Taking flight

Taking flight: Trust, ethics, and the comfort of strangers – lessons from research on emotional and behavioural difficulties and exclusion from school

This article explores the themes of trust and ethical conduct in social research, with particular attention to the trust that can develop between the members of a research team as well as between researchers and those whom they research. The authors draw upon a three-year empirical study of destinations and outcomes for young people excluded from alternative educational provision. They also make reference to a contemporary exposition of Aristotle's writing on friendship in order to explore two sets of relevant distinctions that have a bearing upon our understanding of relationships that emerge in the context of social research projects. These distinctions are between impartiality and selectivity on the one hand, and between universality and particularity on the other. The authors attempt to demonstrate that these distinctions have a bearing upon the development of trust, and upon the conduct of ethical research, arguing that the latter is not synonymous with compliance to ethical guidelines.

Introduction

This article is an exploration of the genesis and growth of trust in the context of a particular social research project. Here we are mainly concerned with making visible the development of trust between particular individuals, in some cases across boundaries of inequality, rather than with the development of trust in government and public institutions. We address another issue that is indirectly related to the main theme, with reference to an empirical study of destinations and outcomes for young people permanently excluded from special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) in England (Pirrie *et al*, 2010). We shall explore what we mean when we talk about ethical research, and consequently what it means to be an ethical researcher. To provide at least a partial answer to these questions will necessitate some exploration of the fault lines between compliance with ethical guidelines on the one hand and the conduct of ethical research on the other. The inference here is that these two activities are not necessarily synonymous. We shall attempt to demonstrate that this is the case by examining, albeit rather briefly, the role that journal editors and academic reviewers play in policing the boundaries between compliance with ethical guidelines and the conduct of ethical research.

Taking flight

Before embarking on the main business of the paper, it may be useful briefly to outline the ontological assumption that underpins the argument, namely that those involved in educational research need to pay greater attention to the relation between materials and forces (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 377) and to the embodied, situated, affective and creative dimensions of their practice. As we shall attempt to demonstrate with reference to particular examples, greater appreciation of these dimensions is the key to ethical practice in educational research.

According to Aristotle, making things involved bringing together form (*morphe*) and matter (*hyle*). The anthropologist Tim Ingold (2010) has described the consequences of the dominance of this hylomorphic model of creation in fields as diverse as anthropology and architecture, art history and material culture studies:

> Form came to be seen as imposed, by an agent with a particular end or goal in mind, while matter — thus rendered passive and inert — was that which was imposed upon. (p. 2)

It is no coincidence that one of the ways in which we seek to challenge the hylomorphic model, particularly the way in which its underlying assumptions are reproduced in social research is by turning again to Aristotle. We do this by considering a contemporary interpretation of his writing on friendship, a theme to which he devoted a substantial section of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Nehamas, 2008). Nehamas's reflections provide a vehicle for exploring and reflecting upon the relationships that emerged and developed during a three-year research project and for examining the 'combination of vital, tangible and intangible dynamics in the way that personal relationships are relationalities are lived'.[1]

The etymology of the word 'project' encapsulates this sense of taking flight from a view of creativity that systematically downplays 'creative entanglements' or an 'improvisatory joining in with formative processes' (Ingold, 2010, p 3). The word is derived from the Latin *jacere* — to throw. Let us consider for a moment what happens when something is thrown. For example, take the kites designed and assembled indoors by Tim Ingold and his students using simple materials such as paper, bamboo, ribbon, tape, glue and twine. Ingold describes how these ceased to be objects when taken outside and launched into the air. In play with the wind, they 'leaped into action, twirling, spinning, nose-diving, and — just occasionally — flying' (p.7). Of course these kites were attached to people who jerked at their strings and ran around frantically in circles, their gaze directed upwards. However, it would be misleading to describe these kite-flyers as agents. For as Ingold explains, once it is thrown or launched, the kite-in-the-air is no longer an object that is susceptible to the operations of an agent as it was at the point of assembly. Rather, it is a thing 'that exists in its thinging' in the same way that a person exists in her personing (Ingold, 2010, p. 7). In the same way we would suggest that a research project takes on a life of its own once it moves from design to 'implementation'. Moreover, it appears that this life is contingent, unpredictable and unreliable. In sum, 'to render the life of things as the agency of objects is to effect a double reduction, of things to objects and of life to agency' (p. 7).

It seems to us that what is important in educational research, as indeed in many other types of practice such as painting a picture, cooking a meal or flying a kite is not 'what people do with objects' (Miller, 1998), but that they 'assign primacy to the processes of formation as against their final products' (Ingold, 2010, p.2). It is important to recognise that this includes the way in which researchers or indeed any other type of practitioner *inhabit* rather than *occupy* the world (see Ingold, 2007; Pirrie and Macleod, 2010). This also applies when we consider what it means to conduct ethical research. For as we shall attempt to demonstrate, the defining characteristic of ethical research is the gathering together of particular strands of

[1] About Realities, part of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/realities/aboutus/index.html

life. In what follows we shall explore two sets of challenges that exemplify the 'creative entanglement of materials' in an attempt to expose the fallacy that the life of a research project can be reduced to the agency of researchers. Indeed, we might even go so far as to say that it is the entanglement of our lives with those of others and with the things that surround us that makes us fully alive. 'Things are alive', Ingold observes, 'because they *leak*' (2010, p.7). As we shall see below in the story of sepsis, this is the case literally and precisely as well as metaphorically.

The challenges referred to above relate to the issues of trust and ethical practice in research. Firstly, there are the challenges associated with attempting to establish trust with research participants at a distance, across social as well as geographical boundaries. Secondly, there is the challenge of demonstrating our trustworthiness as researchers to our peers as we report to each other our attempts to recruit of prospective participants. As we move on to the main themes of the article, it is with gentle irony that we invite the reader to hold on to the image of the kite-in-the-wind-and-the-person-on-the-ground and to bear in mind the unpredictable and invisible forces that animate them.

Establishing trust

One of the main challenges experienced during the course of the study of young people permanently excluded from special schools or PRUs was negotiating access to research participants, and of developing their trust at a distance (Macleod and Pirrie, 2010). The term 'at a distance' applied literally, given the fact that we were working across different jurisdictions of the UK, as well as metaphorically. For to a man, as it were, the research team comprised white middle-class women of advancing years who were commissioned by a government department to research the 'trajectories' of young people between the ages of 12 and 17 from a range of ethnic backgrounds, in the wake of their permanent exclusion from a special school or PRU. In fact, one of the clearest insights to emerge from the research was that the major difficulties that we experienced in fulfilling the research brief were *in spite of* the manifold *advantages* that we possessed. In contrast, it was evident that many of the young people and service providers whom we interviewed had made substantial progress in spite of the manifold *disadvantages* that they faced. In the case of some young people in particular, these difficulties pervaded several areas of their lives. In some cases, an inappropriate placement, or indeed even a series of such placements, compounded a range of other social and emotional difficulties experienced (Cullen 2010; see also Pirrie *et al* 2010).

We take the view that a full consideration of the challenges of establishing trust at a distance and the complex and uncertain nature of the process should be part of any account of a study that purports to address the ethical dimension of social research. Yet when we attempted to do this in an earlier publication, one of the peer reviewers made the following observation

> The ethical positions adopted by the team are opaque and should be explicitly considered, particularly in regard to the ways in which initial contacts were made and consent to participate obtained.

It emerged in subsequent discussions with the editor of the journal that fairly minor adjustments were required before the article was published. It transpired that all that was necessary was that we demonstrate our trustworthiness by making explicit reference to the fact that we had complied with impartial and universal ethical guidelines, such as those set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2004), the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA 2005) or the Social Research Association (SRA 2003). We were also advised to invoke in a little more detail the core values of a fairly restricted operational definition of ethical research: namely, voluntary participation; informed consent to participate in the study and the right to withdraw at any time; avoidance of risk of harm; confidentiality; and anonymity. We had to demonstrate how these had applied in the study of young people permanently excluded from specialist provision. In short, we just had to show that we had washed our hands. It was clear that on this occasion at least we were not expected to explore whether or not we had got them dirty in the first place and, if so, why. (Or perhaps, if not, why not?) It seemed that our reviewers were more interested in the 'idealised, normative projection of the hopes invested in the practice, a statement of potential' (Power, 1997, p. 4) rather than ethical engagement with the vagaries of the research process.

It is our intention here to move beyond 'a description of actual operational capability', and an account of the 'rituals of verification'. We shall consider how engaging with what Ingold (2010)) described as 'the creative entanglement of materials' is a *sine qua non* of ethical research practice. In his powerful critique of the audit society, Power (1997) claims that 'defining auditing is largely an attempt to say what it *could* be'. We believe that the same applies to claims relating to the conduct of ethical research. That is to say that 'rituals of verification' and the ideal of 'transparency' in the research process appear to have largely taken precedence over a more nuanced consideration of the ever-shifting relations between materials and forces. We believe that at the heart of research as improvisatory and ethical practice lies an attempt to make darkness visible and to capture fugitive moments of apprehension and response. In short, rather than focusing on how to unravel a story, we might consider how a story unravels us (De Waal, 2010).

There appear to be other reasons to challenge the primacy accorded to (mere) compliance with ethical guidelines in the conduct of applied research in education. For a start, it is not entirely clear whether the publication of and adherence to ethical guidelines serve restore trust or to undermine it. Indeed they may signal its absence. The philosopher Onora O'Neill (2002) has argued that mechanisms such as ethical guidelines and codes of conduct, as well as the range of outcome measures and performance targets introduced in order to drive up standards in public service have in fact driven out rather than restored trust in the professions and in a wide range of public and private institutions. However, as O'Neill points out, it appears that despite an apparent universal distrust we continue to place our trust in particular individual members of the professions: we call the police when trouble

threatens and are upset if our operation is cancelled.[2] Sztompka (2006) broadly concurs with O'Neill's view, and cites 'growing evidence that "vertical trust" in the rulers or institutions of rule has been consistently decaying, turning both to indifference and active distrust' (p. 906)(see also Power, 1997). More recently, and with specific reference to safeguarding legislation in relation to children and young people, Kathleen Marshall, the former Children's Commissioner for Scotland has criticised the 'risk-averse culture around children's safety'. She has pointed out that the new safeguarding requirements in Scotland and the rest of the UK have in effect institutionalised distrust and have had a negative impact upon the number of adults volunteering to work with children. As she explains, the impact on young people may be even more profound.

> We say we wrap kids in cotton wool, but I say, because we have become so fearful of them and for them, we wrap them up in barbed wire and put up a sign that says 'keep out, don't touch.'... And that it not good for children because they can't develop the relationships they need with adults who are going to nurture them. [3]

Marshall, a lawyer by training, is referring to the tension between the ideal of impartial and universal protection under the law and the unpredictable and contingent nature of the particular interpersonal relationships upon which we all depend for our physical and emotional wellbeing. These relationships entail an element of risk that cannot be eliminated through an infinite regression of guidelines and safeguarding measures. Of course we need to weigh the evidence, and to make informed decisions based upon it. It is certainly important to recognise that codes of conduct have some role in shaping and managing research relationships. However, there are parts that these simply cannot reach, and there comes a point when we simply have to trust. For, to paraphrase Niklas Luhmann (1979), without trust we wouldn't be able to get up in the morning.

There is a further dimension to the challenge of establishing trust at a distance. Not only did the members of the research team have to secure the trust of those with whom they were working in the field, but they also had to develop or to maintain trust in each other. This was particularly important given the level of challenge they faced in ascertaining the whereabouts of young people deemed to be 'vulnerable' and in need of protection. In our interactions with each other, we were at pains to demonstrate that we were meticulously and conscientiously carrying out our part of the bargain. This was all the more necessary because we worked in three different institutions in two different jurisdictions of the UK. Moreover, we had different histories and experiences of collaboration with each other, and we met in different constellations with varying degrees of frequency.

In retrospect it appears to some of us that this process, which extended over many months, face-to-face and online, was a demonstration of the fact that the researchers

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[2] http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2002/lecture3.shtml

[3] http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/apr/21/kathleen-marshall-child-protection

were importantly similar to each other, and that they were acting in ways that would both support and justify this similarity. Indeed it is possible to argue that the essential similarity that we were at pains to demonstrate in our interactions with each other was the basis of our ethical engagement with the task at hand. In retrospect it appears that these mutually reinforcing conversations about the difficulties that we faced were what bound us together as a dispersed research team, and provided a means of support in challenging circumstances.

The trials and tribulations of the research team, and what with the benefit of hindsight appear to be self-justificatory and mutually reinforcing conversations that took place over the course of the project can, we believe, be regarded as 'emblems of our commonalities'. This is the phrase that the philosopher and literary critic Alexander Nehamas (2008) has used to describe the values that are the basis of moral engagement in modernity. However, behind these 'emblems of our commonalities' can be discerned what Nehamas has described as 'badges of our particularities'. It is to a consideration of these that we now turn, as badges of our particularities are the key to unlocking the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of trust that we shall consider in the concluding part of this article.

The adventures of Researcher A

The following extract from Researcher A's diary is a snapshot of the life of a research project, one that is rooted in the unpredictable flow of the everyday. Researcher A recalls a misadventure that occurred during a field trip some 400 miles from her home institution.

> *November 2007*
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> I took the sleeper down, as I wanted to make the most of the time. I'd planned to spend a day in London, before heading to [a provincial town in the south east of Engliand], then on to the south coast for some more interviews. I was having some porridge in the station when I noticed that a tiny cut on my finger had started to ooze a little. I had time to kill, so I bought some Elastoplast and antiseptic before heading to Camden Social Services. I spend most of the morning there, talking to social workers and digging through box files. After I'd finished there, I met Kate, Joe's mother, for lunch in a wee place in Kilburn. We ate oily fish, as Kate said it was good for the brain. We talked about how nine-year old Joe was getting on in the small psychiatric day unit in which he'd been placed after his permanent exclusion from a pupil referral unit for primary school children. We had a good, wide-ranging discussion, and I really felt I was getting the picture, or at least Kate's picture. Later I went to the B&B, wrote up some notes, did some stretching and had a nap. I woke up feeling slightly sick, but vaguely peckish nonetheless. I decided to go out for something to eat. By the time I got back, my finger was very purple and had swollen to twice its normal size. There were little red traces going up towards my elbow. Later that evening, I found myself in a hospital bed with a drip in my arm and a sign saying 'nil by mouth' above my head. I sent Kate a text. 'Do you remember that we were talking about how vulnerable we all are? Guess where I am tonight?' She got

> back in touch immediately, asking if there was anything she could do to help…

In the wake of these events, Researcher A had to reschedule interviews that had taken many weeks to arrange in the first place. However, this turned out to be a far less difficult and time-consuming process than she had anticipated. The story of the injured digit, her two nights in hospital, the general anaesthesia, the discomfort and the minor surgery created a bond of trust in places that previous assurances of confidentiality and guarantees of anonymity could not reach. In short, it facilitated rather than inhibited the research process.

However, it is the impact of the misadventures of Researcher A on her relationship with Kate, one of the research participants, that is of particular interest here. Kate had previously given informed consent to participate in the project, and had agreed that the researchers could talk to her nine-year old son Joe. However, she continued to place her trust in Researcher A not merely because Researcher A had previously demonstrated her trustworthiness by complying with guidelines for the conduct of ethical research and negotiating written opt-in consent. On reflection, it appears that Kate continued to place her trust in Researcher A, and that she disclosed further details on Joe's case because she and Researcher A had had lunch together. The fact that Researcher A had told her about the circumstances surrounding her unexpected admission to hospital later that same day, thereby making manifest her vulnerability and subtly altering the power relations and the degree of social distance between the two women, had a further impact upon the research process. During an unscripted moment and its aftermath, the paths of these two individuals crossed, they joined forces, and the flow of materials changed direction, momentarily at least.

It will be self-evident that this is Researcher A's side of the story, and indeed that Researcher A is one of the co-authors of this article. There are no 'data' relating to Kate's perspective on this particular issue, as the above are reflections *ex post facto*. This is an example of how the life of a research project extends well beyond its delivery date. This moral of this tale resides in the particularity of the relation between her and Kate, and is encapsulated in the title of the 2008 Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh.

'Because it was (S)He, Because it was I'

In the 2008 Gifford Lectures, the philosopher and literary critic Alexander Nehamas presented a scintillating account of friendship and its place in life. The title of this series of five lectures, 'Because it was He, Because it was I', is the response given by Montaigne to the question of why he considered his contemporary Etienne de la Boétie as a friend. One of the questions addressed in these lectures is 'why someone like Montaigne, who is both a gifted writer and takes friendship most seriously seems abandoned by language'. Nehamas explains why language is not up to the task of addressing the theme of friendship directly.

> We don't have a great novel of friendship as we have great novels of love, marriage and adultery, war and peace or education'. And part of the reason surely is that 'friendship — even when it involves extraordinary actions — consists mostly of small everyday activities quite unimportant in themselves.

> *What* friends do together matters less than that *they* do it *together*. But a narrative of insignificant events is likely to be an insignificant narrative. [Emphasis in the original]

Nehamas uses the example of Montaigne, and many others drawn from his personal life, and from film and television, to illustrate that there are other values in addition to impartiality and universality (the sacred cows of ethical guidelines in social research). These are selectivity and particularity, which he argues are often neglected in contemporary accounts of ethics. In retrospect they were there, bubbling under the surface, in the conversations between the members of the research team referred to above, but they were subordinated to the emblems of our commonalities in the interests of keeping the show on the road. These competing sets of values, these 'badges of our peculiarities', Nehamas argues '[impose] limits on our solicitude' and 'direct us to treat different individuals differently, exactly because of their individual differences.' This is anathema to the universalising tendencies that are inherent in universal ethical guidelines. We saw that in the wake of her lunch with Researcher A, the latter's subsequent hospitalisation and late-night exchange of text messages, Kate's decision to continue to place her trust was different from what it would have been if none of the events above had taken place and Researcher A had merely followed a set of ethical guidelines in negotiating access and securing consent. If that had been the case, Researcher A's attitude to Kate would have been one of indifference, although the use of that word in this context may offend modern sensibilities.

The reader may well be wondering how this account of friendship can be applied to relations between, for example, researchers and those whose lives they are researching. First of all, it is worth considering that Nehamas proposes a very broad definition of friendship, one that encompasses precisely the types of relationships that are of interest here:

> The notion of friendship (*philia*) includes a large variety of human relationships, many of which (like the relations between business associates or fellow citizens) have nothing to do with friendship as we understand it. When we consider that most of the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerns the development of virtue in an individual, it becomes plausible to think of Aristotle's discussion of friendship (*philia*) as his account of interpersonal relations as a whole.

If we adopt this broad definition of friendship, then it is clear that the 'conflict between the impartiality of morality and the selectivity that seems essential to friendship' (Nehamas, 2008) has a direct bearing on the wide range of relationships that obtained in the research project discussed here. It also has far-reaching consequences for how we define ethical research. The relationships under consideration here included those between individual members of a research team, some of whom could be described as 'friends' in the more restricted, contemporary sense of the term or indeed as character friendships in the Aristotelian sense (NE VIII, 3, p. 205). The relations between the researchers and the representatives of various stakeholder groups within the government department that commissioned the project also fall within this broad definition. However, it is the relations between

the researchers and the wide range of individuals with whom they came into contact during the project that is of particular interest here. These included gatekeepers, 'key workers', young people and their parents or carers. These at-a-distance figures (Macleod and Pirrie, 2010) also included a wide range of service providers who could offer a (usually fairly restricted) view of individual young people's circumstances and development: for example, teachers and social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists, youth offending team officers, counsellors, therapists, work experience co-ordinators and many more.

These relations are examples of what Aristotle described as friendships based on utility (NE VIII, 1, p. 204). They are transient because 'utility is an impermanent thing: it changes according to circumstances' (NE VIII, 1, p. 204). Aristotle observes that 'friendships of this type seem to occur most frequently between … those in middle or early life who are pursuing their own advantage' (NE VIII, 1, p. 204). This description certainly applies to the individual members of the research team, who were intent upon gathering good data. However, it may also apply to some of the participants in the research, albeit to an extent that it is more difficult to ascertain. Some appeared to benefit from their participation, although it is not possible to ascertain this retrospectively. For example, Kate had an opportunity to tell her side of the story. Researcher A's encounter with Kate also demonstrates that it is possible for something that has all the characteristics of a friendship based purely on utility — generally the preserve of 'persons of low character' (NE VIII, iv, p. 208) — can also help us to lead a virtuous research life. This is not to say that an inferior kind of friendship that is less likely to endure (i.e. one based on utility) can develop into a virtue friendship — and certainly not as a consequence of the contingent and rapid onset of sepsis. Moreover, it is not at all clear whether such a development would be desirable, or indeed ethical. It would certainly call into question of the whole notion of informed consent. For how could one consent to enter into a relationship that appears to be time-limited and yet has the potential to endure beyond the life of the project? The point here is that following the flow of materials rather than seeking to impose form on matter is a prerequisite for ethical research. Encounters such as the one between Researcher A and Kate leave their imprint upon us. Such is the nature of ethical practice.

One of the reasons is that the issue of utility in research relations is under-theorised is that most of the research literature on the issue establishing or maintaining trust between members of a dispersed research teams is in the area of organisational behaviour and management rather than in psychology or moral philosophy. This is interesting in itself, as is a reflection of a pervasive and rather narrow instrumental approach to building trust that we have briefly considered in relation to the operation of ethical guidelines. Moreover, the management literature generally addresses issues relating to the effectiveness of 'virtual teams', in an environment where advances in information and communications technology (ICT) are the main enabler, and competitive advantage the main driver (Powell *et al* 2004). Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1999) observe that the reliance upon 'asynchronous and synchronous computer-mediated communication' that is a defining feature of the operations of virtual teams generates a form of 'swift trust' that 'appears to be very fragile and

temporal' (p. 791) (see also Meyerson *et al* 2006). Here we are concerned with the development and maintenance of what we might describe as 'slow trust' (although this is a term of art that is not used in the literature). However, as we saw from the example of Kate and Researcher A, this type of trust can develop very rapidly, so 'thick trust' might perhaps be a better description. In addition, this type of trust developed through both face-to-face as well as through computer-mediated contact.

The comfort of strangers

In this article, we have attempted to explore the tensions between the impartial and the universal on the one hand and the selective and the particular on the other. As we saw above, the former are the values that lie behind the formulation of and adherence to ethical guidelines. The animating principle behind these values is that human beings are importantly similar to each other. Ethical guidelines are one example of the type of mechanisms that are put in place in order to preserve these 'emblems of our commonalities'. They enable us to treat others with indifference and yet at the same time to claim that they are special. This is because when we employ this perspective we focus on the general qualities that people have in common (e.g. the fact that they are young, and have a history of exclusion from school) rather than on those that make them different from each other. We might describe these universalising values and the practices that they generate as the bird's-eye view of moral engagement in social research. In contrast, the selective and the particular are values that direct us to treat individuals differently just because they are different. In this case, the relation 'is based on the similarity of just those specific traits which differentiate them from the merely universal' (Simmel, 1971, p. 146). Moreover, as we saw from the examples above people differ from each other in ways that cannot be predicted, and in ways that cannot be universalised. As Nehamas illustrated so vividly in the course of his five lectures, it is not possible to come up with a complete inventory of what makes someone special to us. How often do we exclaim 'that is *so* like her?' or 'isn't that just like him?' when we hear of the exploits of a particular friend? Yet, if asked what it was about this person that endeared him or her to us, it is unlikely that we would come up with this particular example of behaviour. For the paradox at the heart of this is that such behaviour is at once entirely characteristic and yet completely unprecedented. Nehamas points out that when we are asked to say what it is about our friends that we love, we reach a point where we simply run out of words and have to resort to the phrase 'and so on…'. One of the reasons these special qualities evade description is that emerge in and through interpersonal relations. These values, these 'badges of our particularities' are protean and defy codification. They emerge in and through lived experience. In contrast the former, those of impartiality and universality, are enshrined in codes of practice, in various sets of guidelines, in the deliberations of university ethics committees, and in an infinite regression of safeguarding legislation, to name but a few examples.

It is no coincidence that in the case we are considering here there is no satisfactory antonym of 'bird's eye view'. The term 'worm's-eye view' is particularly inappropriate, as it evokes the image of a slender, creeping, naked, limbless animal,

usually brown or reddish, with a soft body divided into segments' rather than a fully present, sentient moral being with an innate inability to compartmentalize.

Conclusion

One of the reasons that we have devoted so much attention to the misadventures of Researcher A is in order to bridge the gap between the impartial and the universal, the selective and the particular. We wanted to produce a narrative that would comprise elements of both. We have explored this encounter because we believe that it reveals what lies behind the taken-for-granted homogeneity of notions such as the research team, or of the class of young people described as 'vulnerable' or at risk of exclusion. The dynamics of the relationship between Researcher A and Kate illuminate the paradox at the very heart of human relationships. We hope — and perhaps dare not trust — that the above reflections will open the door to a more mediated account of how proximity and distance create a 'form of being together, a form of union based on interaction' (Simmel, 1971, p. 144) than more conventional analyses of researchers' status as insiders or outsiders. We also hope that our deliberations on the development of trust in a wide range of research relationships will demonstrate that it is more important to exercise the ethical imagination than it is (merely) to follow ethical guidelines. We trust — for our position would seem to dictate that we must — that short-lived 'friendships' based on utility have the potential to help us lead a good research life, although they may not make us virtuous. We suggest that the good research life entails being poised between wandering and attachment, and developing attention rather than mere attention to detail. This requires that we hold the selective and particular in our memories rather than genuflect to the impartial and universal. To conclude, the lessons that we can draw from the deliberations within the research team and the encounter between Researcher A and Kate can be summed up as follows.

> In the case of the stranger [i.e. the sociological form that presents the synthesis of the properties of wandering and attachment], the union of closeness and remoteness involved in every human relationship is patterned in a way that may be succinctly formulated as follows: the distance within the relation indicates that one who is close by is remote, but his strangeness indicates that one who is remote is near. (Simmel, 1971 p. 143)

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