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## Memory-Work as a method of critical reflection

### 1. Making memory work

#### 1.1. *Roots*

The method of memory-work was developed by feminist activists in West-Germany, namely a circle of women who were part of the project *Frauenformen* (women's forms) surrounding the editorial group of the journal *Das Argument* throughout the 1980's. In the preface to their publication on female sexualisation they explained the origins of the method: "The whole project arose out of our fundamental unease with all the theories of socialization previously developed within psychology and sociology. (...) The question of how individuals make certain modes of behaviour their own, how they learn to develop one particular set of needs as opposed to certain others, is never addressed. In no existing work did we find any indication of the existential affliction and obstacles facing girls in their attempts to become 'grown-up' women." (Haug 1987, p. 24)

The discussion processes of the women who pioneered memory-work were embedded in a context of debate on Marxist theory. An important influence was also the development of Critical Psychology (CP) at the same time with its subject-scientific approach. "CP as a subject-oriented research program promotes a type of research in which subjects are both participants and co-researchers simultaneously (...). Psychological research is intended as research for people and not about people. This is possible only if psychological research is conducted from the standpoint of the subject." (Teo 1998, p. 247) The closeness of the project *Frauenformen* to this approach is obvious. "Taking humans as subjects of the conditions of their lives – as in the project *Frauenformen* – demands from the research process to bring to bear their subject-status." (Meyer-Siebert/Schmalstieg 2002, p. 48)<sup>1</sup>

What *Frauenformen* focused on was the problem of construction of self in circumstances of suppression, and the perpetuation of these very circumstances in spite of their suppressive character through the acts of the subjects. The demand to bring to bear the subject-status of those who took part in the research process meant also to include participants in the process as co-researchers. Research then is not research on, but research with and research for those who are the subjects of the research.

"The project *Frauenformen* addressed these demands on feminist research through the method of memory-work which was formulated at first in Vol. 2 of the publications of *Frauenformen* and increasingly systematized through the different projects.<sup>2</sup> Research material are stories/scenes that are written by the participants in the research project themselves." (Meyer-Siebert/Schmalstieg 2002, p. 48)

A key figure in the process of developing the method was Frigga Haug who taught sociology at the Hamburg University for Economy and Politics until 2001. She was also a visiting lecturer in

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<sup>1</sup> The term subject in this context has the double meaning of 'made by' and 'makers of' at the same time.

<sup>2</sup> Between 1980 and 1997 *Frauenformen* published a total of 9 books on topics like female sexualisation, performance/gender, fear, film experiences, politics of women

Copenhagen, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, Sidney, Toronto and Durham.

## **1.2. The method**

*Female sexualisation* contained a chapter on the method in which guiding assumptions were presented. (Haug et al. 1987, pp. 33 - 72) But as Frigga Haug explained, for a long time she hesitated to write a research guide for memory work because “in principle this runs against my idea of keeping the process methodologically open and allowing for space for innovative intervention.” (Haug 1999a, p. 7)

As a consequence of her series of lectures held in Durham, North Carolina she eventually presented such a research guide 1999 in her article on “Memory-Work as a Method of Social Science Research: A Detailed Rendering of Memory-Work Method.” (Haug 1999b) She highlights four basic theoretical assumptions that underlie the method:

- “That one’s own personality is constructed  
The idea that our personality is not simply inherited, fixed, but rather that we construct our self in given structures, includes that our personality consequently has a history in which we gave meaning to what we found essential and by doing so shaped ourselves as personality. This history defines our steps in the present and the future.
- The tendency to eliminate contradictions  
All that does not fit in with the unambiguous presentation of our self is put aside in favour of a most clear-cut picture of our self, for ourselves and for others.
- That meaning is constructed  
In our everyday lives we try to establish a consistent meaning for ourselves. We create a type of image of ourselves in which we believe and that we try to present in all communicative situations. The construction of meaning is a process permanently ongoing. We send messages and expect that others receive these messages in the same way as we intended to send them. The construction of meaning thus relies on the acceptance of others. This happens by means of gestures, appearances, expressions, but first of all by the means of language.
- The politics of language  
(...) Language is not simply a tool which we can use at will, but rather (...) in and through the existing language politics are made that are talking through ourselves and that are regulating our construction of meaning. This means also that culturally in a way there are ready-made meanings lying around. These meanings impress themselves upon us when we are writing and dictate us what we may not ever have intended to express.” (Haug 1999b, pp. 9 - 11)

Memory-work is a collective process. A group comes together for the purpose of investigating a specific question or topic. At the heart of the process lies the engagement with self-generated stories/scenes, their writing and analysis. This engagement however is necessarily embedded in a discussion process on the actual topic or research question. Only in this context does the work on and with the self-generated scenes make sense.

Four main parts of the process can be described in general terms.

### 1. Initial discussion/s

Subsumed under this heading is the necessary clarification amongst the participants of the actual topic. The exchange of thought on the topic in question should lead to a preliminary sketch of the problem as point of departure from which the group will approach the topic. This should be done in a manner most accessible to all participants.

“The topic should be formed in lay terms. It is important not to pose the question in scientific or analytical terms since memories will not emerge when the appeal to them takes the form of language that is not in the vernacular. ‘A time when I was afraid’ is common language to which everyone can relate. Setting the question in scientific terminology, ‘About the problematic gender-specific emotional inability to act’ would elicit few memories.” (Haug 1999b, p. 3)

### 2. Writing of scenes

Each member of the group writes a scene on the agreed topic. The scene shall describe a situation that the author remembers from her/his own life. The stories are written in the third person singular. “This forces the participants to explain themselves as not self-evident and, therefore, unknown persons. (...) We might call this choice of third-person narration historicizing or distancing the narrator.” (Haug 1999b, p. 4)

When writing the text the author will concentrate on this one experience only instead of the description of a set of experiences<sup>3</sup> or a biographical report. ‘Meta-explanations’ should be avoided<sup>4</sup> as well as interpretations of the scene within the story. However as much detail of the actual happenings as the author remembers should be included.

The length of the scenes needs to be adjusted to the time available for the group to work on the text-analysis. As a rule of thumb one typewritten page can be dealt with in a two-hour session.

### 3. Text-Analysis

This step follows a set procedure:

- a) The text to be analysed is read out loud and consensus about common sense understanding and theory is sought amongst the group

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<sup>3</sup> Take e. g. the topic ‘job interview’ – instead of simply describing one interview, one could also write about a number of different interviews over a period of time (a set of experiences)

<sup>4</sup> E. g. if one describes a journey from Sligo to Dublin and starts to explain the historical roots of the railway system of Ireland ...

At this first step in the text-analysis the group follows the pattern of empathizing with the author. “We first want the meaning the author wishes to convey. Most of us learned in school how to interpret text. What does the poet want to tell us? (...) At this point it is important (...) to work toward a consensus about the author's meaning. This will open up a lively discussion. A number of different suggestions should arise, as each member of the group analyses the text. There are never any wrong answers. Each suggestion should build upon the others creating a thesis-like formulation of different statements, ultimately reaching a consensus.” (Haug 1999b, p. 11)

The group also seeks for the common sense theory that informs the message conveyed. This concerns sediments of folk-knowledge that are part of our stories also. Common sense message and theory can often be expressed in form of a proverb or saying.

The results of this first step are recorded and put out of sight.

#### b) Deconstruction of text

While “the next step is simple and at the same time rigorous. (...) [It] is not easily done because most individual experiences reported rely on empathy and comprehension and are successful in eliciting these in everyday communication. The consequence is the attempt to cultivate therapeutic discourses of sympathy and to relate connecting stories by way of 'psychologizing'. This stance and practice is not only theoretically unproductive, but it also stands in the way of insight. It invites group members to ally with opponents of understanding and active thinking and simply increases painful perceptions. It is absolutely necessary that distance be established in order to work with the text. (...) The questions about the text are limited to language use - basic grammatical rules. Sentences contain a subject, a verb, an object, perhaps adjectives. They give information about the engaged person, her emotions, her activities, and other persons. With this notion, we split the text in its elements.” (Haug 1999b, p. 14)

First the verbs referring to the active subject are collected, then motivations that guide the active subject and emotions that the active subject experiences are noted. In doing so all interpretation of the text is to be avoided.

Then the same is done for all other persons who play a role in the story.

Then the group looks for linguistic peculiarities, e. g. the repeated use of impersonal subjects, or auxiliary verbs, or negative forms of expressing activity.

Then white spots are identified in the story, that is “elements not mentioned in the written memory but necessary to the plausibility and agreement of the story.” (Haug 1999b, p. 18)

Eventually contradictions within the story are listed.

The collection of textual elements is visualized for everyone. This can be done on a flip-chart, on posters on a wall, on a white board etc. For this purpose a table format provides a template that can be adapted according to space and equipment used.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The table presented here is an adaptation of the format presented by Frigga Haug. I am going to also show examples of its practical application further below.

	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
<b>Active subject</b>			
<i>(if needed: active subject in plural 'they', 'all' etc.)</i>			

<b>Who</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
Person 1			
Person 2			
Person 3			

<b>Linguistic peculiarities</b>	<b>White spots</b>	<b>Contradictions</b>

### c) Reconstruction after Deconstruction

At this stage the actual text of the story is put out of sight to give room for a new perspective on the story. Now the group works only with the table that was created in the deconstruction of the text. The elements used in the construction of the story are laid bare and are looked at as the building stones, the material which the author choose to put together.

By using only the material in the table, the participants discuss how the author actually constructs her/his personality. During this step there is always a temptation to go back to empathizing with the author in a bid to 'save' her/his common sense message. Therefore this step requires a certain analytic discipline. The material to be used now is only what was detected by deconstructing the story.

The group formulates a thesis about the way the author constructs her/himself.

The same process is then repeated for other persons appearing in the story.

### 4. Problem transfer and final discussion

With the re-construction of the actors in mind the participants now discuss the meaning of the story again. The findings of the re-construction can lead to a different angle altogether from which the story is viewed, it can even lead to statements in opposite and contrast to the first step findings about the meaning of the story.

From this discussion a transfer of the original problem (question) onto other planes is possible. New questions can evolve that were not obvious before starting the text-analysis, certain theories can become a matter of interest and further investigation. Taken-for-granted assumptions and the dominant ideologies that guided the author's constructions can be deciphered. Thus uncovering the entanglement of personal and public theories and the ways how reality is defined and articulated can lead to new pathways. Following these new pathways can increase the participants' ability to understand the problem at hand better and become more conscious in dealing with it in their own (life) practice.

### 1.3. *Dissemination and derivations*

The character of memory-work as a method left open for developments has been mentioned already. Frigga Haug explicitly refers to this idea in her introduction to the *Duke Lectures*. When she presents her research guide she compares it to a cooking recipe. While one can read “how it is commonly done” it also offers the chance to “examine what one should not leave aside, or change.” And “memory work is applicable in a variety of situations. It is suitable for adult education outside the perimeters of the university, as it is for people beginning something new, or in social movements.” (Haug 1999b, p. 6)

As early as 1984 a group of women from *Frauenformen* brought memory-work to Birmingham where it was taken on by members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). “I remember that some of the women from the group in Berlin came to the CCCS to talk about the project on female sexualisation and to describe their memory work method. (...) I think what attracted me to their idea was that they valorized the private, the everyday, the personal and carved out a space for aspects of experience that, as a mother of three, were of immediate, daily interest to me.” (Clare/Johnson 2000, p. 199)

Mary Jane Kehily remembers that “memory-work became a key feature of many of these groups at Birmingham. It was commonly seen as a research method that also served as a productive mode of analysis. As a method and a mode of analysis, it could be readily incorporated into the cultural studies notion of group-work as a politics.” (Kehily 2010, p. 14) She recalls various collaborative projects that used the method.<sup>6</sup>

Mariette Clare and Richard Johnson in their essay on identity and power in a memory-work method provide a reflection on their use of the method in the context of CCCS. This report is quite dense in relation to the dynamics that the method unfolded on the group involved. From their description however it can also be understood that they applied the method not in a rigid manner, but rather developed their own tradition. This included technical adaptations in terms of writing the texts, e. g. there is no emphasis on the historicizing of the author, or stories are written under a certain time constraint. “In theory these autobiographical fragments are to be written at some speed, preferably within an hour. The speed is important because it seems to minimize the opportunities for self-censorship and self-editing, making the contradictions of everyday life more available for analysis.” (Clare/Johnson 2000, p. 198)

The memory-work group that Mariette Claire and Richard Johnson describe had eight members, seven postgraduate students and one teacher. From the way in which they highlight the dynamics that unfolded in the group a difference is noticeable to the reports given by the *Frauenformen* collective. For the CCCS-members there is evident a much closer and much more personal involvement of participants that is recorded also as internal negotiations of power in the group.

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Jane Kehily refers to - “The Popular Memory Group” (1980’s); “Televisual Machinations” (1990); “Cultural Forms and Social Identities” (course ran by Richard Johnson as part of a Masters programme); “Politics of Cultural Studies of Sexuality” (1990’s); “The Narrative Group” (early 1990’s – 2004).

From their report however it is not clear which are the determining factors for such a perception been able to arise. If there are differences on the level of cooperation and consequences in group dynamics for the collaborative process between the original groups of *Frauenformen* and the CCCS groups it would be interesting to follow these up and find out if these can be related to different adaptations of the method.

Besides the connection to CCCS in Birmingham<sup>7</sup> particularly the visiting scholarships of Frigga Haug accounted for the dissemination of the method over the realms of the German speaking part of the world. On these grounds then memory work has been taken up over the last twenty years by researchers in North America, Scandinavia, Canada and particularly Australia to investigate a wide range of topics.

Jenny Small in a cursory overview lists: emotion and gender; the experience of women leaders; work-life harmony; body/landscape relations; body and place; racism; subjectivity; silence and gender; women's sexuality; consumer service encounters; patient practitioner relationships; leisure experiences; tourist experiences; sport; use of memory-work to enhance student learning; student assessment process; experiences of casual ESOL teachers; women's writing; emotion and gender and learning; study of economics and gender; emotion and mathematics learning; science; women and mathematics; menstruation; pro-feminist subjectivities among men; women's speaking positions and feminine subjectivities; women and AIDS prevention; HIV treatments; older women, health and relationships; heterosexuality and desire. (Small 2000)

In the course of the various studies researchers have more or less regularly adapted the method to their own needs. This led to a number of questions to be asked about the method also. In an introductory chapter to their compilation of articles on international perspectives on memory work Judith S. Kaufmann, Margaret S. Ewing, Diane Montgomery and Adrienne E. Hyle find that only "two, of what might be called, 'traditional' uses of memory-work have been published since Haug. Traditional, because the researchers most closely adhered to the method as set out by Haug." (Kaufmann/Ewing/Montgomery/Hyle 2008, p. 11)

Problem areas which they see in relation to memory-work concern the liberty of researchers "to bend and break the rules of the method," (Kaufmann/Ewing/Montgomery/Hyle 2008, p. 9) dimensions of time, topics investigated, the question of collectivity in the research process and on a general level the lack of detail provided by researchers in their description of the application of the method. In relation to derivations and developments of memory-work they find "perhaps the most imaginative and intriguing extension of memory-work is Davies (2002) use of collective biography." (Kaufmann/Ewing/Montgomery/Hyle 2008, p. 9)

Together with Susanne Gannon, Bronwyn Davies highlights differences of her concept of collective biography and the original memory-work process in a chapter on *The practices of collective biography*. Referring to the gap between Marxist theory and their own experience as women as constitutive for the pioneer group who developed memory-work she states: "Haug and her colleagues set out to disrupt existing theory by insisting on a starting point in their own experiences as girls and as women, and then going back to theory to see how it might be changed in light of those experiences. Our approach has not been embedded in this kind of quarrel with Marxism. Our theoretical framework is post-structuralist, and we take this not to be a dogmatic framework that is in need of quarrelling with." (Davies/Gannon 2006; p. 4)

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<sup>7</sup> In an unpublished interview which I conducted in September 2011 with Frauke Schwarting, former member of *Frauenformen* and Dirk Mescher, CEO of the teachers union in Hamburg, the connection of the discussion circles of Critical Psychology and *Frauenformen* with CCCS are also confirmed from the 'other side'.

Bronwyn Davies specifies further. “Foucault (...) identifies three types of struggle against the powers through which lives are shaped: ‘... against forms of domination (ethnic, social and religious); against forms of exploitation that separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection [*assujettissement*], against forms of subjectivity and submission).”<sup>8</sup> Although each of these struggles is bound to the others, the emphasis of radical feminism, and of Haug’s memory-work, is on the first (although Foucault has omitted to add gender in his list). (...) As a strategy of resistance, collective biography places its emphasis on the third type of struggle, without ignoring the first two, of course, since they are inevitably bound up with each other.” (Davies 2008, p. 48)

Such a statement is certainly useful in establishing a gap between memory-work and collective biography, it is however questionable as far as it plays the various struggles out against each other. In fact, for the founders of the method memory-work is concerned from the outset with all forms of subjugation. “Memory-work (...) deals with the entanglement in the system – how are we actually involved in the ideologies, in the habits, in the emotions in this system and what possibilities of loosening and changing ourselves can we find, what openings are there? At the time [of developing memory-work, RH] this corresponded with the development of Critical Psychology, which is mainly concerned with the zones of opportunity and alternatives open to us if we just consciously exercise them for expanding our abilities to act. The question thus is how do we become subaltern obedient, fearful, feminine. Apart from ourselves we can receive assistance here from Critical Psychology and the chief authors, Gramsci and Marx. This is what memory-work researches: how we socialize ourselves, the human essence which in its reality is the ensemble of the social relations.” (Haug 2005)

It would certainly be worthwhile to distil the theoretical differences between Bronwyn Davies’ concept and the original memory-work in a more expanding manner. In the context of my current study however this can not be achieved.

Here it will suffice to note that memory-work has already flourished in a way that incites derivations of the original approach. The way of perceiving such a development is certainly bound to the context of the observer, be it as an attempt of post-structural mopping-up what could be supposed to be Marxist ballast, be it as an attempt of modernising the methodology at hand.

Another important reference in relation to derivations of the method concerns the efforts of Karin Widerberg (University of Oslo, Norway) who holds that it “really is a method that makes a difference. (...) I have allowed myself to develop it into a whole set of methods and techniques. This, I believe, is to be true to the very idea behind the method, if not strictly true to the model as it has been developed by Frigga Haug.” (Widerberg 2008, p. 114)

She reports of using memory-work as an individual enterprise, whereby remembered scenes on a specific topic are written by the individual engaging in the process over a period of time. The result is a collection of scenes that can be used to incite further study, providing traces of potential engagement. She reports on two such processes in which she wrote about ‘sexual harassment’ and ‘sexuality and knowledge.’ She concludes: “Since the stories had been written one at a time with the purpose to explore and illustrate diversities rather than similarities and connections, the result is of course a picture of an ‘I’ as multiple. This is a result of the method.” (Widerberg 2008, p. 117)

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<sup>8</sup> Source of quote of Michel Foucault in Bronwyn Davies’ text: Foucault 1982, p. 781



However she is quite conscious about the restrictions of not sharing the scenes with others for interpretation. She also reports on memory-work as a collective enterprise of four scholars from three different scientific disciplines (literature, psychology, sociology) who worked on an interdisciplinary project on “body/experience in a way and in a connection that could enable us to learn something new.” (Widerberg 2008, p. 117) They took up the idea of memory-work, wrote four texts each and adapted the rules of writing to their own needs including a body-biography also. She describes the process of writing and collectively discussing the texts in positive terms as an experience of fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue.

Furthermore Karen Widerberg reports of her experiences in teaching memory-work in three-day courses with students, graduate and postgraduate alike, and of using the method in various workshops where the focus was not on learning the method but rather on a specific topic. Eventually she also describes how she uses the method as a tool in her general teaching practice as a lecturer in sociology.

In all cases the idea of using self-generated texts as basis for an engagement with a certain topic is at the core of the application. What varies are the extent to which discussion is possible (time), the number of participants (from individuals to large groups of up to 100 students), the composition of the group (i. e. their mode of entry), the way topics are chosen (preliminary discussion, set upfront) and obviously the purpose of the exercise.

In her concluding remarks Karen Widerberg notes: “For me memory-work is an invitation to methodological explorations that can further the development of qualitative research. It is an approach that can result in a whole variety of methods and techniques that can also be used as part and parcel of the more traditional methods and techniques, such as interviews and observations. It is a method that makes visible the social and taken for granted. Thus it is one of the most fruitful methods available in making gender, class and ethnicity known to us in new ways, both in research and teaching. The lack within sociology is not theory but empirical knowledge of ‘how things are put together’ (Dorothy E. Smith’s expression). We need to know how the social comes about, how it is done, and here memory-work inspired methods can help us out.” (Widerberg 2008, p. 131)

It is obvious that finding out “how the social comes about, how it is done” is also at the heart of critical reflection on rituals and ritualisations in school. Following these general considerations I am going to describe the practical application of memory-work in two groups in the course of my research on reflection processes of primary school teachers on rituals/ritualisations. This will be done in a rather detailed fashion. First I will give a general account of experiences with the two groups. Then I will document the discussion processes of the second group and comment on their development also. The expanded coverage is meant to address the stated lack of descriptions about the actual application of the method. (Kaufmann/Ewing/Montgomery/Hyle 2008, see above)

## **2. Getting a grip on the method**

### ***2.1. Pilot group***

Having read some of the *Frauenformen* publications in the 1990’s I was aware of the method of memory-work and it's potential to approach a topic in critical manner. However this awareness was rather peripheral to me. I had not personally participated in a memory-work group.

When memory-work was developed first, it was mainly acquired as a research tool by active participation. “At present we introduce the method in every semester in one or two hours briefly and relatively unsystematic. We explain what memory-work is, how we proceed and provide an overview on our research. The new women then learn the method not in joint studies of the basics, but first and foremost through practical participation. The theoretical foundations out of which the method was developed and which at the same time provide the yardstick for a discrete application are moved into the background.” (Haubenreisser/Stöckmann 1993, p. 140)

In my own situation when considering memory-work as a method for my research I found the theoretical foundations rather accessible. The relevant literature guaranteed a good footing in this regard. What I lacked however was the experience of practical work with the self-generated texts. Here the research guide of Frigga Haug became quite handy. It provided enough detail to function as a point of reference in the practical work with two groups.

A first pilot group was made up of two teachers, a retired lecturer, a social worker, a software developer and myself. The participants knew each other in advance from the context of involvement in a primary school, as parents, teachers, or on a management level. The group came together for the purpose of experimenting with the method on the topic of rituals. There were two men and four women in the group. Two of the participants came originally from France, three from Ireland, one from Germany. The age span ranged from 28 to 55. The group met on seven occasions. Meetings were 3 – 4 hours long. A number of experiences emerged from the process with this group.

1. It was easy enough to introduce the general idea of the method. Theoretical foundations of the method as presented in the research guide were commonly accepted. The attempt to understand the various steps of the text-analysis without having practically exercised it however proved rather difficult.
2. Before turning our attention to the topic of rituals we tried to get a grip on the format of writing. To this end all participants wrote a story about an experience *At the pool*. We choose this as a topic that was general enough so that everybody was easily able to remember a scene. The writing of the scenes proved relatively easy. This gave us some confidence for continuing with the project.
3. The discussion of the term ritual brought together a lot of material, but very little clarity. While we were able to list a number of characteristics, these were not seen as in any way consistent. This was seen as a problem of the topic, not one of the method.
4. When we moved from the initial discussion to defining a theme for the writing of the scenes there was a general understanding that we were investigating rituals. Yet we failed to clearly formulate our research question/s. This lack of clarity led to situations at later stages where in discussions of the actual stories the point of reference was not always clear either. The theme chosen was *A ritual in school*. The generality of the term ritual was thus narrowed down to experiences in the framework of school.
5. A particular difficulty for our group was connected to the first step of text-analysis, i. e. the detection of the meaning and common sense theory. We found that we had a constant tendency to already question the first impressions as evoked by the texts. We found ourselves critically analysing instead of empathically reading the scenes, hence being too fast.

6. We found that the technique of dissecting was easy to handle as long as we kept rigidly to the conceptual idea which proved to be not difficult either.
7. We reshaped the template for the text-analysis provided by Frigga Haug in her research guide and included a section for the active subject/plural which in the context of the written scenes played a prominent part.
8. The authors of the scenes had no problem with the fact that it was their text that was scrutinized. Feedback was unanimously positive about the experience for each of the authors. It was found to be enriching to actually look at the scenes in this analytical manner. In many situations all members of the group had great fun in looking at our own crooked constructions.
9. The discussions ensuing after each text-analysis were seen as fruitful and enlightened. They brought together a great number of quite valid statements on rituals (in school). However due to the lack of clarity in terms of an overarching research questions, the results of these discussions stood more or less beside each other without a clear connection. This mirrored the situation that we found at the beginning of our memory-work project (as above under 3.). It left us in a situation where we seemed to have detected a lot of detail, but the overall picture remained unclear, thus a positioning of our own selves in the context of ritual (in school) was not yet possible.
10. On an organizational level the meetings took place in the houses of participants. The atmosphere was very informal. While this impacted certainly on the initial feeling of well-being of all participants, it also had disadvantages, be it simple occurrences like disruptions by incoming phone calls, children to be brought to bed etc., or also on the level of concentration which could easily be distracted.

## 2.2.

### *The second group*

The second group came together as a course offered in an Education Centre in Ireland. Participants were four teachers and myself. There were three female and two male participants. One participant was 25, the other participants were in their late 40's or early 50's. All participants apart from myself were from an Irish background. Participation was voluntary. Eight meetings took place on a weekly basis in late afternoon hours, i. e. after school. The meetings were held in the Education Centre. They lasted for two hours. The course was announced under the title *Memory work – school rituals and ritualisations*. The experiences in this group differed in parts from the first one.

1. I was much more in the role of a leader in this group. The mode of entry, the formal context of the course offered in the framework of the professional development program, the fact that participants did not know each other in advance in a private setting, the fact that I was 'employed' by the Education Centre to 'deliver' the course, hence: being responsible for its 'success'<sup>9</sup> – all this accounted for a different atmosphere from the very start, less intimate and more formal.

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<sup>9</sup> In fact I was not employed by the Education Centre. The course was rather based on a mutual agreement consisting of the provision of the insitutional framework by the Education Centre and delivery of the course by myself. There was no financial arrangement in place. However this was not known to participants at the outset of the course.

2. As a consequence from the experiences in the first group, I approached the project differently. From the first session on the focus was on the actual topic *school rituals/ritualisations*. The method of memory-work was introduced only briefly, a short discussion took place on the basic assumptions, but in general everyone agreed to these.

3. No trial writing took place. The process of writing as such was not problematised from the side of the participants. The general rules for writing as stated in the research guide were presented and accepted.

4. The initial discussions on ritual were quite similar to the ones we had in the first group. The fuzziness of the term and the lack of clarity of its meaning was easily discovered. Based on the discussion we developed as research questions: What is the role of ritual in school? What is our role in ritual? These questions functioned as a point of reference and a point of departure in our later discussions after the text-analysis. They also provided a way back on track if a discussion drifted away too much.

5. To allow for a change of modes/approaches in the text-analysis we used a technical fix. At the start of text-analysis the scene to be looked at was read out loud by the author. Although the other participants had received copies of the text, at this stage they only listened to the story, but did not look at the text (copies were simply put under tables). In this way it was very easy to follow the story in empathic manner and consequently come to consent on meaning or common sense theories.

6. In this group however it was more difficult to stick to the rigid concept of dissecting. On a number of occasions the texts in question were empathically defended by participants. However this was usually corrected, sometimes by me, sometimes by various members of the group. Eventually there was a common understanding in the group that we all have the tendency to feel with the author which in memory-work runs counter to the intended process. Hence everybody became sensitive towards this phenomenon.

7. There was a degree of anxiety present in the group that only went after the first text-analysis was finished. Such anxiety was no issue in the first group. The level of trust that was a given in the first group however could not be assumed unconditionally in the second group. It had to develop.

A couple of times in the first meetings I found myself in the role of reassuring that the matter of our engagement was not to analyse the 'true identity' of a participant, lay bare 'who they are', strip them down to the core of their personality etc., but rather that we are looking at ways of self-construction that are applied in certain situations or circumstances. It took me three sessions to find out that there was actually some confusion about terminology when one participant informed me that in looking up memory-work in the internet one finds reference made to a range of psychological investigations particularly in the context of child abuse.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> There is also in the German language another use of the term "Erinnerungsarbeit" (memory work). It is used in historical science in projects of uncovering 'forgotten history', often of a local dimension. It became particularly prominent in relation to projects dealing with the history of Nazi-Germany (for a recent example see: <http://www.darmstadt.de/leben-in-darmstadt/soziales-und-gesellschaft/erinnerungsarbeit/>).

As there is no copyright on such a term and due to its open meaning it can in fact be used in manifold ways when biographies are attended to. (see e.g. Mitchell/Weber 1999) Kersten Reich includes "biographical work" in his "pool of constructivist and systemic methods of teaching/learning" and he states that "biographical work is memory work" (Reich 2008 ff.). Obviously any biographical work includes always remembering, that is: without memory no biography, hence the statement.

8. The discussion after analysing the various scenes was far more coherent than in the first group. Here the clear formulation of the point of departure in form of the research questions played a crucial role. It may have been important also that the way the problem was laid out included a clear reference to the participants, i. e. What is our role in ritual? While it can not be said with absolute certainty, it is however quite likely that this way of posing the question made it much easier for the participants to refer to their own practice in the discussions. Approached in this manner the topic was simply closer to their everyday life.

9. The coherence in the discussions from one to the next session allowed the problem to also develop further. New questions came up in the course of the exchange. Discussing the role of teachers in rituals led to questions of responsibility in the profession, of structural conditions, of political impositions and of articulated alternatives within the education system.

The reluctance to furnish a rather stringent description of the various steps of the process of memory-work in bid of the supposed openness of the method for situational changes as referred to by Frigga Haug also meant that for researchers there was probably a threshold to actually experiment with memory-work. What the two pilot groups however show is that it is quite possible to apply the method on the basis of the template provided in her *Duke Lectures*. That such applications are always apt to situational adaptations according to the given circumstances in which memory-work is initiated seems self-evident.

The memory-work groups were meant to function as a laboratory for critical reflection on rituals. The following section gives an account of the second group's discussion processes.

### **3. Memory-work on rituals in schools – a report of the discussion process**

In this section I am presenting the summaries of the meetings that took place with the second memory-work group in the Education Centre. These summaries were written by me the day after each session and posted via e-mail to all participants. They were re-edited for the purpose of including them in this text, albeit changes overall were minor in scale. They were mainly made to guarantee anonymity and no changes were applied to the thematic content of the summaries. The character of the summaries is that of a communication amongst the members of the memory-work group. This accounts for certain passages appearing like personally addressing the reader (which in their original context they did as they were addressing the members of the group). For reasons of authenticity this has not been changed either. The summaries are highlighted by a grey background colour to distinguish them for their documentary character.

#### ***3.1. Session One Initial discussion***

At the beginning we found that there is obviously a problem of clarity when thinking and speaking about ritual.

We found that there is a connection between:

- Routine and ritual
- Habit and ritual
- Tradition and ritual

These terms all seem to have something to do with each other.

We found that there is an overlap in our use of the words. Activities can be understood as routine and ritual at the same time. An activity that is seen as a tradition can also be seen as a ritual. Out of a routine a habit can grow. A habit may also be seen as a ritual. Yet they are different terms so one would expect them to denote different things also.

Based on this first impression we tried to figure out if it is possible to describe something that could be seen as characteristics of rituals. We did this by constantly switching between concrete examples of experiences that we understood as ritual and a level on which we tried to find general terms for the elements that played a part in those experiences.

Examples of concrete experiences included:

- Break-time, deputy principal being 'present' on corridors
- Annual school play (staged performance)
- Taking care of injured children
- Start and end of lesson (learning support)
- Prayer in class (getting up, sitting down)
- Lining-up
- Time-out chair
- Hide and Seek (children hiding from teacher)
- Traffic light system (rewards, disapproval at end of week)

A good part of our discussion circled around a question along the line of:

Are there certain patterns in them that can be distinguished, be it that they are similar for some, or different for other experiences?

It may be possible to come closer to an answer to this if the question asked of the rituals in the examples is posed slightly different first:

What is the role of ritual in school?

What is our role in ritual?

Asked in this way we look at the function of the ritual, and also at the part that we play in the ritual.

For the role of ritual some elements of this sparked up in our discussion already. It was mentioned that the annual school play (including the build-up, preparation period for it) seems to have a function for 'breaking down barriers' between teachers and students. We identified elements of discipline, order prevalent in rituals like lining-up, 'time-out-chair.' The hide and seek game could be seen as a ritual of reassurance of good-will and mutual acceptance. Transgression seemed to play an important role within ritual. This led to the question whether ritual is in a way dependent on (be it materialised or potential) transgression.

It appeared as if ritual often has to do with boundaries. Status was another term used in this context.

The role that teachers play in rituals in school also featured in our talk. The presence in the corridor during break-time was seen as a specific way of supervising (in this case 'being approachable', but at the same time by simply being there preventing unwished-for behaviour of students). This example also led to the impression that in the actual ritual situation there seems to be 'tension'.

I think we briefly followed this thought, but I can't remember fully whether we could come up with something like a consensus, how we should actually understand this 'tension' – I know that it was said (maybe not in exactly these words) that the tension is certainly one that is felt (by the teacher). But I don't remember us going down this route of thought any further.

It was said that acting as a teacher can mean to act in ways that one might not really agree with. In certain situations in schools we put aside concerns about inter-human relationships that would be guiding principles for our interaction outside of school. Most pointedly this was put into the formulation of teacher vs. human being, which referred to the situation of 'breaking down barriers' in the context of the annual school play.

It was also said that as a teacher one depends on the cooperation of the students/pupils in rituals. If a student/pupil simply refuses to cooperate at all – the ritual seems to break apart. A limit for teacher action in this context was seen in the application of physical force.

Rules and regulations were mentioned as a defining element of school (teaching) practice: from school policies over curriculum to education law. However it was also said that the actual way a ritual in school is performed is in fact not regulated by those written decrees. Obviously the participants in the ritual decide 'how to do things'.

We noted that rituals can change over time. The way prayers featured in school was mentioned in this context, and it was understood that the sheer number of prayers said during a school day has decreased over the last number of years. This obviously constitutes a change in the 'ritual culture' or 'ritual framework' of the institution (school).

In passing it was also mentioned that greeting ceremonies change over time. 'High five' or the 'hip-hop gangsta greetings' were mentioned as an example of this.

We also found that for a teacher changing class can mean that in one year certain rituals are established in a class, but in the coming year those same rituals may not be possible at all. This was traced back to the different characters of pupils that teachers meet in different classes.

In this context it would be interesting to change perspective and look at it from the side of a pupil, or better from the side of a class (group of pupils). Obviously they change teacher every year as much as teachers change class. If teachers find that certain rituals do 'work' with one class, but not with another – can that be said in the reverse also from the perspective of students/pupils: certain rituals 'work' with some teachers, but not with others?

We did not specifically mention the different set-up of primary and secondary school. In relation to rituals in school it may be the case that the fact that in secondary school a class is taught by different teachers (according to subjects), and vice versa that teachers teach different classes – while in primary school a teacher in general works with a class all day for a year – has an influence on the rituals.

In our discussion we also found that from the perspective of children the entire school day could be seen as a succession of rituals. The age of children seemed to play a role in this, i. e. the impression was that the day is more ritualized for younger children and that ritualisation seems to decrease from the children's perspective with getting older.

In this regard the notion came up that children may need rituals and that there is a correlation to

age, i. e. the ‘need for rituals’ being stronger in younger years and decreasing gradually.

We noted that there may be a difference between the perception of a school day as a succession of rituals when viewed from the side of teachers or the side of pupils. We did not however go down the route to make this clearer and work out the differences between pupils and teachers.

We noted that rituals are context-bound. There is a ‘right time’ for ritual. If the bell in town rings at noon, everyone gets up to say a prayer. We understood this to be a ritual. Not getting up would be a transgression. If students/pupils are assigned with silent work during a maths lesson and in this situation a student gets up and starts saying a prayer out loud it would be completely inappropriate.

It was said that ‘the way to do things’ in a sheer physical sense becomes a matter of interest in ritual. We looked at the example of ‘how to stand for a prayer’ and found that there is a certain leeway for students, but not endlessly. The decision of what particular physical performance of an act is acceptable or not is made by the teacher. Yet it was also noted that in making decisions teachers take into account the pupils. Dress-codes were mentioned as an example, and it was noted that too rigid a regime on the side of a teacher can be quite counterproductive, leading to conflict.

We found that rituals have to do with expectations. The establishment (or performance) of rituals in the classroom were seen as influenced by expectations from e. g. colleagues or principal. It was mentioned that as a teacher one is expected to ‘have control’ or ‘be in control’ of the class. The example of the ‘time-out chair’ was used to stress this point. It was said that if a teacher is seen unable to make a child sit on the ‘time-out-chair’, the colleagues/principal will think the teacher does not have control.

It was said that as a teacher one is similarly expected to do things at certain times in certain ways. This was referred back to the idea of the school day as a succession of rituals (from the perspective of children), and we found that it may in fact be possible to see it in a similar light for teachers. Following a pattern in teaching practice that runs along the line of ‘what is expected’ was found to be potentially experienced as a ‘pressure to conform.’

The question was put forward how much we do actually know what others expect of us, and what role in this our ‘expectations of the expectations of the others’ play in this.

### ***3.2. Session Two Reassurance – Basic assumptions - Technicalities***

This session consisted of three parts.

#### Reassurance – a recap of initial discussion

We used the example of bringing the children into the classroom in the morning (‘in groups’) to recap on our initial discussion. We found that a number of elements/characteristics (routinisation, discipline, dependence on cooperation of pupils, potential transgression, set way of acting) are quite obviously identifiable in the activity. We agreed that we could safely understand the activity as a ritual activity.



We turned towards religious activities which we simply accepted as 'ritual' in our first session but did not clarify why we do so. It was said that religious activities gain ritual character if they are done in a 'set manner' (as 'prescribed'). A difference was noted between saying a prayer in solitude or in company with others, the first possibly not being a ritual, the second however being a ritual.

We took up the situation as mentioned in our first meeting in which a pupil in a maths class during silent work suddenly stands up and recites a prayer. It was noted that this would in fact not happen. However we played with the thought of it happening and found that in practical terms the teacher would try to put an end to it by pointing to the inappropriateness. The situation however would be difficult for the teacher and we found that this may be caused by the fact that in saying a prayer a pupil would use one value system (religion) to play it off against another one (instrumental learning). Both of these systems are essential to schools under religious patronage.

We found that in ritual activities there is always an expression of values (norms). This was applicable to religious but also to secular ritual activities. In the example of bringing the children to the classroom values could be identified relating to 'work ethics'. This could probably be put in words like this: "we now enter the time and space where 'learning' takes place and you are expected to 'do your best' in this environment."

Another normative (value) aspect found prevalent in the example was the way one relates to her/his own body and others. A possible wording: "each individual is expected to keep to their own physical sphere." Pushing and shoving was seen as not opportune ("of less value ..."?). Safety was mentioned as an argument against 'pushing and shoving.' This was contrasted to the situation at a birthday party with a number of 8, 9 year old children and it was found that in this situation 'pushing and shoving' often happens.

Expectations of others came up in the discussion again as a strong factor of influence. We spoke about putting up displays in the corridor and how pressure can be felt strongly to put 'good examples' of class work up regularly. It was noted that this pressure may be something that all teachers in a school may feel without even knowing what expectations the others factually have. It seems as if there is a 'silent agreement' that displays are 'to be put up', that they need to be 'up to date', and that they fit into a category of 'good work' which is defined along lines of 'common taste'. However this 'silent agreement' is not verified/falsified in discussion.

The notion of 'good work' was questioned. Reference was made to a group of special needs children for whom doing any work at all is already seen as a success. Results of their work processes however don't fit the standards of 'common taste'. Teachers may be reluctant to put such samples on public display (in corridors) simply to prevent the students who produced them from ridicule.

For our further proceedings we agreed that we are comfortable enough at present with not having a general definition for 'ritual' but rather a number of aspects, elements, characteristics which are obviously connected to the notion of ritual.

These will function as points of reference in our discussion of individual memories (stories). By going along in our process of analysing our stories we may also be able to gain a clearer picture of the interlacing of various aspects. After finishing analysing our stories we may take up our discussion at this point again. The question of 'defining ritual' may come up then again, but there may also be other questions developing on our way that we may find more beneficial.

### Basic assumptions in memory-work

We looked at the basic assumptions that underlie the concept of memory-work.<sup>11</sup> Discussion of these assumptions was not controversial. In general everyone seemed to agree to these points as presented.

The interdependency of individual and society came up at various points and it was questioned how much ‘responsibility’ one has in ‘constructing one’s own personality’ – or else how much one can be a victim of circumstances also. It was said that this question would play a central role in the process of analysing (deconstructing, reconstructing, interpreting) the stories.

It was pointed out that in the actual text-analysis we are going to work with the texts only. Rather than using the text as a means to find “who you are” (i. e. lay bare one’s “true identity”) we will use the text to find out how certain patterns are used in the construction of the text to create (“construct”) and convey a particular image of self and society.

### Technicalities

We then looked at the technicalities of writing the stories and agreed on the following.

We will all write about: “A ritual in school that I liked” or “A ritual in school that I did not like” This is understood to be the topic of our stories.

When writing our stories we will write in third person singular, ‘he’/‘she’ rather than ‘I’ – this allows for a greater distance from the story when entering into text-analysis.

While writing we will avoid biographical narration or recounting series of successive events.

- Example: If I wrote a story about how I learned to swim, I would concentrate on an actual story in the pool and the happenings that I remember, however I would avoid explaining that I was born in town XYZ as the second son of my parents ... etc. I would also concentrate on one experience/scene, even if the process of learning to swim may have been a succession of swimming lessons I would describe one session as I remember it rather than describing the succession of ‘learning steps’ that I went through (e. g. first using foam wings and a float, then removing the float, then removing the wings etc. all of which may have taken place over the course of a few weeks/sessions)

While we write we try to describe the situation as we remember it. In the description of our memory details are welcome.

Format:

- We will write with a font-size of 11 or 12.
- Line-spacing should be 1.5
- Stories should be not longer than one page (A-4). Obviously if a story is shorter that is no

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<sup>11</sup> Participants had received a hand-out at the end of the first session in which these basic assumptions were explained in a manner roughly similar to the presentation above in section 8.2.2.

problem. Also, if one needs a little bit more space to finish a story there is no problem. The 'one page' is a guideline, not a law.

We agreed on a deadline to have the stories written and posted around per e-mail to everybody by next Monday.

### **3.3. Session Three Greeting the flag**

In the third session we started the process of text-analysis. The stories were sent around as requested beforehand so that every group member had copies of all stories. I picked one of the texts as the first one to analyse and got the O.K. of the author for this.

The story was read out loud by the author while the other members of the group listened. The copies of the actual text of the story were put aside during this time. (see above, section 8.3.2.) This is the text of the story:

#### *A Ritual That I Liked In School*

*Every day, once the coats were hung up and shoes were changed, prayers were said and the children turned to the flag. It hung in between a picture of the pope and the 1916 proclamation. On this particular cold morning, the honour of holding the flag fell to a brown haired, pig-tailed six and a half year old. She had been patient so far, but now she looked up hopefully as the teacher scanned the room. There were butterflies in her tummy. She knew the words as well as the other children – in fact, she thought she might have known them better than some - and she'd been practising at home. Her name was called and she eagerly walked over to the teacher. She wouldn't have dared to run, the teacher would not have been happy with that, but she wanted to. How lucky for her that her mother had let her wear her new bobbins today. Thoughts of telling her parents when she got home raced through her mind but she concentrated now on the task at hand. Inside her chest, her little heart was beating furiously. Outwardly, she was poised and serious. She knew this was not the time to smile even though she was bursting with pride. This honour could so easily be snatched away. She'd seen it happen before. Now, as the teacher firmly placed the old, faded flag in her hand the other children looked on expectantly. She extended the child's arm until she was satisfied that the flag was at an appropriate angle. The child's arm locked into place determined to keep it that way. And then it began. With a nod from the teacher, thirty-four children placed their right hands over their hearts and began singing Amhrán na bhFiann. The little girl joined in enthusiastically. It was more difficult to hold the flag straight than she would have thought, but glancing over at her teacher she willed her arm to stay put for the duration of the anthem. Her heart soared as it came to the final lines, they were her favourite lines after all, but a part of her was sad because it would be a long wait for her turn to come again. While the class applauded, the teacher carefully returned the flag to its usual place. She gave the little girl a smile as she returned to her seat so she knew she had done a good job.*

In the discussion after listening to the story we tried to figure out what 'common sense message' is conveyed in the story. This was expressed as: "If you play by the rules, if you do what is expected,

if you are patient, you'll get your reward.”

We found that there is also an underlying assumption on which the story builds. This was expressed as: “School gets you ready for life.” This was meant to depict the common sense theory that what one learns young stays for life and school is the place to do so.

Then we took up the text and started deconstructing it. We put the various elements into the table format. This looked like that:

	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
<b>Active subject</b>	<p>had been patient looked up knew thought had been practising walked wouldn't have dared to run wanted concentrated</p> <p style="padding-left: 100px;">was poised was serious was bursting</p> <p>knew had seen willed glanced would have thought knew joined</p>	<p>teacher would not have been happy ⇨ therefore she does not run</p>	<p>hopeful eager enthusiastic</p>
'parts' of active subject	<p>(there) were butterflies in her tummy heart was beating arm locked in heart soared a part of her was sad</p>		<p>(there) were butterflies in her tummy heart was beating heart soared a part of her was sad</p>

For the other subjects in the story we found:

<b>Who</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
teacher	<p>scanned would not have been happy placed (flag) extended (child's arm) was satisfied nodded returned (flag) gave (smile)</p>	-	<p>would not have been happy was satisfied</p>
mother	<p>had let her (wear bobbins)</p>	-	-
children/class	<p>turned looked on placed (hands) began singing applauded</p>	-	-

Linguistic peculiarities	White spots	Contradictions
<p>It was mentioned that a number of terms in the story are ‘metaphor-like.’ One may say that they contain ‘more’ than what is said literally, as if they are symbolic (‘pope, 1916 proclamation, Amhrán na bhFiann) – but the symbolic meaning is only detectable for somebody who has knowledge of this meaning already, i. e. is familiar with the specific symbolism. Strictly speaking we could not say that this is a ‘linguistic peculiarity’. It is in fact a rather common way of using language.</p> <p><i>In this context the ideas of ‘construction of meaning’ and ‘politics of language’ play a role as tools for our analytical work. It may be interesting to consider how we use (not only) ‘symbolic terms’ in our narratives. I am going to attach an article of Basil Bernstein on ‘elaborated and restricted codes’ that may provide some further thoughts in this direction.<sup>12</sup></i></p>	-	-

Based on the material that we listed we ‘reconstructed’ the active subject (main character) of the story. This was expressed: “The active subject is constructed as a person who is obedient, patient, conscientious. Yet her body does not ‘go together’ with this ‘personality’.”

We found that there is no spontaneity in the event - but inside the child:  
The main character in the story is struggling ‘with herself’; presents a ‘façade’ that does not reflect her (true?) feelings; she actively suppresses her drive (don’t run – walk); she is constructed as all ‘mind’, knowing, thoughtful – while her emotions are ascribed to ‘parts’ of her body. It is nearly as if these parts of the body seem to have their own life (i. e. an emotional life) that needs to be kept in ‘check’

The other children/class are constructed as physically active. In contrast to the main character: they are not thoughtful, knowing; they have no emotions; there is no struggle for them they are constructed as ‘matter of fact, do the business’; even the applause has no further quality, it is as if they simply ‘fulfil a task.’  
(it is also interesting to note that the main character ‘joins’ them ‘enthusiastically’ in their singing, something we did not specifically refer to in our discussion, but yet it is part of the text)

The teacher is constructed as a person who is efficient, controlled, ‘cool’, perfectionist.

With reference to our initial impression of the story (“If you play by the rules, if you do what is

<sup>12</sup> The *italics* are my own comment which I included in the summary after the session. The attachments referred to here were: Bernstein/Elvin/Peters (1966) “Ritual in education”, and: Basil Bernstein (1964) “Elaborated and restricted codes”

expected, if you are patient, you'll get your reward") we found that this statement does not fully capture what we derived from the text-analysis.

We did not find a new formulation to express this. From our discussion however, may I suggest something along the lines of: "If you play by the rules, if you do what is expected, if you are patient, you'll get your reward – but it costs you! You have to censor your impulses, emotions, drives, wishes. You have to disconnect from your feelings and make sure that they are not seen."

The underlying assumption that is contained in the story: "School gets you ready for life" was seen as a rather short and unspecific statement, nearly a passe-partout formula that can be used to support whatever one wishes, e. g. it was understood that just as much as it may be necessary in life to sometimes 'hide' your feelings, at other times it is similarly necessary to 'show' them.

At the end we had a very brief look at the actual text of the anthem that the children sing and found that it has a rather martial (and thus physical, dynamic) character, which again stands in contrast to the control that the main character exercises over herself.<sup>13</sup>

Comments on the session:

I felt that during deconstructing the text we drifted away from the literal content of the story a lot. We frequently started to discuss 'what was meant' rather than 'what is said.' This is a normal occurrence when engaging for the first time in this particular way of looking at a text.

We all have learnt to work with texts differently, i. e. to 'empathize' with the author, to 'put us in the shoes of the actors' etc. However this rather prevents us from looking analytically at the stories. What is required here is the application of a new technique. We also see what is gained from applying the technique and how separating the various elements is a step to see them in a different relation to each other, and by doing so enhance our perception and consequently our means for reflection.

In our next session we will already be more 'tuned in' to this specific way of approaching a text. This will allow us to also get through with the actual deconstruction faster and provide more time for the discussion afterwards ... i. e. reconstructing the characters, referring back to the original 'common sense understanding' and also relating to the overall context of our discussion on rituals. Particularly the last aspect could not be addressed yesterday for simple time constraints.

There are a number of avenues that offer further discussion, e.g.:

- a) re. ritual on a general level ⇒ Can we come to a consensus of characteristics that make this activity a ritual?
- b) re. the specific ritual ⇒ Can we detect elements in this ritual that we identified in our initial discussions over the last two weeks?
- c) re. ritual in school ⇒ Take up the questions 'what role does ritual play in school' and try to answer it for this particular ritual. Then: does the main character learn something through/in this ritual?
- d) The 'flag-story' was written as a ritual in school that the author liked ⇒ is it clear from the story what it is in the ritual that she liked? And what evidence is there in the text?
- e) re. the 'common sense message/theory' ⇒ Can we (after reconstruction) detect the specific

<sup>13</sup> See appendix 10

ideological content in it, i. e. what are the thoughts that are hegemonic here? Are there alternatives? If not, is it possible to formulate them?

In our further proceedings we will inevitably also have a look at aspects of ritual theory (and its application to school). By developing our own material via the deconstruction, reconstruction, and discussion of our stories we will have a rich source of reference.

At our current stage I would encourage you to have a look at theoretical material on rituals (or rituals in school). I am sending you a file with the text of an article on 'ritual in education.' Bernstein/Elvin/Peters' article is the first one in the English-speaking world that specifically deals with 'ritual in education.' Written in 1966 there are obviously a number of more recent publications also, however it provides a very good starting point for more theoretical considerations of rituals in school.

If you feel like even more food for thought ... from an abundance of books on rituals let me suggest two books of Catherine Bell:

Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual practice*, 1992 (new release also 2010)

Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 1997 (new release 2010)

### **3.4. Session Four** **Parent/Teacher meeting**

We worked on the story about a parent/teacher meeting. This is the actual text of the story:

*A ritual that I did not like*

*He went to the first parent-teacher meeting in the secondary school that his son attended for half a year. It took place in the gym of the school, a dreary place, particularly on a dark and dull evening in late January.*

*When he arrived he stepped into the gym and saw that along the walls on both sides of the hall there were small tables put up. Behind most of the tables a teacher sat. Placed in front of the tables there were always two chairs. The hall was cold and most of the teachers wore coats or thick jumpers.*

*He was not familiar with the procedure and asked another parent whom he knew as a neighbour how this all would work. The man told him that he should simply wait in the entrance area and have a look from time to time if one of the teachers of his son would be free. In this case he should go to the table and talk to the teacher.*

*In the entrance area there was a table with tea and biscuits set up by the caretaker, and also an electric fan that provided a bit of heat. So he decided to stay there as suggested by his neighbour. He looked interested at the coming and going of parents to and from the teachers' tables. The situation seemed rather strange, the whole atmosphere reminded him of a cowshed.*

*After a short while he had seen enough to be able to understand the system of access to the teachers. He now kept an eye on three teachers of whom he knew that they taught history, English and maths in his son's class. The history teacher was free first so he went to his table. He was curious what sort of conversation could be had in this atmosphere.*

*He introduced himself to the teacher. The teacher then told him that his son was a rather good student, that he had no problems with him and that everything was more or less fine. Having a keen interest in history himself he would have loved to engage the teacher in a discussion about the*



*history of schooling in Ireland but he felt that was completely inappropriate, in particular in face of the number of other parents who were swarming around the place waiting to get a chance to talk to the teacher. So he decided to ask no further question and rather move on to the maths-teacher. The situation was a repeat of the first one, no real conversation developed between him and the teacher. Within five minutes everything seemed to be said and he moved on. The English-teacher was not free at this stage, so he went back to tea and biscuits. Here at the table with the electric fan no serious conversation took place either. While sipping their tea parents were always with one eye luring for the next free table.*

*When the English teacher was eventually free, he went to her table. She was also the class mentor and he expected a bit more from this conversation. He heard that after a couple of weeks at the start of the school year she now felt that his son had settled in rather well and that he got on with the other students without trouble.*

*He would have loved to force her into a discussion about the school uniform and how this was a constant topic for potential struggle at home, but he felt there was no chance to get his thoughts across in this atmosphere. So he left it and played along in being nice to each other.*

*After this he had no desire to stay any longer in the cold and dreary place and he made his way back home.*

In the initial discussion we tried to figure out what ‘common sense message’ is conveyed in the story. This was expressed as: “Parent-teacher meetings are not worthwhile. They (teachers) don’t listen to you anyway.”

As an underlying assumption we found: “Teaching is just a job like any other – therefore one can not expect any real interest from teachers.” We also found that this assumption is connected to the idea that teaching is a vocation. Therefore the standards on which teachers are measured are set ‘even higher’ and consequently if they don’t live up to those standards they are looked at as ‘not proper’ or ‘uninterested’.

Then we took up the text and started deconstructing it. The various elements were:

	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
<b>Active subject</b>	went arrived saw was not familiar with ... asked stepped knew should wait should look should go should talk decided to stay looked had seen was able to understand kept (an eye on) ... knew went was curious introduced would have loved to engage felt (it was inappropriate) decided (to not ask) moved went went expected heard would have loved to force felt (there was no chance) left played along had not desire to stay made (way home)	Motivations in the text appear only in form of implications.  e. g. 'decided to stay at the table' ⇨ because of the electric fan?	Curiosity

For the other subjects in the story we found:

<b>Who</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
Son	attended was (a rather good student) had settled in got on with others	-	-
Neighbour	Told	-	-
Teachers (in plural)	Sat	-	-
History Teacher	was free told	-	-

Parents	swarming sipping (tea)	-	-
English Teacher	was not free was eventually free was (class mentor) felt	-	-

Linguistic peculiarities	White spots	Contradictions
<p>In the text there are numerous ‘animations’, that is subjects that are not actual persons, but rather things or abstract terms:</p> <p>It (meeting) took place Chairs were placed Hall was cold Electric fan provided heat Table was set up Situation seemed strange Atmosphere reminded him No real conversation developed Everything seemed No serious conversation took place</p>	-	-

Based on the material that we listed we ‘reconstructed’ the subjects of the story. “The active subject is constructed as a person who internally and externally is active without changing the environment. His activities have no material effect. He appears like a person who walks through the forest but does not pick up a leaf. He does what he should do – not what he would like to do. All of this happens without a motivation or emotion.”

“The other subjects have no real qualities - the teachers are like cardboard cut-outs. Only the parents (as an amorphous group) show some level of activity (swarming, sipping), although without motivation/emotion.”

We found that there is a striking difference in the activity level between the active subject on the one hand and the other subjects on the other hand. In fact after the active subject the animated environment seems to act much more prominently than the other persons. In this context also: the funny construction about ‘no conversation taking place with the electric fan’ underscores the importance of the ‘things’ in the story.

In an attempt to rephrase the initial statement about the message of the story we found: “Parent-teacher meetings are not worthwhile, there is no engagement going on in them.” The idea that ‘teachers don’t listen to you anyway’ is not supported by the elements of the story, there is no attempt made by the active subject to actually say something to the teachers, consequently there is nothing they could listen to. However the teachers don’t make any attempts to engage either.

We spoke about expectations, here: what expectations the parent brings into the situation/meetings with the particular teacher/s, and what expectations the teachers have in relation to the situation.

We found that no exchange takes place between the partners in the situations about their expectations. This is captured in the term ‘no real conversation’ – although in fact there is ‘real’ conversation, i. e. persons speaking to each other. But this conversation has obviously a quality that makes it be experienced as ‘unreal’, this quality being the lack of engagement.

We touched on the question why there is no engagement. In this context we found that it is actually quite difficult for teachers in parent-teacher meetings to engage with parents. Usually time slots of 10 – 15 minutes are calculated for the parents of each child. In such a short time it is hardly possible to have a conversation that has any significant depth.

The situation in secondary schools was seen as putting even more strain on teachers, because they usually teach a subject in a number of classes, thus dealing with a large numbers of students during the course of a week. In parent-teacher meetings there is simply not time to pay extended attention to any one student. From the teachers perspective thus it makes sense to ‘play along’ and fit in with the conveyor-belt system of parent-teacher meetings.

We also moved into an exchange of personal experiences and found that parent-teacher meetings in primary and secondary school seem to differ somehow. It was noted that in primary schools the physical set-up is different. The meetings take place in the teacher’s classroom. Parents also have an allocated time-slot, i. e. they are invited to come at a set time to a set place. For secondary schools the physical set-up as described in the story was found to be a realistic picture. A change in the actual way how teachers and parents communicate was also noted for primary schools. Experiences were reported of a rather satisfying communication in parent-teacher meetings.

In one case a development was also described that took place over the last number of years in the particular primary school in which parents were included in school activities more often and more consciously (cooking classes for parents were mentioned as an example). This was related to a better communication between parents and teachers.

A few additional remarks:

In our discussions we usually do not come to a ‘final answer’ – we rather find ourselves again and again confronted with ‘a new question’ or with contradictory results. The lack of the ‘final answer’ can be experienced as frustrating. It is not easy to live within contradictory situations. You may remember one of the basic assumptions in memory-work is that we (i. e. human beings as social beings) have a tendency to eliminate contradiction. This is not rocket science and it is pretty much a ‘survival strategy’ also. However one of the gains from memory work is particularly to shed a light on the contradictory situations in which we find ourselves in society – and come to a more conscious way of dealing with them. As social actors we become agents of our own will rather than pawns in the hands of others (or if you like: victims of circumstances). This does not mean that the contradictions would ‘go away’, they are still there and we may also find that in certain situations we are ‘alone’ and a realistic assessment of the situation may suggest ‘no action’ at a given time. Yet if there are options to ‘be active’ we will actually be able to see them and we can also make strategic moves to change a situation so that such options do actually arise.

In our meetings I get the impression that you in fact enjoy this search for ‘new questions’ and that you don’t find it a tedious procedure that you hesitantly endure. Surely it would be interesting for me to get a feedback on this.

Let me also say a few words about the connection to our overarching topic of rituals in school as it was mentioned yesterday a couple of times. We will bring together the results of our discussions after all four texts were analysed and relate them to rituals. At the end of the day we all wrote a story about a 'ritual in school.'

In our initial discussions (in the first two sessions) we have identified a great number of elements that play a role in rituals (in school). If you find the time you may have a look at the summaries of these two sessions again. I am sure you will recognise and identify certain topics from our general discussions in the two stories and in our analysis of them also.

### **3.5. Session Five** **Inspector's visit**

We worked on the story about an inspector's visit. This is the actual text of the story:

*A ritual in school that I disliked*

*It was the day of the incidental visit prior to his second diploma, in those days you had the inspector for an entire day in each of your two probationary years. The date had been flagged in advance so it was a tense time preparing notes, the pupils and the classroom. It was also his first encounter with this particular inspector – a divisional inspector who was filling a gap as the school no longer had a district inspector. Still, when the day dawned he was reasonably relaxed. He had, after all, gone through teaching practice in college with no difficulty. He had, successfully, undergone his first diploma with an inspector who had a very bad reputation. He had had no problem with him.*

*The inspector arrived early on the day of the visit. He was a big man, physically, and had obviously no time for small talk. In fact he had a superior, almost disdainful, attitude. Not a good start. The morning progressed slowly. No comment from the inspector, no glance that could be interpreted as conveying approval let alone encouragement. He just wrote furiously in his notebook which had a green cover. Just before the break he called the teacher to look at the roll book. It was completed as per instruction, black ink, correct symbols entered in the correct spaces, totted and cross totted, no errors that had had to be corrected. Yet these facts were not commented on. Oh no, the handwriting was not of the correct standard. In his words there was an absence of 'perseveration'. The day was getting worse.*

*Lunch time came. Usually a time for quiet words of encouragement from the rest of the staff. Not today. There was nothing positive to report, no sign that things were going to plan. The afternoon stretched out long in the mind. The next disaster was a history lesson. Inspector, had had enough. He invited the teacher outside so they could talk out of earshot of the pupils – sounded ominous. And ominous it was. The inspector was not going to undertake the diploma examination as, he said, the result was a foregone conclusion. He would report to the Department that he was deferring the diploma which wouldn't look as bad on the teacher's file as a failure in the diploma. Then he shook hands with the teacher commenting that he was not a teacher and never would be. He added that he would be with the inspectorate for a long time to come and would be closely monitoring the teacher's progress.*

*A dismal end to a dismal day. It had been a crushing experience offering absolutely no hope. One old Brother did say he had had a run in with the same inspector many years before. It has lived in*

*the memory of the teacher for over thirty years and, in a few dark moments, led to the question – was he right?, should he have pursued a different career?*

The common sense message that we found in the story was expressed as: “Might is Right.”

We also found that such a phrase implies that: Where there’s no structure, no boss, no chain of command ... chaos prevails.

The deconstruction of the text led to the following entries:

	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
<b>Active subject</b>	was (relaxed) had gone through had undergone had no problem	-	Relaxed

For the other subjects in the story we found:

<b>Who</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
Inspector	arrived was (big) had (no time for small talk) had (attitude) wrote called had (enough) invited was not going to undertake said would report was deferring shook hands added would be monitoring	(talk out of earshot) (make file look not as bad)	-
Old brother	Said		

Linguistic peculiarities	White spots	Contradictions
<p>Questions at the end</p> <p>Animations:</p> <p>It was Date had been flagged It was Day dawned Morning progressed It was completed Facts were Handwriting was Day was Lunch time came Nothing positive Afternoon stretched Disaster/History lesson It was It had been It has lived</p> <p>There are a number of sentences without any subject:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not a good start.</li> <li>- Not today.</li> <li>- A dismal day to a dismal end</li> <li>- Usually a time for quiet words of encouragement</li> </ul>	<p>The inspector's reasoning, rationale for 'having enough' and for deferring the diploma is left unclear.</p>	<p>The diploma is deferred – yet there is “absolutely no hope”</p>

Based on the material listed the subjects of the story can be ‘reconstructed’ as:

“The active subject is constructed as a person who does not do anything”

“The inspector is constructed as a ‘matter of fact’ person, who does his job, is competent and efficient, with a trace of ‘human touch’.”

In our discussion afterwards we were surprised about the discrepancy between the impression that the story evokes when read out and the results of the deconstruction/reconstruction process. Initially the inspector seemed to be a ‘big bully’ – but the deconstruction did not at all support this image.

We also found that the animations play a prominent role in the story, and amongst them there are repeated references to time-related terms: There are forces at play in the story that are beyond human control.

The fact that the active subject does nothing in the story in combination with the ‘matter-of-fact’ efficiency of the inspector then implies that ‘man-made structures’ are as powerful as natural ones. At the end of the day, an inspector coming to a school is something different than day dawning or morning progressing - but they are presented in a fashion that allows for them to be regarded as similarly unavoidable.

The earlier idea of ‘might is right’ was found not supported by our deconstruction. We rather found the message of the story could be: “There are structures at work that are beyond control. They run their due course regardless.”

We discussed about structures as such and found that the idea that ‘chaos prevails’ where there is no structure is a rather simple construction that does not really say a lot. In fact, there are structures everywhere and the story points to them: natural ones, but also man-made ones.

The use of an idea like ‘Where there’s no structure, no boss, no chain of command ... chaos prevails’ confuses the two. Natural structures can in fact not be criticized: there is no point complaining about the fact of gravity, it won’t change anything for the apple will still fall down from the tree. This is different for man-made structures. A boss, or a chain of command are in place as a man-made structure. They are to be questioned, scrutinized, their rationale to be understood and a position in relation to them to be developed. The question then for man-made structures is always: which structures, why those and not others, who implements them, how did they appear in the first place, whose interests are served.

We also turned our interest back towards the idea of rituals and looked at the question, why the stories that we analysed so far were written as ‘stories of rituals’. Elements that we found:

- formalisation of behaviour
- Standardization of behaviour
- Routinisation of behaviour
- Status differences of actors / (authority)
- Standards/rules are set or represented by authority holders
- Interaction does not provide honest engagement
- Expression of an unquestioned/unquestionable order
- Rules/order/expectations are not explicitly verbalized, they are (supposed to be) ‘known’

The question came up, what relation is there between ritual and emotion, is there a connection between the two?

We found that as human beings we can not not have an emotion, be it as fleeting as it may, there is at any given moment of our lives an emotion. However we recognised that rituals may in fact ‘do something’ to/with our emotions. This thread was not followed any further (we were at the end of the session) – but it should be kept in mind and taken up later again.

**Addendum – on the way home two thoughts went through my head and I wish to share them with you.**

a) The stories that we wrote were written as ‘a ritual in school that I liked’ or ‘... that I disliked’ In fact the two stories of the male participants were rituals that they ‘disliked’, while the three of the female participants were rituals that they ‘liked’. I wonder is there a pattern in how males and females actually experience rituals?

Granted, we are a tiny group, however it would be interesting to simply collect more stories from other people and find out, whether this initial observation is in any way supported further.



b) I thought about the white spot in the story that we analysed, i. e. the lack of rationale given for the decision of the inspector to defer the diploma.

I wonder if this 'white spot' is a 'strategic white spot'? Don't get me wrong here, by strategic I don't mean a consciously chosen strategy, but rather a certain way to make the story 'round'. Say, the reasons for the inspector's decision were stated – they would also be open for investigation, for critique, could be scrutinized, found to have substance or not. But it would also imply that the actions of the active subject would be open for the same investigation, critique, scrutiny, having substance or not.

As the active subject in the story 'does nothing', it seems to necessarily follow that the rationale of the inspector can not be mentioned. In this way the impression of forces beyond critique being at work can be created.

If something was 'done' (by the active subject) and 'reacted to' (by the inspector) it would suddenly open the whole story to a new dimension of thought, i. e. if the situation was found to be unjust, unfair, prejudiced the logical consequence would be that one could also think about 'what else could be done' in the situation/about the situation etc.

It may be the case that only without mentioning the inspector's rationale (and the actions of the active subject), the impression can be upheld that 'nothing can be done' anyway ... which we subsequently translated in our first thesis as: "Might is right"

And yet, whenever we use a notion like this, is there not a certain element of ambiguity in it? On the one hand, we resign to the fact that 'might is right' (nothing can be done); on the other hand, we also implicitly express that this is very much 'not right', that 'might' should not be the decisive factor for what is 'right' and what is not.

Wandering from these thoughts I found myself thinking about situations that I remembered from my own life in which I felt, 'nothing can be done here' – and I came across a good few of them. What I found also was that this 'nothing can be done here' was (often) connected to the fact that I felt 'alone', i. e. if I had had support, solidarity, help in situations in which 'nothing could be done' I am sure that in fact 'something could have been done'.

I remembered that not only the active subject in the inspector story 'does nothing'. We found for the active subject in the parent-teacher meeting "He does what he should do – not what he would like to do," while the active subject in the flag raising story "Presents a 'façade' that does not reflect her (true?) feelings. She actively suppresses her drive (don't run – walk)"

Is the helplessness that is part of the impression that the stories about the inspector and the parent-teacher-meeting evoke related to the presentation of the active subject in the story as 'isolated'? In fact, the presentation of the girl with the flag is one that also presents her as isolated in the activity – until she "enthusiastically" joins in with the other children singing the anthem. In the parent-teacher-meeting the other parents are an amorphous mass that "swarms around". In the inspector story the colleagues appear as a group that does not appear (no encouragement).

In all these cases the active subject is portrayed as 'alone' facing a 'force'/'power'/'authority'/'structure' as represented by a person (or persons) who is in a position of 'official authority'.

I wonder what that tells us when we try to find answers to the questions:

- What is the role of rituals in school?
- What is our role in rituals in school?

### 3.6. Session Six The medallion

The text of the story that we looked at:

*A ritual in school that I liked*

*In a large national school in the city's most modern housing scheme in the 1960's the following occurs.*

*The roll book had to be collected every morning from the principal's office. It was a responsible job. She and her friend were about eight years of age and in second class, the highest class in that section of the school. To go to third class meant going to an entirely different building which had two storeys. It was a long walk from the classroom down a narrow corridor to the principal's office. They tapped lightly on the principal's office door and waited.*

*Mother Mary was a woman small in stature but could be sharp of tongue. Her office had a hushed warm comfortable feel to it unlike other parts of the school the pupils and teachers inhabited, which were clean but functional and had a tendency to be noisy even at the quietest of times. Wooden furniture on stone floors makes for a cool and noisy environment.*

*The routine of collecting the roll book was as follows: you knocked, waited, were handed the roll book (a very important document, to be handled with care and not dog-eared for this must be passed on to the inspector) and you returned to class. Later the same journey would be made to return the roll book, completed by the classroom teacher, to the office.*

*On this particular day the two girls were invited into the office and asked to wait. It was warm and cosy with a hushed silence and a smell of books and paper. The nun rummaged in her desk drawer and finally brought out two chocolate medallions covered in silver paper. Imprinted on the paper was a nativity scene. The girls each received a medallion for work done in an efficient and reliable manner throughout the term. They were then told they could take the roll and return to their classroom.*

*One of the girls thought so highly of that piece of chocolate she refused to eat it. She saw it as recognition of her work, of her responsibility, of her reliability. She kept it in a drawer for months and looked at it. Her brothers taunted her to eat it and laughed at her for not doing so.*

*Finally, months later when the sun shone and the nativity seemed far away, she did eat it and was very disappointed with its taste. However, the sense that she and her friend were to be trusted with an important task was not so easy to diminish.*

The common sense message that we found in the story was expressed as: "Children respond to praise – it incites pride."

We also found that underlying to such an opinion is the conceptual idea, that sanctions/rewards work (in education), that in teaching (education) one gets a (desired) result out of applying sanctions/rewards.

In the course of our text-analysis we found that there are in fact two episodes in the story.

- a) the scene in the school (role book)
- b) the scene with the brothers

The text-elements of the two may be looked at separately

a) the first scene

Here the active subject appears together with her friend, all verbs relate to the two together:

	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
<b>Active subject &amp; her friend</b>	were (eight years) tapped (lightly) waited were invited were asked to wait received were told	-	-

There is one other person appearing in this part of the story:

<b>Who</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Emotions</b>
Mother Mary	was (small) could be (sharp tongued) rummaged brought out	-	-

Also in this part of the story, we found a significant number of animations:

<b>Animations</b>
The roll book It 'To go to third class' It The office Other parts of the school Furniture makes Routine Journey It Nativity scene

We further found that there is an entire paragraph in which the perspective changes from narration to explanation, and in it the reader (listener) of the story becomes the active subject: "you knocked, waited ..." etc.

In this context we also found that the first part of the story contains relatively little description of the actual happenings when compared to the surrounding explanations.

b) the second scene

The active subject here appears on her own.

	Verbs	Motivations	Emotions
<b>Active subject</b>	thought refused (to eat) saw kept looked did eat was (disappointed)	Thought highly of piece of chocolate – thus refused to eat	Disappointment

Who	Verbs	Motivations	Emotions
Brothers	taunted laughed	-	-

There are only three animations in this part: the sun, the nativity scene and the sense.

In contrast to the first part there are no further explanations or changes in perspective in this part.

### Reconstruction

We treated the two sections of the story separately:

a) The active subject and her friend are constructed as passive, deferential, (docile), who act in routine manner without emotional engagement. The principal is constructed as active – in opposition (and addition) to the girls.

b) The active subject is constructed as a person who is internally active. The brothers are constructed as externally active.

We also found that in both scenes an ‘actual interaction’ is missing.

In the first section while there is a ‘receiving’ – there is yet no ‘giving’.

In the second section while there is a ‘taunting’ – there is yet no immediate reaction to it.

In discussing the findings we found that there is a pattern of ‘opposites in addition’ in both sections. I was stuck for the terms yesterday, but this can be expressed as ‘complementary opposites’.

This term refers to communication theory. Paul **Watzlawick, Janet Beavin Bavelas, and Donald D. Jackson** developed the terminology of ‘symmetric’ and ‘complementary’ in relation to communication processes. Two little passages on this. The first is from:  
<http://www.wanterfall.com/Communication-Watzlawick's-Axioms.htm>

*"Inter-human communication procedures are either symmetric or complementary, depending on whether the relationship of the partners is based on differences or parity."*

*A "symmetric" relationship here means one in which the parties involved behave as equals from a power perspective. The chance of airing all the relevant issues should be greater, but it certainly does not guarantee that the communication will be optimal. The parties could simply be equally submissive, or equally domineering. However, communication between equals often does work well.*

*A "complementary" relationship here means one of unequal power, such as parent-child, boss-employee or leader-follower. This is much more efficient in some situations. For example, the unequal (complementary) relationship between soldiers and their officers means that soldiers are very likely to obey a surprising order, such as "Get out of the truck and jump in the river!" without delay – rather than debating it, perhaps with great interest, but quite possibly at fatal length.*

The second one is from:

<http://www.breckenridgeinstitute.com/building-blocks-of-organizational-culture-article.htm>

*“Symmetric versus Complementary: Watzlawick argues that every relationship must be consciously or unconsciously defined (negotiated) by the participants as being either symmetric or complementary. In symmetric interactions, people tend to mirror each other’s behaviour and emotional responses. Symmetric interactions are based on an assumption of equality that has been tacitly agreed to by the participants that tries to minimize the differences between the participants. In complementary interactions, one person’s behaviour and emotional responses complements (is different than) the other’s behaviours and emotional responses. Complementary interactions are based on an assumption of difference that has been tacitly agreed to by the participants that tries to maximize the differences between the participants. Differences can include being assertive-submissive, superior-inferior, primary-secondary, or as Watzlawick refers to them, being one-up or one-down.”*

If communication is analysed for its symmetric/complementary character, the topic that is underlying is obviously that of power-relationships between those who take part in the communication processes.

I am wondering if it is possible to relate this approach to our investigation of rituals (in school). Questions then could be:

How is symmetric or complementary communication related to rituals?

Can both be found in rituals?

Does the terminology provide a means to explain what goes on in rituals?

Can the terminology be a means to understand one’s own behaviour in rituals?

If yes, how ...?

At the end of the session I handed out two articles about rituals in which the main theses of Franz Wellendorf and Catherine Bell were presented in a condensed form.

### 3.7. Session Seven

#### *Does it matter if something is a ritual?*

On the basis of the two texts that were handed out in the last session (summaries: Wellendorf, Bell) the question was raised: “Does it matter if something is a ritual or not?”

As an observation it was noted, that in relation to rituals there seems to be always somebody in a power role.

The role of the audience in a ritual was highlighted. We found that in our stories there was always an ‘audience’. Even if we as the writers of the stories did not particularly focus on their being there, effectively the ritual unfolds its symbolic and expressive quality always in its reference to the audience. Whatever is happening in the ritual is at the same time an interaction of those involved in the particular activity and a demonstration to all those who are ‘in the audience’.

They are also part of the ‘expectation’ and in our individual considerations part of the ‘expectation of expectations of others’ – that all adds up to a rather important role of the audience in a ritual. This aspect is mentioned briefly in the summary of Franz Wellendorf’s text.

We also discussed the terminology as suggested by Catherine Bell, i. e. ‘ritualisation’ rather than ‘ritual’. We found that there may be an advantage to look at ‘ritualisation’ rather than ‘ritual’ due to its more dynamic concept.

In discussing greeting rituals we saw that a ritualisation can be used in a strategic way to express something and yet avoid saying it so that one can not be held ‘liable’ for it afterwards. (“Yes, I have hugged you, kissed you, but so what: I have never said that I am your friend ...”)

We discussed the example of girls in a secondary school ‘negotiating’ the dress code (by wearing pink t-shirts, sticking out under the obligatory navy jumper). Understood in terms of ‘ritualisation’ this can be seen as a ‘strategic intervention in a negotiation of power relationships’ – seen as such it can gain a new quality also in the eyes of teachers. With the ‘tool’ of knowing about ‘ritualisation as a strategy’ teachers need not simply dismiss it as a ‘provocation’ or ‘deviant behaviour’ – but rather can try to enter into the ‘negotiation’ on a different level, i. e. try to effectively communicate with the students about what is the core of the ‘problem’, not the symptom.

We found that the pink t-shirts are an expression that says ‘something’ without the girls actually verbally expressing it. (*It would be an interesting exercise to ask the teachers of the respective school to write in their terms what they understand the girls are actually ‘saying without saying it’ ...*)

We found that there are a lot of aspects in school life in which the actors within the local/particular school have leeway for regulating their own affairs (dress code is one). For a school then it is a question also how the ‘negotiations’ of these affairs take place and that each school in fact has a ‘school culture’ in this regard that allows for more or less ‘open negotiation.’ The question in it is who makes decisions on which matters, and how are these decisions established, i. e. which processes are involved in decision-making.

*What we forgot in the discussion of the pink t-shirt is that there are various social 'networks' in which the ritualisation has effects. It is not only a 'negotiation of power-relationships' between students and school officials; there is at the same time an aspect of 'negotiation of power-relationships' amongst the students (e. g. who is the most 'daring', the most 'rebellious', who is the most successful in negotiating with the teachers, who gets away with whatever is seen as most prestigious etc.)*

The observation that there “seems to be always somebody in a power role” sits quite fine with such an example – however power in the concrete situation is obviously not necessarily the same as ‘official authority’, it is more a negotiated front-line between two counterparts.

Is it the case that ‘ritualisation’ is a way of ‘low intensity warfare’ – initiated by either side with the intention to:

- shift the front-line,

or

- confirm the front-line in case of it being ‘threatened’ (or also reaffirm the front-line in a bid to prevent it being threatened)?

At any rate, we saw that ritualisations can be seen as indicators for real contradictions, or for conflicting interests – that is contradictions or conflicting interests that are not openly verbalized, dealt with, but rather are negotiated via ritualisations. If they are ‘monitored’, i. e. if they are observed as ‘ritualisations’ the actual conflict can be addressed – the contradictions or conflicting interests made open (verbalized) and negotiated in a conscious manner.

This would account for a school culture with a certain way of dealing with conflict in which the power-relations are open to scrutiny themselves.

We found that in those aspects of school life that are regulated on local level, the establishment of such a school culture should in fact be possible. However there are aspects of school life that are not accessible to open negotiation between management/teachers/students. We mentioned the curriculum as an example, another one mentioned was the number of lessons, school days as regulated by education law.

In this context it was mentioned that for teachers the ‘front-line’ actually can be felt as ‘running through oneself’ – that is pretty much in line with the idea of acting in ritual ‘without conviction’, doing things (and as teacher: requesting others, students to do things) of which one is not convinced that they are right.

At the end we turned again to the initial question ‘does it matter if something is a ritual or not?’ – In a way we have actually addressed this question to some extent already in our discussion on the concept of ritualisation, but we may take it up again in our last session next week.

### ***3.8. Session Eight What is school?***

This was our last session. At the beginning of the session we spoke about the fact that in literature on rituals in school the authors regularly go through all sorts of trouble to find a definition of ritual, while there is no similar attempt made to define 'school.'

Some authors refer in their texts to the functions of school – particularly where rituals are also looked at in terms of their 'functions.' Yet there seems to be a common assumption that everyone knows anyway what school 'is' so that no further effort is made to define it.

However we found that what we experience as school is a rather 'young' phenomenon in historical terms. While there were systems of conveying knowledge and skills from one generation to another in all societies at all times, the particular form of school as we know it was developed only over the last approx. 200 years.

In an attempt to define school then we found that this is not an easy task at all. Obviously it is a place where teaching and learning are supposed to happen. However it is not the only place in society where teaching and learning happens. Children learn in families before they go to school. They learn in peer groups, in sports clubs, in orchestras, by watching TV, by using computers etc. (and in all these circumstances it is similarly possible to find the counterpart of teaching, i. e. in parents, siblings, older children, coaches, tutors etc.). Furthermore there is an awful lot more happening in school besides 'teaching and learning.' In fact school is as much a living environment as any other place where people are – and by being in school they simply 'live their life' without constantly 'teaching and learning'.

It was mentioned that schools should be places where children are allowed to live their lives 'as children' – but it was similarly mentioned that the status of a 'child' is equally historical, that in fact a number of centuries ago the concept of 'children' as we have it today did not exist. Children, i. e. young persons, mixed and mingled and were not separated from adults.

We found that school as we have it today can be seen as 'a building, an enclosure' – without this physical base it would not be thinkable, or at least it would be something 'different.' We also found that there is a continuum based on this physical presence of building/enclosure that is supra-personal. The individual child and the individual teacher are only necessary for school to 'be' in as far as they are momentary 'inhabitants' of school. The organization has its own life over and beyond the individual 'inhabitants'. In fact there is an administration side to school that guarantees for this 'own life' probably even more than the actual inhabitants at any given time.

We tried to capture this in the notion 'school is an institution.'

We also found that school is a field that is constantly contested. This idea referred to the observation that within a number of years dominant topics 'come and go' in school. Recent examples from our own experiences were 'integration', 'differentiation' or 'literacy and numeracy.' There is obviously a connection between lobbying on politicians, political decision making, educational science and educational practice that has concrete influences on the everyday practice in school. It effects the lived lives of the inhabitants of the institution.

In a way it is as if a number of topics 'lie around' in educational science, ready to be taken up



whenever they seem opportune. We found that talking about education in terms of ritual can be just as well seen as one of these topics that are ‘lying around.’ The decision however which topic will become ‘dominant’ at a given time is one that is made in the dynamics as mentioned: between lobbying on politicians, political decision making, educational science and educational practice.

We did not explicitly go down that route yesterday, but it is worth noting that teachers (just as much as pupils, or parents) are players in this dynamic field.

We then turned towards the discussion from our last session that ensued about decision making in schools. Taking up the notion of ‘articulated alternatives’ as put forward by Catherine Bell we watched a film about ‘democratic schools’.<sup>14</sup>

In the discussion about the film we found that the idea of ‘democratic schools’ is quite appealing. We discussed the idea of implementing elements as presented in the film in the practice of conventional schools. We found that this would be in fact possible, but it could lead to further developments, probably of a conflict nature.

We used the example of allowing children to decide whether or not they take part in lessons, or else play on the yard. We found that a teacher who wishes to introduce such a practice for her/his class in conventional school would have to defend it within the team, principal, board of management, probably parents.

We related the film to our topic of rituals in school and found that the first impression that sticks out is the near complete absence of rituals in the schools portrayed. We discussed this in relation to the idea as promoted in the film of having a ‘rule of law’ rather than a structure in which certain people (according to the echelons of the hierarchy) can make amendments. Ritual thus was in fact identified as distinct to explicit rules. What was striking in the film was that the ‘rule of law’ is applied to all members of the school community (inhabitants, to use the term from earlier ...) alike, that is students and teachers.

The question came up whether there are no rituals at all in ‘democratic schools’ and we found that there are certainly rituals, too. The assembly (school meeting) as shown in the film can be understood as such a ritual. In it the power relationships amongst the members of the school community are negotiated. The character of the outcome of this negotiation, or the style in which the negotiation takes place may be quite different to comparable situations in conventional schools – how and ever there is still a ritual element to the procedure even where power relationships are negotiated with the aim of equilibrium between all participants.

Eventually we ran out of time. Thus we took up the question as posed in the last meeting ‘Does it actually matter if something is a ritual or not?’

In response we found that the concept of ritualisation (as ‘strategic intervention in negotiation of power relations’) as derived from Catherine Bell can be a useful tool for understanding certain activities in school that otherwise are difficult to interpret.

Furthermore we took it that the point is not so much to be able to ‘define an act as ritual’ for the

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<sup>14</sup> In the film the principles of schools are explained in which children decide when, what, with whom they are going to learn and in which models of collective decision making on the basis of one person one vote are applied. The film title is simply “Democratic Schools”. It was produced in 2005 by Jan Gabbert with support of the German Federal Ministry of Education and research. (<http://www.en.democratic-schools.com/>) It has recently been uploaded on youtube, too: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUZU-NHxa9c>

sake of 'defining it' – but rather it is necessary to gain an understanding of the act that allows to win agency in relation to it. At this point the conceptual ideas that are part of the discussion that we had on rituals may be a helpful tool as well. If we take 'ritual' as a concept to analyse activities we come to different results than where we use other concepts (or worse: have no concept at all). And in this sense it matters, whether something is looked at through the lenses of 'ritual' or not.

#### **4. Memory work applied for reflecting on rituals – an appraisal**

Memory-work was employed in my research as a method for addressing the specific aspect concerning the question of the accessibility of rituals and ritualisations for critical reflection. It was seen as helpful in potentially developing suggestions for improved conceptual inclusion of the complex of rituals/ritualisation in critical reflection processes.

The most obvious finding from the memory-work groups was that there is in fact nothing inherent in rituals that renders them inaccessible to critical reflection. Quite the opposite, due to their character as social action that is essentially centred around social order, norm, values they are in fact an area of life that seems predestined for critical analysis.

There are however issues that are worth a closer look. I will do so in this section with reference to the second group, the one whose discussions was documented in the previous passages.

The group was made up of teachers from different schools. The fact that there were no institutional bonds between the participants meant that there were also no negotiations about the own workplace going on in the memory-work groups. In this sense the setting was clearly laid out to provide for a significant distance from their normal professional setting. There was no interference of the usual hierarchies, or power-relations anchored in the concrete situation in the schools of the participants coming into play in the group discussions. In a way this mirrors the situation that would be normal for reflective group supervision.

The time frame for the meetings was clearly set and adhered to. There was a clear purpose for the group: reflecting on rituals. The meetings were about this topic only, there was no interference of other topics (as would be common for staff meetings). Thus a concentrated engagement with the topic was possible.

The summaries presented, in section 3., are evidence of a discussion process that reached an intensity that would be rare for reflection on rituals in professional settings of teachers. The actual text-analyses are based on the input of the particular participants. The same holds for the problem transfer and the ensuing discussions after text-analysis. It may well be possible that in a group composed of different members different aspects might have become more prominent in the discussions. It is important here to keep in mind that the discussions (and results) are not 'right or wrong' but rather provide a set of arguments that can be used by the participants to make sense of reality in a way that was not available beforehand.

In relation to the scenes that were written by the members of the memory-work group it is observable that all scenes are written from the perspective of ritual participants and not from the perspective of ritual experts.<sup>15</sup> At the time when the memory-work group was held this was not seen as a problem. However, it would be a rather interesting project to also write and analyse stories from the perspective of the position of authority. At any rate this would be an immediate link for a follow-up project.

I just said that the purpose of the group was clearly set: reflecting on rituals. And yet, can it be said that the purpose was to critically reflect? In the flyer that was used to advertise the group the term critical reflection was not explicitly mentioned. At the same time the method of memory-work is inherently critical. In this sense the purpose of the group was surely critical reflection, even if it was not explicitly named in the announcement. From the side of the participants in the memory-work group then all that was required was an interest in the investigation of the construction of social reality and the openness to engage in the processes as suggested by the method.

The task for me as the facilitator in this regard was first of all to make sure that the participants felt safe enough in the group to bring in their personal contributions. The second task then was to also bring my own input into the discussions without taking on a lecturer's position. There will be more to say on the general idea of leadership in memory-work groups in the next section. At this point it may suffice to note that the two tasks seem crucial for the success of the group.

Success here refers not to the achievement of a set result. That would be impossible. Success rather refers to the accomplishment of the process as such, going through the various steps of the process, coming to the point where a problem transfer is actually possible and where social dimensions of the personal constructions as included in the stories are up for scrutiny.

Memory-work as a method is more than text-analysis. For being a critical tool of reflection or research the basic assumptions are far more important. It is only on their basis that the text-analysis comes into play. Without the basic orientation in approaching a topic text-analysis leads nowhere. On this issue Frauke Schwarting, one of the members of *Frauenformen*, reports about groups who “came up with something that was of interest to them (...). And these were genuinely self-organised groups who worked on a topic (...) who started with memory-work and how well or how bad that worked for them I can't really say, but we received relatively often requests, where they invited us after 9 months and said, now we have an awful lot of paper and an awful lot of analyses, what are we to do with it? What was missing there was the entire framework, the basis. They did not know what to do with it.” (Schwarting/Mescher 2011)

Hence applying memory-work requires a certain approach. As a method of critical inquiry it rests on a critical attitude. In the case of the practical application of the method in the course of my study it was part of my role as the facilitator in the group to bring this attitude into play. This is in parts reflected in the summaries as documented above. At the same time the participants in the group were involved quite actively in driving our investigations along the route of critical reflection. It was only on the basis of their contributions that we arrived at the point of looking at articulated alternatives.

Irrespective of the particular direction that the discussions in the group took what is important in the context of my own research project is the finding that rituals are in fact accessible to critical reflection for teachers, given the situation in which the reflection is going to happen facilitates for it.

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<sup>15</sup> The status of teachers as ritual experts is explained in *Negotiating legitimacy – Rituals and Reflexion in School*, the book about the research project

For me employing memory-work for critical reflection during my research necessarily involved an engagement with the method as such. It seems warranted to also include a few passages about the application of memory-work in other contexts, particularly because of its origin as a method for research in social science and not specifically as a method for reflection in professional contexts.

The following section looks at experiences with memory-work as a research tool. What I am presenting is not meant to be an exhaustive overview, but merely to highlight some aspects in applying the method that would be worth fleshing out in a theoretical framework of memory-work. Obviously a theory of memory-work has not been written yet and if it was to be written at all it would have to be approached with great care. Any such attempt would have to balance between the unavoidable prescriptive effects of a theory and the desired openness for experimentation as intended from the outset when the method was developed by *Frauenformen*.

## **5. Experiencing memory work**

### ***5.1. Group dynamics, roles and setting – aspects for further consideration***

Memory-work as a method oscillates between critical inquiry of ideology, scrutinizing and consequently further developing existing theory on the one side and a process of participatory research in which the participants gain an increase of personal knowledge and ability to act.

An important part in scrutinizing and further developing existing theory is the presentation and publication of results. In this regard the numerous articles and books that were generated in the course of studies using memory-work give ample proof of its significance.

In a historical development a shift concerning the application of memory-work can be noticed. The original process of inventing the method out of a social movement in a collective engagement of women as an attempt to overcome shortcomings of traditional masculine theory on the one side and a politics of consciousness-raising on the other is to a great deal history by now. The method has proven to be applicable in numerous contexts.

For a researcher who wishes to employ the method it is now possible to refer to a pool of literature and tailor it to her/his own needs. Yet what is not extensively covered in the descriptions of projects using memory-work is the area of group dynamics in applying the method. Aspects of this topic are considered by Mariette Clare and Richard Johnson who draw particular attention on participants' experiences of recognition and misrecognition in their memory-work group.

“Memory work as process showed us how the construction of a collective identity under conditions where power relations are untransformed, always involves the differential recognition of identities. Some identities are recognised as exemplary, some are recognised as long as they ‘behave’ and stay in their place, and others are marginalized, subordinated or expelled to become the demonic/desired Other. The dynamics of the group itself can now be understood as manifestations of the dialectic of identity and recognition.” Engaging in memory-work for this group at CCCS obviously led into a direction which they had not foreseen or intended: “(...) starting out on memory work set in train unpredictable processes which were intellectually generative but personally troubling and destabilizing. These included the splitting up of the group with major and unequal consequences for

individual careers and prospects. Paradoxically, however, the break-up of the group taught us further lessons in the dynamics of knowledge/power and in the formation of social identities.” (Clare/Johnson 2000, p. 220)

They problematise in particular the power relations amongst the members of their group and here the role of one member who “was in a position to offer significant recognitions and practical support to the individual academic projects and identities of other members of the group” which meant that “the different power relations within the group were often condensed in the teacher/taught relation.” (Clare/Johnson 2000, p. 209)

In my account of the two groups above I have pointed to the problems of leadership, modes of entry, trust, collaboration all of which are connected. In the actual work process influences stemming from these areas are easily obstructive to the overall process of cooperation.

Triggered by my experiences with the two groups and discussions with Frigga Haug I conducted another series of interviews with teachers from alternative schools in Germany who took part in a memory-work seminar with Frigga Haug a few years ago. The group worked on the topic of *Learning from experience*. In the conversations I traced their experiences concerning the work processes in their project. A report on their research is publicised in book format. It is a good example of the potential of the method for the participants to generate a process of critical investigation. In a summarising statement Frigga Haug notes: “At stake is not so much the relationship of experience and theory.<sup>16</sup> It is more about two different avenues to knowledge, the first spontaneous, immediately subjective, the second reflective, looking for generalisability. They are referential to each other. (...) Both areas are contested and in multiple ways permeated by dominance and submission, and they determine each other in this manner. To find a way through this jungle requires a collective project in which one learns to work tirelessly self-reflective, to sharpen all senses, rediscovering the abilities of perception and narration and most of all the ability to contradict oneself.” (Lehrende aus Freien Alternativschulen 2007, p. 30)

In the case of the group of teachers from free alternative schools their collective project comprised of five meetings during a period of three years. Four of these meetings were weekend-seminars. There were twenty teachers involved in total. 11 teachers took part in all meetings. I interviewed six of them. The reports of the teachers, i. e. participants in the memory-work seminar and co-researchers, suggest that in the actual work process the leadership played an immensely important role for the success of the project. This relates to the intellectual engagements but also to giving directions and guidance in terms of structuring work tasks, time-keeping, moving or summarizing of discussions.

Frigga Haug describes the role of the researcher in memory-work vis-à-vis the co-researchers in terms of Gramsci’s organic intellectual. “I call the person leading memory work an organic intellectual. Coined originally by Gramsci, it denotes the figure within the group who assumes the intellectual tasks for the group. When doing memory work, there is no division of labour when it comes to writing the remembered experiences. Because the leader has had the same experiences, she should be free from the expert feeling and be able to participate in mutual discussion. This arrangement stirs up imagination while avoiding elitist judgement. No matter how much insight we think we possess, it is only when we have learned to see ourselves as children of these circumstances that we are equipped to work with others as we work about ourselves.” (Haug 1999b, p. 7)

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<sup>16</sup> As mirrored in the method in the common sense understanding of the self-generated texts (experience) and their critical reflection on the basis of deconstruction and reconstruction (theory).

While the concept of organic intellectuals is quite appealing, in concrete situations of working with groups it requires a common understanding and acceptance of such a role definition on the side of all involved.

For a researcher engaging with a group in a process of memory-work then it is also necessary to be aware of group dynamics derived from potentially varying role definitions. While memory-work can certainly be applied in a great number of circumstances like university-contexts, adult education settings, social movements, community groups or philosophical circles to name but a few, it is yet necessary to be aware of the specific context in which one applies the method.

The demands on the researcher in terms of necessary input regarding structuring of work processes, regarding safeguarding personalities of participants, regarding intellectually challenging participants, regarding providing theoretical material as points of reference etc. can change significantly from one to another setting.

Participants in memory-work get accustomed with the method relatively fast. Once the initial reservations and anxieties are overcome in the actual process of writing scenes and analysing them together with the group participants get attached to the method, and in fact develop an eagerness to continue with it, or apply it in other circumstances. “But now I have done it also with a group of office holders of the Left Party. They are downright addicted to it. They want it over and over again, because now they naturally find out why they don’t solve so many questions, why a great many problems are so overwhelming to them, for example that they question that politics have to be emotionless for otherwise one gets nowhere and so on.” (Haug 2011)

In the interviews with the teachers who took part in the group on *Learning from experience*, all of them stated that they were eager to also apply the method in their professional context with their respective teams in school. “And the three of us who took part [in the memory-work seminar, RH], off course we were completely intrigued by it, and it constantly went through our heads. And we wanted to continue memory-work here also.” (Gayed 2011) But as unanimously as the teachers stated that they wanted to use the method in their teams they also reported that this did not work for them. Not in one case was it actually possible for them to do it in their own school. The reasons for this were seen in a lack of interest on the side of colleagues to engage with the method, but also in a lack of self-confidence on their own side in terms of applying and guiding the process.

The latter can be overcome by further exposure to the method, or also by self-directed learning in voluntary circles. The former however presents an obstacle to memory-work that simply makes it impossible.

Memory-work can not be done with people who do not want to engage in it. In the interview with Frauke Schwarting she reports from her experience as a lecturer in a compulsory seminar on research methods. She tried to use memory-work as a practical example of an applied research method and found “I did it again in the university. It was a disaster. (...) One doesn’t believe how strong the influence of the basic conditions is. I mean, that was a compulsory seminar. They had to do an assignment. The whole thing takes place irrespective of their interest. The number of participants wasn’t right either. I could not choose in this context, there were thirty, thirty-five. You can forget it, simply forget it.” (Schwarting/Mescher 2011) Therefore situations in which participants find themselves compelled to take part are a recipe for failure from the very outset. For those however who choose to engage in a process of memory-work on a topic of interest, this process can have transformative quality. Whoever is ready to part from the dullness of clichéd

certainties will find in memory-work a handy tool to gain new perspectives on her/himself and the social.

### *5.2. Memory-work in the tool-box*

As a research tool memory-work has proven to be fruitful in numerous projects (see Small 2000, mentioned above). It transcends the boundaries between research and reflection. Due to its character as a method of critical analysis it is obviously as good as purpose-built for critical reflection.

In relation to the professional reflection processes of teachers on rituals there is a need for the particular negotiations of power relations in respect to the particular school being suspended for the critical reflection process to happen at all. In the reality of teachers' professional life reflection remains a social act that connects other acts. Is it possible at all to break out of social acts?

Not really, but it is possible to leave certain fields, enter other ones, thereby suspending certain power relations. They may be traded for other ones, or in the other fields there may be new ones developing. However for teachers who wish to critically reflect on rituals to come into a setting where the particular negotiations that dominate their work situation are – at least temporarily – suspended opens up the necessary space. Once this condition is fulfilled memory-work provides a remarkable tool.

“All my books are (...) if you like, little toolboxes. If people like to open them to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged (...) so much the better.” (Foucault 1996, p. 149) As much as a screwdriver or a spanner may appeal to social scientists after Foucault, memory-work adds yet another dimension to the toolbox: a scalpel to dissect constructions in an act of social searchery.

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