also the fruit and the fecundity of the insight.

So **Desmond** not only describes his experience of how “the letter wrote itself” (MU22), but there is the opportunity to examine the quality of the letter itself. **Debbie** not only reflects subsequently on her experiences, but provides contemporaneous written evidence. **Roger** not only records recovering his insight from a feeling, but furnishes the scientific proof. **Tony** not only traces his experience in verbal form, but presents the visual evidence of that experience in cartoon form. Each will be examined in turn.

First, **Desmond** shrewdly but respectfully addressed the authoritarian Afrikaner leader as a family man: “I am writing to you, Sir, because I know you to be a loving and caring father” (Appendix B). He uses the phrase “I am writing to you, Sir ...” no less than ten times. As Du Boulay (1988:104) points out: “It is a remarkable letter, heartfelt yet statesmanlike, direct yet never failing to be tactful and courteous, eloquent, informed and precise in its suggestions”. The

irony was that it was so articulate that the Prime Minister concluded that it could not have been written by a Black man and that **Desmond** was being used politically by the White opposition. He simply could not credit that this letter was the fruit of an insight that **Desmond** had experienced in retreat on his own, as he claimed. So it is not surprising that when **Desmond** asked for permission to publish the reply, he received a curt rejection; it would have been all too revealing of the racist attitudes of the Apartheid ideology. The ‘nightmare’ of his insight was to become reality sooner and more tragically than even he had feared.

Second, the distinctive value of **Debbie’s** e-mail is reflected in the fact that only contemporaneous notes taken by a witness may be used in the witness box in court. The immediacy of her e-mail, describing her experience of insight during that night and into the early hours of the morning and sent at 4.19 a.m., precludes subsequent rationalisations and elaborations. As such it provides valuable evidence and significant first fruits of her insights, in which her truth and vulnerability is palpable. This enables a clear overall picture as well as details of small but significant shifts in her experience. For example, it is possible to examine the significance of her transformative experience of listening to music most of one night. Begbie (2000, p. 13) sometimes says to his students: “There is more to music than meets the ear”. A person’s social and cultural embeddedness, as well as physical, physiological and neurological make-up profoundly mediates the experience of sound. In addition, and this is crucial for **Debbie’s** experience, music is able to ‘express’ emotion and feelings in remarkably powerful ways. Scruton (1997, pp. 346-364) challenges the view that emotions are located solely in some inner or ‘subjective’ life, which are externalised through music. He argues that the expression of an emotion can enable feeling, and this is one of the ways in which a person comes to self awareness and maturity. Our emotional response to musical sounds, according to Scruton, is fundamentally a ‘sympathetic response’. It is a kind of ‘latent dancing’ or subliminal ‘moving with’ the sounds. So the music invites us into its ‘gravitational field’, draws our feelings along with it, and so leads us to open up to feelings we would not otherwise experience. In this way, we can be emotionally exercised, enriched and educated. This ‘sympathetic response’ is vividly illustrated in her experience. “The music is just calm and it’s almost a meditative state ... you can centre deep down within yourself and go to a place where you don’t normally go” (MU25). However, she also reacts antipathetically to both words and music: “I even think ‘no I wouldn’t

put it that way’, and put my own words to it ... the way I would feel the music must be” (MU25). So perhaps Scruton’s view is not the last word on the subject.

Shepherd & Wicke (1997, p. 127) argue that:

The human experience of sound involves, in addition to the sympathetic vibration of the ear drums, the sympathetic resonators of the body. Sound ... can thus be *felt* in addition to being heard ... Sound ... enters the body and is in the body.

So as Begbie (2000, p.27) points out: “Even a deaf person – for example, the percussionist Evelyn Glennie – can perform highly intricate music by sensing floor vibrations through her feet”. Perhaps this feeling of the music in the sympathetic resonators of her body is what penetrated **Debbie’s** ‘deafness’ and enabled her to feel, respond to and resonate with what had previously ‘impacted’ her but had not been ‘interpreted’, thus facilitating her experiences of insight that night as detailed in her e-mail. As in everything, from advertisements to films, music is the ‘hidden persuader’ *par excellence*.

Third, the particular value of **Roger’s** proof sketched on the blackboard on the day of his insight, is that it expressed the fruit of his insight almost immediately. His use of the word “sketch” indicates that it was done quite quickly, that it contained a number of images or pictures for which at this stage he did not have the necessary words or formulae, and that it was not yet formulated in a completely rigorous way (MU20). A few months later the proof was published (Penrose 1965). This proof, the fruit of his insight, is a good example of mathematical rigour, succinctness and elegance.

The distinctive value of the fruit of **Tony’s** insight is revealed in the socio political Cartoon **5**. His work was examined, in Chapter **4**, under three themes: the verbal text, the visual text and the context; together they form a richly layered account of his work. What is striking is that virtually all the significant points he makes about his experience of insight from no less than nine cartoons (see Appendix **A**) are illustrated in this single cartoon (Cartoon **5**, below).

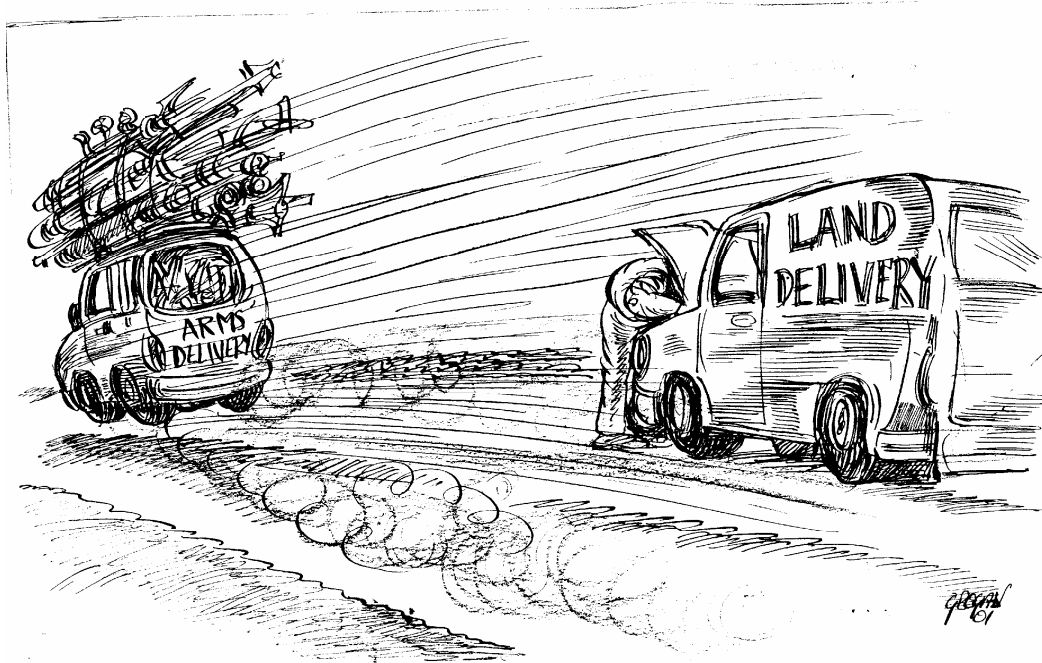


Figure 12. Tony Grogan's Cartoon 5

Six points are particularly noteworthy:

(1) Tony is struck by the 'impact' of a "rich irony" which grabs his attention (MU2) and starts a process of associations (MU18) around land issues.

(2) It is the *passionate opposition* to injustice and corruption that generates the creative energy for the cartoon. So the creative process of drawing the cartoon does not begin with the land delivery van which **Tony** has used before, but with the spark of energy and 'interpreting', associated with the new thought of Tony Yengeni's 4x4 (MUs 13-14).

(3) This *all-or-nothing statement* about the speed of arms delivery overtaking the delivery of land which is at a standstill, and in fact has broken down; this contrast provokes reactions and raises questions ... Why has the government been so speedy in the delivery of arms?

(4) There is a degree of subtlety so that Cartoon 5 can be *read on different levels*. As **Tony** muses: "An appropriate military vehicle would be a ... Caspir or a Tank or something like that ... no, wait a bit, a 4x4 is far more appropriate, because it brings another allusion into the whole thing" (MU14); in fact, it brings in, as illustrated, multiple allusions.

(5) There is the use of the *English language* with all the nuances, ambiguity, opportunity for punning and so on which enables the concrete *delivery van* to become a *vehicle for the delivery* of services as well as more abstract ideas (MU11).

(6) Tony always tries to bring in an element of humour (MU12), so he takes delight in using comic devices of speed for the 4x4 to heighten the contrast with the lonely figure representing the government, tinkering with the engine of the land delivery truck to try to get it started (MU15).

7.12 The Value of the Experience of Insight in the ‘Unfolding Context’ of Life

A further outcome of a relationship with the research participants is the possibility of investigating and evaluating the significance of the particular experience of insight in the unfolding context of their lives. The genesis of this further perspective is already latent in each interview. **Desmond** acknowledges that his experience of insight led to possibly his first, and certainly his most overt, political action (MU24). **Debbie** emphatically describes her experience as a turning point in her life “like ... [pause] ... a flower getting out of its tight little bud-form ... it was the [emphasised] turning point” (MU37). **Roger** refers to a number of other insights (MUs25, 37, 38, 41) but this experience was not only a most unusual one, it was significantly his first experience of insight leading to a published discovery. **Tony** makes his living as an artist and cartoonist and reveals that his creativity was intensified by his passionate feelings about the inhumanity and injustice of the apartheid oppression.

In the light of the ongoing relationship and appreciation, particularly expressed by two of the research subjects, for the opportunity to learn more about the significance of their experience of insight from the research process, my initial reaction was to extend this research. However, on reflection, it was decided that it required a separate investigation to do the topic justice, with the key research question for the interview being: “How do you assess the significance of your experience of insight in the subsequent development of your life and work?” That question, put to all four research participants, might make an interesting follow-up to the current research and perhaps provide the subject matter for an appropriate journal article.

7.13 The Value of the ‘Relationship Between Sight and Insight’

The fact that sight is the most common metaphor for insight is universally acknowledged, but the precise *quality* of seeing in this context, beyond coherence, certainty and pattern recognition, remains remarkably unexplored in the literature in this context, despite the emerging academic discipline of Visual Studies as mentioned in Section 6.3(4). Pattison’s (2007) argument for a more intimate way of perceiving through ‘haptic’ or touching sight is a powerful critique of the prevailing Cartesian myth of a detached, disembodied and unitary way of seeing things.

Perceiving is as much about acting on the environment as it is about receiving signals from it. As Damasio expresses it: “When you see, you do not just see: *you feel you are seeing something with your eyes*” (Damasio 2006, p. 232). So haptic vision enlivens, contains *poesia* and creates a yielding kind of knowing, which can lead to compassionate and empathic involvement in, and understanding of, the subject matter.

Pattison (2007) contends that the use of words like ‘see’ to denote ‘understand’ presents a particular difficulty, for not only does it bias the language of visualities towards the Cartesian myth, but it also makes it very difficult to understand any particular dimension of sight on its own. He is surely right when he points out how Western academics are bewitched by the complexity in their scopic regime. One has only to think of the overcrowding of data in so many PowerPoint presentations: “I see what you mean” was never more true and less digestible. Another example would be the tendency of so many people to studiously read the labels at an exhibition, while giving only a cursory glance at the masterpieces themselves.

If the idea that seeing might involve in some sense touching with the eyes is a powerful one, even more powerful is the idea of being touched by the object of our gaze, and Pattison conjures up the fury that must have motivated the attack on Michaelangelo’s *Pieta* in Rome. The shadow side has to be recognised: haptic power is also open to abuse. However, it is precisely because it is so powerful and “all images are polysemic” (Pattison 2007, p. 80), that the connection between haptic sight and insight may well not just be metaphorical, but be closer than previously recognised in the literature, for haptic sight is sentient and notes even small alterations in its own attitude. In terms of this research, it is clear that haptic sight, whether it be witnessing suffering under apartheid as in **Desmond’s** experience, or suddenly focusing on a significant book title as in **Debbie’s** experience, or mental images as in **Roger’s** experience, or visual images as in

Tony's experience, can evoke profound feelings. It is at the very least a significant part of the essential preparation for, if not an actual precursor of, insight; involving several small but significant shifts of awareness in increasingly understanding a problem, before the 'giant leap' in insight in terms of what is required to solve the problem.

7.14 The Value of the 'Relationship Between Foresight and Insight'

There are clear elements of foresight in **Desmonds's** experience of insight, although he is insistent on setting three limits. First, that he was not the only one who was "deeply concerned and very apprehensive ... aware of how people were feeling about 'the system'" (MU3). Second, that he was not primarily focused on anticipating the details of a particular outcome, but was aware of precipitating factors. Third, that those precipitating factors could be averted by meaning signs of change, as is frequently typical of biblical prophets. As it is expressed in the official biography:

Tutu may have been prescient in predicting an explosion; but when it came, a few blocks up the hill from his home in Soweto, its nature took him – and the rest of Soweto's parents – by surprise ... the rebellion started in the Phenfeni Junior Secondary School. (Allen 2006, p. 155-156)

This is in sharp contrast to the earliest record, by one of Winston Churchill's contemporaries at school, of Churchill (aged 16), saying:

I see further ahead than you do. I see into the future. This country will be subjected somehow to a tremendous invasion, by what means I do not know, but I tell you I shall be in command of the defences of London and I shall save London and England from disaster (Gilbert1994, p. 215).

Churchill's statement is a truly remarkable foresight of his role in the Second World War, and is not an isolated example. It is matched by his long held conviction that he would die on the same day as his father. Despite being in a coma for ten days following a massive stroke, he did die on the morning of that very day.

In contrast, **Desmond** makes no claim to see into the future nor is he centre-stage, or fatalistic (MU28). He writes to the Prime Minister (Appendix **B**):

I am writing to you, Sir, because I have a growing nightmarish fear than 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 A people made desperate by despair, injustice and oppression will use desperate means. 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. (For a more detailed discussion see Section **5.3.3**).

In addition, he clearly articulates three requirements for peaceful change. Sadly he was, at the time, a prophetic voice crying in the wilderness. His voice was drowned out by someone closer to the seat of power. Manie Mulder, Chairperson of the West Rand Administration Board, made a statement within a few days of **Desmond's** letter, that reflected the ignorance and arrogance of the White administration: "The broad masses of Soweto are perfectly content, perfectly happy. Black-White relationships at present are as healthy as can be. There is no danger whatever of a blow-up in Soweto" (Bonner & Segal 1998, p. 78). Despite the fact that **Desmond's** prophetic warning was not heeded, his experience of insight was a defining moment in his life and ministry; the subsequent fruit and fecundity of his insight played a significant role in his developing influence in South Africa, culminating in the peaceful transition of power and his inspirational role as Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

7.15 The Value of the 'Relationship Between Humour and Insight'

Desmond's self-awareness is frequently revealed in his humour; his tears and laughter flow easily (MU12). He recognises the "pressure" of his experience in terms of submitting to a higher divine authority, but is aware that it may appear to others as an arrogant or presumptuous initiative of his own. His sense of humour, revealed in "at least I [emphasised] believed that! [laughing]" (MU29), enables him to cope with the paradox between the outward appearance and

the inner reality of his experience of insight. He delights in the incongruities and contradictions of ‘working’ on the letter during his retreat with guffaws of laughter (MU17). Despite his age and frailty, he cannot resist his parting shot about God not being able to cope yet with him in heaven!

Debbie, as a result of her self-insight, becomes less harsh on her husband who had been “putting his foot in it by just breathing” (MU3) as well as herself, and so is able to laugh at her self-righteousness (MU22). She is aware of the two different parts of herself in which she write from her Self to her self (MU36). In chuckling at the proper “Mrs Brown person”, who does “all the right things” (MU31), she even wishes she could be a bit more “sluttish” although she is “not quite sure [she] can pull it off” (MU43). Sometimes her laughter releases tension and excitement (MU32). Her humour often underlies her vivid phrases revealing her self-awareness; such as her new-found freedom as “a flower finally getting out of its tight little bud form” (MU37), and a wry reference to her vulnerability involved in living out her insight as “going out on the ocean with one oar” (MU42).

Roger’s humour varies from a delightful self-deprecating laughter over his forgetfulness (MU12) to chuckling happily (MUs 13, 15, 16, 40, 42) and laughing without inhibition (MU44). There are at least thirteen points in the interview at which his humour and infectious enthusiasm infuses his account of his experience of insight. **Roger’s** humour has a playful aspect to it, which is not, of course, confined to verbal expression; it is often expressed in playful behaviour and he specifically refers to his “playful mathematical construction” of two shapes that tile the plane in the manner of Escher tessellation. He says he “discovered” them in the course of this playfulness – rather as one ‘discovers’ a joke – without any expectation that they would be useful “to everyone’s astonishment, particularly mine [laughing] it turned out that three-dimensional forms of these tiles may underlie a strange new kind of matter ... now one of the most active research areas in crystallography! [chuckling]” (MU41). So this playful generative activity ‘outside the box’ can enable new insights and discoveries.

Tony depicts the Soweto uprising, the subject of **Desmond’s** insight, as a huge black giant rousing from sleep (see Cartoon 1, Appendix A). He explains that in order to show respect he has drawn this powerful giant in classical lines in contrast to the rather comical little Nationalist

Government ministers being shaken about on the surface of the earth. As Cartoon 5 (in Section 4.5) reveals, his style of cartoon leads towards the lampoon rather than the satirical. He explicitly states “I always try to think of something amusing” (MU12), and aims to “set up concrete images in people’s minds” (Appendix A). So he connects PW Botha wagging his finger with the fall of the rock in Namibia, known as the ‘The Finger of God’ (Cartoon 2 Appendix A), and in making subtle humourous allusions enables people to read it in different ways. Clearly his passion about the injustices of apartheid (Section 4.8) is a great source of creative energy and fires his imagination and sharpens his wit and insight. He also exploits the subtle nuances and ambiguities of the English language in, for example, “That’s their funeral” as in Cartoon 9 (Appendix A).

So the experience of the four research participants reveals that a sense of humour and laughter, related to their experience of insight, expresses a sense of incongruities revealed, as well as conflicts resolved; like charity, it has to begin at home if it is to be genuine. In chuckling, as they all do in different ways, the participants sit lightly to themselves. A heavy seriousness is fatal to self-insight and may be inimical to other forms of insight, as GK Chesterton (1943, pp. 204-205) remarked “solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy: hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity”. Laughter, by contrast, may be a sign of a “leap”, a raised consciousness, a result of an insight.

A joke has often been used as a metaphor for insight. Either you ‘see it’ or you do not (Dominowski & Dallob 1995, p. 37). So, as Gick and Lockhart (1995, p. 203) put it: “Humour is found in the resolution of the incongruity” between the expectation and the punchline, because the joke invokes a dominant but incorrect representation.

In the light of the evidence revealed above, the question had to be asked: is humour more than a metaphor for insight? The conclusion drawn was that humour cannot be regarded as an *essential* component of the structure of insight, but clearly it can, in many cases, play a valuable role in facilitating insight precisely because it shares the same characteristic as insight in terms of ‘transcending the usual or dominant way of seeing things’ (Section 6.7).

7.16 The Value of the ‘Philosophical Understanding of Intuition for Insight’

In the course of examining the experience of insight as self-authenticating, in Section 6.8 (1), evidence was adduced from the experience of all four research participants, distinguishing classical intuition as a holistic experience that integrates diverse sources of information and providing the *basis* upon which inferences and deductions can be drawn. It was suggested that this appears to challenge the conceptual framework of intuition in experimental and cognitive psychology. It is now appropriate to argue that case and demonstrate the significance and value of the philosophical understanding of intuition for insight.

The conceptual framework of intuition and experimental and cognitive psychology may be characterised by three particular attributes: first, intuition is equated with *unconscious* processing, as a facet of implicit cognition (e.g. Dorfman, Shames & Kihlstrom 1996, Reber 1989, 1993); second, intuition is presented as an *inferential* process operating below the threshold of awareness (e.g. Hinton 1990, Ubel & Lowenstein 1997) and third, intuition is associated with thought processes in the dual system that are *not rational* in the traditional sense (e.g. Epstein, Lipson, Hammond 1996, Holstein & Huh 1992, Sloman 1996). In contrast, the evidence of the experience of insight of all four research participants is entirely consistent with the philosophical understanding of intuition expressed by Osbeck (1999, p. 244) that:

Intuition provides the underpinning of thought and experience, such that reasoning could not and does not occur independently ... it is not ‘employed’ in merely a particular sort of task; it establishes the means by which both creative and analytic activity are possible.

This clearly differs from experimental psychology’s portrayal of intuition as judgments made without awareness of inferences that support them (e.g. Hinton 1990, Kleinmütz 1990). Osbeck (1999, p. 238) fairly asserts: “The notion of a judgement based on inference, albeit inference below the threshold of consciousness, is a very different notion from that which can have *no* grounds even in principle”. The *non-inferential underpinning* of ‘thought and experience’ as well as ‘both creative and analytic activity’ is particularly important and is regarded as adding value to this study. It emerged very clearly from the very different ‘self-authenticating experiences’ of all four research participants.

7.17 The Value of ‘Relating the Qualitative Research to Neurobiological Research’

Curiously, the mention of feelings still often conjures up an image of self-indulgent naval gazing, or disregard for world issues like justice and peace, and a tolerance for relaxed standards of intellectual performance. This is precisely the opposite of what is revealed about the significance of feelings in this research on the experience of insight. The experience of all four research participants strongly suggests that the strengthening of rationality and the valuing of insight requires that greater consideration and discernment be given to the vulnerability of the world within, as well as the significance of feelings and shifts of awareness.

In the light of this finding, it appeared important to investigate the findings of neurobiological research. It is recognised that a comparison between qualitative human scientific research and natural scientific neurobiological research may not be common practice, but it is hoped that it may add a further distinctive value to this study of insight. So the evidence of this research will be investigated under five main themes, arising from the research and engaging in dialogue with the neurobiological conclusions of Damasio.

(1) *It is natural in everyday language to speak of different levels of feeling, awareness, consciousness and attention in insight.* The evidence of this research in the experience of all four participants is that both consciousness and attention occur at different levels and are related; they appear to influence one another in an upward spiral, resulting in greater alertness, sharper focus and higher quality of image processing.

Desmond experienced a shift in awareness “... it seemed like a pressure from God” (MU14); it came suddenly as a “bolt from the blue” (MU25), and grabbed his attention as a categorical imperative. **Debbie** referred frequently to operating at different levels (MUs 33, 36): in terms of relating to her husband and daughter (MUs 18, 30, 31, 32, 39), in terms of protecting herself (MUs 20, 22), and in terms of lower defences as she is interacting with music (MUs 25, 27).

Roger said “Curiously I *did* [emphasised] actually forget my trapped surface idea, but that is not at the level I mean ... I am supposing that if it had not had some aesthetic quality to it, it would not have reached any appreciable level of consciousness at all” (MU27). He also mentioned a

whole range of things going on in his head, from vaguely thinking (MU13), to conjuring things up (MU19) and, to inspiration and insight (MU25) involving pictorial images and models (MU39). Silence seems to be a pre-requisite for his most important thinking (MUs 31, 37, 42). **Tony** noticed an irony which immediately “fixated” his attention (MU2). Significantly, Damasio (2000, p. 56) uses the same term ‘impact’, in this connection, that has been used throughout this study: “Consciousness allows feelings to be known and thus promotes the impact of emotion internally, allows emotion to permeate the thought processes through the agency of feeling”.

(2) *It remains important to guard against the dangers of incipient dualism and reductionism.*

The evidence of this research, in the experience of all four participants, is that, without the interaction of brain and body as an indissociable organism, there would be no insight to investigate. This is entirely consistent with Damasio’s (2006, p. xxv) statement that without the interaction of brain and body there would be “no suffering or bliss, no longing or mercy, no tragedy or glory in the human condition”. The experience of insight cannot be reduced to the mechanism of a disembodied mind, yet paradoxically, as Damasio (2006, p. 250) observes, “many cognitive scientists who believe they can investigate the mind without recourse to neurobiology would not consider themselves dualists”. The critical error in what is perhaps the most widely known phrase in philosophy, namely Descartes’ dictum (1637/1970, p. 101): “I think therefore I am”, is the separation of reason from emotion, as if they did not mix any more than oil and water. Taken literally: “It suggests that thinking and awareness of thinking are the real substrates of being” (Damasio 2006, p. 248). This is precisely the opposite of Damasio’s argument in *Descartes’ Error* (2006, p. 248) that: “in the beginning it was being and only later was it thinking”. The result of Descartes’ dualism led to “the separation of the most refined operations of the mind from the structure and operation of a biological organism” (Damasio 2006, p. 250), which accounts for the widespread insistence that rational processing must be unencumbered by passion, whereas Damasio (2006, p. xxiii) categorically states that: “the lower orders of our organism are in the loop of high reason”. So he contends that feelings are neither intangible nor elusive: “Contrary to traditional scientific opinion, feelings are just as cognitive as other percepts” (Damasio 2006, p. xxv), such as hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell. So **Desmond**’s concern that his sense of ‘pressure’ “doesn’t seem rational at all” (MU15) probably comes from an traditional scientific view. In stark contrast, **Roger**, as a scientist working on the

frontiers of discovery, is delighted that his insight can be recovered from a lingering feeling of elation.

(3) *It is critical to recognise that the body provides a ground reference for the mind.* The evidence of this research, reflected in the experience of all four participants, goes beyond the previous finding of an indissociable organism and reveals that the body provides a ground reference for the mind. So, for example, **Desmond** first feels the ‘impact’ of a bodily sense of “pressure”, and then ‘interprets’ it as a categorical imperative from God to write to the Prime Minister. On the basis of a study of anosognocics, who report irrationally about their motor defects and inappropriately about their feelings related to their state of health, Damasio (2006, p. 154) concludes: “what does not come naturally and automatically through the primacy of feeling cannot be maintained in the mind”. Clearly, in **Roger’s** experience, it was precisely this primacy of feeling that enabled his subliminal experience of insight to be maintained and recovered. In Damasio’s (2006, p. 159) delightful phrase: “feelings let us *mind the body*”. He argues that feelings have a truly privileged status; because of their inextricable ties to the body, they come first in development and retain a primacy that subtly pervades our mental life. Since the brain is the “body’s captive audience”, feelings are first among equals. Damasio (2006, pp.163-164) specifically states: “The cognitive mode which accompanies a feeling of elation”, such as **Roger’s**, “permits the rapid generation of multiple images such that the associative process is richer and associations are made to a larger variety of cues available in the images under scrutiny”. (The extreme of this mode is mania.) It is hypothesised that this helped **Roger** recover, or even reconstitute, his insight. On the other hand, the cognitive mode which accompanies sadness, such as **Debbie’s**, is “characterised by slowness or image evocation, poor association in response to fewer clues, narrower and less efficient inferences, over-concentration on the same images, usually those which maintain the negative emotional response” (Damasio 2006, p. 164). (The extreme of this mode is depression.) It is hypothesised that this delayed **Debbie** in coming to her insights.

(4) *It is impossible to be aware of all that goes on mentally.* The evidence of this research is that, in insight, the key components may unfold in the body and mind very rapidly and sometimes virtually simultaneously, as in **Desmond’s** experience. So it is perhaps not surprising that **Roger** “forgot” his insight, because it can happen so quickly that not all thoughts gain salience. According to Damasio (2000, p. 126-127): “neurons get excited and fire

themselves away in just a few milliseconds, while the events of which we are conscious in our minds occur in the order of many tens, hundreds, and thousands of milliseconds”. As a result, according to Damasio (2000, p. 129): “Only a fraction of what goes on mentally is really clean enough and well lit enough to be noticed, and yet it is there, not far at all, and perhaps available if only you try”. This is classically illustrated in **Roger’s** experience. Damasio (2000 p. 129) adds: “curiously one’s context does influence how much one notices in the fringes of the mind”. This context was ‘crossing the street’ in **Roger’s** experience, ‘on the step of the bus’ in Poincaré’s experience and for Darwin it was ‘the very spot on the road’, as explored in Section **6.4 (4)**. When a good or bad outcome connected with this process comes to mind, however fleetingly or subliminally, as in the experience of all four research participants, a ‘gut feeling’ is experienced. Damasio (2006) gave this phenomenon the technical term, the *somatic marker* hypothesis, arguing that such markers in the body increase the accuracy and efficiency of the process, by signalling an alarm or a celebratory bell. So somatic markers assist deliberation by highlighting some options as dangerous or favourable, reducing the need for sifting a wealth of detail. It is significant that they mark both cognitive and emotional material, and may also operate outside consciousness. Damasio (2006, p. 188) concludes that “this covert mechanism would be the source of what we call intuition”. Such somatic markers are clearly a particularly important feature in the experiences of **Desmond** and **Roger**, but are clearly also present in the experiences of **Debbie** and **Tony**.

(5) *Finally, it is vital to recognise the significance of the sense of self.* The significance of this sense of self is highlighted in this research in ‘the influence of the life-world on the self’ Section **6.4**) and in ‘the influence of the self on the life-world’, (Section **6.5**) as found in the differing experiences of all four research participants. The researcher’s experience of failing to understand the full significance of **Debbie’s** sense of self in her sense of rejection is recounted in Section **7.17 (3)**. Shakespeare has a striking and beautifully nuanced way of drawing attention to this in the first line of *Hamlet*. A guard, alone at night, hearing footsteps shouts out: “*Who’s there?*” Superficially, it is such an ordinary event; yet it is a particularly evocative and profound question at the start of a play that so powerfully dramatises the bewilderment of human beings about the origin of their condition. Neurobiology illuminates in fine detail the way changes occur in both brain and body proper in an organismic way, as existential phenomenology has always insisted in principle. “If core consciousness is the indispensable foundation of consciousness,

extended consciousness is its glory ... and at its peak is uniquely human” (Damasio 2000, p. 195). The sense of self is connected to the lived past, the present moment and the anticipated future. The sense of self is uniquely expressed in understanding, creativity and insight. The ‘self’ referred to in these research findings is of course based on activities throughout the entire organism: “the self is a repeatedly reconstructed biological state” (Damasio 2006, pp. 226-227). His interpretation of the condition of complete anosognosics is that their state of ‘self’ is impoverished because of their inability to process current body states with the result that they have to rely on old information. This vividly demonstrates the importance of existential phenomenology’s understanding and insistence upon the interplay of time’s three dimensions for a fully functional sense of ‘self’. So the sense of self is often, to use T.S Eliot’s vivid images in the *Four Quartets*, like “music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all”; yet, in those fleeting moments of insight in which deep understanding emerges, “you are the music while the music lasts”. “The images that constitute knowing and sense of self – the feelings of knowing – do not command center stage in your mind” (Damasio 2000, p. 128). The evidence of this research is that these images influence the mind powerfully, but discreetly and usually subtly rather than assertively.

7.18 The Value of the ‘Researcher’s Own Learning Experience’

The attempt, in this particular section, is not to give a complete account, even if that were possible, of my learning experience, but to indicate some points on the learning curve where small, subtle and necessary shifts of awareness occurred – perhaps even some insight.

I am aware that this may well reveal that as a researcher I am more of a warning to heed than an example to follow, but perhaps there is still some value in that. It is one thing to research the experience of insight and quite another to “live and walk in the way of insight” (Proverbs 9:6). I shall seek to give a different example of my own learning as I sought to understand the significance of each of the research participant’s experience of insight.

The first example on the learning curve came right at the beginning of **Desmond’s** account of his experience. I have to acknowledge that, initially, I regarded his description of the horror of apartheid and his personal ambivalence about leaving Johannesburg to become Bishop of

Lesotho (MUs 3-13), as almost an incidental setting of the scene, without really appreciating the significance of his conflicts as essential preparation for his experience of insight. Perhaps I wanted to evaluate the achievement of insight without *seeing* and valuing the cost, the conflict and the pain from which it arose. On this occasion, my supervisor drew attention to the fact that I had only six meaning units in this section in my first draft. As a result, I reviewed the transcription and increased it to the current number of eleven. In the process two things happened. I realised I had failed to appreciate the fundamental nature of the preparatory experience for insight. I also experienced the refining power of the methodology. It had the effect of putting **Desmond's** experience under the microscope and I was surprised by the depth, complexity and intensity of his struggle before going into retreat. This new way of *seeing* it helped me to formulate not just his own situated structural statement, but to recognise the significance and crucial importance of this preparation, as part of the whole and holistic experience of insight in the experience of all the other research participants. So this finds expression also in the first three constituent components of the general structure of the experience of insight.

The second example emerges from the therapeutic relationship with **Debbie**. I was interested, and perhaps a little flattered, that in her list of six things in her e-mail, that had “greatly impacted” her (MU9) the first one she mentioned was a rather unusual ‘interpretation’ of mine in therapy. In terms of this research, it was perhaps an insight as analytic intuition (see Section **2.10.3.1**), rather than interpreting psychoanalytic theory (as in Section **2.10.6**). I am not aware, either before or since, in therapy of taking a book off my shelves and reading a short passage to a client. But I had a sense that C.S Lewis’s (1963, pp. 111-112) vivid images, and beautifully expressed understanding about the need, if she was going to protect her heart from the perturbations of love, to “lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness” (MU20), might help her to see the implications of her self-protective attitude and behaviour. I was aware that it required some courage to share it, because one does not usually warn a client whose husband has been unfaithful to her for eighteen years, that “in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it [her heart] will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable” (Lewis 1963, p. 112).

However, I sensed that the timing was right, and so it proved. **Debbie** “wrestled with whether or not it applies to me” for a month and a half. She describes it as “blood, sweat and tears” (MU21) and eventually concluded, as a result of listening to music that night when her insights came together, “I have a sense that it does” (MU9); “that’s pretty much what I was doing ... I was pretty happy to put my heart way way away” (MU20). In fact Lewis’s insistence that: “If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no-one, not even an animal” hit home because of Debbie’s loss of her kitten (MU28) in a way that I had not intended at the time. So she gained self-insight as well as insight into the vulnerable nature of, and risks inherent in, loving. This was essential, because there was no guarantee that her husband would be able, even if he was willing, to change his behaviour.

In the third example, in complete contrast to the above, I missed the significance of **Debbie’s** sense of self in her experience of insight. It should have been obvious, because I regarded her experience as primarily an example of self-insight; so, logically, it follows that her sense of self would be a critical factor. The truth is, I did not really *see* it; it required a shift in my awareness, and a little insight to recognise what a decisive factor it was. Not only did it follow logically, but in fact she had been quite explicit in the interview about her experience of rejection in the most vulnerable area of her life (MU8), her fear of rejection (MUs 24, 29) and her conclusion that: “rejection is the big thing” (MU30), but still I did not fully comprehend it.

Some time later, early one morning, as I was musing in bed before getting up, I suddenly and unexpectedly remembered an incident in therapy with **Debbie**. Immediately I knew it was significant, and felt a little excited and realised that I was in touch with a fresh empathic level of understanding her. The incident was crystal clear to me as if it had just happened. After vacuuming the floor in my study/consulting room, our domestic help had put the two chairs in which the client and I sit, about fifteen centimetres further apart than usual. To my shame, I did not even notice this; what I did notice was that she seemed more withdrawn than usual, but she did not initially disclose why. Later on she had the courage to tell me that she felt I was deliberately ‘distancing’ her. I was initially surprised, then recognised the importance of what she was saying, and apologised; we could see the previous indentations of the chairs on the carpet.

For me, this was such a helpful and vivid experience of empathically understanding her fear of rejection and the sensitivity and vulnerability of her ‘sense of self’ as in Section 7.17 (5). In the light of this little experience of insight, I was able to ‘see’ with new eyes how profoundly her ‘interpreting’, the influence of the self on the life-world, was affected by her experience of ‘rejection’ and her resultant sense of self (Section 6.5). It seemed clear that her withdrawing was to protect her ‘self’ from rejection, and that this was why there was a considerable lapse of time between most of the experiences which made an ‘impact’ upon her, and with which she had really wrestled, before she was able to ‘interpret’ them in a way that felt authentic for her, one night listening to music; significantly a ‘Symphony of Hope’ (MU25). It also it enabled me to appreciate more profoundly what it meant for her to be ‘held’ in therapy, by the music and by God (MUs 4, 5) as the *sine qua non* of her experience of insight. So, in fact, right at the beginning of the interview she had revealed this, but I had missed the *significance* of it.

I have come to recognise the inconsistency between these two experiences of working with **Debbie** as typical in my learning curve: times of sight and periods of blindness, moments of insight and days of stumbling in the dark. Yet, recognising the stumbling and facing the challenge seems essential for deeper understanding and occasionally for insight. I have often experienced something of this, when a first draft of a chapter is, quite appropriately, heavily criticised by one of my supervisors. Frequently I require about three drafts before I begin to feel satisfied. My learning curve owes a great deal to the complementary role of my supervisors: to Assie Gildenhuys for his conscientious responses to my material, critical eye for detail and high standards for clarity of expression; to Richard Alapack for the depth of his understanding and the breadth of his application of phenomenology, as well as his personal encouragement and challenges.

As a fourth example in my learning curve, both supervisors felt I had not been sufficiently clear and explicit about the distinctive findings of the research in my first draft of Chapter 6, and one suggested that it was important to define and explore more coherently the *passive* experience of ‘impact’ (Section 6.11.5), the *reflexive* experience of ‘interpreting’ (Section 6.11.6) and the *active* experience of the ‘self-actualising’ process of insight (Section 6.11.7). It was in the process of responding to this useful challenge that I became aware of the way the three ecstasies of time in **Roger’s** reflexive experience of ‘interpreting’ might be illustrated by a musical chord,

and further by a cadence bringing about a harmonic resolution (Figure 12 in Section 7.6), similar to the way in which a satisfying ‘interpreting’ brings resolution to the issue or problem at a structural level in insight (Section 6.11.6). That small shift in awareness brought about a greater awareness of the significance and value of music illustrating aspects of insight in this thesis. In the next few seconds I realised that if I were asked to give a popular presentation of the experience of insight based on this thesis, I would not only want to present the key aspects of the research participants’ accounts of their experiences of insight, and the ten constituent components as findings of this research, but I would also want to construct a more experiential interactive musical ‘workshop’. This would not only make it a richer multi-media presentation, but also provide significant heuristic power, in enabling the audience/participants to experience aspects of insight and to explore illustrations of a number of the findings with musical examples; and perhaps to discover insights and solutions for themselves. As George Steiner (1997, p. 65) observes: “In the face of music, the wonders of language are also its frustrations”. Obviously, further thought and consultation would be required to put into practice such a ‘workshop’ of music-making and music-hearing for insight; equally obviously it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to work out the details in this context.

In my fifth example I have to confess that very naïvely in the preliminary study, I was hoping to get a clear sense of sequence in the structure of **Tony’s** creative insight. What emerged as we looked at his cartoons together was that there was no such clear pattern and, therefore, I would need to be more discerning of the structure of his experience rather than approaching it at a linear, sequential level. I felt perplexed and stuck. It was then that I suddenly realised in practice, rather than in some vague theoretical way, the value and importance of existential phenomenology’s understanding of the interplay of times’ three dimensions. It is so obvious in hindsight, but it came to me as a sort of insight that powerfully illuminates at a more profound level what one to some extent already knows. It may be objected that this is simply an example of the application of a truth, but, as argued in Section 7.10, this study regards a sudden, unexpected, and more profound application or understanding of a truth as part of the experience of insight. Indeed, it is not only part of the nature and significance of the recurrence of insight, but it is also a constituent component of the essential structure of the experience of insight itself (see Section 6.10).

7.19 The Limits, Shortcomings and Omissions in this Research Requiring Further Investigation

Despite the length of this study, there are at least five areas requiring further investigation.

First, the relationship between ‘impact’ and ‘interpreting’ is so significant that it might be valuable to specifically investigate the catalytic effect of listening to music. The potential for such an investigation is illustrated in **Debbie’s** experience, because this research reveals that she responded passively, reflexively and actively, which recapitulates in microcosm the three constituent components of the dynamic core of the experience of insight. Such an investigation goes beyond the limits of this particular research, but it is hypothesised that it might be a very fruitful avenue for further research.

Second, the experience of insight as ‘self-authenticating’ suggested in this study bears further investigation. **Roger’s** experience is sufficiently unusual to have questioned the common assumption that it is the “Aha!” experience of insight that motivates, enables and empowers action, but further investigation of the ‘self-authenticating’ nature of insight as integral to the whole experience of insight is necessary. At present, this is expressed as a tentative conclusion; that ‘it *may* even precede the conscious “Aha!” experience of insight when its full value is recognised’ (Section **6.11.8**).

Third, the question of whether seamless, transliminal experience between the propositional and implicational subsystems in terms of meaning making is *essential* for all forms of insight is worthy of further investigation. In this research, its value is noted (in Section **6.6**), but it is acknowledged that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that it is a necessary constituent component of all forms and experiences of insight.

Fourth, allow me to throw in a wild card. In the light of the current research and development of a scale of soft signs of loss of insight in people suffering from bipolar type II disorder (as defined in DSM – IV) featured in the international conference of psychiatrists in Vancouver in April 2010, there may be an interesting opportunity for a collaborative and comparative study between losing insight and gaining insight, between the different understanding of insight in

psychiatry and psychology (see Section 2.2), between a more quantitative and a more qualitative approach.

Fifth, the potential significance of the experience of insight in the lives of each of the research participants was referred to in Section 7.12, but it was concluded that this required a separate investigation to do the topic justice, with the key research question for the interview being: “How do you assess the significance of your experience of insight in the subsequent development of your life and work?” It was suggested that this question, put to all four research participants, might make an interesting follow-up to the current research, and perhaps provide the subject matter for an appropriate journal article.

7.20 A Concluding Overview of this Study

The distinctive value of this study consists primarily in revealing the nature and structure of the experience of insight, together with a comprehensive and integrative reflection on the findings. It is person-centred rather than problem-centred, experience-orientated rather than theory-orientated and meaning-focused rather than mechanism-focused. One of the significant implications of this is that it is possible to explore the richly detailed descriptions of experiences of insight as diverse as those of the four research participants. Yet as revealed in Section 7.17 the qualitative research findings are entirely compatible with neurobiological research. In addition, there is not a built-in bias against seriously exploring the structure and components of insight of apparent transcendent experience, for example, and comparing it with experience of insight of natural scientific and cosmological issues.

The selection of research participants adds value despite flaws in guarding boundaries. Amongst the findings, the ‘disposition of openness’ and the need to adequately ‘confront’ and ‘contain’ the raw material for insight are regarded as important. Identifying and distinguishing the ‘moment of impact’ from the ‘moment of interpretation’ is also crucial since the evidence of this research demonstrates that in experience they do not always occur simultaneously as is usually assumed. The recognition of insight as ‘key to a self-actualising process’ and the significance of insight as ‘self-authenticating’, together with the importance of the philosophical understanding of intuition for insight, are matters of considerable consequence. An evaluation of the quality of



‘understanding’ in insight and the ‘recurrence’ of insight proves beneficial. An examination not only of the experience but also of its effects and ‘fruit in the unfolding context of a person’s life’ appears to have considerable potential and is worthy of further study. The relationship between insight on the one hand and sight, foresight and humour on the other, is useful. There is also benefit and value in relating this qualitative research to neurobiological research. Without doubt the appraisal of this researcher’s limits, shortcomings and own learning curve will give encouragement to others. It is also hoped that the recognition of the omissions of this research requiring further investigation will open possibilities to others.

I am profoundly grateful for, as well as humbled and enriched by, **Desmond’s** passion for peace and spirituality, **Debbie’s** appreciation and appetite for life, **Roger’s** sense of awe and wonder towards the mystery and beauty of being, and **Tony’s** delightful lampooning of our human failings.