

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESS EXPERIENCED ACADEMICS

1. Do you consider yourself to be a writer?
2. Early on, how did you find the culture of academia, particularly in terms of your writing process and product? Could you describe it in terms of positives and negatives?
3. Do you think you have been moulded by your experience of academia or dealt with it on your own terms, can you say a bit about this?
4. When, where and at what time do you write?
5. Do you have any other physical preferences for writing – pen versus computer for example? Do you use journals/notebooks?
6. How do you feel about writing when you begin? Do you have an inner critic or any specific barriers and motivators for writing? What are your tools for breaking writer's block?
7. How do you feel about your writing process since joining the academy? Has it changed or not?
8. What do you consider to be the criteria for a 'good' piece of academic writing?
9. Have you sent your work off for publication or feedback? What has your experience of either been like?
10. Do you use a critical friend or someone you send your work to for feedback? Do you give feedback on your colleague's work or engage in a community of practice? How does this impact on your own writing process? If yes, how do you find it and if not, why not?
11. When you write, are you writing for an audience, an editor - to get it published?
12. Do you have an emotional link to your writing or is it 'the job'? Can you separate emotion unless it adds to the professional quality of the writing - can you control that choice?
13. Do you feel that you are supported at work to develop your writing? How does this take place?
14. Julia Cameron said, 'In order to have a real relationship with our creativity, we must take the time and care to cultivate it.' What else could be done to support you in your writing development? You may want to consider:
 - Time and space
 - Workshops or retreats

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- Mentor
- Community of practice
- Insight into publishing
- More guidelines
- More freedom
- Something else

15. Do you feel that you are a professional writer? Is this legitimised through your work and your department and if not, how could it be?

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR EXPERIENCED ACADEMICS

1. Are you a writer?
2. Early on, how did you find the culture of academia, particularly in terms of your writing process and product? Could you describe it in terms of positives and negatives?
3. Do you think you have been moulded by your experience of academia or dealt with it on your own terms, can you say a bit about this?
4. When, where and at what time do you write?
5. Do you have any other physical preferences for writing – pen versus computer for example? Do you use journals/notebooks?
6. How do you feel about writing when you begin? Do you have an inner critic or any specific barriers and motivators for writing? What are your tools for breaking writer's block?
7. When you first sent your work off for publication or feedback, what were your early experiences of this process like? Did it affect your writing and can you say a bit about how?
8. Do you or have you ever used a critical friend or someone you send your work to for feedback? Do you give feedback on your colleague's work or engage in a community of practice? How does this impact on your own writing process? If yes, how do you find it and if not, why not?
9. What do you consider to be the criteria for a 'good' piece of academic writing?
10. When you write, are you writing for an audience, an editor, to get it published or are you true to yourself and your own sense of what good writing is? What is the rationale for this?
11. Do you have an emotional link to your writing or is it 'the job'? Can you separate emotion unless it adds to the professional quality of the writing - can you control that choice?
12. Did your early experiences have any impact on how you or how your journal gives feedback to colleagues, subscribers etc?
13. What does your journal look for in a 'good' article? What are the factors that ensure an article gets in?
14. What would ensure an article definitely does not get in?
15. What are your feelings about alternative ways of writing up data? In submissions you receive and for yourself?

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16. Do you ever enjoy reading an article that does not make it to publication and if so, why does this happen?
17. What do you take into account when providing critique?
18. What would you advise other academic writers about their own writing process?
19. Do you feel that support for writing and writing development is available at the university? How does this take place?
20. Julia Cameron said, 'In order to have a real relationship with our creativity, we must take the time and care to cultivate it.' What else could be done to support yourself, peers and colleagues with writing development? You may want to consider:
 - Time and space
 - Mentor
 - Community of practice
 - Insight into publishing
 - More guidelines
 - More freedom
 - Something else
21. Is there anything you wish to add or that has arisen as a result of your reflections on academic writing?

APPENDIX 3

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH
JESS MORIARTY AND PHIL PORTER
(FEEDBACK ON AUTOETHNODRAMA 'IMPACT')**

Key

- [inaudible]: Inaudible (no suggestions possible)
[text?]: Inaudible but possible suggestion (s) provided
[text]: For clarification of meaning
Text in italics: Emphasised speech
[laughter]: Contextual information
[sic]: As meant
(text): Parenthesised speech
...: Pause/false start

Jess: So, it's the 25th May and I'm here with Phil Porter to talk about my script, *'Impact'*

Phil: OK. Well, I see what you're saying. It's quite a personal story and also because it's based on your research and your experience of research, it's quite a tricky business in a way

Jess: You were heaped with a bit of a thankless task!

Phil: Those things aside, I'll approach it as if it's any play and then things I say which you'll appreciate in abstract which also don't fit with what you're trying to do and the purposes you're trying to...

Jess: I mean, you go for it...

Phil: OK. There'll be four or five broader points that kind of come up which I'll come back to at the end to recap, but we might as well start at the beginning

Jess: OK

Phil: And like all good teachers I should start by telling you what's really good about it, which is that it's really engaging and very clear, and there's some fantastic scenes and the monologue stuff works very well and it's vivid

Jess: Oh that's good, I was trying to... I was worried that *my* character was the most insipid and boring [inaudible] so that's quite important

Phil: No, I don't think that at all. I'm a particular fan of Gerald

Jess: Good

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Phil: I think maybe because having a dad who's a retirement age academic makes it very easy for me to bind to that character... So to start with the beginning... we start with the big monologue. What directors and actors always ask whenever you write any monologue is, "Who is this person taking to?" which I don't think is necessarily or particularly useful – it always frustrates me as a question. But what they're always getting at is, "Why is this person speaking? What is their relationship to what they're saying?" And I think that's more useful when looking at this, I mean I don't think it's a problem, but quite often monologues might be someone reliving a trauma in order to get over it or something like that and this feels like it's ruminative in a way, like somebody trying to piece everything together, everything that's happened to them to see how they've reached the point they've reached – which I think is a good solid motivation [to carry?] through the play. If that's what you're following, I feel like it works best when it's in the present tense

Jess: Right

Phil: Quite a bit of it's in the past and then there are bits where it kind of comes into the present

Jess: Yes, right. OK

Phil: And that may be a matter of taste but I think just in terms of when asking the audience [what] to do here, is to picture and relive it with the character

Jess: So the bits work better in the present tense?

Phil: Yes, for my taste I think when she's telling it in the present tense it makes it easier for us to actually live through it with her and to feel like we are going on a journey with someone rather than feel like it's a sort of *fait accompli* that we're just going to be led through it. Do you see what I mean?

Jess: Yes, sure

Phil: So there's that, and... I feel like the opening I really like because – it's something we've talked about before – that sense of creating a questioning in the audience's mind. I feel like that opening line is fantastic, it makes us instantly wonder what it is that Pete couldn't face and the fact you withhold that for quite a while whilst giving us clues, and when we do finally get the answer I feel it's not necessarily the thing that we would first imagine which I think is really good

Jess: I wanted people to think that it was something not that serious, or maybe something like a pregnancy or something like that

Phil: Yeah, well you pulled that off with me – that was what I was figuring. And because the truth is quite sort of strange – that works really well for me. Going back to that sense of someone trying to figure something out, what works really nicely and where I think there's room for possibly more of, is in the peculiarity of the details, it's really grabbing when you're talking about the doctor's name and the mural on

the ceiling, because somehow the imagery of the story seems to feel like it's part of this person piecing it all together and you're seeing everything together, and the strangeness of it feels like it gets us quite a long way quite quickly in terms of that process

Jess: What I'm worried about in what you're saying is... does it feel like the writer is trying to work out what's happened or that the person is trying to piece together what's happened?

Phil: It feels like the person is trying to piece together what's happened

Jess: That's all right then! I don't want it to be the other. I don't want it to feel like I'm trying to piece it together – I don't want it to be that self-indulgent writing where *I'm* trying to work something out for myself. I did want it to be the character that's trying find out how they got to here

Phil: Yeah it does feel that way. I think it's a strange thing when you're writing in the first person and writing dramatically and trying to find the balance [between] how articulate someone should be in trying to... to break into how well they remember things and how well they can describe those things, and sometimes I think you have to embrace... I think it's quite, in a way sort of elegant and linear the way the story is put to us and I think perhaps there's room to sort of make the story slightly less-well told in a way – it's a very tricky thing to put into practice but it's perhaps about really getting into the idea of what are the ways the brain remembers things and the fact there are also different oddities that might creep into a memory and wouldn't necessarily make complete sense in the telling of the story. One thing when you were talking about CBT [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy], whether or not that would be an opportunity to sort of disappear into that world or slightly different way of explaining things for a moment or something like that that could slightly disrupt the linear nature of the narrative at that point

Jess: So you think maybe that section needs something more anecdotal or something?

Phil: Yes, possibly, or even just a kind of curve ball of some kind, either an anecdote or (and I don't know if you could make this work), making the story suddenly feel like it's going on a CBT route or something. Do you know what I mean?

Jess: Yeah, so take people off on a little tangent

Phil: Yeah, to give a sort of stylistic surprise

Jess: I thought maybe you'd say to take that section out, because it was important in the context of my story, because obviously it was that sort of epiphany moment but I wasn't sure if it felt laboured here or if I should just say counselling or something like that because CBT is so specific

Phil: No, I personally felt that the specific-ness [sic] of it was good because it makes us feel that we're engaging in a particular sort of story and a particular life so I don't

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mind that all. I think whatever you can do as well, given that I'm saying I don't think that the idea of who is this person speaking to matters much, but there is a sense that this person *is* telling us a story, anything you can do to keep reminding the audience that this is a sort of engagement and of a real storytelling process, seems kind of crass in a way, but all those sorts of comprehension checks and all those other things you would do when telling a story at a party or to your partner, are really useful to just – they'll do something to the audience's brain, in making them feel like they're not allowed to switch off

Jess: So do you mean later on when I say I'm going to call my parents but I don't because I'm worried they'll have a car crash and I had a car crash a little while ago, and so to make other parts of it more kind of like that?

Phil: Certainly that, but I think I'm talking about something even less complicated, which is occasionally saying, "Do you know what I mean?" as you would – just because it sort of doesn't... it kind of plays a trick on the audience's brain

Jess: Well, I say "actually" quite a lot, and I'm worried that's a bit Hugh Grant

Phil: Well, nothing wrong with that, but it's more that type of questioning, that comprehension check – that's what would make that person think, "I'm engaged in a two-way thing here", that sort of nodding along with the story thing. Do you see what I mean?

Jess: Yes – they are being told the story, that's a good thing to remember, that the audience are being told the story

Phil: I don't think it's far off at all, that balance between the sense of someone piecing something together and actively telling a story to a specific room of people. If you can get these two things working perfectly together alongside each other, that's the key to that section

Jess: Were there any sections in the opening monologue that you thought were a bit woolly or a bit... [boring?/need cutting out?] or anything like that?

Phil: Well, no. The first time I read it, because I didn't know where it was going, it's very difficult to know what's kind of woolly... So, the other thing I'd say in relationship to this, but in a way it probably relates to the main point and also relates to whether any of this is superfluous... so when I got to the end of the play, I did feel pretty clearly what it was about, it was about the characters struggling to figure out their own priorities and their own work/life balance...

Jess: Their own identity in a way, I suppose?

Phil: Yeah, exactly. As expressed through what they are prioritising and, I think, certainly at the end of this monologue, what we want is something that is really going to lead us – we don't want to be completely unsubtle, but that's the kind of spine that we want to begin here, and it's a really crucial point at the end of the first scene of any play that you give a cryptic but fairly strong indication as to

where we're going and so I feel that towards the end, or just in terms of the whole piece – I'm not suggesting wholesale changes – I'm saying there's maybe something you can do, you can be a little more firmer in terms of... it's a bit like writing an introduction to an essay, when you restate the question, there's a sort of "this is the thing that I'm going to address" kind of moment

Jess: So maybe here, on the way home, I can have a kind of "who am I?" moment?

Phil: Yeah

Jess: That makes a lot of sense

Phil: So, when I say that's one of the bigger notes, a lot of what I'm talking about is looking for opportunities through it to always be bringing it back to that question, always reminding people what kind of story they're being told

Jess: Because I suppose the other thing that the characters are all representative of is different aspects of academic culture, so with Gerald – none of the characters, apart from the two female ones who are kind of based on me as I are [sic] and me as I might've become – Gerald is based on the idea of old school academia, and that idea of where is the place for that now, and is there a place for that now? So I wanted to... and obviously Jan is that kind of new order, new management, free market schooling and all the rest of it but obviously within those ideas I want this linear thing of who is this person, how is she finding her identity in all of this?

Phil: Well, I think those different characters that you have chosen serve you really well because in terms of telling this main story as well, because towards the end when Jan and Gerald are arguing over the top of Debbie's head it's perfect because in their own ways, even though they have their own distinct lives and agendas they are able to represent the two polar opposites that Debbie is trying to find her place in, so I think that is all going to be fine

Jess: OK. It's just that the central story needs clarifying from time to time?

Phil: Yeah

Jess: OK

Phil: It's something that when I started as a writer a few years ago, when always you write a play and then have a meeting with the theatre and they always want to say "whose story is it?", like they always want to know who the protagonist is, which I think is a genuinely rubbish question because some plays work like that and some plays don't. But in this, you can't escape that this is *their* story – you start with 10 minutes of one character speaking. You have to embrace that really

Jess: It *is* her story, but I thought that because it's so much me it would be very self indulgent and also not very interesting for it to be only that story, and I did want it to be saying something about academic culture as well, definitely

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Phil: Well I think that that's working really well, that the two are bouncing against each other in the right sort of way. The only other thing I was going to say about this first monologue is that moment of realisation when she realises that she wants to have a baby which is [such a?/a touching?] crucial moment in the play – what people would call an inciting incident in the play – the thing that launches the rest of the piece, I felt that I needed to know even more about what kind of revelation this was – is this a person that up until this point they thought it was the last thing they wanted, or is it just a person who's never thought about it much before and suddenly feels it?

Jess: I think it was that I'd always (you know, the character had always) wanted to have children and that this event had made them realise – question their own mortality – it was literally that moment, instead of thinking “I might die” (which is a very Moriarty trait to focus on) it was more that thing of “What if I never, what if I don't have time to have children or what if I don't get to have children” – that was more of the agonising moment, and then it was like opening the floodgates, that was it, that was all I could think about after that. It's been there for so long and I'd put it to one side and, actually, all the other things that I'd concentrated so hard on in my career – I had pushed Paul and everyone else out so I could concentrate on this “thing”, and it was like this was candy floss, it's not enough, it's important to me but it's covering up for something else that's missing in my life and now all of a sudden I realise and now I've got to do something about it today, in that [time?/window?] frame, and so...

Phil: Well, yes, that's a great start for the story and it's not that I don't get any of that from what's there, I think in a way it's such a key moment that perhaps in the whole speech it has an equal weighting to other stuff that's going on, so you need to try and find a way of really foregrounding that moment and making us feel that we know absolutely everything we need to know about it, because it is like a “hallelujah” chorus moment. So let's move on a bit...

Jess: OK

Phil: So, top of Scene Two, we have Debbie who's doing something frivolous on the computer (and this is a relatively small point here), but I wonder whether you might be able to find something – and this comes down to whether it's a radio play or a stage play – I think it would work quite well on the radio so if that's your intention you can ignore this, but for the stage, you'll probably want to find something more physical so the audience can share the joke

Jess: Like an actual email joke?

Phil: Yeah, or not an email but anything that suggests the sort of time wasting that Jan wouldn't be in favour of

Jess: So, is this visual or not?

Phil: Yeah. It might be something that has a stupid tune out loud, like the TV comparison meerkats – something that invites the audience in as a joke. And then here's another of the broader points that I would make about your writing which relates to the dialogue, which this opening section is an example of – there's quite a lot of direct responses, quite often you set up a line with something very direct and then say something else, like "Then how have you managed it?/I don't know. No life, I guess". That "I don't know?" is something that crops up a lot in your dialogue...

Jess: What, "I don't know?" or just that kind of thing?

Phil: I mean that kind of short, very direct response at the beginning of a line which, in a way blunts the appeal of the line that follows and is superfluous. It's something like you see a lot in all levels of writing, [that you state the text, and then you're stating the text again in the line?]. It's a bit like whenever you see a line where the first word is "yes" or "no", it's really worth looking at it and thinking is that "yes" or "no" implied by what follows anyway because it not only holds things up, but it reduces whatever subtext there is in the line and so you've got all the invention in the second part of the line but you've already stated the meaning of it in the first bit

Jess: So, would you have, for example, when she says, "Oh, hello Jan, I didn't hear you knock" and Jan says "I didn't, we run an open door policy", would you get rid of "I didn't"?

Phil: I would, yeah.

Jess: And would you get rid of "Yes, it seemed you on the radar" and have "It seemed you on the radar" [inaudible]?

Phil: I would. Obviously, if you really know exactly why you want something there... but it's also about what actors are able to do. I often find that I write those things in earlier drafts because I'm figuring out what that person is trying to express, but then actually once the writing is working really well, the actor would be able to communicate whatever you're putting in those little sections with the rest of the line, and what it allows is for the dialogue to start working at a speed that is fast enough to be exciting for the audience, and it's also going to give the audience something to do with their brain because you have to give them a little bit of guesswork, you don't want to fill in all of the gaps. So yeah, that's something to go through generally and what you'll hopefully end up with is something that... well I think it would work quite well with the style you're doing because there's quite a lot of sparring and that sort of thing, and the snappier that kind of stuff gets – I mean look at someone like Patrick Marber who specialises in that kind of cut-and-thrust – yeah, you'll see how he's really boiled [things] down to something quite minimal

Jess: OK

Phil: So, yeah, with Jan's behaviour here... I wondered if there's a slightly clearer route for her through the scene. It seems to me that the main event of the scene, what

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Jan's trying to get at, is to get Debbie to approach things in a more practical way regarding funding, research – that kind of thing. Her route in getting to that question seems... I know she's not a very nice person, but given that the most logical thing would be her buttering up Debbie (and she is doing some of that), but the move into talking about the counselling – I don't understand that in terms of Jan's project in the scene

Jess: I wanted that to be (and I'm not precious about getting rid of it if it doesn't work) a [veiled?] threat because, although I didn't take any time off, if you have anything on your file about work-related stress or anything like that, it can be used against you e.g. if they want to get rid of you they could declare you unfit for practice. It's like Jan is saying, "Look, I know about this, I'm aware of it" and it's meant to be a bit of a shock for Debbie as well

Phil: Well, that makes good sense, but it wasn't completely clear to me (although it could be me being dim). I thought it might be better if it starts with her just trying to be nice, and when she doesn't get the desired response, try something different rather than two or three tactics all at once – that would give her a clearer path through the scene. But in terms of (and you've heard me talk to students about this) is to try different tactics to achieve your motivations – it's completely legitimate and interesting that she's trying different things, but they come in a strange order

Jess: Yeah, I thought of it much more as Debbie never being on the right foot, because Jan will butter her up and then say something double-edged, then butter her up and say something double-edged again – but I can see how it looks like it's Jan who doesn't know what she's doing rather than Debbie, because I wanted to do that "rabbit-in-the-headlights" thing, so that Debbie is like, "I don't know how to deal with this... I don't know if she's my friend or not"

Phil: I think you can get that, but it's hard because that's exactly right and interesting to have a character who does that and keeps you uncertain, but at the same time we have to be able to follow her logic as well otherwise we get lost. But it's a really tricky thing of trying to set up a logic of hers that we can understand, but also that we can understand that Debbie doesn't understand it – but I don't think it's far from that at all

Jess: OK. Is there anything in particular that you're like... like the bit about cutting the lines, bits you think are inappropriate or you feel she [Jan] isn't sure about the line she's taking there? Or is it more a general she-should-start-off-nice-and-finish-bad?

Phil: No. Well, the point where the line got broken for me was the start of the counselling bit (top of page five)...

Jess: So maybe if I just changed that section there, where she says "I'm not here to talk about that now", maybe she could say something quite soft and then go into talking about the department. Would that work?

Phil: Yep, I think so. It's hard to figure out, but...

Jess: I'll have a look at it though – I do know what you mean. I don't want it to seem like Jan doesn't know exactly what she's doing, that's the most important thing

Phil: Yeah, I think in a way it's similar to what we were just saying, that because Jan is quite hard and manipulative, and this is the first time you see her you need to express that, but in a way I think that's an interesting thing for us to discover in its own time, so this stuff about the department being in a vulnerable position of saving 5% (and this relates generally to your less-appealing characters, like Ray), which is also, in order to get to where they are they must have some ability in knowing who they're talking to and tailoring how they say what they say to get what they want, so yeah, I'd play around with Jan being nice for a while, then seeing her turn – that would be a good coup rather than...

Jess: So, Jan being more charming earlier on?

Phil: Yes. And it's great because you've got something for her to be charming about, and that's what you start with (talking about Debbie doing well) – just let her stick with that for a while and let us buy into that as well. I would never have said “woolly” though!

Jess: No, but the section isn't doing what I want it do, so I need to not hang on to it

Phil: Yeah, but it might well be that somewhere else in the scene or something you could...

Jess: Make it the pivotal moment?

Phil: Yeah, that could be when – if it came later that could be the first sign to us that Jan is not just being friendly and complimentary

Jess: OK. And I don't want it to be pantomime either, I don't mind Ray being pantomime and I suppose towards the end Jan is that archetypal villain, but I wanted her to be bit more dimensional than that, whereas Ray isn't

Phil: Yeah. Does Ray exist in the real world?

Jess: Yeah, I've known people like him, but I've never met anyone like him at the University, but he's that ambitious, sycophantic, no-real-interest-in-what-the-university-might-be-here-for in terms of what it should be... you know, in terms of what the new order want it to stand for now and what the old order want it to stand for?

Phil: I know someone like that

Jess: Yeah, I think there's people like Ray in every walk of life, aren't there? Well, there's a bully in [inaudible] as well, so... but I don't want them to be just stereotypes or representatives. I want them to seem more three-dimensional than that. But Ray is the least important in terms of depth – he really is just a sparring partner for Gerald

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Phil: Well, yeah – I don't know, there's always that idea that your baddies should get the best lines...

Jess: Yeah, he is that Alan Rickman in 'Robin Hood' for me

Phil: I think it's fine to know what you think about people but people should always be able to spring surprises as well – you don't want to feel you know everything about someone from the first five seconds. Well, you might want to, but in terms of the style of your play, what you're setting up is something where you've got some very well-rounded characters, so you need those other characters to exist in the same world as that. Don't worry, it's not like I'm saying you've got to...

Jess: I know. It's just that I'm thinking now that, because I wasn't thinking about those things, I was just enjoying writing the dialogue, and when my dad read it he said (for Gerald's leaving speech) that could be an opportunity to say something really meaningful about the old order/new order coming together, and I said that I didn't want that to happen, because Gerald wasn't (like Debbie and Jan) one of the main characters, he's meant to just be representative. I did have quite a long monologue for him but I got rid of it. But I don't want them to become caricatures or anything like that either

Phil: Well, yeah, I've got exactly the same note as your dad, but I think I was perhaps imagining something like, not a direct attack, but something where he's coded his feelings about things into something a bit more – not a great speech or anything, but something...

Jess: Like a quip or something?

Phil: Yeah, I mean going back to what I said before, I do think it works really well, Gerald doesn't seem peripheral to me, he definitely feels like one side of the argument, one of the birds on Debbie's shoulder with Jan on the other – so I think it's quite fun to explore where he's coming from

Jess: OK. That makes sense

Phil: So this bit about Polish cinema?

Jess: Should I cut it out?

Phil: No, not necessarily. I'm just interested to know what...

Jess: I wanted to show that Jan was doing that thing women sometimes do, that thing where they're being very nasty to each other, then be very girlie with each other, "Oh look aren't we being girlie together", and I wanted it to show Jan saying, "Look, I do have a personal life as well" – which seems to be, among women (I don't know about men) in academia, that thing of having it all, the partner, the career, the publications and all the rest of it. And there is this jealousy and back-biting if one part of your life isn't as... you know, like the part where she says "You can't be a mother and an

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academic” – more than one person said that to me, it was like I’d betrayed women everywhere by trying to have it all. Is it a bit woolly that bit?

Phil: Well, what I think here is that it’s one of those opportunities to shift people’s focus back to that central theme that you’re talking about...

Jess: Who am I?

Phil: Yeah, that, and in particular in relation to the “Is it possible to do both?” – have a proper home life and career. So, the idea that they are competing in a way but trying to be friendly is great

Jess: But it doesn’t [come across?/work?]?

Phil: I think you’re going there and then you slightly shift away from it because Jan has such a strong reaction to what she learns about Pete, so maybe you can focus that a bit better – but then it’s great that you come back to what she says at the end there about not getting pregnant before the Research Excellence Framework. Is that the old Research Assessment...?

Jess: Yeah. I don’t explain that because anyone not in academia wouldn’t care, it kind of explains itself

Phil: I think you pick it up anyway from earlier in the scene, where you talk about her research. So, right at the end here, again it depends whether it’s a stage play or a radio play, I think because we’ve heard the opening monologue, we know that the comment about not getting pregnant is loaded anyway, so we don’t need much...

Jess: So I don’t need so much detail at the end, the stage direction?

Phil: No.

Jess: Yeah, I thought it was a little *1920s* maybe

Phil: No, we don’t need it. But the only thing that did strike me was (although I don’t know what it would be) that if you really wanted a tidy scene structure, whatever that thing was at the top of the scene that Debbie got caught doing, you might be able to bring that back in some kind of clever way

Jess: The email could go off again or something...

Phil: Yeah, so if that had some kind of resonance, although you don’t want to make it so neat it looks silly, but it would give it some nice structural coherence

Jess: Yeah, and it would be a nice bit of relief for the audience as well, wouldn’t it?

Phil: Yeah

Jess: So, with this bit, would you change it, or go back to it and rework it?

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Phil: When you describe what you're talking about in terms of having to have it all and the competitive nature, I think that's a really interesting thing...

Jess: So you think it needs to be clearer?

Phil: It's odd because it needs to be clearer but also more subtextual [sic] at the same time. I think what should be clearer is that they're competing (if that's what they are doing?)...

Jess: I think Jan's competing, but I don't think Debbie realises she's competing

Phil: I think maybe that Jan needs a little more to say, then, around that "Why on earth would he do that?" thing and painting that picture of going to the cinema (if she's doing that in a self-[aggrandising?] way. That might be quite nice

Jess: OK

Phil: So, Scene Three. It's a nice join between the scenes. There's a pleasing amount of connection between leaving Scene Two and where we begin Scene Three, which is great. I found, though, in this opening section of dialogue (this is very minor)... what I was expecting when Gerald is saying "Debbie, Debbie, Debbie..." is that he's either about to say something reassuring or, as she says, patronising, but actually what he says is something rather blunt and bad news-like, and I couldn't quite figure out where that came from in a way – I felt like I was being set up for something slightly different – his approach at the beginning didn't relate to his blunt assessment of the situation

Jess: So something less blunt?

Phil: Either something less blunt or...

Jess: Something funny?

Phil: Yeah, or the set up could be different if that's what you want him to say. He could say, "The fact is..." or "We all know..." so that it seems a more logical progression... "Must be why they want me to retire"... is this new information to Debbie (that they want him to retire)?

Jess: No, I wanted Gerald to be one of those perpetual "I'm going to retire next year... No, next year etc." types

Phil: In that case, because (generally) it's always helpful when something is new or someone is bringing something new to a scene, rather than playing out the status quo and [filling up the room?], it doesn't have to be new info itself, but if there was something, some new added pressure from Ray, or someone's told him very clearly that it's time to stop procrastinating...

Jess: Or do you think it's better as new information, so that Debbie is shocked? Would that be more interesting?

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Phil: Yeah, because that would give her something to play back against... and then it would be clear to the audience why this moment between them is the moment we're seeing. But yeah, generally I think this scene is really working well. I like their relationship – it's intriguing, interesting, you're puzzling over whether it's flirtatious, avuncular, or paternal – there's plenty of stuff there for the audience to sink their teeth into, really. There's a nice change of rhythm, on page 8 there's a nice section of snappy dialogue which already works really well, I don't know – if you look at it in terms of getting rid of even more, I think it could really fly, you'd feel the whole thing really begin to accelerate in a pleasing way. But it does work as it is

Jess: Can you point out something in particular, for instance instead of Gerald saying "I thought it was boring", he could just say, "It was boring"?

Phil: Yes. That section for example. If it was like "It was boring/That's honest/I'm sorry/What?/It doesn't feel like you care/Oh god" – that kind of thing. So you could lose...

Jess: Just tighten?

Phil: Yeah. And it would also give more space for the actors to act

Jess: OK

Phil: So, the very last line of the scene, I'd cut that. "I hope you do have to wee in a bag" is a much more interesting line than "Charming!" Plus it's fun to give her the last word

Jess: I think that's the only reason why I put charming in – I wanted Gerald to have the last word! But that is funnier

Phil: If you could think of something he could say that tops what she says... but yeah, you always want to go out with a bang rather than a whimper. So, Scene Four... Jan's monologue

Jess: Yep

Phil: Well, I really liked this. There's loads of...

Jess: That wasn't in the first draft, but my dad said you need something to humanise Jan in a way, so that's why I put something in. Because Jan is meant to be that tangent moment, that if I hadn't had that epiphany or gone for CBT and everything else, that that was the kind of path that I was on and I needed to invent that back-life, so that's why this part is maybe a bit woolly in places

Phil: I'm not worried about the woolliness – I don't think it is woolly. I think that there are two big issues. One is that, it's not that this can't work, but it is structurally unusual given that we've set up Debbie as the person who is relating to the audience, and given that all the other speeches are her, to give Jan her moment like this, because if it is meant to be Debbie's story...

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Jess: It kind of detracts from that?

Phil: Yeah, it's an odd thing to do just once, you'd normally expect to find in a play either one character having that relationship with the audience, or everyone's able to do it all the time. That's not to say it's wrong...

Jess: So do you think if I gave Gerald and Ray something...

Phil: Yeah, if you gave them something it would be great, but if the motivation for that is to make something structurally coherent...

Jess: I'd probably do that for Gerald but I don't feel that I have anything for Ray – I don't want to give him anything either

Phil: They don't necessarily have to be anything like as sizeable, Ray could have two lines to the audience if you wanted and that might still convey a sense of a play where everyone can relate with the audience if they want. But I'm not sure because I think you wanted things to be seen through Debbie, that's what you've set up to this point, even though there are bits coming where Debbie isn't present, you still feel like she knows what's going on there through Gerald and that kind of thing. So, I don't know, it's a choice – it's not wrong, but it will have an effect on the way people receive the play on the whole

Jess: So, would you cut it?

Phil: It's hard to say...

Jess: I tried to keep it as short as possible because I didn't want it to unbalance the play towards Jan and away from Debbie, but I did want to give her something to show she wasn't just this "boo-hiss" person

Phil: What I wondered was whether – you couldn't deliver it like that – but whether there was room for some of this to be developed in the [next] scene when they start to argue. It seems very valid, or believable, that at some point either Gerald or Debbie is going to ask Jan, "What's in it for her? Why is she here?" I mean, if she doesn't care about the students, or education, then what is she doing here? Obviously then it would be ridiculous if she spoke for 10 minutes about holidays in France, but it might be that some of this material and the essence of some of what she's talking about could fit in with a scene, and for her to be saying that under pressure could give it some added dramatic [power]

Jess: I suppose in the next scene when she appears quite vulnerable with Debbie before then steps back up, my problem would be if it came up later in the scene where she's sparring with Gerald it would let her off at the end – because what I wanted was for this thing to go, "Here is another dimension to Jan, *but* it's not forgivable that she's become the way she's become." I mean, at this point you think she's like Debbie, that there is another side, the audience thinks there's another side

to her but by the end of the play, like Debbie, you know there isn't – although Debbie is still hopeful she might be redeemable, although the audience will be less sure!

Phil: Well, I think with Jan's journey generally this fits quite nicely because what you've got is she starts out ruthless, then we get a sense that maybe she's on this journey to a better balanced life etc., then around the time Debbie makes the realisation who she wants to be, Jan goes the wrong way, and I think this is quite a nice stepping stone towards the moment where we think she's going to turn out all right. So, yeah, I think this would belong in the next scene

Jess: So, put some of these ideas into the next scene?

Phil: Have a look at them and see if you are able to do that...

Jess: The other thing with the monologue as well is that it's more forgiving than the dialogue, I can't imagine Jan saying to Debbie in dialogue the bit about her mum making meals that last forever and fish stews and tagines [sic] – it would be a cringe moment. But maybe she could tell the anecdote about her dad when they go to their house?

Phil: It depends. You need to set them up right, get to a point where that shift in rhythm feels right. So if they're arguing with each other and then there's a silence and *then*, when we're expecting Jan to storm off and say something horrible, then she surprises us and starts... as if the argument has put her in a place where she has a clear memory of these holidays or maybe Debbie asks the question aggressively and rhetorically, "What are you even doing here?" – and then you surprise us and give us a very honest answer. It might be there is a way to work this into the scene

Jess: Yeah, I see

Phil: But if you fudge or crowbar the monologue into what is a dramatic scene you'll feel it very quickly, but I think you'll know whether it's going to work or not. That's what I'd probably do

Jess: So take this and restructure Scene Five?

Phil: And make it a bigger scene, basically, and don't feel hurried into moving on with it. I think a lot of the meat of her character is there, could take place there. The other thing I was going to say about that scene is that I felt (and this might not tally with your experiences or research) with Jan, the idea that her dad always hoped she would be more like her mum is interesting, and you can see why it would upset her. But what I feel like is the more neat, poetic and archetypal story would be someone who's spent their whole life trying to please someone or be like someone in order to please them, is for that person to be horrified by that

Jess: If that's not how it's come across then I've failed. I wanted it to be that Jan had spent her whole life trying to please her father by being like him, even though she

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accepts she's not the Oxford don academic, but she's tried to do it in a different way and that her mother is this peripheral fan on the sidelines cheering her on and that when the dad is like, "I wish you weren't like me, I wish you'd been more like your mother", it means her whole life has been meaningless – that the whole rationale for her life has been vapid

Phil: What's not quite there is actually early on in that speech. I think because what she remembers are her happier memories of childhood, as they are family memories, maybe that makes it a bit hazy. Either at the start or right at the end, if she could confirm that for us

Jess: What, that she always wanted to please/be like her dad?

Phil: That she was being like him to please him

Jess: OK. The other thing I wanted to say was that idea of in the past it would have been the male academic at work and the wife at home, and even with Gerald when he makes the feminist/wife/underpants comment, it's saying it's only very recently the idea of women having it all or doing it all has been more prevalent whereas for people like Gerald and Jan's dad it isn't something they would've expected as a notion, that they would want to have families as well. But that would've been a choice that either you're going to be like your mother, be maternal and do the family thing and support a husband who might be an Oxford don. But what I wanted to say was that was what Jan's father wanted for her really, not to be like him. So that doesn't come over?

Phil: It comes over that she wants to be like him, and it comes over that he's disappointed, but the bit in-between, that she's doing it in order to please him isn't. To me, it's more like she's doing it because it's a fantastic life for her

Jess: Yeah, that line "I want that life for me", but I suppose it's that thing where instead of realising that she can't have that life because she's going to mimic her dad rather than her mum, that that's the kind of problem. But yeah, it does sound like she wants it for her but then gets lost along the way

Phil: Because in a way it would be quite interesting to open up for us the possibility that she might think she'd rather be making jam, but that's not where she's going in the end, but that would be an interesting thing to say, like does she want this thing for herself at all?

Jess: I suppose that's quite a difficult question, really. It's something I'd want to, but then I wonder if career women, is there really a moment when they go, "Sod this. I do want to be making jam!"? And I do think that when you decide to have children, there are many career women who say, "I can't do this anymore, I've got my children now". So it's that thing of having it all again. I mean, whenever I have those moments of "Should I give it up for the children and stay at home making jam?" it goes as soon as it comes – and I imagine it would be the same for Jan. And I

don't want the play to be about it's a choice, I want it to be the reverse of that, that it doesn't have to be a choice though it's difficult when it isn't. I don't want it to be "it's making jam or having a career". Because that, for me, would be quite anti-feminist

Phil: Be a good title though. Well I think, in a way, through Jan, that's not... because she's swum so far to the dark side, it's just an interesting thing to briefly entertain

Jess: You're right, it is confusing, it's like she wants that life but, I wanted it to be that she hasn't quite realised that she wants that life, but then she'll have to follow her mother rather than be like her father – like she could've had that life if she'd married someone like her father. But that doesn't come across, you're right

Phil: But also, the whole thing puts her in a... if it's very clear that she's doing it for him, it puts her in a very interesting situation generally, because now she realises that she doesn't please him, you can see in a strange and perverse way why she's gone into overdrive in terms of proving something to herself

Jess: I wanted it to be that she's so far steeped in it now that the only thing to do is go on, that there's no turning back. And also, in terms of age, it's that thing where Jan's in her thirties and her partner has left her and had an affair, that if she did decide to have a family, it wouldn't be the same as a man deciding as he's pushing 40 that he's going to have a family – which is more than possible. So, yeah, I wanted it to be more like she's gone so far now that this is the only way forward. But maybe that doesn't come across, that it's more in my head and not on the page

Phil: I think it's really close, like maybe one draft away, having had these thoughts, and trying to be really clear about what exactly it is you want people to come out of it definitely knowing, and then what kind of things you want to tease people with. Once you've got that in your head, do a strategic redraft of it. But then, also, I'm suggesting that you might want to deal with that material differently in the first place

Jess: But I think that's a really good point, that the next scene could be longer, that through the dialogue that could come out in quite an interesting way. I mean, arguably, the monologue for Jan is a cheat as well. So [*making notes*]... Jan should be more like her mum and not her dad if she wanted that life... maybe. Should I be arguing? I don't feel like I want to...

Phil: Well, as the person who then goes away and does it you can have the final word that way

Jess: No, I think that scene, more extended, will be a better scene. I mean, the scenes are quite short aren't they? It would break up the pace of the two [*inaudible*] scenes

Phil: Well, I did a word count of how much monologue and how much dialogue there is, and it's about 60% monologue at the moment, so if anything it would give it a more pleasing shape – you should probably look for it to be 60/40 the other way, so that would start to redress that. OK, so, Scene Five... in the spirit of making this a

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bigger scene, I think it would be quite interesting to see Jan at least try to keep her emotions under at the top of the scene – it's playing a game with the audience, you're showing them something's wrong but you're not telling them what it is, even if it's only for a matter of a few lines

Jess: So dramatically it's going to be more interesting as well?

Phil: Yeah, also it gives you an opportunity to show something a bit different in Jan – and it's that thing about asking questions again – you're forcing us to answer a question before you've asked it rather than starting with the eruption – or the answer if you like

Jess: So, this could start with Jan already in Debbie's office, which could throw Debbie off, and then Jan could tell her something anecdotal about her life before coming to the university or something like that?

Phil: Yeah, or anything that feels right

Jess: Something that leads the audience?

Phil: Yeah, or it could be a complete lie, she could be talking about what a brilliant night she just had with what's-his-name, and then she just can't lie anymore. Or it could be she's ranting targets and statistics, or anything

Jess: So sort of a trick of the eye?

Phil: Yeah. And also I really like the situation Debbie finds herself in here, of having to be friendly and supportive and saying, "Why would anyone leave you, Jan?" It's a good general comic situation which is great and while I was enjoying it I was wondering if there's room for more of it, more blatant lying – just because it's more fun, really

Jess: I think that as well, what I'm worried about, is that at times Debbie comes across a bit thick, which might give another edge to her

Phil: That's a terrible thing to say about a character entirely based on yourself!

Jess: Well I think I am guilty of it sometimes, that thing when with some people when you do play it dumb it's just easier, you pull the blank face and nod but behind their backs you're like, "God, they're mad!" I think if Debbie did do more of things like that she would endear herself more to the audience, rather than just being a wimp at times. So yeah, that works, that's a good idea

Phil: Right, so this is probably my main issue or note with this scene, is that the trigger for Jan to turn on Debbie doesn't feel specific enough at the moment

Jess: So that bit after she says, "It doesn't have to be a competition"? Because the idea here was she can't [inaudible] think how weak I look, and I wanted that to be the trigger for her to think, "God, think how weak I'm looking *now*". But that's not enough?

Phil: That's probably a bit too subtle, and what you want is for it to be something that happens between the two of them, like I can imagine if Debbie is using herself as an example, or if it sounded to Jan like Debbie was using herself as an example of someone who has it all figured out, that that could rile her as she's down. Do you see what I mean?

Jess: Yeah I do. I don't want Debbie to do that though, go "Look at my perfect life", because the whole point of Debbie is that actually her life isn't perfect either, you know, that there's no such thing. And, predominantly among females in academia, in my experience, it's that jealousy thing, always thinking that someone's trying to get one over you or someone's got it better than you or got the upper hand or got it easier. And that creates this lack of support and this tension as well. But maybe I will extend the scene to bring in Jan, to make her more 3D – I could definitely find another pivot to set her off. But I don't want Debbie to go to her that she "should be more like me". Because there's already the thing of "you should be more like me" coming through it, but not too sinister

Phil: I suppose what I mean is for Debbie to say, with completely good and gentle intentions, but also understand why Jan in her particular emotional state would take it as...

Jess: Because she's a cow!

Phil: Yeah, and because she's looking to deposit her massive reserves of aggression. It shouldn't be too hard to find something that's meant to be self-effacing but is taken the wrong way. And I think if you did that, then some of what follows might take a different shape; that the argument might progress in a slightly different way. But generally, it's great that Jan goes on the attack. She's pretty horrendous, isn't she?

Jess: I do think in a way that what she says about getting rid of the baby is perhaps going too far, in a way it's the most unrealistic line in the play – I can't imagine someone actually saying that. But I wanted it to be this kind of recklessness that she doesn't care what she says now, she's not afraid for her job or position – she just wants to be poisonous towards Debbie and upset her. And at this point Debbie can hold it together, but at the end when she says she's a crap mother, she can't. But do you think it's too much?

Phil: If anything I'd say unleash more. I think this pause at the top of page 13 disrupts the flow of the scene, and this section where it seems like she might be about to... where she's asking, "Is that Pete?" and you wonder where it's going, I think that makes it a slightly bumpy ride. Once Jan goes, I just want to enjoy the scene, watch her unravel, and when you get to the bit about the baby, that bit will be – I like it anyway – it will feel even more of a final nail. But yeah, I think there's a lot of pleasure to be having as she completely loses it. And the fact that you're giving Debbie a lot of right to reply draws it back to being a bit too civilised

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Jess: So let Jan unravel... don't let Debbie respond. What about the end of the scene? Is it OK that Debbie asserts herself again, or should I leave it just as Jan unleashing?

Phil: It just depends how you shape it. If you're going to have more information about Jan and why she's there and where she's come from, it depends on where that comes in the scene

Jess: I might go for where she says, "You're mad, you're bonkers"... instead I'll probably have Jan going, "Careful!" and then Debbie say, "I used to look up to you! I wanted to be like you!"

Phil: I [inaudible] that line. It's just the idea that anyone would want to be like Jan. Whether...

Jess: Well it's that weird thing of... obviously I have seen real people who've toed the party [line] and done well, it's that weird seductive thing about ambition that watching someone rise through the ranks and watching someone woo the right people and to get to where they are, there is something quite "Ooooooh, I'd quite like to be able to do that, that's what I want" and to be mean to people... and that thing also about being married to the job, that discipline of pushing everything else out and just focusing on that... there's something awesome about that, I suppose. But do you think it's completely unbelievable that anyone would want to be like Jan?

Phil: No, I just think that maybe she could qualify it by saying – obviously not exactly like you...

Jess: Well what if she just said, "I used to look up to you"?

Phil: Well, the thing is (and I didn't make a note of it because I thought it was bad – it's an interesting idea that she wants to be like this person who's really bad), it's just whether there's...

Jess: Well, you know what I said about that split, that tangent thing, there is a part of me that understands how that happens because I was never as vile and nasty as Jan, but I did get to a point where I was so wrapped up in what I was doing at work that I became completely unable to be objective about anything else. So I can understand how if you carried on – it's like the Macbeth thing – that once you're on that path it takes an epiphany moment to make you go, "What am I doing?" And Jan has that opportunity but decides she's gone too far and might as well carry on. But maybe that's too complex to come across here, that maybe the idea of Debbie looking up to Jan here is just ridiculous?

Phil: I wouldn't say it's ridiculous, it's very interesting...

Jess: I think even at the end though Debbie still has hope for Jan... that Jan could be redeemed...

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Phil: I think all it needs is maybe some acknowledgement within there that, that given everything that's in there now, that that is genuinely astonishing – that she is astonished at herself

Jess: Astonished at herself...

Phil: I just find it...

Jess: It doesn't sit otherwise? OK

Phil: I just find it interesting rather than anything else. And it pushed my grounds of credibility – but only in an interesting way

Jess: I think I just need to work on those two scenes to draw in those ideas and to restructure them to create something new anyway so I think that will work itself out

Phil: So that scene, it's potentially quite a reasonably big job, but at the same time, once you get it right, especially because it's right in the middle of the play...

Jess: I totally agree with what you're saying so I'm not particularly worried about it being a big job

Phil: I mean, right in the middle of the play it would be nice to have a big scene where things are...

Jess: A meaty scene...

Phil: Yeah

Jess: And then obviously, after that we've got some light relief from Gerald and Ray

Phil: Yes, I enjoyed all this

Jess: But I'm worried that it's too shallow, the scene's too shallow

Phil: No. I think it would sit quite nicely with the scene before. The lighter tone makes it more enjoyable. Again I'd look at the dialogue for what you could lose, because again the pleasure of it is two people sparring, so the more zip to it we can get the better. And I guess it comes back to the question of Ray and what he thinks he is – like we know he's an oaf, and all his buying into the modernisation stuff is laughable, which is fine and works but I want to know why, not the detail level of Jan and her parents, but I'm interested to know what's going on in his head, why he thinks he's right

Jess: I think it's just pure ambition with Ray – when the new order comes it'll be people like Ray standing on the top of the mountain and people like Gerald making way. So the only thing Ray is thinking about is himself and his career and how he can rise up – there's no moral or social conscience involved. It's purely like, "How can I get to where I want to be?" I didn't give him more of a motivation than that!

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Phil: I think his motivation is fine. It's clear and those people exist. For me it's whether he would be so un-tactical in the way he speaks to Gerald – in a way he's not even patronising

Jess: Yes but I think he's written Gerald off, though. Like he just wants to get Gerald out, he doesn't even see him or the old order as any threat or interest – he knows that they're gone, that their time is over

Phil: Like this section, when he's talking about the new building and do they need tutorials, they've got email and online classrooms – what I'd like to see there is him almost pitying Gerald, that he still thinks books are the answer – something that would give us a glimpse that he does really believe these things and that he's not a robot, but wrong

Jess: OK. Well, I just found out that the Dean of Faculty is thinking about giving everyone an iPhone so I'm now worried it's going to look like I've mirrored Jan

Phil: Well, someone's got to say it. It's ridiculous, isn't it?

Jess: Yeah, but not me!

Phil: So yeah, it's just a sense that he believes these things, but like I said, the general tone of it and the tone he brings to it is absolutely fine and works really well in relief of the other bits because he's part of the same world but at the same time from a different side again. And I love Gerald's use of the word "gizmos". So yes, Debbie's speech in Scene Seven... again here it's another big structural question, which is it's another monologue but being spoken to someone so it's a different convention

Jess: Yeah

Phil: So what you've set up is the idea that she's telling a story to the audience who are then coming alive in various ways

Jess: So she is still telling the story to the audience but it's that thing of, "How did I get from where I was at the end of the first monologue to how did I get to this point?"

Phil: Well, I like the idea of her talking to her baby but sometimes I feel that she could... if you were going to do that you would have to keep bringing it back to the baby all the time – otherwise it just looks like the baby is being forgotten, and it's hard if it's about very grown up things and lots of...

Jess: Do you think it would be easier to change it so I'm telling the audience, "I can't believe he's still here and I can't believe you're still here" – just to shift it again?

Phil: Yeah, possibly. I think certainly in terms of the structure of the whole play it would be helpful, but I wonder though if you can have your cake and eat it too and be going between the two in some way

Jess: What do you think, instinctively, writer-ly [sic], gut... what do you think it should be?

Phil: The thing that I know would be fine is to do it to the audience

Jess: So for the sake of Ray, really, to have a baby gurgling and then quieting down... but we'll talk about that at the end

Phil: I think a little of that gurgling and speaking to the baby about its nappy or something would help as well – I wouldn't want to get rid of the baby, I like the baby – I'm not some sort of "baby getter-ridder-of" [sic]! But in the end, having the baby there causes quite a lot of problems when it comes to the amount and kind of information you want to communicate to the audience

Jess: What do you think about the cancer? Would you tell a new-born baby that?

Phil: I think all of it is somehow feasible in the sense of how you came to be, all of that is fine, but it's just that somehow the amount of it is...

Jess: Is it too much, is it too self-indulgent?

Phil: It would come out like that to a baby, well the language of it feels relatively articulate – just somehow there's a credibility issue. It's not necessarily to do with the nature of the information. It's just the amount...

Jess: Strategically, it's going to be easier for me if I address the audience and every now and then the baby comes in, isn't it?

Phil: Yeah

Jess: But is that right?

Phil: That would be good, but I think you should be actively looking for those opportunities, like you could be switching between talking about that and then actually be able to say "you" to the baby – you know, you could deliver a line to the baby and switch between the two quite freely. Is that a pain, though? Do you look at that and think you really liked talking to the baby?

Jess: No. Well when I first wrote this I found it impossible to be objective about it but now I'm ready to just do the job. And I think it has to be that way because if I can't be objective about it then I'm completely screwed, because the whole point is when I have to defend it my [inaudible] they'll just go, "So what?" And I have to be able to say it stands up on its own as a play and part of that process was doing the feedback surgery, and also I need to be realistic that it is very personal so there are going to be things in it that I'm going to be like, "But that's how it was, I can't get rid of it". But I want it to have a purpose. I want it to have an impact outside of my own wanting to get it off my chest kind of thing

Phil: Well I think a lot of these shifts are relatively subtle, but it's just getting your head round it in a slightly different way, a different convention or structure of the scene. But all the ingredients are there, it's just how it's shaped

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Jess: My worst case scenario was for you to just go, “Oh no!” I was hoping you’d say it was just shaping it and shifting it and doing some work on it now. So yeah, that definitely makes sense, I can do that. So anything else about that scene that wasn’t right or too long?

Phil: The only other thing is – and it’s similar to what I was saying about the opening speech about finding ways to create any little surprises – whether or not they’d be any more (regardless of whether it’s to the baby or the audience), whether or not there’d be more questions going out there rather than it feeling like it’s quite a...

Jess: So, like a few more speech things?

Phil: Both that and rhetorical questions... I’m struggling for an example...

Jess: I know what you mean

Phil: Things that don’t exist within the time line of the story... [*Break/audio file change*]... Scene Eight – this scene is working very well and it’s exactly the right decision for Jan, for us to wonder whether if she’s going to see the error of her ways or if she’s going to be the full Nazi. Also that sense that you’re toying with us a bit in relation to where she’s going is very good. So it’s the intention that she starts to be tough and miserable, the bit where she’s interested in Debbie’s life and makes the decision to be vulnerable

Jess: Well, I think she’s embarrassed and then she’s got all this stuff she wants to get off her chest, that she wants to talk to her and she wants to... she’s doing that thing where she’s asking about the baby and her life etc., but what she really wants is to talk about herself

Phil: If anything I’d say there’s room for a little bit more... you could withhold that a little longer, make us wonder what it really is – it’s interesting because it’s a meeting in a corridor, you have a sense that one of them hasn’t said all they’ve got to say and there’s a sense they’re hanging on for a reason, that they’re not ending the conversation but neither are they getting to the point. It’s nice to leave us wondering what it is she’s actually going to say – you know, is she going to sack her or make amends? So that’s the only thing I’d say, hold back a little longer on her asking for a chat. But otherwise it’s really nice and seeing her at the end, hoisted by her own Blackberry petard...

Jess: But also I wanted to put it up there that Jan wasn’t going to be redeemable and that Debbie hasn’t worked that out – although I might’ve said, “Fucking students!” before

Phil: I thought lecturers said that all the time about students! But what I took from that was she has seen the inherent problems in her and Ray’s take on the world. So what I liked about that was that it suggested to me that she was going to come out of it a more reasonable person in the end – which is great because that’s not what happens

Jess: I wanted it to be that when she sees Gerald it's that reminder of everything she doesn't want, and that's what makes her turn back to the dark side

Phil: We'll come to that later – that's one of the things I wanted to talk about. But yeah, that's a small scene and I think it works really well. So, Scene Nine... so we touched upon earlier the possibility of whether Gerald might use his speech more to make his point – but you said you feel like he's...

Jess: I feel that the play isn't about Gerald, that although I want him to be 3D and I hope that that comes through – that he's more representative of the old order. And I wanted it to be like, "Yeah, this is my chance to rant, to say how I really feel", but instead he holds back because he feels like he hasn't got any fight left in him. And even in the end when he fights with Jan but then he backs off when Debbie says, "No, I'm actually going to have to say this is the end of it now". But do you think he should say something, even if it's just something subtle?

Phil: Yeah, if you were to do it, it should be something subtle and coded...

Jess: Something coded about old and new?

Phil: Yeah...

Jess: A Chekhov moment...

Phil: Yeah, something that people who are with him would understand and that people who're against him might not understand, because that makes it interesting for him to have a conversation with Ray for whom it might've gone completely over his head. Or Ray might be feeling smug because whatever he thinks, he knows that Gerald is finally on the way out as are people of his ilk. So yeah, I think it's just that because that leaving speech is so loaded with the possibility that someone might do something or say something that they always wanted to but never been able to before, you probably have to do something to satisfy or at least acknowledge that expectation from the audience. Do you see what I mean?

Jess: Yeah, I do. I will extend that. The other thing for me also is that I do think the old order *is* beaten. And that's actually come after writing this, but more and more it's looking like the Conservative government – I'm not going to say coalition because they're not a coalition, they're just Conservatives – are going to cut funding for HE, it's going to be more about free market economics, Oxford and Cambridge will charge what they want for fees and the rest of us will jostle for position in the line behind them. And that's why I wanted it to be more of a whimper, a nothing. But yeah, I think you're right, the audience will be disappointed

Phil: Yeah, it's like if you put a best man's speech on stage and just did a nice one without any rudeness. But also it's well worth thinking about how, if there's some further meaning to his speech other than to say thanks, how does it relate to Debbie and the position she's at with her own dilemma and the central theme to the play? Is

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he saying, “I don’t know why anyone would want to thrive in the profession that I’ve devoted my life to?”, or is he saying it’s time for young blood?

Jess: Things are different now...

Phil: But yeah, something that we can imagine her hearing and it contributing to her central dilemma I think would be good

Jess: OK, yeah. That makes sense

Phil: And then... I’ve written Ray seems to know he’s evil

Jess: I wanted him to be a bit “pig-in-shit”, though. And it’s also that he knows that Gerald’s gone now so he’s just enjoying it. Do you think that’s wrong?

Phil: Well, if he is a passionate believer in these things then in a way I find him believing in these things is richer than him just being a Mandelsonian- [sic], Iago-embodiment [sic] of Machiavellian evil

Jess: I don’t see him as the embodiment of evil. I see him as one of those people who whatever the party line he says, “Yes! I agree with that.” And equally, Jan could turn around and say tomorrow we’re going to paint the University red for this reason and he would say, “Yes! Yes! Yes! That’s absolutely the way to go!” – and that he knows that, and this is just a moment where...it’s just superfluous almost – he’s just enjoying getting rid of Gerald. So do you think he needs to say something more than that?

Phil: Well, my point is that that’s a good character to be writing, but I think that those people still think that they believe it for a reason – they don’t think, “I just believe everything for...”

Jess: No, you’re right. They do genuinely believe it at the time

Phil: And so to try and infuse it with some of that. But the thing I really like about the scene but also would like to see more of is – it’s like I was saying before about giving your baddies the best lines – the idea that Ray manages to spear Gerald a bit at the end with his own dilemma, which is, “Do you want to go back to how things were before, essentially a conservative with a small ‘C’ position, or do you believe in change?” (as embodied by the Jans and Rays of this world), that that sort of paradox for Gerald, who is retiring and does want it like it was before but would also probably recognise that as a dream...

Jess: That romantic idea...

Phil: Yeah, and the fact that Ray manages to get into that slight hypocrisy of Gerald’s view of things is a great thing to happen. And to have a smarmy idiot actually win the argument – galling though it is – is pretty pleasing. And I just wanted to maybe hear a bit more on the end of that scene, in that bit when they’re talking about “It won’t be like how it was in your day/I thought this was my day” – I thought that was such

rich territory there may be room for some sort of expansion of that conversation, to actually hear Gerald fight back a bit harder, or for Ray to really hammer the point home. But, yeah, I do find it very interesting.

Jess: Maybe that would give Ray more purpose, because I wanted it to be almost like Ray didn't really understand that he'd managed to get Gerald to – Gerald obviously thinks that – but that Ray didn't realise, wasn't smart enough to realise, that's what he'd got Gerald to think about. But you think it would be more interesting if there was a bit of malice and intent?

Phil: Or certainly enjoyment of the fact that the old guard don't actually have all the answers

Jess: And actually that's true for the audience, because what I don't want is for the audience to go, "Oh, it should be how it was before", and that's it. I don't want it to be as simplistic as that – that actually it's a negotiation rather than the old order being better than the new order. It's not actually that, but how do you bring what's good about the old ways forward and make the good stuff about the new ways good as well, and that maybe people like Ray and Jan aren't the people to facilitate that. But yeah, I think that that makes sense

Phil: I think you could probably get both sides of that across, really, and I think it's exactly the right point in the play to feel like the certainties of the play are being thrown up in the air a bit. As a member of the audience you want, as you hit the home straight, to suddenly feel like you don't know who's right and who's wrong or whether anyone is completely right

Jess: OK. Good

Phil: And then at the end of the scene I like the fact he's been given a Blackberry, but I thought I'd highlight that you've got two scenes in a row that end with Blackberry-related one-liners, which might seem a bit odd coming in quick succession...

Jess: A bit boring? What if I shifted the opening of the present and then expanded more on this idea of the old order making way for the new?

Phil: Yeah, we could maybe end with him unwrapping the present but not seeing it and then seeing it in the next scene or something like that...

Jess: That's going to be a murder-your-darling thing because I wanted Ray to be like, "NNNNNmmmmm..." [sic] rather than be like, "In your face, in your face..." – I wanted him to be like that [being thick rather than smug and triumphant]

Phil: I mean, in a way, the Blackberry at the end of this scene means more than the Blackberry at the end of the last scene, so it might be you just want it so you can look at a different way of communicating the same things at the end of the scene with Jan

Jess: But yeah, you're right, it is too back-to-back, isn't?

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Phil: Yeah probably. So yeah, that's a minor point really. Oh yeah, going back to the beginning of that speech, I did have one other point, which was just that (and it might not work at all), was whether Debbie might say a few words or just introduce Gerald or something like that – something that keeps us feeling that Debbie's in the scene so that we do maintain the idea that we're seeing the scene through her eyes

Jess: So Debbie could say something about someone who's really inspired me and stuff?

Phil: Yeah, I think that would be good and also, if Jan's there and sees that, to see that Debbie has a proper friend and that these people actually have respect and friendship might fuel her own dissatisfaction with life. But yeah, just to keep Debbie at the forefront more than anything

Jess: OK

Phil: So, and then we have the climactic scene, with more about Gerald's retirement which is very enjoyable stuff. I like the sound of the book group and that kind of thing. Is there any acknowledgement that this gift that was given almost as a sort of nasty gift, that there's an irony that he...?

Jess: He says at the top of page 23, but do you think I need to develop that more? I did want that to be like Gerald is a little seduced by the new as well – in a weird way

Phil: You don't need to expand it much, but yeah, something of that irony would be quite nice, that really he's wowed by its potential

Jess: OK

Phil: So, the dialogue between Debbie and Gerald works but I wondered if it might give it a tension if we know from the beginning that Debbie is really keen to find out what Gerald thought of her thesis...

Jess: So she could say something like, "What did you think of the thesis?" early on?

Phil: And because he's distracted with his Blackberry... so it's getting quite difficult for her and so we can empathise with that situation, and again it's about planting a question in our minds and knowing what we're waiting to find out...

Jess: And it's that last power game between them I suppose as well

Phil: Yeah, I think it would be fun and it's probably not beyond Gerald to enjoy making her wait a bit. And then, with Jan... well, with this argument there's again room for some sort of expansion – this is where, in terms of Jan and Gerald, trying to use them as much as possible rather than being sideshows to Debbie's dilemma as the two competing voices in her head – because of that, I think it's great that the play ends with them having a big barney with Debbie present, because it feels like it's in Debbie's head in a strange way. But, yeah, I feel like there's the potential for developing that argument even more. But again, like when Jan lost it before, I

feel that what's really going to help is pinning down what the trigger is that's made her – because she's gone through quite a lot of shifts in the way she's approaching [inaudible], like the last time we saw her she was being quite nice and seemed to be going one way, so I really want to know what it is that sets her on the other way, and whether that could obviously be in the scene – I mean there's some stuff already in the scene that might trigger her but I feel that perhaps it's not clear enough

Jess: So maybe extend the earlier argument and have a pivot in there, like when Jan first comes in and sees Gerald and they first start sparring with each other, maybe extend that a bit and have something like that devil-and-angel thing on Debbie's shoulders and have a pivot within that?

Phil: Yeah, very possibly. The only other possibility I was thinking could be that something's happened off-stage in the in-between time that has made Jan like the last time we saw her, maybe she was talking about having an affair or going on a date or whatever, that maybe her one brief foray into having a personal life has ended in humiliation, and that's maybe why she goes back to plan A, or yes, it could be something very specific that Gerald says now that he's off the leash. But I feel that we slide into argument when actually it needs someone to really turn – we want that feeling of something quite sudden

Jess: OK. And I suppose that devil-and-angel thing is when Gerald sticks up for Debbie and then she tells him to back off Jan (“No, no, leave it!”)

Phil: Yeah, I think to see them really going for each other would be great, you know like the way those great... well, how the Americans are generally much better at writing those sorts of things, those muscular arguments that bring plays to a head and not being afraid to be un-conversational about it, and to have people really on the attack... but yes, the key area for me is we've got (from the top half of page 26) Jan who seems to be surprised and a bit annoyed that it's being delivered on time, and is that (her irritation at that) what you see at the moment as what unsettles her and makes her...

Jess: I think, as well, that it's that she didn't think it would really happen, so when it does, rather than thinking it's because Debbie's worked really hard, straight away she decides it must be because Debbie is inept at something else in order to feel secure about herself, I suppose – because Jan just can't have it that Debbie can manage to do all of it, because that makes Jan feel insecure about herself

Phil: Yeah, I think that's much more interesting than what I was talking about with things happening off-stage, but it's not quite fully realised somehow

Jess: OK. So, needs to be clearer that Jan is uncomfortable that Debbie is close to “having it all” and that this shakes Jan into reacting so negatively...

Phil: And the good thing is that you've got Gerald there who can actually poke at Jan much more directly than Debbie would, because he's retired and doesn't like her and there's that open animosity, if Jan is on the ropes emotionally, he can go for the

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kill and that can be what provokes her into really fighting back. So, I think you've got loads of potential to set up, and you've got the right people there and the right moment, it's just being... it's just seeing it through

Jess: It just needs fortifying?

Phil: Yeah. Because those climax scenes are the hardest thing to write, and yet they always come at the end when you're feeling like, "I want to get there now", it's like seeing a 400m runner whose legs are getting wobbly as they finally finish. And so, well, I don't really have much to say about the end

Jess: That's always good – unless it's... apart from it's terrible!

Phil: No, like I was saying before, when I got to the end I felt I knew very clearly what it was about, and in a way I feel that if you put into practice some of the things we've been talking about in the set up it will only benefit the end further

Jess: Right, yeah, what you've said has been really useful, there's nothing that I'm thinking, "How could he say that?" or anything like that so I don't feel like... I was a bit worried it would be a hatchet job, but I do feel now that it's a case of boning [sic] it up a bit more (for want of a better expression!)

Phil: Well, I hope it doesn't seem too...

Jess: No, I thought you'd be worse actually...

Phil: What, like more aggressive?

Jess: Yeah, well, not aggressive, but I thought you'd be more ruthless

Phil: Well, the trouble is, if you just approach things from the point of view that anything that doesn't quite work – if your first instinct is to cut it, you'll end up throwing the baby out with the bath water

Jess: So what did you think in terms of the idea of it being a better radio play rather than trying to do something with it afterwards about getting it out to an audience?

Phil: I think that's possibly quite a good instinct – I think I'm slightly hesitant because I don't really know a great deal about radio – but my feeling of what a contemporary radio play version of it would be, would probably involve more weaving together of the monologue and the dialogue, that the joins between the two would be less blunt – that sense of somebody telling us a story and it coming to life, which is what radio does very well... so within the scenes that are described within the monologue, some of that would be coming to life and the joins between the two would be more sort of woven and possibly we would be hearing more of Debbie's thoughts as the scenes progress as well so it would be more of a – you'd have to find a way of creating something less... well, it would probably happen in (technically) 40 scenes rather than 10, but it would be more to do with the way you chop it together – almost like film. The number of times I've spoken to radio producers, they talk almost

more the language of film rather than theatre because the structures they're talking about are... well, because you have that ability to go immediately from one place to another, which theatre doesn't do, so theatre writing is often about dovetailing information – which is something you've done very well here and you might have to actually undo some of that in order to make it into a radio play

Jess: OK

Phil: But I think, certainly as you were saying at the beginning, the sort of scale of the story is probably something that would suit radio quite well, obviously the locations and things

Jess: I just can't imagine someone paying to see something about academic culture at the National Theatre, for example (maybe I would!) – it's not like an Alan Bennett 'History Boys', with all these young characters, and different characters with different layers and those kinds of things. It's saying something more specific about one person in academic culture at the moment. So that's why I thought it would work better on radio

Phil: Yeah, that is the kind of story radio does quite well I think, like we were talking about in relation to the very first scene, that sense of someone piecing something together, and a play that exists within someone's own head and conscience, is something radio gets across quite well and theatre struggles with. But yes, perhaps it doesn't have the theatricality, basically, for theatre – it's about thoughts and words...

Jess: Yeah. I might even rework it as a radio play to be submitted with the thesis in that case, because otherwise it would seem a bit silly to do it the other way round. But yeah, that's good

Phil: And I think what the tricky thing with weaving things together is making those links between the monologue and the dialogue always feel like they make sense and the journey you're taking people on is coherent, because the monologue material you've got quite often takes you into quite different parts of this person's life and isn't always based in the university, that might be quite...

Jess: Problematic?

Phil: Yeah, but it might be that the links between one scene and the next are more playful than that and it might be a theme or a word or something that links the two together and so you still feel like you're on a single journey

Jess: OK. So, anything else?

Phil: No, not unless you've got any questions?

Jess: No, I don't think so

Phil: Good. Well, it's been a delight

Jess: Oh, good, I'm glad. Are you lying?

Phil: No!

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**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH
JESS MORIARTY AND ISABEL**

Key

- [inaudible]: Inaudible (no suggestions possible)
- [text?]: Inaudible but possible suggestion (s) provided
- [text]: For clarification of meaning
- Text in italics*: Emphasised speech
- [laughter]: Contextual information
- [sic]: As meant
- (text): Parenthesised speech
- ...: Pause/false start

Jess: I am here this morning, it is the 17th December 2008, with Isabel Letts, and we are talking about academic writing experiences. So the first question is – do you see yourself as a writer?

Isabel: Yes

Jess: First and foremost?

Isabel: Oh?

Jess: In terms of professional – and that is in the title, if you say to people what you do?

Isabel: Oh. The “what do I do” thing? Oh God! [laughter] Um... no I don't see myself ... because I am obviously close to retirement and I am totally jaded with academic life [laughter]... well, not totally because I am looking forward to my study leave. So I see myself as an artist really. So then writing ... I see myself as an artist who got waylaid into academia. And I see writing as an important part of what I am. So that is not an add-on. But I am not sure academic writing ... I don't know how I feel about myself as an academic writer. I don't see myself as an academic any more

Jess: No? But maybe a writer?

Isabel: Yes

Jess: When you say you see yourself as an artist, is that some kind of visual practise, or is the writing for you a creative experience?

Isabel: I am interested ... in the long term I am interested in combining visuals and writing. So the long-term project – which I know I won't start for some years,

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because I am just not ready for it – involves ... it has a [*reference to academic subject 2*] dimension and it raises [*adjective deleted for anonymity*] issues, and also has illustrations as well. So it is not completely divorced from my writing now, but it has a completely different nature. So my work in [*academic subject 2*] will be useful, but it is not the main part. And part of the problem for me at the moment is ... because I can't write and do this job it really sort of quite hurts to think of myself as a writer

Jess: Oh. Can you say a bit more about that? Why can't you write and do this job? Is it a time thing?

Isabel: It is time ... because it is not ... of the places that I have worked, this is the least research orientated place (apart from primary schools) [*laughter*]. Actually no, actually that was more supportive – I did my PhD as a full time primary school teacher. And that was really difficult but at least I did have the holidays and half-terms. And what has happened here, working here, is that I am so drained prior to the holidays, that it has now got to the point that it is very difficult. Now, when I say I don't do much, that is probably not correct, because when you look at my current record, I have still got publications. I have still got things that are coming through. But I know that I have sort of finished with here... because I can't take the stress of being in an institution that doesn't value creativity and research – and wanting to [*finish*]. But I have got my study leave, which is funded [*aside about funding, funding details and revealing identity*]. I am aware that I am quite upset. There is not much point in being upset because I am moving into my study leave, and I am sure I will feel better. But the study leave ... six months is funded ... half the study leave is funded by the [*name of charity*], £12,500, and then £1,000 from the [*name of research centre attached to university school*] and the rest is being covered by [*information deleted*] the [*name of university school*]. So [*name of university school*] has supported the study leave and I am grateful for that. Without that, I wouldn't be doing any more writing. I have been trying to revise a paper for some months, and in the past I would be able to do it at weekends and things, but I have just got to the point where I have got a mother who is elderly and has to be visited on Sunday, and I am tired. Deeply tired. So “writing” as a buzz word comes up with a lot of frustration with it. Although frustrations seem to be over it is there, it doesn't quite grab me...

Jess: It doesn't make it OK?

Isabel: No it doesn't make it OK. So, I realise a lot of things, like you are taping, and I realise some of the things I have said have not been put very carefully about the institution. But I just feel so negative, so negative about the University of Brighton. The way that there is rhetoric about research and it is just not matched up in practice. And I think the structures are such that people who are doing research, and who are members of the [*academic subject 1*] Research Advisory Committee, we run round after things, we follow the procedures, but the procedures are designed to make nothing happen. So, you can see ... the number of times that we have been here before, and nothing is really going to *change* until the politics of the institution and the ideologies of the institution change. I don't see that happening in the near future

Jess: And that is creatively and professionally stifling?

Isabel: Yes and the other thing was I had the Framework Agreement and my research work wasn't acknowledged. And so I had to go to appeal. So that was 18 months spent filling out more forms and writing things, and then I got re-graded on appeal. And the amount of time and stress that went into that has undermined my goodwill very significantly

Jess: Understandably

Isabel: And I shouldn't have had to be put through that. Because it was obvious I had got the publications and the publications meant that I fulfilled the criteria. So there was a sort of denial of my research

Jess: And a kind of devaluation of your writing as well I suppose?

Isabel: Yes. I have no idea ... I don't think ... there can't be any reasons related to my record that would lead me not to have been recognised early on. Even if my first application had not been as clear as it might have been, certainly whatever I produced the second time would have spelt [it] out ... there is the CV, there is the list of publications. And they said that I hadn't done anything during the time I was here. Like, if you don't want to see it, you don't want to see it

Jess: Obviously I don't know your specific case. But I can't remember in the framework agreement, you just had to provide evidence that you had fulfilled a certain criteria. I don't remember anything that said that you have to have done it in the last 6 [18] months

Isabel: I knew it had to be done in a certain period of time. I didn't pick that up immediately, but I did pick that up fairly early on. But it was then said that I had got a track record that was elsewhere. Then what happened ... I couldn't apply for a readership until I had got the principal lectureship and then, after all that time, after getting the principal lectureship I then looked at the criteria for getting a readership. Because I hadn't been doing certain things while I was here, I couldn't then apply for a readership because I wasn't getting the staff development opportunities that would have been necessary. Then there was lots of talk about staff development being the flavour of the month in terms of meetings, and I think, "Sod it" – staff development means recognising that people are doing things and then supporting them. So, despite getting the funded study leave, which I am really grateful for – but that is bringing in money from outside – and people are volunteering to do my admin work in my absence ... so – yes

Jess: So the institutional policies and frameworks, have kind of been stifling to your creative writing?

Isabel: Yes, yes, yes, yes! And I have seen that happening with other people as well. Obviously there are some successes now. People are actually completing their

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[doctoral degrees] and that is really good, but it doesn't mean it's not very difficult. And I don't see the institution supporting research. I have worked in other institutions, and I have seen institutions supporting research. There are still complaints. There was one place I worked in New Zealand ... staff more or less had to do a doctorate. And that didn't go down very well because not everybody wanted to. But here, people are struggling to do it. And I do organise my time so that I have one day free [inaudible] here every three weeks. I go to London for meetings and I talk to people and so on. That is just keeping 'mind' going – because I don't have any discussions that relate to research substance here. So there will be discussions that relate to the management and organisation of research, like the formal committees – but there is no real discussion

Jess: No creative conversations?

Isabel: No. I don't go to the seminars, research seminars – I have only been to my own

Jess: Well I suppose what I mean by creative conversations is just those times when you do sit down and talk to people who are interested in a similar field to you or a similar project

Isabel: Or just have an intellectual conversation about...

Jess: Not formalised, not “we are having a meeting with an agenda and things”

Isabel: Yes

Jess: Actually just sit down and talk about things you are researching or things that are interesting you within your research

Isabel: Yes. The only time I would do that would be – I teach a [*academic subject 2*] module with Julia, Julia Smith, and I just did that last year, and we are doing it one more time this year. And we have conversations as part of that, but that is because we are teaching on it together. We have made the decision to teach jointly rather than alternately. So rather than doing one week me, one week her, we both turn up at the same time and we present discussions to students as well as engaging students in discussion. So that is good. And that is why I am doing that during my study leave because I am being funded by the [*name of charity*] and the module is about [*theoretical field linked to charity*], so I am really ... I couldn't say, “No I am not doing it – I am on study leave!” Also, it will be useful...

Jess: It sounds like the collaboration is creative and is professionally rewarding in terms of the dialogue and discussions and things...

Isabel: Yes. Yes

Jess: I will move on. You have touched on this already. Early on how did you find the culture of academia in terms of... particularly in terms of the impact on your writing

process and product? You said that you wrote your PhD during your holiday time when you were also working as a full-time primary school teacher. Really, I mean since you have joined Brighton University...

Isabel: Here?

Jess: Yes. Did you feel that you have been moulded by the academy, or do you feel that you have been able to deal with it on your own terms? It certainly sounds as if you have been kind of moulded by the structures here. Or do you think you have been able to deal with it on your own terms?

Isabel: I don't feel moulded at all. Just constrained

Jess: Right

Isabel: I had a long career before I came here, so I had loads of things on the go and lots of publications already, so, no. It's just constraints. I think there are sorts of things where people would be moulded, but you can't mould people's weekends. You can mould what people do in the day. Attempts to do that ... my thing is ... attempts to do that don't work

Jess: You are making me feel quite passive. What you were saying about doing your PhD in the school holidays, I am the same. I find that in term-time I find it very difficult to find the time to write. Then in the holidays I use the time then. It is that thing that from 8.30 to 4.30 I can just sit at my desk and just write. It can be silent. No emails, no students, no staff knocking on the door. So I do use the holiday time to my [inaudible] and the writing up of my other research. And I feel that is because I don't really feel that my role as a writer is legitimised through the university structures...

Isabel: No, no

Jess: Also I feel dishonest to my practice, but saying that I will wait to the holidays and write then. Obviously people are very tired and stressed and working very hard, so the holidays should be a time to recuperate and relax – although I do find the writing process relaxing. So yes, I think I have been manipulated a little bit by the structures but it has been relatively positive. Although I can't sustain it for the rest of my career I wouldn't have thought

Isabel: Yes. I sustained it for quite a long time, and then enough. I am just too old basically

Jess: Do you think – the reason that I am trying to – I wanted to do the EdD because I teach creative writing, so there was an element of wanting to legitimise the creative writing practise, which is still viewed in some areas as being a bit of a Mickey-Mouse-namby-pamby option [sic]. So I wanted to do some meaningful research around that area. But also I was thinking... well, that in a few years time I will be able to concentrate on the things that I really am interested in such as my own creative writing and other projects. And I am kind of listening to you, thinking that

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maybe there won't be that potential. Maybe there won't be those opportunities. Maybe it will always be like this

Isabel: I don't regret having done a PhD, so I think doing an EdD is a good idea, and completing it. But I would have thought that if you were into creative writing, you probably need to do that outside. Because... I don't know, your school may be different, but this isn't a creative institution so creativity doesn't sort of come into it here. I don't know. If you are working in a framework which is anti-creativity, then it is difficult to be creative because you need that freedom. So, you can't be answering emails at the same time. There is an expectation to answer emails every day. Now some people are good at not doing that. Andrea puts her out-of-office thing on (but she does answer them!) Yes. If you have sent her something that was urgent, she would answer it – so she is obviously reading them. So there is a sort of pressure to keep going. If I was you I would be careful that you don't lose the creative writing, your personal creative writing, because that is against the grain. The creative writing is against the grain in an academic institution

Jess: No. At first that is kind of what prompted me to do the EdD as well, because I did think that I was a complete fraud, and a complete hypocrite, because I was teaching creative writing but I wasn't doing any creative writing because I was so busy responding to emails and filling out funding bids and things like that. And writing in a style that I thought was dry and objective and passionless. And I just thought that I wasn't going to be able to sustain this. I would just write like this for the rest of my life. And the EdD is providing me with a few opportunities to realise that I can do it – not so much on my own terms – but there are possibilities to be personal. So that has been really positive

Isabel: Yes, yeah

Jess: But at first, it was my frustration with the... plate spinning. When I first joined academia I had this vision of people with elbow pads and pipes, doing the work that they wanted to do and then imparting their wisdom to students. And of course it isn't like that. It's a massive plate spin! All the time emails, meetings, funding bids, report writing, and all the other bits... pastoral work for students as well. You have to keep going, and then it seems research and writing is a tag-on at the end. And I found that a real shock. And that is what kind of pushed me to do the EdD as well, to discuss and research that problem for me as well.

Isabel: Yes, it is very much an add-on. Somebody said, talking about research, this is just professional updating ... that you couldn't say you couldn't turn up for a meeting because you were going to the library [*laughter*]

Jess: No

Isabel: Meetings are the most important thing. I discovered recently that I was supposed to cancel teaching to go to exam boards. And I know exam boards are

really, *really* important, but I always put teaching above exam boards. But that was a mistake, and I now know that you have to cancel teaching if you have an exam board. So the priorities are meetings – and then certain other things. And the academic health report was being the most significant thing in the course leader's life – *the most significant thing*. And it is most bizarre

Jess: And the thing you are saying, about the institution not being particularly creative, I am sure the powers that be would want it to be perceived that this is a very creative institution – that kind of embraces creativity and encourages creativity. But it is when creativity and sustainability become buzz-words rather than in practise

Isabel: Yes, yes

Jess: And like you say, the things that might be personal priorities that you assume are there within the academy actually aren't, and it is about meetings, it is about framework agreements, it is about finances – rather than teaching and learning and producing students that are going to be creative lifelong learners

Isabel: Yes, yes it is nothing to do with that

Jess: It has been a bit of a shock

Isabel: How long have you worked here?

Jess: I worked for the University – I worked here part-time when I was doing my MA, but in management, but I have been lecturing for I think... four years now... yes, four years

Isabel: Right

Jess: The time has gone very quickly – but I still feel like a new person. I still feel that I am getting to grips with it, I still feel like I am finding things out. Because at the beginning I was thrown in, and you are not mentored, there is no induction process...

Isabel: No

Jess: It's a sink or swim culture. And actually the EdD has been instrumental in making me feel part of the University. Before I just felt like a complete outsider, kind of on the outside and looking in, wanting to be part of this group and this culture. The more I go on the more I am happy to be – not an outsider, I don't see myself as on the margins or anything like that – but I feel more confident about what I am doing

Isabel: Yes. And a healthy degree of distance

Jess: Yes, yes

Isabel: The plate spinning thing! I had forgotten, I used to see it like that but now I see it as a factory and a production line. It was as a result of a staff development review ... because I would try and do everything. And then it was really good ...

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it was Julia – she said there are some emails you don't even need to open them. Not opening emails? So I put on my staff development plan that a task was to not open every email. And then I started looking at the amount of time allocated to this task ... therefore I cannot spend time reading this carefully. So when I would read the admissions UCAS forms I would check that the interests were not [*laughing*] pornography and thieving, and that the reference... I would check the things like that, but I haven't got time to dwell on any of the detail at all. So it was a check, "Is it safe to offer this person a place and what do they need to do in order to meet the criteria?" [then] next one! So that production line mentality ... I used to see ... imagine a production line above the desk, the emails, and you come in the morning and you put your finger on the computer to turn it on and you look at the phone, and that sort of... like that ... [*mmrrgghh*]!

Jess: It is kind of 1984

Isabel: Yes. Sort of white collar, but it is a factory. There are sort of many values from the factory that are brought in here. Like of ... well I suppose there is still some trust. There is an assumption that you will be doing the work all the time. But that is because they know that you are doing the work all the time otherwise you couldn't possibly do it. The other thing that I find gets in the way is that people don't count the cost. They say that "we could do this" and "we could do that". But who is going to pay, where is the resourcing coming from? The "where is the resourcing?" question doesn't ... isn't introduced. So people – groups of people – are shooting themselves in the foot. And you don't want to go to the meeting and come away with something to do ... not only have you been to the meeting but you have got something to do as well. And you are even further away from even thinking about something that is research

Jess: Yes. I think it was that thing, as well, that when I was writing small scale funding bids, that I was putting in time and money for doing things, and right at the end I would write this whole project up in five hours. I knew that it was a complete joke and that it was probably going to take me a week or two weeks to write it up. Just because it was ticking boxes and just because I knew I would get the funding if I said, "Oh, yes, and I will write this up in five hours" – so I was devaluing my writing and I was devaluing the whole process. And by doing that I am then taking part in setting the benchmark for other people as well. And it is something that you think "Well, this has got to stop". Because it is becoming that I am devaluing the creativity and the writing process as well. I am writing bids that say I want to research into that! [*laughter*]

Jess: It was slightly backward. This is a bit more about the creative experience. Do you have any kind of physical preferences for writing? Is there a particular time of day or do you use a computer or a pen?

Isabel: I only use a computer and I can't really handwrite very well at all. So, once ... I did a secretarial course when I left school, so I learnt to type then and that really

freed up my writing significantly. Then when computers came in, which was ... um ... I used a computer for my PhD – that freed me up to write. Because I am not one of these people – well I wasn't at that point – who can produce the words and leave and they would be right. And I think in the past people who could produce perfect prose were the ones who were really successful ... that was a real asset. But once you have got word processing, you don't need to be like that. So I can just sort of write things down and re-order things

Jess: Umm ... can you say a bit more about that? Because with the writing process now, are you one of those people who can write something, and feel when you have finished it “Right, that is done”? In terms of you don't have a kind of inner critic going, “Oh that's not very good” or, “You are going to need to redraft that” or “There are sections that aren't right”. Or do you feel ... has that been kind of the development process? Early on you couldn't just get the words down ...

Isabel: No I couldn't. I couldn't ... umm ... I had structure ... structure was a problem for probably decades. And then I worked with James [*name of external professor*], on the first book that I edited, and we received a chapter that needed a lot more work doing ... we had a problem chapter. And I had some other documents which could be put in together. And basically he laid things out on the floor and cut and pasted things. And then at some level I saw that you could actually trial-and-error structure, in the same way that you could trial-and-error a sentence. So I started to do that – to physically lay things out on the floor and then cut them. And fairly quickly I got over the structural problem – which was useful in terms of teaching, because I have actually experienced structural problems of my own and have actually resolved them. Yes, it just complements to engage in trial and error... I can do this if I put the time in and actually keep trying different things

Jess: Is that the same ... what about now? Do you still find yourself thinking, “Right, I am going to need to structure this, I am going to need to lay it all out and see it”?

Isabel: Sometimes yes

Jess: Or do you just get on and do it?

Isabel: It depends, it varies. It is not a worry

Jess: Right. And it was a worry at first?

Isabel: Oh yes. I struggled. So I wasn't able to write a book. For a long time I wasn't able to write a book. I could write a paper but I couldn't write a book because I couldn't handle that structural demand. And I don't actually use templates. Obviously if you are writing a research bid there is a template, so the structural thing isn't in that, but writing something which doesn't match a particular template ... like my PhD thesis has three parts, an introduction ... I can't remember ... Part Two and Part Three, and then there is loads of stuff in the appendices. It's like two PhDs in one! [*laughing*] Yes it is much clearer now. Structurally much clearer

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Jess: And was there a point when that shift came or was it in the first book?

Isabel: It was editing the book with my co-editor. I organised the book, and the concept, lots of things that I was good at doing. And generally there were lots of things that I was good at doing, like editing other people's work. But I couldn't handle structure at some level and it was seeing James doing something, and doing it with him ... it was the sort of physicality of it – actually physically dealing with structural problems – because we actually kind of pasted two things together. Two papers from the same author, were put together to make a chapter – actually working on other people's work has been really useful

Jess: Reading their work and editing it, or ...?

Isabel: Editing

Jess: Or collaborative writing?

Isabel: Editing other people's work

Jess: Right

Isabel: Recognising how what [*laughter*] ... difficulties other people have, so that they are not just your ... you know, your own – I see what my strengths are. And then my husband is a writer, and that has obviously made a very significant difference to me. Though in some ways, there is always ... he is better – you know – he is better sort of thing ... that sort of element. But ... um ... he is picky about some things. I would ... I think it is important to get the ideas out and then fiddle with them afterwards. I have to stop him coming up behind me and saying, "Something is wrong with that sentence". Well it doesn't matter if something is not right with that sentence because I am not dealing with what is not right with that sentence at the moment – I am trying to deal with the structure ... [*laughter*] ... trying to conceive the structure

Jess: So do you share your work with him and he shares his work with you? Do you give each other feedback?

Isabel: Umm ... I shared my work with him for a long time. Now I don't need to do that in the same way. But I will for the book because he does editing, he does editing of academic work because he ... until the end of this month he is editorial assistant and reviews editor for a journal. So ... and we worked on a journal together. And what he was good at was ... what I am good at is getting meaning from a text, and I encouraged people for whom English is not their first language to contribute to the journal because they had good ideas, but then you are faced with a sort of wonky [*sic*] English, and in some cases people were letting their work come to the journal because they knew it was going to be corrected. They didn't want their wonky [*sic*] English in public. And I know some people say, "Oh no, you shouldn't change people's wonky [*sic*] English" and actually I think you should because the

important thing is the ideas. So I was good at extracting meaning from text, but when I see wonky [sic] English I then find it very difficult to sometimes put it right. So I would work with Paul [my husband]. I know what this person is trying to say, but they are not saying it. But then we would work together on it – on some of the difficult texts

Jess: Is that part of your feedback process? As well as giving feedback on the structure and maybe the content of an article, you would also give textual feedback as well?

Isabel: We would just do it

Jess: You would just do it?

Isabel: Yes we would just do it. You have got deadlines ... I mean the task is to fill the space

Jess: Um ... but not many editors would do that, would they?

Isabel: It was a new journal so we just ... we couldn't be picky and choosy. We couldn't pick and choose to that degree. And I was committed to the idea of having variety. So that means if somebody – yes – if somebody, a colleague in another country, has really good ideas, and their work isn't written to current English standards, then it is part of the editor's job to make it meet current English standards because you are not changing the ideas. I would never change somebody's key idea. But ... and it's not the case of removing all trace of ... umm, umm ... non-standard English – although probably it is a bit. Yes, yes. But people were pleased with the result

Jess: I bet

Isabel: And it was good, yeah

Jess: Could you say ... what is your idea of a good article? What are the kinds of the basic things that you look for in a piece of academic writing?

Isabel: Oh. The criteria that we had for this ... and I think it would be same as co... interest ... if it's not interesting it's ... [laughter] ... coherence – it shouldn't be sort of all over the place. And if it was the journal then it's pertinence – whether it was suitable for the journal. And lucidity – I just don't like academic-ese [sic] (or whatever it's called) where you have jargon for the sake of it. I think there are some useful terms. I think there are some useful terms. I think "epistemology" is a really good term. Students don't like it but I just think, "Well it's tough". There isn't another term that does what "epistemology" does, but just ... I like it to be very plain. I like very plain academic texts, so that the meaning is really clear

Jess: So it needs to communicate an idea

Isabel: Yeah, yeah. So my academic style of writing is very clean. And it can look like statements of the obvious, so my writing style makes everything very exposed

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Jess: And what about things that definitely would mean that the article definitely wouldn't...? The fact that you said the barriers of people not writing in their native language wouldn't stop...

Isabel: No it wouldn't stop them...

Jess: Is there anything that you think... apart from things like, "It's just dull" is there anything that you think that you would say, "No, that is just not right, that is not going to go in"?

Isabel: We did reject some things, and some people didn't like being rejected [*laughter*]. Well, I think if it is an academic journal, it does need to meet some academic standards as regards to referencing

Jess: References?

Isabel: Yeah. I mean I tell students, "This is ... this is the environment, so that has got to be done" ... it has got to conform in some way. And references have to be there. I actually prefer the numbering system. And I am going to try and get the book done with a numbering system ... but I don't know ... rather than the Harvard. But, um, I am trying to think... um... dullness?

Jess: Just particularly in terms of the writing? Anything to do with structure? Do you think that is a badly written piece of academic work?

Isabel: Badly written? It is the ideas that count...

Jess: Yes, Yes

Isabel: I think writing is about the ideas, and if the ideas aren't there then you can't put them in. If it is a bit of a mess that can be sorted if the content is worthwhile. I had an article submitted by an MA student and her supervisor, and you could just see the MA in it. You could see the various sections of the MA. But it was good. It wasn't that difficult just to tweak it, pull bits out and juggle it around

Jess: And you did...

Isabel: I did that

Jess: Do you give feedback to people?

Isabel: No. No time. Not really. "Yes we will accept it. Here it is." Oh, they get feedback in the sense that I never left it until the last minute for people to know what had been done. So as soon as their work had been edited, which of course ... they got it sent back and then invited to change things if they wanted to. And then it would be turned into the PDF at the printers and then they would get it again. So they could check what had been done. I wouldn't have wanted to publish something where somebody felt their ideas had been distorted. Yeah. And sometimes it wasn't clear... "What on earth is being said here?" I was also editing stuff that wasn't in my field.

Because it was [*academic subject 1*] and [*academic subject 2*], and I am not actually a [*type of theorist 2*]. And there was one article that was written by someone for whom French was the first language, and it was in quite detailed areas that I didn't know anything about, so it was actually quite a struggle. That author didn't like my influence immediately, but then it was OK

Jess: Giving feedback is a difficult one. I have been OK... I have got some detailed feedback on articles that I have got out there. And I made the mistake of just doing that, sending off an EdDs assignment, and hoping it would get printed. And then the feedback came, "You cannot just submit an assignment and hope that it gets in". Maybe as well, because I do creative writing and I give a lot of feedback, I don't mind getting negative feedback as well, as long as it is constructive

Isabel: They would get feedback if they were rejected, but if they were accepted... then...

Jess: Then who cares...

Isabel: Yeah, yeah

Jess: I think I would be a bit like that as well

Isabel: But it was so time consuming as well. I couldn't do my own writing very much when I was doing that. I just got sick of doing other people's work, you know? It was good because it made me ... I did generally have status in academia. People want to know you [*laughter*] and that's nice. I am not being cynical about that. I don't think it was done ... I don't think it was a nasty thing. It was good. You had... but it was something to do and not do. The model that I used was one from James [*name of an external professor*], who I mentioned earlier, who had edited my first article. I had sent him an article from early work on my PhD, and it was a complete [*laughter*] mess. I am sure it... I didn't know what to leave out or what to put in, or structure. I was a primary school teacher and I was doing a practical research PhD based on the ideas of a particular [*type of theorist*], [*name of theorist*]. And James did a brilliant job on it, and made something out of it, and I respected that. I then had an article that was useable and coherent and presented my ideas. So that was the model that I followed

Jess: You have talked a lot about feedback and editing, but do you use critical friends? Do you use collaborative writers to bounce ideas back and forth, until you are happy with the finished piece?

Isabel: I tend to be...

Jess: Or do you feel you are the stand now, that because you have done so much editing, because you have done so much writing, you are kind of moved beyond that now?

Isabel: I am always happy with the piece before I send it to somebody. But as soon as I say it is finished I find things wrong with it. So, for the book, I will look for people

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to read it, and it's a question of, "How can I get so and so?" "How much of this can I get other people to read?" "How many people might read the whole thing?" "How many people are still around?" I used to really keep my network going, and I think there are still people who I can call up, because people will be interested

Jess: Your community of practice?

Isabel: Yeah, yeah. So I would definitely want people to read it. But I am aware that it is quite hard

Jess: Why hard?

Isabel: Because of the time involved

Jess: OK. I thought you meant hard because of the content, or hard because... But it's just hard to ask people...

Isabel: Yes it's hard to ask people. You think, "Can I ask someone to read the whole of this, or would it be best if I just asked them to read the chapter?" I think you ask people to read the whole thing. Then, if they can only read a chapter you say, "Well, you can only read a chapter, fair enough – this one in particular". Critical feedback is really, really important. And I would like students to read – you know – I would like feedback from students as well, because it is written ... it will be written for students

Jess: So is it accessible to them?

Isabel: Yeah. And does it connect with them? Because I am aware that I don't text ... well I wouldn't write it in text ... but I don't know what people do any more. I don't... umm... I think I feel the gap between me and very young people now is so, so different, so huge. On the other hand if you write clearly you should communicate with anybody. And I write for overseas. I didn't mention that. I write ... I only write for an international audience, I never only write now for the UK audience

Jess: So when you do write, are you thinking of your audience, or are you thinking of a particular editor or a particular journal that you want to get published in? Or are you always just true to yourself as a writer?

Isabel: No I am always writing to an audience

Jess: Right

Isabel: Yeah

Jess: Is it different every time or do you have an idea of who that audience is? Is it similar?

Isabel: It depends. It varies. So if I am writing for a keynote and I was writing for the people who would be at the conference... so if I am doing something for a conference I would write for that conference. If I am doing it for a journal, it would be an element of starting off writing in my head, and then thinking which journal I

could send it to. So, for the book I am actually not getting a publisher before I write it because I don't want it to be tailored to the publisher. I want to write the book. Then I will know how long it is

Jess: And then for the audience to come to you?

Isabel: Well I know who the audience would be but it's the publisher I don't know. I know who it will be written for. It is quite nerve wracking, but I don't want to commit to a length ... because it is all about money and the number of pages, and what it has been advertised as. I just don't want... Also, publishers don't want new stuff. They want stuff like previous stuff that has been successful. So if you're writing something that is like previous stuff that has been successful you want a contract up front. If you are doing something slightly different, then they need to see it finished because you don't want them undermining it before you have actually completed it. So I have got a really, really careful idea of how I want the book to read. And I have got ... um ... there is an author [*name of US professor*], who wrote very thin ... a very thin book, 1978 or something like that, and it is just beautifully, *beautifully* written, and it's not full of references, because it is his own idea, it's his own work. It is not academic in the sense I have said previously. It is written to communicate with quite a wide range of people. You can't... loads of people could read it and understand what he was talking about

Jess: Is that the ideal?

Isabel: That's what I want. And that is why I don't want the Harvard system because it is splitting up the text – if every time you mention a text you have got to split up your sentence...

Jess: It disrupts it

Isabel: It disrupts it, yeah

Jess: It sounds as if for this piece it will be! But I was wondering, do you have an emotional link with your writing, or do you see it as just the job? As part of one of the products of the factory, do you...?

Isabel: No it's nothing to do with it. If I think of it in terms of the factory that would kill it cold

Jess: Yes. So there is an emotional...

Isabel: Completely. Yes

Jess: Every time?

Isabel: Yeah. If there isn't, um ... I couldn't write without that

Jess: Um... that is interesting. Because I... that is how I... I read some academic pieces and I think it feels like this person doesn't care about what they are writing.

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And that is something I very much wanted to avoid with my writing. Now my supervisor says, “It’s very obvious that you have enjoyed writing this, but will anyone care about what you have written?” That’s the only thing. I get so wrapped up in what I am writing – and of course interviewing people! And people have been so generous with their reflections, so... What are your feelings on writing up data and on alternative ways? You spoke about the long thing, and the different types of referencing so as not to disrupt the flow. But what about different ways of writing up academic pieces, using the ‘I’ voice for example?

Isabel: I use ‘I’

Jess: You do?

Isabel: Yes and I encourage students to use ‘I’. I think that you need ‘I’ in the introduction, and I think ‘I’ at the end as a minimum really. And obviously ... um ... will people, like [*name of theorist*] ... they use ‘I’ and they... [*laughter*]

Jess: I am doing an autobiography, about my experience of academic writing, and I suppose my experience of the academic culture to go alongside these interviews, which I am hoping are going to be more like the ‘Paris Review’ interviews, rather than chopped up/coded/ which I think distorts and destroys the story of people as well. So that is why it is very important to me, but I am getting more and more conscious of, well, is this going to be ridiculed when I put it out there?

Isabel: When I worked at the University of [*name of place*], Peter [*name of professor*] had an MA student who apparently wrote her Master’s thesis in blank verse. And I never saw it. I wish I had. I wish I had photocopied a page of it, because I have mentioned it since. Well, I think that means you can do a lot of different things you know. What has happened is there is a sort of formula everybody is told... and I teach it. And I thought you couldn’t get a good mark with it. But I have got undergraduate dissertations at 90 [which] used a standard formula, but did it really well. There is an 80 [which] used a standard formula. There are really good, really good dissertations that use the standard formula. So I don’t try and buck it any more. But I think that there is a problem with the standard formula. It’s not necessary. The other thing is I don’t have... I mainly do [*reference to academic subject 2*] stuff. My own stuff... that I do on my own...

Jess: So it has to be ‘I’d’ really? It has to be kind of... do you think?

Isabel: The others would be ‘we’ if we started with “we did this”. I think you need to own

Jess: Yes

Isabel: It is not detached. Somebody wrote it

Jess: I kind of see it as being a bit of a pretence, especially if it is a PhD or if you have been given time off to do some writing, why pretend that you don’t care about

it? That is what always – maybe that sounds quite naïve – but that’s always shocked me that you were being encouraged to – I am not knocking the EdD *per se* but that is how I perceived it when I came into the course, that I was going to have to pretend that I didn’t care about what I was studying, and researching and doing

Isabel: No I don’t think that is the case. I think you have to...

Jess: I do as well, definitely. Because, like you say, otherwise you start to think, “Why am I doing this?”

Isabel: And you are doing it in your extra spare time. So, um ... yeah, I like, in terms of a Master’s dissertation or an undergraduate dissertation I want to know why is this person doing ... why do they care? And why should I care? There will be references and so on in that and I need to locate it in an academic context. And the trouble I am going to have with the book, I have to try to detach, I mustn’t carry on writing in that frame because that is not what I am wanting to do [sic]. I am wanting [sic] to do something that is not quite academic, but using knowledge from academic things. But certainly for something that is part of an academic course, yeah, I want to know, “Why should I care about this?” and “What else has gone on?”

Jess: It is interesting what you are saying about caring. With the journal editing, were there ever occasions when you read something personally, and you thought I have really enjoyed this – or this is really riveting but it is not going to go into the journal?

Isabel: No. Because I used to bend the rules. Pertinence was an issue. Like, “How can you say this is part of what the journal is about?”, and I was quite open. And I think other people would have thought, “How did that come to be in this particular journal?” – there were elements of that. So I would have been more comfortable perhaps with a magazine

Jess: Right

Isabel: A magazine format. But that’s...

Jess: It’s interesting though, although on the one hand I am listening and I wish that I was in that field so that I could work on an article to use to do some editing and things on. On another hand, you – it still makes you the gatekeeper of the kind of knowledge and...

Isabel: Yeah, yes...

Jess: And power I suppose. But instead of a kind of, you know, no or yes – it’s a kind of, umm – there’s possibilities

Isabel: “Change this back.” This one author wanted a 400-word footnote! [laughter] And I said no

Jess: Why? I can’t think why anyone would want to put... a 400-word footnote!

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Isabel: Well, it was because the work wasn't published so people couldn't read it somewhere else. But, I mean, I couldn't have a 400-word footnote. So length would be something ... does this mean it needs to be a lot shorter? Yep. And it would be made a lot shorter. I had a friend ... a publisher gave me a free hand, so being an editor was nice. The publisher gave me a free hand. The roles were very simple. And, yeah, I was the gatekeeper. But the job is to fill space and you are responsible

Jess: My, um... work isn't going to be about getting rid of the gatekeepers. It is just about asking the gatekeepers about their experiences really. It is interesting that you are – I kind of get the impression that you enjoyed your position a lot more than some of the other people I have interviewed?

Isabel: Oh no, no. Yes it was. I enjoyed it because I had ... it was a creative process. But it got in the way of my own... I began to be seen as an editor. That is not ... that is not the way I saw myself. But the criteria – Is it interesting? Coherent? Pertinent? That's... I mean, the journal now has, I think, the new editor ... because it is now in the US, I think they have 19 criteria for reviewing articles [*laughter*]. I did feel a sense of pride when it came out and it was coherent, and it was a good issue

Jess: Do you do any mentoring to people as well? I mean, early on in the interview I said what would have really helped me with my process when I joined the University, would have been if I had been able to do some collaborative writing with someone more experienced. Or just had some kind of mentor, to kind of advise me or guide me or nudge. Which sounds – which a lot of people have said, “Oh no it wasn't like that for me at all” – but do you see that? I mean, as your role as editor?

Isabel: I would have liked to do things like that. I was happy to do that. But that wasn't part of what my job is here

Jess: And time, again, means that that is not...

Isabel: People didn't have ... um ... there wasn't anybody to help [*laughter*]. Actually, that is not strictly true

Jess: Because no one asked for help? Or because...?

Isabel: Because it is not like that here

Jess: Or we shouldn't need help?

Isabel: No. I think ... I mean, I think people ... I don't think publication is what is seen as coming out of Masters and [*doctoral degrees*] here. It is the qualification. So people [colleagues] do them and they don't necessarily follow them up with a publication. Elsewhere I have been in groups where helping people with their writing and stuff like that ... Other institutions. When I came here it wasn't part of my job. Maybe somebody else does it?

Jess: Well I will ask you a bit more about that in a minute. Because... I know we haven't got much time so I will move to the last few questions. We have already

touched on this – so I have some indication of what direction the answer might take – but do you feel the support for writing and writing development is available at the University and if so how does this take place? *[laughter]* Going back to what you said earlier you said something about doing the journal editing, finding out about other people’s kind of foibles or insecurities, or problems with academic writing, was very good for your confidence and your process. And in a kind of mercenary way it has been the same for me, because I ran creative retreats for people struggling with the academic writing process and I still do workshops and things around that now – and in a kind of slightly sick way I did find it very comforting to find out that there were Head of Departments, Professors, New Lecturers like myself that all kind of had struggles with the academic writing process. The main one being time and space to write, that it wasn’t really legitimised by the institutions they were working in. But I did actually find that really helped my confidence because all of a sudden it was not just... I had kind of suspected that it couldn’t just be me, but actually to have it said in a workshop – “Oh!” People with huge publishing records as well, saying I still don’t feel satisfied with my writing process. It did kind of give me confidence

Isabel: That reminds me. One of the institutions that I worked ... I was seen to have a good publications record among my colleagues. Then, because I don’t keep quiet about things I said about the rejections. And people were really shocked. Because I had loads of rejections, loads *[laughter]* but you just keep going

Jess: You are not meant to say...

Isabel: No

Jess: You are not meant to say if you get rejections. I know that quite a number of my colleagues that I have talked to have said that they don’t send work out because they don’t want to get rejected. Whereas I see it very much that if I send my work out, and it gets rejected, well next time I will be closer to getting it accepted. So, because I will respond to the feedback so I will have a better idea of what that journal wants – actually one journal that I got rejected from then used me as a reviewer. So I got even more. Because they... I got even more insight into what they were looking for, which was really helpful as well and very interesting. But, you do think that there is support for writing development here, or is it based on your own kind of motivation and initiation?

Isabel: I mean, I don’t know what other people’s experience is, but I try to support writing when I am working with MA students for example. And recently an MA student who has just graduated, I have given feedback on her conference paper. So...

Jess: What about staff? What about academic staff?

Isabel: No. No. I have done it elsewhere, but not here. Because I am not seen... the hierarchy here don’t see me as a researcher. I wasn’t appointed... I was appointed to work on the factory floor, and once you have been appointed to work on the factory floor that is where you stay

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Jess: Julia Cameron said, in order to have a relationship with our creativity, we have to take the time and care to cultivate it. And for me that really rings true. For me it really is this legitimising time and space for writing that would really help with my writing process and, also, possibly things like a community of practitioners or critical friends. Because I am aware that if I send an article – for example I have got colleagues doing the EdD at the same time as me, from my school. I suggested that we gave each other our assignments to read and give feedback on – which I did – and then when we met they were shocked that I had actually done it

Isabel: That's a shame

Jess: Yes it was. But then, as well, like you say, taking up people's time with reading

Isabel: But I think people should. I always see it as part of my ... I would have seen it as part of my job to provide feedback on other people's work

Jess: Is that an individual decision? Is that a personal kind of "this is what I should be doing to help other people" or do you feel that is expected and legitimised by the university?

Isabel: It's not ... it's not legitimised or expected by the university. And I don't think you can expect people... it's not the case that you must put pressure on people to do it. There must be ... there must be a culture in which that kind of thing goes on. And I have worked in another new university, and we did have that culture. Now, how people handle the feedback – that was an issue. It might not necessarily ... you know ... people may not actually want that amount of detail. I obviously do ... when I edit, I edit. I am not "light touch" if it is for publication. I mean, if it was somebody's creative writing that would be different. But if you are ... um ... if there is ... there are sort of unspoken rules, and there are tricks of the trade, and if you want to get it in that journal, then this is what you have to do, I think

Jess: I have got a few ideas here, and I am just going to read them out and you can say how you feel that the University could... what they could do around these to kind of improve this...

Isabel: There was something that I didn't say from the last question

Jess: OK

Isabel: When I first started out and I was doing papers at different institutions, and there was somebody that I worked with, that, you know, I had interactions with and he said that the most important thing that he needed for writing was unbroken time. And I think *that is it*. Unbroken time. And that means at least a day. And the suggestion that maybe people could make more of half a day [*sneers*], well, you know, half a day free of teaching is not long enough – you need a whole day to do anything. Sorry

Jess: No. I completely agree. That is why I have been leaving my writing until the holidays. But I have been lucky, because I really enjoy having that kind of unbroken time and space to write. But especially, and it isn't like you said, your mother isn't very well at the moment, but I have got this idea that I am going to be writing [my] EdD assignment this summer. And I am going to have a new born baby. And I am thinking that the unbroken time and space that I have had in the last few years, is just going to completely go. I know it is the same for everyone else at the University – carving out this time and space whether it is for personal reasons, or professional reasons, seems to be getting harder and harder. And yet it is just assumed that writing is something we will do, along with everything else

Isabel: I am not sure that it is assumed here

Jess: Do you not think so?

Isabel: No. No. I don't think writing ... I don't think there is any interest in it really [*on the part of senior management*]

Jess: Even in terms of if you are ambitious, inevitably you are going to have to do a doctorate, or produce journal articles, or get funding in order to write a book?

Isabel: Yes you need to get the qualification. But I don't think that there is any writing beyond the qualification in the system. I don't think that is the expectation. And the important thing, I think, is meetings! [*laughter*]

Jess: There are a lot of meetings...

Isabel: I think if you don't really do the meetings thing...

Jess: What could the University... what could they reasonably do, apart from a wish list of saying every member of staff will get a day off a week to write and research, or everyone will be invited to go on a writing retreat twice a year... something like that? What do you think the University could reasonably do, maybe in terms of time and space, community of practice, possibly training or guidelines or mentors? Do you think there is anything that actually the University could say, "Well fair enough, we could do that"?

Isabel: I think the University is a business, and that is purely what it is. The concept of higher education as being educational ... I think that is history. The idea that we are in some way developing knowledge for future generations – that has just gone. This is a factory and it is a factory that deals with something called academic stuff. It would have to be a ... the institution is a bit ... if you say the institution is a business then what it does... it's not a very well organised business... it could be a better business. So it would not do things like alienate its workforce so that the goodwill goes out the window

Jess: Are you talking particularly about things like the Framework Agreement?

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Isabel: Oh! The Framework Agreement! If it was bad enough for the academic staff, for the non-academic staff it was appalling. And the University, senior management, seem oblivious of the effects of what they have done. And they think they have saved money? If you don't cost goodwill ... I did accounts (when I did a secretarial course I did accounts) and I do remember that there was a cost... you put value on goodwill. Well if you run a system, and you only look at the observable things and you don't have any account of goodwill ... you don't run a business that way ... that is not a good way to run a business. So the University has squandered huge amounts of goodwill. And there is the potential to put a monetary value on that. Whether or not you like that idea of that way of looking at things, I think there is a potential monetary value. And, you know, it's ... they have not got it right

Jess: I think you are right. Although I am still naively optimistic about why – about not being part of a factory – but what you are saying is unfortunately striking a few resonant chords. When I first joined the University I said yes to everything. People offered me...

Isabel: Yes...

Jess: I said yes. Yes I can do that. I can do that. I can do that... and made a real show of on the surface seeming like I was coping with all of these projects and all of these things that I had said yes to very competently and confidently. Where, of course, when I went home at night, I was saying, "I don't know how I am going to do everything". And in the end, actually, my shoulder ended up... um... going and I was sure it was a physical reaction to the fact that I had just taken on so much. I actually ended up having Cognitive Behavioural Therapy by the University, just because... I had just become a kind of pressure cooker. Having said yes to everything, I just suddenly realised that was a crazy thing to do. But I just assumed that's what you did

Isabel: That is what people do

Jess: And then now, I have kind of, although I feel – sometimes I hear myself say things out loud – I think I have lost part of my soul. I feel that I am helping colleagues who are still in that kind of yes-yes-yes mentality. Because it is something that in the end... well, I agree with goodwill and I agree with the value of goodwill, but I also agree that too much goodwill in the end does just make you think, "What am I doing?"

Isabel: Oh yes. I didn't mean goodwill as in saying "yes". I think what is happening ... I think ... um ... there is the opposite of goodwill

Jess: Yes

Isabel: Now

Jess: Because when you feel that you have been... or in my case I allowed myself to be taken advantage of as well, I think... but it was all of a sudden, now I am much more thinking, "Well, realistically have I got time to do that project?"

Isabel: Yes

Jess: Because I feel that I should – I am made to feel that I should be grateful for the work I am doing [*laughter*]... if that makes sense? Well actually part of me is grateful, I love the job and I am grateful for what I do, in comparison to what I could be doing. But at the same time I work really hard, so it isn't just that I should be grateful for doing what I am doing, it should be reciprocal as well. People should be grateful for the work that I am putting in, too

Isabel: You should be grateful for the job on the production line

Jess: Yes. But I kind of think, that I had got into that mentality that I should just be grateful and I should just say yes to everything. And now I am starting to believe that is nonsense, and it's not healthy and actually it's not supportive to my peers or anything either

Isabel: Oh no

Jess: I am just adding to this culture

Isabel: Yes

Jess: Yes

Isabel: And what has happened here, a lot of people – not everybody – work and do admin during the holidays. They haven't got time to do the research during the holidays, because they are too busy doing admin

Jess: I heard two people talking the other day and they said, "Oh, yes I am not going to work for the full two weeks, well obviously I will check my emails." But I thought... well, that is working – because it's that thing of straight away you will be thinking I have got that to do when I get back to work, I have got that to do when I get back to work. So there is no "I will switch off for two weeks" – but I will do my emails, or I will do that project I am working on. It has to be a switch off...

Isabel: Yes. If you are doing work... um ... I mean the fact that when you come back to work there will be 800 [emails] in your inbox, then there has to be time allowed for that. But the system doesn't acknowledge email and the amount of time that is spent doing it

Jess: So everything becomes goodwill

Isabel: I don't see that as goodwill

Jess: No I mean – for example – I can't remember how many hours we are allocated to that in a week – but it never is that. So if you are given 15 hours admin time, then 15 hours extra might be responding to emails for example

Isabel: Yes

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Jess: It all becomes this blob rather than structured...

Isabel: Yes, or very fast... I come in and... and that's where the sort of production line thing is. Because you ... if you don't pull that lever now that little thing there is not going to pop out and land on...

Jess: Yes. It really has – I used to work in management. I used to work in bars and cafes and commercial services, and thought then my multi-tasking skills were honed and improved to quite a high level. But in a weird enough way, in academia they have had to kind of go up a level where I expect I will be very much able to focus on, kind of, prolonged tasks – and it never happens

Isabel: I find hardly any prolonged tasks. It is all thinking on the spot, thinking very quickly...

Jess: Fire fighting

Isabel: Recognising what is likely to cause more problems. So you don't want anything that is going to breed. Any trouble that is likely to breed, you want to stop it breeding. And I do think the students need to be put really high up on the priorities. And then ... because you do actually get ... no, just because ... you do actually get some positive feedback. If you actually are nice to the students, it is nice to be nice to students because they are the sort of clients, and then it is also ... it does actually mean that you have less [sic] problems – because at least they are on your side

Jess: Rather than creating more ...

Isabel: Yes

Jess: Breeding more problems

Isabel: I always think, on the exam board, I am batting for the students. That is generally how I see my job. I am here to bat for the students. And if there is somebody who never turns up, and is a pain, I don't then put myself [out] for them ... there is no point in me having the same conversation with them every semester. But by and large most students aren't like that. They are struggling in the same way that we are and they... in a sense ... because I have the sort of advantage of being in the pension scheme that was (hope it is still OK!), but, you know, advantageous. Things were better for my generation than for the young students coming in from school now. In that sense, I feel sorry that they haven't... they have got a harder life to come than I have had [*comment – we can carry on until 20 past*]

Jess: Well I was going to invite you to say if there is anything that has cropped up or anything that you... would like to add at the end of the interview? About your writing process or your experience of academic culture?

Isabel: It is a strange interview. Because if I had planned it I wouldn't have said a couple of things I have said [*laughter*]

Jess: Well you can take them out

Isabel: I suspect that my thoughts about things have actually come out embedded in other things. Which maybe is quite good. It has been a quite free structure. So I think, as far as I am aware, I have expressed important things about how I see things. But not in the way that I would have done if you asked me the questions in advance. Do you know what I mean?

Jess: Right. So do you think I should ask the questions in advance?

Isabel: No, no. Because I would have had to have thought about it and I haven't got time

Jess: You do have a very kind of spontaneous response to them as well. Weirdly enough, because I didn't actually use my question sheet as a prompt very often, because what you were saying did seem to lead quite naturally on. And as you were talking I was thinking, "Oh well, that leads on to that question as well". So for me it did... there was quite [a] linear [structure] to it. But I think that is because of the nature of the questions, that it does make people go off on very personal experiences where it sparks something... "This happened to me 15 years ago and this is the impact that it had". Or, "It reminds me of a project I did with so-and-so". So actually it didn't feel convoluted at all. It felt very kind of natural

Isabel: It will be really interesting to see what you do with it

Jess: Well. I am hoping not to do very much to it, actually. I am hoping, after you have had a chance to do any edits, I am going to just let it live and breathe. So I am hoping it will be kind of bookends of research and also my autobiography – and the interviews will exist in the middle

Isabel: Right

Jess: With a kind of narrative around it, to give it theoretical shape

Isabel: I wish I had been more articulate. I am sure there were things where I... sloppy. I try to be really precise and I come from that sort of [*academic subject 2*]. I am not a [*type of theorist relating to academic subject 2*], and I don't follow [*practice related to type of theorist*] at all. As a [*another type of theorist relating to academic subject 2*] I am completely against that, but I do ... when I write, I try to be very, very clear. How words are used, and nuancing [sic] and ... But when I speak I am not, and it's all *blaaahhh* [sic]...

Jess: But that for me is the kind of humanising thing. That is what has been very nice about interviewing the journal editors, and the superior academics, is that actually when you talk, when you reflect, when you tell your stories, it's quite difficult not to do the kind of, "Oh yes, and that makes me think of this... and that makes me think of that"... And I think it is quite humanising, which I hope will come across when it goes out to readers. So thank you very much. It has been really interesting. So thank you very much.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH JESS MORIARTY AND ISLA

Key

- [inaudible]: Inaudible (no suggestions possible)
[text?]: Inaudible but possible suggestion (s) provided
[text]: For clarification of meaning
Text in italics: Emphasised speech
[laughter]: Contextual information
[sic]: As meant
(text): Parenthesised speech
...: Pause/false start

Jess: I'm here with Isla talking about academic writing processes. So, the first question is, do you consider yourself to *be* a writer?

Isla: Absolutely not! No, definitely not, no

Jess: But writing is a part of your job?

Isla: Yes it probably occupies quite a lot of my time, in fact the vast bulk of my time but I don't identify with being a writer

Jess: What do you think it means to be a writer then, how is it different to what you do in your job?

Isla: [sigh] Um... I suppose I think there needs to be some kind of... what do I think it means to be a writer? I think it means being able to be confident with the language and to feel that you can articulate whatever it is you want to express through the use of that medium and I suppose I think for me that there's always a kind of barrier there. I mean, I'm dyslexic and um... you know kind of got a disabled sticker [laughter], you know I get a grant from Brighton Council for my DPhil because I'm dyslexic and I don't know what that means because I've done lots of academic courses and I've done lots of writing in those courses but um... I think it just means for me I've got a bit of a block about writing – I don't think I do it terribly well but I can do it, in a fashion

Jess: But it's not something you feel confident doing?

Isla: No, I definitely don't feel confident. I enjoy reading and I enjoy when I've finished it, if it's somewhere near what I want to say but I always feel there's a huge gap between what I feel I know and how it's expressed on the page and that for me is a frustration

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Jess: Right, but because you don't always feel that they marry up?

Isla: No

Jess: OK, I bet that's true for lots of people

Isla: I tried actually more and more to find ways to lessen that gap and that's partly I suppose about, you know, expressing your own point of view or being able to say what it is you actually think. But I still find that quite, quite difficult

Jess: No, it's interesting because if someone says to me, "What's your doctorate about?", not just in a sentence but actually going into the theories and the methods and methodologies and everything, I panic, but if someone said to me, "Could you write 500 words about what the doctorate's about?", no problem because somehow – and not because I feel inarticulate when I speak – I think it's just that thing of the writing process actually helps me make sense of what's in my head a lot of the time

Isla: Well, I think I agree with that, I think the writing process does help you kind of distinguish. One of the things I've been looking at in the creative writing process is actually, is kind [of] hierarchy, of kind of... cognitive kind of understanding, which I think actually although I'm a practice-based person I think... I still think there is a cognition that goes on with writing, which is different and I hate to use the word superior but I think there's a kind of challenge in writing, which in the ability that it enables you to express kind of ideas or constructs, which I think it's very hard to do in any other kind of medium, with the same degree of precision you know, you can allude to things in, you know, through drawing, through writing, through painting... um... and I don't know whether I'm thinking that because I feel that I don't have those skills in writing but, um... I think there is something in writing, which I admire, you know I'm very in awe of people who can actually write, or write with ease or flourish, I think that's a kind of great skill to have actually, so yeah

Jess: The next question is, early on, how did you find the culture of academia? Not so much when you were a student but since you've kind of come to work doing research and projects, um... and particularly in terms of your writing process and product, and could you describe it in terms of positives and negatives?

Isla: Um... I think, you see I suppose I've worked in lots of different situations, you know, I started my kind of working life in the civil service and then I worked in academia and then I went back into various public sector roles, so I've gone backwards and forwards and I think that I... the thing about the academic setting is it's very individualistic, there's not much for kind of structured hierarchy and in some ways that's very unsupportive. I mean, in some ways a hierarchy can be very supportive, you know where people are actually responsible for kind of guiding and shaping you and kind of nurturing your development. In academia there really isn't that kind of support, you know. There are workshops you can go to and it's self-initiated but there's not much opportunity for feedback in a safe environment

on your work and, you know, I've said I'm dyslexic but I don't declare that, I mean I've said to you I would [not] dream of saying that because I just kind of make sure somehow I get around it, um...

Jess: Why wouldn't you, because you'd be worried about people... thoughts or...?

Isla: I think it's being able to... no it's not so much what people think, I think it's all right once you're established if you're in a post for a while but I think in the recruitment process I wouldn't mention it

Jess: Really?

Isla: No I wouldn't have mentioned it, because I don't think... if you're applying for an academic job, which involves kind of writing and research, if you say you're, you know... I still kind of feel there's still an awful lot of prejudice around. I think people wouldn't understand what it meant, wouldn't understand what that might mean for them as a person working with them (a person with dyslexia). They'd just think, 'Oh God, that's difficult'

Jess: No, that makes a lot of sense. I think what you said about the – and I often thought as well that academia's a real sink or swim culture – and what you were saying about not really feeling supported, I mean, when you start you're not kind of mentored or given an induction programme, you're left to get on with it and if you can't get on with it then get out

Isla: Well, also there's a huge gap between people who are kind of established on contracts and people who are on short-term contracts and there's the contract culture is hugely problematic I think, especially for researchers um... when you're looking for work, you feel you need to be obliging in order to retain the work and people exploit that because the only way you're going to secure your next contract is to over-deliver on what you have set out originally to do and um... and so people in secure positions rely on that and it's an awful thing to say but it's... I think there is a bit of that culture

Jess: No, I absolutely agree. There are definitely people at the university with, you know, part-time or fixed-term contracts at a big disadvantage to other [staff with permanent contracts] people. It's not exactly the same but when I first joined the University I felt like I couldn't admit to anyone I didn't have a clue about doing academic writing and that actually I didn't really want to do it, based on what I'd read. I couldn't really *see* me doing it, but at the same time I was thinking, "Well, I'm going to have to", so what do I do? Who do I go to and say, "I've no idea, I don't think I can do this, I want... I need to know how to do it"? And then you just think well I've got to shut up and get on with it, which I did find stressful – I'm not saying it was the worst thing that's ever happened to me but it was... I did think, "I'm in the wrong job, I'm a fraud"

Isla: Yeah, no I think there is that feeling of being a fraud that a lot of... kind of... you feel like, you know, often that's been referred to, you know, women feel like

they're impostors don't they in those kinds of environments? And you do, you do feel that there's a way of doing things that somehow you're not kind of party to or you don't kind of understand, um... and the only way you can get through this... so maybe what needs to happen is that... is that if you're going to be an academic and there are particular kinds of characteristics, I think, of people who have got that inclination – it's not necessarily to do with intelligence, it's... a lot of it is to do with an ability to kind of battle it out, actually – frankly – which is like spend hours and hours on your own reading things and working it out and there's nobody to tell you actually that this is the right way. I mean, one of the things, for instance [about] my job just doing writing and research is I can do all the reading, maybe do some writing, but you know analysing research, that's a whole huge territory, which I am employed to do but know nothing about [*laughter*] frankly, you know, I'll find a way of doing it but actually it would be much better if there were support – the quality, the research would be better and you know, um... and if there was more collaboration, I mean, I've been working with you and actually the projects that I do with other people, it's much more fun. The quality is better, you iron out some of the cracks and you get through some of the vulnerabilities, which I think are really important and...

Jess: It's something [about] what you said about the gaps as well, isn't it? I mean you can fill in... I don't want to say you can fill in each other's gaps [*laughter*]

Isla: Yeah, yeah

Jess: But um... but yes, it is that thing of...

Isla: But also actually being collaborative actually kind of, actually opens up new bits, it becomes more interesting

Jess: Yeah, I agree and it's that thing of when you're having conversations, rather than just internalising everything, it's when you have conversations that you think, "Oh yeah, well I hadn't even thought of that". I mean, sometimes with the project we're working on, you know at the beginning I was like, "Oh, I hadn't thought [about] that, that's what the project was about" and then you'd be like, "Oh, I can see why" and then, I mean this is probably unprofessional to say but it wasn't actually until I interviewed the students that I was suddenly like, "Oh yeah, I really get this now". I can really kind of... it's pulled together for me and also reading your other work really helped me to contextualise what we were doing as well, which if I'd been on my own I think I'd have been a bit like, "Oh, what am I doing?"

Isla: Yeah, I know, well that's it – you can't do it on your own. I think it really helps to kind of shape it and nail it but then I'd done quite a lot of collaborative work, I suppose I quite like that way of working and um... and I suppose women maybe tend to do it more. It's a bit of a cliché to say that but maybe women do, some... well, some women do seek out those kind of ways of working um... yeah, so I don't... I... so yeah the academic environment is a kind of strange one I think, um...

Jess: It's... I mean it's anecdotal but um... some of the journal editors that I've interviewed have said, one in particular said that um... you know, collaborative papers are something that they pay much more attention to now as well

Isla: Really?

Jess: Yep, and it was I think largely because it was, he was saying because, "you know, because of this idea that it's two people's expertise, if it's two people it's probably been quite a big project as well", but also like you say it's that thing of the quality is quite poss... I mean that's not a scientific argument but because you're covering for each other's kind of areas of weakness, you've had these creative conversations bouncing ideas back and forth, so it's, you know, it is anecdotal, it's not a kind of scientific fact, this won't be the basis of my thesis but, now there's a lot of argument to say collaborative writing is a very kind of successful and powerful tool

Isla: Well, I mean I've worked... when I think about my own kind of [academic] career, when I first started at the University of Brighton I worked... it was in 1989 and that was a long time ago and I was probably, I was about twenty seven and I had two children and with my friend Jenny we applied to do a job share at the University of Brighton and we were the first job share team the University of Brighton had ever had

Jess: Goodness

Isla: And we had this big spread in the University paper and... but it was really funny because they couldn't really get their head round it because in the end they gave us both... kind of two separate job roles

Jess: Really?

Isla: Yeah, so it was kind of strange although they'd profiled it like this, actually ultimately we were kind of separate and then we both went off, we did it for two years and then we both went off and had more children and went off to do other things but Jenny and I always worked together, you know, planning all the courses and then we delivered things separately but it was all the planning and the thinking processes that we did together and actually I think it just knocks off the really obvious [inaudible]. Yeah, so that's always been a large part of my experience, I think, and then I also think that team working is like... on the other side of it can be the disastrous end of collaboration sometimes, so it's actually, it's kind of paired working where there is responsibility for a joint kind of responsibility for producing something at the end where your stakes are kind of invested together and actually I think there is a most productive...

Jess: Yeah, I know it's a real generalisation to say collaborative writing is better than individual writing 'cause I know – I've got a few colleagues who are really good friends and people that I respect professionally as well but when we work together we're a complete nightmare, so um... whereas someone like you, actually we didn't

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know each other very well at all so it's been a real fluke and a real gift that we have been able to work together, hopefully effectively

Isla: Yeah [*laughter*]

Jess: Um... so you were saying about the job share thing... do you think you've been moulded by your experiences at the University or do you think that you've been able to deal with it on your own terms, or do you think that you sometimes, [that] there is that thing of, "I've got to either do more than [what's] expected of me because I've got to be seen to fit in or to be achieving", or set your own boundaries and be true to yourself, I guess?

Isla: I think it's both in a sense. I think if you come in on a kind of contract basis you do have to prove yourself, there is absolutely no way of getting round that I don't think and I think that always requires... I think that it does require more than exceeding people's expectations I think. Now, whether that's to do with my perception of the situation or whether in fact that's really the case um... I don't know but I think the reality is a kind of contract culture is associated with kind of getting grants, getting, you know, completing bits of work and you do have to be, you know, very kind of active across that front and there's not ... um... so it's a double-edged thing I think, there is that expectation if you want more work from the University you have to be prepared to put yourself out but I think on the other side, I think I've been able to... I don't have high security needs in terms of jobs and I've always – although funnily enough they've probably increased over the years – but I've always [inaudible] at the University and I've kind of decided I didn't want to do what I was doing and I left and I did other things so I've kind of shaped my own *ad-hoc* kind of working life, I suppose, so I have always been true to myself in the sense that I've kind of had an instinct that I've... I don't like the path it's going down and that has not usually been just a work decision, it's often been a life decision in relation to children and the balance between work and children, kind of what I wanted but um... I think that, well the one thing I will say, I think the dyslexic experience I had did um... affect my first job when I was at the University because I don't think I really acknowledged it, I mean, I'd done a degree, I'd done an MA...

Jess: Did you know that you were dyslexic at that point though?

Isla: No, it's only when I went to... well I knew myself but it wasn't formally diagnosed. It was only when I went to art college. I went to Central Saint Martins [sic] and all the students are, you know, [*laughter*]... And it's just kind of, you know, you realise actually it's not... it's quite normal and...

Jess: Most students at Grand Parade... I mean that's not... that's right isn't it, most students are dyslexic?

Isla: A lot of them are, yeah, a lot of them are ... yeah and um... and, you know, [they] go through the formal kind of process and you think actually... and it's quite,

it does change your kind of identity a bit because you think, “Oh!” So it takes you a little while for it to sink in and actually I don’t talk to anybody about it really um... but when I was in my first job I actually... I found the process I was... it [was] a kind of job... I [had] huge kind of classes to manage, you know like seventy students and the process... I used to try to find ways around the, um... feedback process – you know, you have to do that collective feedback – well of course I can’t spell, so I was trying to write things on the board [*laughter*] and I felt terribly inadequate and I didn’t know how to deal with it, so I could organise these classes and I could set it all up, I could do the lectures because I was in control of that but in a situation where you were required to take feedback, I was not in control of that and so that made me feel very vulnerable and a complete impostor, so [*laughter*] so, definitely an experience

Jess: It’s good to hear though that you have felt, although you’ve kind of maybe at times needed to be strategic I suppose it’s good to know that you haven’t felt kind of manipulated or moulded by...

Isla: No, I don’t think I have but then I think um... I think I suppose if I look at my working life I’ve always... work has come second to my life, although they’re the same, actually life for me is, you know, work is an important part my life but often I’ve made decisions about work um... in relation to what’s happening in my life and that’s always been... and also I think I’ve chosen actively to work in a particular way, you know I worked with my partner Jenny for a while and then, yeah, so...

Jess: No, ‘cause I mean what happened to... I had the same thing when I first got to the University I was on a part-time contract, loved the teaching, loved what I was doing so wanted to show everyone that I was capable of doing everything so said “yes” to absolutely everything I got offered and then last year in particular I was very stressed and had some health problems as well, I ended up having Cognitive Behavioural Therapy because... and it wasn’t until I got there that... and when they asked, you know, it’s a very simple question but they said, “What’s the most important thing in your life?”, and I said “Oh, you know my family”, and they said, “then why is work... why are you doing this to yourself at work?” And it was only through the process of CBT that really helped me to think, “Yeah, actually I’ve got the balance completely wrong and it’s a detriment to work and to my personal life as well that I’ve kind of done this as well, so that’s what [is wrong]”. And I do think I allow myself... because I was ambitious and because I wanted to be perceived as being effortlessly successful, because I thought that was what you had to do that I just kind of kept quiet, when what I was really thinking was, “I’m not coping, I’m not coping”, and luckily it didn’t kind of spill out but um... it did into my personal life I probably think more than my professional life

Isla: Well, I think that’s what suffers – your home life. I think that people don’t want to see the amount of work you’re putting in to do something, so if somebody says to me, “Oh, can you write up this?”, you know, they think “Oh, five days”, and you

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privately think to yourself “28 days” [laughter]. And so you spend every weekend and every evening doing it and then you effortlessly put it on the table and you think, “well, actually, that’s a lot of work”, and I know when I see people do things, I mean, some people may do some parts of it better than others but I think there’s a lot lost through not sharing. But on the other hand I also think there’s a kind of... in some way you have to firm up yourself and actually there’s no easy way to do that

Jess: No, there isn’t

Isla: You have to know what you can do and the timescales you need to do it in and I think that I do know now and it’s taken me a long time, what my kind of limitations are and what I can do and what’s going to take me a long time to do, what I feel comfortable doing and what is going to push my boundaries a little bit – and that’s not to say I wouldn’t go there, because I always think it’s quite good to go where your boundaries are

Jess: But not 24/7

Isla: No, well, this is a problem and I think that you’re right... is that when you first kind of arrive at a university, whatever stage you’re in you actually have to say, “Yes, yes, yes, yes.”

Jess: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Isla: And there’s not much protection from that, you know because the university are push, push, pushing for getting grants, you know, my next job role will depend on whether I get the next bid in and whether I get it or not, you know, or whether the centre gets it or whatever. Of course it will... otherwise I’ll be looking for something somewhere else, you know, so yeah

Jess: It’s true actually, although we talk about job security it’s the same, I think, even um... as a full-time lecturer every year I have to sit down with my head of school and discuss what it is I’m doing, how many students I’m going to have to see if my hours fulfil my, you know, fulfil my contract and although I’ve been lucky so far that I’ve always been over because of the “yes, yes, yes” mentality but there’s always that fear of, “Oh, what if I don’t have enough this year, I can’t afford to, you know, what if they reduce my contract?” Which obviously they can’t do and there is always work there but you kind of, you wouldn’t have that in the real world if you like

Isla: I think, well, I think in a way I disagree with that because actually when I worked, before I came to the University I went to um... in between I worked in the Department of Education and Science and I went in as, well, after... well, all my children had kind of got to the age when I suddenly thought, “Well, actually I need a proper job for a bit” – I occasionally get those thoughts [laughter] – and so I planned to be a sort of policy officer in the Department of Education and Science [DES] and I got the job and it was working on the ‘Children’s and Young People Strategy’, which I didn’t know anything about and it was the same kind of process

Jess: Really?

Isla: Yeah, in a sense, it's very individualistic, um... you're well supported through... much better supported through technology and through line management but ultimately there is still this kind of process of testing out your limits and testing out what you can do and it's like, I suppose it's a bit like I picture it like you – you have to do three laps running before you're allowed to kind of walk, and that's exactly... because the first three months I was there I had to do three kinds of policy papers and, you know, and whatever, and I was thinking, "I don't know anything about any of this and talk to all these ministers" and I just thought this is way out of my depth, I don't know what I'm talking about and...

Jess: So it was sink or swim again?

Isla: It is sink or swim, yeah it is the same thing and... but if you get through that, somehow you do come out slightly changed and you know what you can do so I'm not knocking it completely but I'm just saying it's a very stressful time and um... yeah...

Jess: The trouble with these interviews as well... I was interviewing someone the other day and of course with a lot of it you start to kind of think kind of negatively about it but we entered the interview by both saying but we wouldn't want to do anything else so actually what we do compared to other things we could be doing was incomparable, you know, there's nothing [else like it] so it's that thing of when you analyse it's easy to be kind of "Oh, but there's this and there's this and there's this" but I think you're right if you can get to a point where you feel um... that you're doing what's acceptable to you that you're achieving high standards, but that... without kind of doing the three laps when there should be occasions when you can walk as well, then I think there's something very kind of...

Isla: But I also think that management need to take responsibility, they don't take responsibility for the workloads they're giving you and that's what... frankly, I think that's what they're paid for um... there's not a kind of manageable... I mean if there's going to be an individualistic kind of culture within the University where people are autonomous, OK, fine, but at the moment we have this kind of halfway house between, you know, people who can give you work and tell you what to do but not actually give you the other side of management, which is the support and development and actually, frankly, one of the things I'm not entirely sure who my line manager is at the moment. I'm not actually sure whether it's Jean or whether it's um... Ann Asher, I'm not sure, actually, so I'm thinking the other day if I want to go to a conference or a training thing I think, "Who do I ask?" you know?

Jess: But it's very unusual as well, I mean, if I saw some staff development that I wanted to go on and I approached my head of school, I'm sure they'd be very encouraging but I never feel that they come to me and say, "Jess, you should go on this, or do you think, you know, that after your last staff development that maybe this

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would be a good thing for you to do?”, which maybe sounds a bit kind of nursery state, but I think especially when I first joined that would have been really helpful

Isla: Yeah, I think it is but also I think it's tied to money because you know the contract that I'm running, there's a differentiation, there's a certain amount of money that's been found for me to do X, Y and Z and I'm not sure how much money there [is to] support my development, whereas I think there's a big pot of money to support some staff's development and, you know, some people go off to China or India and do massive kinds of great things and New Zealand, Canada [*laughter*] so there's a kind of lack of parity there, you know? Maybe inevitably you have to earn your spurs, I mean, I think there is... I'm not unrealistic, I'm not saying everyone should come in on a level playing field but I don't know, I think I just wonder, I just wonder how many people are really struggling

Jess: It *is* an “earn your spurs thing”, because for example, I know the last few summer holidays it's been me and the admin staff there and I... because I use the summer holidays to do my EdD... because basically during the time... I'm the same as with your art, I need time and space to write and doing it 20 minutes here just before a tutorial or when a student might knock on my door is just – or a member of staff – is just unworkable so I need time and space so I use the summer holidays, but then I think, you know, everyone else is working from home in the summer holidays or taking the full six weeks of the holiday off to recuperate, fair enough and I'm still thinking, “Why haven't I got to that point yet, why haven't I got to the point when I'm going to New Zealand to give?” and I think part of that is... I do think there will come a day and I suppose for me a lot of it is weighted down in this final publication for my EdD that I'm thinking that'll be the time when I go, “Right, that's enough now actually for a bit, that's...”

Isla: Yeah, I think you'll do that and then you think it's a bit... and then I think it is about how to, how being creative about you work in that environment and I do think that's the only advantage I think of working in the University that I can think is that if you can find a way to um... work in a way that suits you and actually be creative, I think there are opportunities to do that, to kind of push those ways of working and I think that's what I... I think there is potential I think in that way to find...

Jess: I know I'm taking up a lot of time um... when, where and at what time do you write... or is it more sporadic than that?

Isla: Um... I write... I prefer to write in the morning um... because I do, I don't... I get kind of tired towards the end of the day and I find that family life kind of intrudes more toward the end of the day so I'm a kind of person where I think... I do have quite a good discipline in a sense I do get up and I actually do what I need to do, like yesterday I just sat in my dressing gown and thought, “Right, I need to do something”, so I have... I kind of have this approach where I just give it time and I see what happens in that time, sometimes it's crap, sometimes it's awful but I do

think I need to give it – often I feel like I need to give it an inordinate amount of time, disproportionate to the kind of the output, frankly, and that is what I find difficult...

Jess: Right, and do you have any other physical preferences for writing, I mean because of being such a time-drain, do you write straight onto the computer or do you prefer to write by hand first or...?

Isla: I have to say I usually try and do the reading first, I mean, although I'm trying not to stick there because I think that what happens is... is that there's always more reading to do and I try and do a certain amount of reading and then do something and then do a bit more reading and then do a bit more, so it's a bit like a jigsaw puzzle then, you know, so do I write... and I think I quite like the writing pro... usually sometimes what I might do is just spend about 20 minutes writing in a book just to get the kind of structure and also to have a break from the computer, so I might do my handwriting in a different room to... I might sit on the sofa and do it, whereas if I'm writing at the computer I'll go and sit where the computer is, yeah, so I do that, but the handwriting's a smaller proportion, it's the first starting point I suppose

Jess: Mmm... and do you have any... like when you first start the writing, how do you feel about it, do you have any kind of writer's block or do you have any tools for kind of boosting your motivation to get on with the writing or do you have an inner critic or anything like that?

Isla: Um ...

Jess: Or are you able to just go, "Right, sit down [and] write"?

Isla: Um... [*sigh*] usually I suppose I try and take a bit of a researcher's kind of approach, which is, you know, the why, what, how thing and I think I probably try and shape it in that way because they're just kind of questions that will get me going, um... so I probably try to work out what it is I'm trying to do and how I'm going to do it and, so I've got that kind of overall picture in my mind and that, those are probably the... I mean, the inner critic bit is always there but I do try to sit on it sometimes but it's quite hard to when you see what you've written, you think, "Oh my God, that's so terrible" [*laughter*], you know, you just think, "Oh, why are you bothering?", and what happens then, which is I think the danger point, is you then go back to the text and they sound so superior and so authoritative and you think there's this huge gap between, you know, my piddly [*sic*] bit of writing and this kind of authoritative tone and you're thinking... and you end up pinching words or phrases or copying things that actually you don't really understand perhaps and that is... that's when I know it's going on a downward spiral when I'm kind of just copying

Jess: Yeah, or I use too many quotes sometimes, where I'll read something and I think, "Yeah, that's what I think", so I'll put it in my work because I think there's no point in me trying to say it more eloquently than that really so... but I think that's a confidence thing as well that in the end I've started to think, "Well, no I can try and say it"

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Isla: But also I think it's to do with understanding. I hate to say it too but it's to do with understanding the territory, if you understand what you're writing about and that is... maybe that goes back to the fact that actually it does require an awful lot of work to understand the territory, whether it's research into art and design, whether it's research into creativity or whatever it is that you're doing, there's an awful lot of literature to get on top of and actually to understand, to be able to write in a way that's convincing and I think that's the thing that's maybe missing, is actually understanding that, that process, you know, looking – doing a bibliographic, putting all the books together, going to the library to get all those materials, reading it. I mean, that's three months work before you've even...

Jess: Yeah, and then you've always missed something even when you've done that, even when after... one year when I was doing an assignment all I'd... I didn't read creatively during the Monday to Friday, I just read academic papers, academic books, even before I went to bed and things as well and then wrote this, this paper and then of course the feedback came back and said, "Why didn't you look at so and so, why didn't you look at so and so" and you just think, "I tried to look at everyone, you know?" [laughter], but it's that thing of you're always conscious of what am I – and I did have that as well, that who am I missing, what am I missing, have I got everyone in?

Isla: Well also you kind of think there's going to be some kind of, you know, there'll be a key paper somewhere supposedly that you're meant to know about but actually it takes quite a lot of finding out and reading to know what that critical mass is and, and a lot of the time especially in the research processes, the research process is an incredibly long-winded process and yeah, so I suppose being an expert in one area would be easy but actually I don't think academic life really allows you to be like that now, I think you need to be a bit more flexible in your thinking and be able to negotiate the territory in a more flexible way

Jess: I think I'm just really scared of how insular I've become as well, I mean at the moment you know my thing is the academic writing process but if that was it from now until I retired for example, which I know is the kind of traditional... that you pick your forte and you go with it and I just think, "Oh my God!" I'd be virtually... I'd be the most unsociable person in the world because already sometimes when people talk to me about what I do and I say, "Oh yes I'm doing my doctorate and this is what it's about" and I have to stop and go, "Wait, I'm turning into one of those people" [laughter]

Isla: Well the thing is to be a hybrid. I mean, I'm definitely a hybrid person, you know, and um... when I think back over what I've done and I've followed what I've been interested in – curiosity wise – now I think it's almost like curiosity killed the cat sometimes because I've moved from, you know, I did my first degree in Geography when I was eighteen and I didn't really know what I was doing, I just went off to university because somebody gave me a place, you know [laughter]

and then I went to work and did industrial relations because, um... I worked for the British Council in London and they, you know, wanted me to do it, so I did it [*laughter*] you know, it got me a job and then you know I got involved in... and then I worked at the University for a bit and then I went back and did... after I had my children, I went back and did my art degree and it just goes on and I think it's to do with, you know, kind of stopping every so often just kind of re-jigging yourself and saying, "Where am I, what am I interested in now?"

Jess: I love that idea though, I love that. I mean, my partner has just started university at thirty five and, I mean, I love... I did enjoy my degree but I didn't get the most out of it, I was eighteen and I went and did English Studies at UEA because I knew I was interested in English but I didn't really have any idea what I was going to do with [it] and now I think the idea of having three years to study a subject that I was interested in would just be magic, absolute magic, yeah, so... and to do something completely... I mean not, I mean obviously somewhere I'd be interested in creativity and things but to do something a bit different as well to English as well, so... but anyway... So what do you consider to be the criteria for a good piece of academic writing, like what are you aspiring to when you do write?

Isla: Well, I think we touched on it a bit earlier, which is I think you do have to be in command of your kind of field and so that's a kind of baseline really but on top of that I think there needs to be, it needs to be whatever it is that you're adding to that kind of field, needs to be communicated in a way that's not just interesting, not so the contents are interesting but it's actually written in a way that's kind of human and accessible but also kind of doesn't just given you the information or the knowledge but actually kind of somehow imparts a kind of, I don't know, almost like a spirit of kind of what you're trying to point to in your writing, you know, it's like saying... well, actually through your writing I suppose you're trying to open up a new little vista and if it's not so much knowledge it's almost a new way of thinking, I suppose, that's what I think really

Jess: And have you ever sent your work off for publication and what has your experience of getting feedback from publication been like?

Isla: I did it, when have I done it, um... one was a very long time ago when I did something on um... I did something for the Industrial Society, which was about... which was about negotiations in whatever, in Trade Unions or something um... because of that stage I was involved in a lot collaborative negotiation kind of work and um... yeah, and that was, no... basically they just told you what they wanted and you just made the words, made the phone calls and sent it back so that was one thing and apart from that um... I haven't got any experience of it, no... although, actually, actually that's not true 'cause I did my art work, I've had quite a few things published in artists' newsletters, kind of if I've done a project I've done kind of a small article... well, small kind of summaries of the project and again that's just writing something and sending it off and then it's just luck and you don't get any

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feedback and you just send it off and if it's published it's there and if you don't it's not

Jess: It's not... and would feedback be helpful or would you...?

Isla: Oh God, yeah!

Jess: It would have been?

Isla: No, I think sometimes you don't want feedback because it requires more work but I think that once you accept and build it into your kind of understanding [about] what needs to be done, yeah, then I do think you need to be able to manage feedback though and, you know, still kind of... that's the one thing I think I learned at the DES when you're kind of dealing with policy work, you get all these kinds of people with clever ideas and at the end of the day it's still your piece of work and you have to decide again how much time you can put into revising it and what it needs to be for and, you know, you can listen to what people have got to say but ultimately it's about you and your piece of work, um... but I think it is really important to get that feedback

Jess: I mean, but with that in mind do you use a critical friend or someone you send your work to for feedback?

Isla: Yes, I'm going to use you [*laughter*]. No, actually, I sent the last piece of work to you and I sent it to Allen Davies, who's at the um... [inaudible], the education advisor there. He's very helpful and very nice and very friendly and um... um... yeah, so...

Jess: And how does that help to... I mean, apart from just the feedback, does it help...?

Isla: Well, the reason why it helps specifically with him because he um... well one he's aware of the project and he's... also he used to be... he's a kind of creator, he started off as a creative practitioner but he's also, he's got a lot of work published in that field and also he edits the journal in which the... I would aim to publish some of the work that I've got so if he kind of likes the shape of what's there then...

Jess: That's good

Isla: Yes, so that when... and also he's been involved in the revision. I mean, I know it's a competitive process so, you know, in the next lot of publications there will be, I don't know how many articles they'll publish but if he's already signalled an interest then actually it helps, um... yeah, so I think I am quite strategic in that sense, not overly but I think, "Well, actually it's that coupling of feeling safe, I actually..." I mean he could be a different sort of person and I wouldn't send it anywhere near him but actually I kind of feel, well he's a kind of person I think I trust to kind of give me honest feedback without being kind of personally vindictive about it

Jess: And that's really important, isn't it?

Isla: It is yeah, really important and also I kind of think, "Well, actually that's the route", you know, that kind of route through, you know, that's the way into some things and if that's what the University wants is names on publications that's what you have to do

Jess: Yeah, that's right

Isla: It's awfully... you know...

Jess: It is strategic though again, no that's a good idea. When you write, so I mean this kind of touches on that, but when you write are you thinking of an editor or getting it published or do you just write it in your own kind of style and voice and not worry about that?

Isla: Um... I'm not, no. I think that I wrote the last thing I did, I wrote just what I thought as a kind of baseline document, I think from that you can then... it's like putty, you can then take that and make it into five or six different types of bread if you like, it's actually that... but you have to do the core work to know what it is you've got to say. You can then say it in different ways, for different audiences um... but having done the baseline work I think, "Well, OK, it now needs to be shaped for a specific purpose" and I know, I know that's the kind of next stage and it's actually such a long process and I've not done it before in that way but I can see that it's so... it's such a long process and if you're learning... and sometimes I feel too old to be bloody learning anything else, you know, can't I just rest on my laurels for a bit, you know? *[laughter]*

Jess: But I feel like that and I've only been there a couple of years so...

Isla: Oh no! So... but I do think you have to have, I think if you, if you just go straight to... if the line is too straight for the publication it can be a bit hollow what you write, a little bit, sometimes, maybe – that's what I think. It actually needs to come from somewhere, it's better if it's got a base

Jess: I think my problem is that mine... I do it the other way completely, which is I write what I want to write and this is the feedback I've had from my supervisor as well, with my last assignment he said, "Yes, this is very interesting, you've obviously enjoyed writing it, but will anyone else care?" *[laughter]* and I was thinking, "Yes, because I almost [did enjoy writing it]", and people said to me, "You've obviously enjoyed writing this", and part of me thought, "Well, that's good that that comes across" but then the other part of you thinks, "But who... where am I going to send it to now?" You know, 'cause it was almost a little bit self-indulgent *[laughter]*

Isla: Yeah, it is... I think it is a...

Jess: And then of course you just think, "I've just spent a year working on this project and X amount of hours writing it up and I've produced something like"...

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I'm like, "Goodness, this is interesting", and then I've got nowhere to send this to without thinking I've got a whole heap of work to do on it to get it published

Isla: Yeah, but I think that's... I don't know, I think that partly I think that's inevitable that, you know, that actually if you just write for the publication then, then maybe you can do that when you're kind of a bit more dexterous around the subject. I mean, maybe if... or maybe if the pieces of research were a bit shorter and sharper... I mean what we're talking about is quite big bits of research that have been going on for like a year or something, whereas I think it's much easier to be much more focused, and, "Right, I want to go in that publication". Um... you know, like for instance, um... when Allen Davis came down (he's the editor of the Art and Design... he's the editor of the Art and Design and Communication thing) and um... I think, well, actually I did talk to him about, you know, "how do I shape this so that it's going to fit what you want" and that's the feedback that I'm looking for and, you know, I need it to be, oh I don't know... it needs to be a specific shape now I guess...

Jess: I think I've got... I think you're right that you need to be true to yourself but you need to have an awareness, I think that's the next challenge for me is to... rather than just thinking I want to write for myself, is to think that I've got to be a little bit strategic about this as well

Isla: But I think there are levels...

Jess: Oh yeah

Isla: You know, I don't think you can be strategic without having anything to be strategic [about]... it's like having a gun that's not loaded with anything, you know you can't... you know, do you know what I mean? If you're going to aim at something, you've got to have something that you're shooting with. It's like, kind of... I do think if you've got something to say then you can say it in lots of different ways, well I suppose that's what I think, I don't know if that's true or not. Sometimes I think I go around about things very, quite slowly, I'm not a fast person, I'm very slow, I feel like I operate at quite a slow pace sometimes and that's because I kind of like to feel that um... that I feel comfortable with what I've produced or said and I'd rather it not be out there than to feel a little bit uncomfortable with it I suppose

Jess: See, I'm a rusher unfortunately [*laughter*] and then afterwards I read and I think... I'll get something back on, or get feedback on it and I'll think, "Yeah, they're right" and I think if I just slowed down, if I'd just taken more time rather than thinking, "Oh, well, this has got to be in and this has got to go", that actually I'd get more satisfaction and the outcome would be more successful as well but um... do you have an emotional link to your writing or is it just the job? Can you separate the two, so can you say, "Right, I've got to write this piece and I've got to get it done so...?" Or is there always a kind of personal and emotional link to what you're writing?

Isla: I think there is always, well for me I think there's always an emotional link to it, I mean I think because, especially in the kind of art field because I think it's more personal to me, you know, and I think it's linked to your own, my own experience to a large extent – sometimes I find it hard to separate out my own experience from what I'm kind of looking into. Maybe I could be a bit more detached with things I was less involved with, I don't know, or that were [there] a kind of less part of me I suppose in some way but I think for me there is always an emotional link and also it's emotional in the sense that it feels awful if you produce something and you just think, "Actually, that's a bit rubbish". It's horrible that feeling 'cause you put so much time into it, you just think, "Well, actually if you put a bit more into it you could feel pleased with it", um... And I also get really, I don't like it if I don't understand it, it makes me... and that's an emotional feeling too, if you don't understand I get panicky and I think that's horrible or if I don't know how to do it, that's horrible, too. Yeah, so it's a hugely emotional [experience], hugely I would say

Jess: Do you find... and this isn't... I don't think... I think it's kind of a – it could be either – but sometimes when I collaborate with people on writing and we get maybe negative feedback or we get turned down I kind of feel a bit more OK about it and then other times, if it's something we've worked really hard on, we really care about then I feel even more kind of angry because it's not just me that they've spurned, it's someone else that I kind of care about and respect so...

Isla: Yeah, what do you mean in terms of...?

Jess: Well, if you send something off... even if it's a bid or if it's a paper or you know whatever and if it gets refused that it kind of... part of me prefers it when it's collaborative and then another part of me feels more defensive for the other person as well

Isla: Yeah. I mean, actually, you see the thing is I've been through a lot of that in a sense because I've been [in a] job share with my friend Jenny, who I worked with for years and we've done lots of kind of things together and I think um... yeah, you do feel like that 'cause sometimes you don't know whether it's... if you, especially if you go for an interview and it's a collaborative interview and you don't know if it's something that you've said and you feel like you may have let the other person down in some way and you think, "Oh gosh, I wasn't quite sharp enough on that point", or, you know, so um... um... generally, no I think it is disappointing, I think because of the amount of work that's gone into it

Jess: That's always the thing isn't it?

Isla: Yeah, it's the amount of work

Jess: How much time you've spent on it... Um... do you think you're supported at work to develop your writing and if so how does it take place?

Isla: Um... I think I've created support for my writing in the sense that I make sure that I go, if there's any kind of sessions or classes, you know, people who kind of talk about writing. I know that I have difficulty with it but I suppose I'm trying to make it more friendly and so I go to all the kinds of sessions because I do believe you can learn a certain amount of how to do it and I... but I do also get bored by the kind of strategies that people present to me, you know, like the Brown's Eight Questions or whatever it is, you know, and I kind of think they do help to a certain extent but at the end of the day it's just me and the paper so, um... yeah, the structure does help and so I seek those kind of opportunities out and they are available um... within the University but they do seem to be a bit narrowly focused around kind of producing an academic paper, you know, there are all sorts of other writing things, like presentations or doing articles or I don't know, all sorts of other bits of writing, which I think could equally be supported um... yeah so I suppose there are oppor... I mean, you'd have to. That's the other thing though if you're doing it as a free, you know, kind of... you're basically doing it in your own free time. I mean, that's... you know, I just accept that if I'm going to go on anything like that then I have to... and the other side of that is actually you have to pay for some of the courses so, for instance, I've just put myself down to do a um... um... presenting kind of course, you know, how to do marvellous presentations or whatever it is and um... and it was £90. Well, actually, that... as a kind of contract person, who doesn't, who's not entirely sure where your, your line management [is], who pays for that, you know, is there money in your budget to pay for that? In fact Gina signed it and sent it off and it was fine' cause I just happened to be talking to her, but actually that, it's kind of... it leaves you feeling slightly odd about it... it was the same with the narrative thing, I was thinking, "Well, who's going to pay for that?" Ann Ashley can pay for it so, I have to then ask for your own kind of personal development, you have to ask and things internally within the University cost, so as a contract worker you're at a disadvantage, so I think that's... I think that is, you know, I think that is a difficult thing

Jess: Yeah, no, I agree... um... Julia Cameron said, "In order to have a real relationship with our creativity, we have to take time and care to cultivate it." Do you feel there's anything else that could be done to support you with writing development? Now, I've got a few things that you might want to consider, um... time and space, workshops and retreats (which you've mentioned), a mentor (which we've kind of mentioned as well) a community of practice (and by that I mean critical friends where you share work) insight into publishing, more guidelines, more freedom, so more kind of... or something completely different – or none of the above, just getting on with it?

Isla: Um... no I think it could be... I mean let's talk about... there are all sorts of different writings and writing that I have to do for university is creative... Research, writing for research, it's academic – I'm not really a um... a writer, a research writer, that's what I feel and so actually understanding how to do the analysis and write up the analysis in a way that's convincing is actually I think it's a very specific...

I mean, I think most of us know how to do literature reviews but actually writing up the analysis of research findings is another huge area, which, you know, in a way you have to be very convincing about and it's a kind of, I think it's quite a difficult thing to do um... and I feel ill-equipped to do it really, frankly, and I guess you kind of learn and you make up your own way of doing it and in a sense I just feel it's a bit of a creative process, kind of interpreting all this stuff um... and I'm sure there are more official ways to it but... and if maybe I'd been on the right course maybe I would have done that, I don't know, I don't know whether that helps um... so having a mentor would help with that, the process to understand what needs to be achieved at those things, at those kind of... The other thing I do think, is I think that research in the University is kind of we rush headlong into it, you know, there's no time for, you know, really we should actually do the literature review, write that, have a look at that, then think about the kind of questions, then do the... I mean basically we just go *Bwoof!* [sic]

Jess: But it's fire fighting, that's how I feel a lot of the time

Isla: Yeah, yeah...

Jess: Like, I'll agree to do a project and then I'll kind of think, "Right" and then there's that project, and actually weirdly because of getting pregnant this year I've been much more strategic, so actually doing these interviews now for my EdD for me... although I am quite conscientious to be fair, I'm not saying usually I leave everything to the last minute, you know, there's a real... I've really kind of organised myself and bullied and harassed people to be interviewed before I go off on maternity leave and with the other projects as well, you know, actually I'm quite grateful if I'm collaborating with someone, they say we've got to get these interviews done because we... actually you're right we do have to get these interviews done because I'm not physically going to be here otherwise so actually having another additional deadline on me has been, has been helpful. But I can't remember where I was going with...

Isla: You were talking about support for the writing process and I mean I think it's, it's a kind of um... all of those things you kind of need but at the end of the day as well you do need all of that support, it's like stepping stone support but it's also the somebody needs to leave you alone to... to let you go and kind of do it, but it's like, you know, if I was a kind of... I suppose in an ideal world if I was kind of managing somebody or a team of researchers I kind of... it would be really nice to say, "OK, now spend the next four weeks doing the literature review. Do that, when you've done that, let's look at it, write it up; what do the questions mean, you know, what are we going to do after that, let's look at the fieldwork, let's do that, write up the, collect the... let's look at the kind of results", so actually there's somebody to share your kind of process with, who's actually supportive and responsible *and* responsible for helping you and I think I just feel, well basically I'm just hanging on by the skin of my teeth I think [laughter]

Jess: You do it very well then in that case [*laughter*]

Isla: Well not... I mean I think I can do it but I mean it's just learning on the job I guess...

Jess: Yeah, it is. Do you think from that... because I've made a decision as well and this was influenced more by announces [sic] than anything else but I decided after in October 2009, I'm going to allocate two days a week where I work from home, so I can work on projects or I can work on my writing and things and um... and that's because we're going into shared offices and I know I won't be as productive in a shared office as I would be on my own and also because um... nurseries are very expensive and I want to spend time with my child as well, I don't want them to be in nursery five days a week, but is there anything that could be done through work to legitimise your writing processes? Is there anything the department could do... um... is there anything else that could be done to legitimise your writing in the workplace?

Isla: I think when it could be talked about more, um... and actually the difficulties of the process and how time consuming it is because I think it's a kind of hidden activity and actually, you know, if the University wants researchers and it wants written publications, actually it takes most people a lot of effort and a lot of time to do it and there's going to have to be time allocated to it and that time is going to have to be, you know, it's somehow comparable to the amount of time it takes up, so yeah, I think it's just... you know, there's a nod towards it in a sense that people know that people do research, but people don't really... when people say research, people don't really... they see the interview bit but the reading and writing... all of that is kind of hidden and the analysis and it's just takes a long time

Jess: Yeah, I completely agree

Isla: The revision of texts, it's such a time consuming... and also you can't do it in a hurry because if you do it's pretty... and actually I think as well it's like there needs to be a community, maybe it needs to be part of your job description to actually look at three fellow colleagues writing... and I need to look at three people's writing and that's part of your job role, to support each other or something. I don't know...

Jess: I'd really welcome that, I think that would be great um... but, um... I think the other thing is as well, I think the other thing is as well is it is this idea of somehow work... I mean we've been guilty of it, in the last project we put in a bid for, we said it was going to take us five hours to write it up and we've done 20... well, you've done the majority of 20 interviews with students, so I mean realistically we're never going to write a 4000-word paper in five hours [*laughter*] but I think we have to kind of say, "Be realistic about how long it takes to do these tasks", and that then as well there has to be something from senior management to say, "and time will be given to make sure it's done", because you're right when it's rushed and it's a pressure and it's on top of everything else, it becomes meaningless and you've always got that fear of, "Is it good enough, am I bit fraudulent?"

Isla: But I think the other thing is, is that I do think that actually if you want... it's a bit like opening a new gateway, if you actually want a new way of working and more time there is a kind of partly incumbent on you to make, have a responsibility to argue your case but also in arguing your case you need to be persuasive with that so in a sense you need something to back up your argument, it's no good... in a sense I suppose what I'm saying [is] it's no good just saying, "Actually I need 27 hours to do this marvellous piece of research", it's much easier to say, "I've done this and it took me this long and it's been really valuable and now I need... if you want me to do that again or you want... I'm going to need this much time". And I think that's just the kind of nature of forging a new way of operating and you know it's part of the job of convincing people there is this kind of spearhead and I suppose you have to be a bit kind of strategic in your own life to decide actually I'm going to put my energies into this because I think that if I can persuade people that this is worth doing and this is a valuable territory and I want to occupy this territory and I need to go there first and if I go there first then it becomes mine or I can have part of the pie and then you can kind of convince... I suppose I don't think you can be too flaky about it in some sense. I don't think you can be too saying, "Well, actually I need 30 hours to do this" and whatever, I just think you have to take some responsibility for the fact that you're forging or suggesting a new way through or a redistribution of time, after all you're dealing with [the] kind of bureaucracy where people, who are senior management...

Jess: And tradition as well...

Isla: Yeah and who have kind of budgets and they have to allocate time, so if you look at it from their perspective, why do they give... so it's a negotiation and you have to go to that negotiation with um... something to negotiate with I think. I suppose that's what I think...

Jess: Yep, no I think you're right, I think what I don't want is for it to be kind of, you're right that kind of flakey thing and I don't want to feel like I'm going cap in hand kind of asking for it as well but it has to just be validated and an empowering process for everyone. So that's the end of my questions. Is there anything you'd like to add or reflect on as a result of the conversation we've had?

Isla: No, I think I'd quite like to do some more collaborative activities though, I think that would be really... I think that's a really valuable kind of thing um... and um... yeah I think maybe somehow kind of pushing that, I don't know how, it would be generally... especially if we're going to be researchers, you know, and if that's what we're going to do but then actually through all that process I think it would be great to have more collaboration and that.

Jess: Good, thank you very much, that's it [*laughter*]

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH JESS MORIARTY AND MASON

Key

- [inaudible]: Inaudible (no suggestions possible)
- [text?]: Inaudible but possible suggestion (s) provided
- [text]: For clarification of meaning
- Text in italics*: Emphasised speech
- [laughter]: Contextual information
- [sic]: As meant
- (text): Parenthesised speech
- ...: Pause/false start

Jess: Yes, we're off... Right, it's Tuesday morning and I'm here with Mason to talk about his writing process so we'll start off with an easy one, well, seemingly easy although it's taken other people I've interviewed about half an hour to answer this one... Do you consider yourself a writer?

Mason: Yeah

Jess: Yes?

Mason: Unequivocally, yeah, number one a writer

Jess: Number one a writer, so you're not an academic who writes?

Mason: No, no

Jess: And what could you, could you say a bit more about that, what is it that makes you say that first and foremost?

Mason: [laughter] He sat back and off he went... um... it's because the only reason I became an academic was because I started writing a long while before, my interest has never been in an academic career paradoxically even though it hasn't gone badly. Um... my interest has always been a self-generated interest to write, but I should add that with me it's more complicated in the sense that I realised early that I wanted to link my writing to a broader social project, so there were two things at work. I never kind of wanted to be [a] solipsistic um... internalised writer, I wanted to be somebody who essentially wrote applied stuff, so although I started by writing a novel called, 'When The Music Stopped', I quickly moved into applied writing, I wanted to apply it to my other key concern, which is probably the overarching concern, which is with social justice generally and that goes back to my background.

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Um... actually my background is interesting in terms of writing in the sense that I grew up in a family, working class family – my dad was a gas fitter, couldn't read, um... or read with the wheelbarrow method as he called it, which is when he couldn't, didn't know the words he was reading he would say "wheelbarrow" and he could just about make out his reading but... so I grew up in a house that was oral basically, lots of great storytelling, a couple of terrific storytelling parents, I was an only child, which is significant, um... and then I didn't learn to read until I was eight so it came to be late, um... I wasn't... I hated school um...

Jess: All the way through you hated school or just...?

Mason: Yeah, even when I was a teacher I always had a really... and the same ambivalence to the academy, always had an ambivalent sense of um... of its irrevocable class-based nature if you know what I mean and so I always felt like an outsider within, within the school and subsequently... um... I treasure the outsider, I treasure the sense of being an outsider but I think that's part of being a writer is to kind of not be mainstream, not be central um... that truth resides at the margins, that's my belief, so... So putting those two things together I, instead of writing novels... poetry, I do write poetry a lot but for myself but essentially I write applied books. I always therefore have to like here, um... generate data, so that probably explains um... why, um... I continue to work inside the academy um... I mean I love supervising students and stuff like that, I like all of that but it's um... it might... my basic definition of myself (to finish off) is as a writer and then um... a long way second would be anything else, so I don't see myself as an academic, I never have...

Jess: I think the, the... what you were saying about the writer needing to be on the edge kind of observing and also the social justice, have you found that those two things have kind of enabled you to combine those two themes in order to kind of motivate and move your writing on?

Mason: Yeah, I think for me in terms of, you know, we talked before you switched on about finding a voice... A voice for me is always um... always has to harmonise my, what I call my internal affairs with my external relations – for me writing wouldn't work if it was just an internal quest. I have to link it with a broader narrative and for me that's the only way I can find a voice, I can't find a voice um... just a voice of self, I wouldn't want to

Jess: Do you think that's because you would consider it to be vain or self-indulgent or...?

Mason: It might be to do with a general take on the literary world as, as bourgeois and self-indulgent, yeah it might and I think there would be plenty of evidence of that if you've been to any of the festivals but I think it's probably not that actually, it's probably more to do with... with motivation in the sense that my motivation could never be just self exploration, it would also have to be self exploration linked to a broader social [inaudible] because I can't understand myself in a sense without

a broader social gaze and once you get into the broader social gaze you cease to be concerned about yourself, you get then concerned with others in similar situations so it becomes a more general scrutiny of the world I suppose, so it's partly about a little boy growing up in a council estate coming to understand the world and not being able to do that not just by self analysis but by social analysis for me

Jess: And is it the writing process that actually helps you with that kind of understanding of the world and yourself as well?

Mason: No

Jess: No?

Mason: For me the writing process um... I've explained this before people and only some people understand it, Bradbury [Malcolm] understood it perfectly well...

Jess: I feel challenged now [*laughter*]

Mason: Yeah, but you see for me um... the writing process is all done before I write. It's an internal monologue, internal dialogue if you like but it's a monologue really, it's an ongoing internal conversation which I'm constantly involved basically, except when you distract me by conversation, but there's an ongoing kind of um... reflexivity about the world I suppose to be pompous about it. I'm just constantly processing – in narration I call it, I'm constantly in narration. Now in that sense when I've finished a spell of being in narration in my head I just write it down, but I don't... I never edit, it's just there... splat, done, move on... so writing for me is just essentially scribing what I've already written in my head and I can wake up still, even at my advanced age with 16 or 17 pages there in my head, that I've just flashed out and I know that sounds absurd but that is the reality - it's been processed in the night and it just come up... it flashes up like on the screen, all the branched arguments and I just have to then sit down, splat it and it's done

Jess: It doesn't sound... it sounds wonderful. I'm still at the point where it's the writing that helps me to make sense of my thoughts...

Mason: No, I don't write my way into understanding, no...

Jess: No, and never have?

Mason: No, no

Jess: Has that narrative always been there?

Mason: Yes, but I think it's to do with what I said earlier you see, I came to reading and writing late so I always processed first in my head internally in a very kind of self-absorbed way, I guess still um... and so writing was a late um... conversion, just a late skill that comes right at the end of a process of reflexivity so I don't write my way into it and people always talk about writing their way into understanding, writing workshops, creativity workshops – for me that just doesn't make any sense because that's not the way I work, but I do recognise lots of other people do but I don't [*laughter*]

APPENDIX 6

Jess: Well, I think... well I've heard of that happening to other people but it has certainly been a process that as they've grown in kind of experience and confidence that they've been able to do that, to kind of formulate a narrative or an argument or an idea in their head and then it's there and it just goes onto the page

Mason: Yeah, that's how it works for me. I would add one thing, which is I think after you've written a few things, a few books, you do... it does feed back into the internal process in a sense that you start to think in a crafting way about how you might put it on the page so in that sense there's an iterative process between the expectation that you will write it and the craft that you know you need... so it's slightly more complicated than I hinted at earlier if you see what I mean?

Jess: Yeah, but the interesting thing for me is that you said this was a process that started quite early on so it's not something that's kind of grown or evolved, it's...

Mason: I think I wrote before I could write, I wrote before I could read...

Jess: [*laughter*]

Mason: No, I'm quite serious, I um... I know that I had all those stories written long before I could, in a way, read or write, so the writing has always seemed to me um... extraneous, superfluous almost

Jess: So it's back to this oral kind of culture of storytelling as well being important early on?

Mason: It is, yeah, and I suspect the best storytellers are similar to that, that something has happened to trigger an ongoing and deep internal conversation and I was listening to an interview with Henning Markell, the detective writer and um... he described his writing as just a lifeline for him ever since his mother left when he was three um... he wouldn't have been able to read or write when he was three but he started in a sense to... well, it was when his imagination began to... it's partly imagination we're talking about here isn't it? That your imagination starts to flourish, the stories start to come into your head, you start to... but it's slightly more... I mean it's slightly more complicated because the other side of that is, if it were just that, if it were just imaginary stories of how you might not continue to live in a council house for example, then it would just be about imagination but for me it's always had that other dimension, which is how do you link this to the world

Jess: Right, so it's not just kind of creative fantasy?

Mason: It started earlier, it started earlier really with questions, essentially my questions were always about trying to understand myself in the world I think, rather than just understand myself... don't know why that is, in a sense it's a sort of externalisation of the thing

Jess: No, that makes a lot of sense to me, but also thinking at the moment of social responsibility of writers and the impact of the writer, especially in a time

when all the money seems to get taken away from the arts, about this idea of actually how important it is to be a writer on the edge looking at society and making comments and writing and bringing it to life through art as well so it's kind of churning up all sorts of things for me... um... I wanted to talk a bit more about this idea of feeling on the edge as well because early on, how did you find the culture of academia when you first... not when you were a student but when you joined as a, as a lecturer or a researcher early on, particularly in terms of your writing process and product, did you ever feel kind of restricted or that you lacked confidence because of the culture of the academy, or did you feel OK about being on the outside looking in?

Mason: I think that's a strange thing, that may be gendered and it may be something to do with my psychodynamic but I've always felt perfectly confident and utterly alienated. In other words um... a bit like Raymond Williams says, "I knew from the beginning I was amongst the enemy", is what he said, that sounds a little overdramatic, a little dramaturgical but I only mean that in the sense that I've had some wonderful colleagues, I love my colleagues but I'm also very aware of the social process that underpins what's going on in universities – who gets to win and who gets to lose. Um... and so it comes back to the same thing of linking your own sense of selfhood to a social project and interrogating the world that you're in, in terms of both, so my... for some reason my own self belief has always been strong, I don't know why um... but it always has and it's pompous to say it but it's simply a fact, I've never thought for a minute um... that I couldn't cut the mustard as an academic um... and I've always been deeply intrigued by a lot of the complicities of academic life about the way that so much is done in the academic world, say in educational writing, which is deeply um... socially neutral at best and socially partial at worst, in other words it tends to... most of the discourses of educational writing at the moment tend to celebrate the privileged groups in society and denigrate those from which I came um... and it's done effortlessly, you know, they talk about school improvement and school effectiveness when schools systematically screw the working class – who would want schools to be effective etc.? And all of that is done without thought because it's the discourse of the moment and I think unless you are outside that and have a strong social location on it you just get carried along – so much academic writing just gets carried along um... and it follows fads and fashions whether it's post-modernity or whatever, which I've plenty of time for post-modernity but so much of it's arrant crap um... and socially useful crap for people in power because it demythologises some important social movements so... I would always be asking that question you see, what does this mean to my tribe, what does this mean to the social groups that I care about? Um... and by and large I don't care about the groups that are represented um... in force in the academy – they tend to be (by and large) bourgeois groups that I have little time for. That's not to say I don't have some wonderful colleagues, I do; I like them – I like them as people um... sounding very alienated isn't it?

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Jess: Well, it's that thing of it seems that you haven't... whereas I feel that I have kind of early on certainly been moulded a bit by the academy um... almost celebrating that idea of being an outsider and the ability, so yes "I can get on with people and I can respect people but you know I'm very proud and always very conscious of my roots and my culture and what I believe in"?

Mason: Deeply, deeply

Jess: Um... so it's more that thing of you've dealt with the academy very much on your own terms, that you haven't played the game, if there is a game?

Mason: I think there have been a number of reasons for that though, to be honest with you...

Jess: I'd love to know...

Mason: Well, one I think is gender...

Jess: Right

Mason: At the time I was growing up as you well know men were much privileged over women and so on so I think there's a whole issue of gender privilege, which has to be factored in to me presenting myself as this underling and nonetheless a representative [of] a gender dominant group at the time, the second thing is related to that, that I think times have changed and there was a time um... in the sixties when working class heroes in universities were kind of celebrated and so you could actually play the outsider and still win so to speak

Jess: Yeah, celebrity

Mason: Yeah, so I think I would be misleading if I would just say it was an absolutely kind of virtuous self-belief in the beginning. I think there were times when – I think those times are over incidentally, I think that was quickly snuffed out both in gender terms but also in terms of working class hero, um... and I don't think the gender thing's over yet as you well know – but it seems to me that there were privileges at that time for somebody to do what I did and it was easier than it would be now. I can see that with my own son, whose own social project is very similar to my own, both wanting to work for social justice, but it's much, much harder for him to live that out in the world as it is and he's turned his back on the academy as a result. I would have liked him to have gone into the academy but he's turned his back... you know, having had Bradbury as his tutor it's quite interesting actually and having done creative writing at the best place he just thought they were a bunch of suits and no-hopers and he just didn't like the political correctness and the um... just he hated the academy um... their just a bunch of time-servers was how he saw it... all I'm saying to sum up is it was a lot easier to do what I did once than it is now and I think it would be hard if I was starting at your stage and wanted to just be myself and stand up for a group of people that have been much

disvalued in the last fifty years... and the tribe I represent is itself a fragmented army so all those things would make it much more difficult to find, you know, if you see yourself as a voice of not just yourself but a group then the fate of the group becomes relevant and the fate of that group has been desperate since regulation and it will be desperate in the new crisis as well, of course – everybody's worried about bankers going to the wall, I'm more worried about my seven cousins who are all unemployed, you know, but the money we know will go to the banks, it won't go to my seven cousins

Jess: Well, that's the trouble isn't it? We can't find any money for the NHS or for education but we can find billions of pounds to bail out banks

Mason: Shit loads, shit loads... billions and billions and I mean people see the absurdity of that but um...

Jess: They do but nothing... it's that thing of... but then what happens after seeing the absurdity I suppose, and it's not like I've been on a picket line anywhere saying, "This is not on", I suppose the only thing you feel that you can do is vote but that feels meaningless at the moment as well so...

Mason: I think it always comes back to Auden, "All I have is a voice to expose the folded lie". I would relate to that and I would relate to one's task in some way as bearing moral witness to an appalling class-ossified corrupt society [*laughter*]

Jess: Cheery stuff! [*laughter*]

Mason: What a miserable old bugger!

Jess: Just more about the physical process of writing... when, where and at what time do you write? I mean, I know that you've said that actually it's all the time, it's while you sleep virtually but, but actually the physical process of writing?

Mason: Well, I've been writing this morning so I write every morning of my life

Jess: Every morning?

Mason: Yep, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, I always write and I try and write for three or four hours every morning and it might go on longer but it's always three or four hours, 'cause there's always something to write down 'cause I've always been processing so there's always something. Sometimes it's useless, I mean, it's not always pristine and useful but there's always a conversation going on that needs to be written down in my head so I tend to write pretty well every day I would say. I write in bursts as well so I might be really... really go like mad for two or three weeks and write, you know 30,000 words or something but other times I would work three or four hours and I might produce a page

Jess: And is that... is it motivated by deadlines or by the fact that you've got a project on or something like that, or is it just...?

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Mason: Never been interested in that at all. I mean, all those things are there but I don't write for them, I write what I've been thinking that day so it's utterly, utterly internally generated – there is no other thing that moves me at all. You could give me a deadline and if I wasn't interested in that at the moment I would pass it

Jess: And not kind of have any kind of anxieties or stresses about it?

Mason: Conscious... um... no but I tend... I mean there's something I have to write for today and I've actually done it but I can write, there are different forms of writing and I can write in a de-coupled way – if you want me to produce an academic report I can do that and I can do it in a way that doesn't touch the sides so to speak, it just comes out and I haven't got much invested in it so...

Jess: Get the job done...

Mason: So academic writing of that sort I can do as a kind of second order thing but my writing [*laughter*] is um... doesn't work on deadlines, it can't, it comes out of an internal discussion

Jess: Do you always feel like you've known yourself or are we talking about something that's happened last year or...?

Mason: Well, I mean, I would quote back to you um... Arthur Miller, 'cause Arthur Miller as you know was quite involved at UEA, I met him a couple of times and I remember him saying once, somebody asked him, he was 89, it was right at the end... actually did you meet Jane Dominic, who did her thesis? She did this wonderful thesis on the phallus in Arthur Miller's work but she was a really, really interesting woman, she went back to California and we became close friends and one of the conversation we had with him was what it was like to be 89 and he said, "Christ it's funny being 89," he said, "I still get up every morning and I write", and I said to him, "Why is that?" And there was a long pause and he said, "I seem to be one of those people that's endlessly in the process of 'becoming'", and I would describe myself that way, so if you ask me do you know yourself... not definitively no, no I don't. I think I have a strong sense of presence...

Jess: Who you are...?

Mason: Who I am, but I think I'm ever changing um... and I'm not a sort of multiple self, I don't think, I think there's a coherent storyline but it evolves, it changes, of course it does- the seasons change apart from anything else

Jess: But that's empowering rather than frightening I suppose. Have you always felt that joy for writing as well, [that] it's never felt like a pressure?

Mason: Never been interrupted at all, no it's been a joy since it began to be... I mean this is sounding incredibly self-congratulatory but it's true, it's a joy

Jess: Certainly something to aspire to...

Mason: No, I don't think you can aspire to it in a funny way though, I mean that's part of...

Jess: I think it's taken me... the last thing I wrote for my, for my doctorate I really enjoyed the writing, I felt very productive, I felt very creative... I didn't feel under pressure to write, I just enjoyed the writing, whereas before I kind of did feel that "I've got to meet this deadline"

Mason: And what about the physical side for you, how important is that?

Jess: For me it's changed because I used to be very much kind of pen and paper as well but my... because of the amount of time I spend on the keyboard my writing has become virtually kind of GP-esque [sic] so now I do write directly on to the computer and I don't write as well... I write, interestingly, I write um... poetry I write at home and ideas for creative pieces I write at home in pen but I will always write academic work at the desk, at a computer um...

Mason: So you make a distinction then between academic writing you do on the computer?

Jess: Um... I do but then whenever I've done the first draft of a poem it will always go onto the computer after, so I can start shaping it and see the length of the lines and different things as well, so I don't see them as two completely distinct processes, they're kind of morphing together um... but I think it's that thing of needing to be at the desk and the computer because it makes me feel it's my job to write and I'm here at 8.30am and I'll... when I go home at 4:30pm or 5:00pm or whatever then I'll have written all day and I'll have loved it, but my posture will have suffered for it!

Mason: Do you get plenty of time for that?

Jess: No, not at all um... I mean that's something, that's part of what this study has come out of, that my writing time comes in the holidays because I like to carve out chunks of time, so rather than saying 20 minutes here or an hour there I like to have at least a few hours and at the moment Monday to Friday that's impossible

Mason: And is that true, like, 40 weeks a year in a sense?

Jess: Um... yeah, so... but I'm finding it easier and easier to carve out more time but for me for example in the summer holidays I am, I had five or six weeks where I just for the whole six weeks I didn't do anything else apart from work (write)

Mason: And what was that like?

Jess: I really enjoyed it. I loved it

Mason: Hmm... and could you write each day then?

Jess: Oh yeah, yeah definitely

Mason: So do you think if it were 52 weeks a year you could?

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Jess: What write like that? I'd love to think that... it feels that it's a bit of a, you know, walking the tight-rope without the safety net. I'd love to say, "Yes definitely", but... but I'd love to try certainly but then that's not true because I love the other things that I do and it's the other things that I do that kind of generate the passion and the interest that I have in the writing so no, maybe no, not 52 weeks

Mason: I think that's the complex conundrum you see, is in a sense how fruitful are the other things we do, how much... so in a sense how much do they service our writing and I mean, I think I've given a simplistic view really to say that I'm constantly in high consciousness mode all that kind of bullshit that I gave you because I think the everyday world, all of the other things that I do and I'm pretty kind of active in research and supervision and other things... I think those are enormously important to me and as you can see I'm still doing them even now in my sixties so it must be so that for some reason, and it's not any longer just for money, I mean it never was in a way, so there must be a sense in which it's more complex than I'm saying. I think there is an ongoing conversation there, which is my writing but a question I would be asking is, "What is my data, what is servicing that writing?"

Jess: Yes

Mason: And I mean, I suppose one of the things I'm such an intrepid traveller... I mean, Maria and I have just come back from actually examining a PhD in Utrecht and we went round there and we went round Istanbul before for a conference... all of those things, I mean, I travel a lot, are also part of this, they seem to me to heighten one's both internal conversation and external conversation' cause you have great conversations when you travel, you know you travel, you meet the local intellectuals, you're forced to think about what's happening to Islamic society in Turkey and so on and so on and so on, so all of it in a way is data gathering behaviour. I don't see it like that but in truth it is, it's processing, it's giving you something to chew on, so I could never be the sort of person who goes to a room and you asked me earlier, "Why not that kind of writing?", I think that's the reason I think I need to chew on the real world all the time – I can't, I don't write out of my imagination, I couldn't, I wouldn't want to create an imaginary story. I want a story that's a story about what I'm seeing, about what I'm experiencing in the world and that's very different from creative writing in a sense, it's a particular kind of applied creative writing... it is creative, of course.

Jess: Yes, I mean people like David Hare would certainly say it's...

Mason: Yeah, and he researches in the same way, I mean Alex and I have read all his books about how he researches his stuff, both big fans... that's my son, really big fans of Hare, huge fans of David Hare's work, I like a lot of it and um... he does, basically does the same kind of research I do

Jess: Yeah, listening to people's stories, yeah...

Mason: And a lot of that is how you... I mean, another view is what I would describe is a kind of vernacular fascination, which is... I can't drive so I always go everywhere by train and bus and I remember being... actually I was thinking of it recently because I went to see... there was an Eastern European set of films on the Brighton Film Festival and Maria and I spent the summer of 1981 in Poland and joined the Solidarity Summit – probably the most interesting summer we've had as a couple – and I remember saying to her... we were on a bus with nearly 200 people, a bloody great Polish bus and I said this is the ultimate democratic experience, to be standing on a bus with a group of people and listening to all the conversations going on and some of them in English and I said, "This is just ecstasy" for a writer, to listen, to be amongst people like this. That's why I would never... I had this great conversation recently with a guy called Anselm Strauss, he's a well known, founded, grounded theorian [sic]... he's an American, bit like Studs Terkel and neither of them could drive a car and I was talking to Anselm about why so many social theorists don't drive even in America and it's to do with that, we decided a lot of the leading intellectuals in England, Basil Bernstein, Asa Briggs and so on do not drive and one of the reasons is that I think we're so wedded to the notion of, of living within vernacular space. For me, just coming in on the train this morning listening to the conversations, great, absolutely great... mobile phones make it even greater in a way, paradoxically, they intrude on my internal discourse but they, they constantly pepper that with "this is the way people are in the world at the moment", wonderful. So there's, there's something there about how you live in the world and how you... you know I think I've learnt most of what I've learnt is talking to people who aren't academics. I mean I don't know if you know Beth in the coffee bar here, but I've had some great chats with Beth about things...

Jess: She's moved to Cockcroft [*different University campus*] now, hasn't she?

Mason: Yeah, I really miss her, I miss her a lot, you know, on an everyday basis, always used to chat with her and I found it really life enhancing and I know that sounds odd but it isn't actually if you think it through...

Jess: It does... the only reason it sounds odd is because I was quite shocked when I came to the University about how – not all obviously – but how this kind of line between academic staff and non-academic staff, this kind of that... and again this kind of hierarchical system and I've got a couple of examples but I won't take up your time with them but I was quite shocked actually about how some of my colleagues um... looked down on people in, either working in catering or as caretakers or as anything else and I found that really upsetting... not upsetting actually just very distasteful I suppose

Mason: Well, I mean it's coming back now to some of the pompous things I was saying earlier, which is I would make a practice of crossing those boundaries and in front of academics who do that... confronting them with, with the fact that I value, you know, everybody basically um... and I cannot be having that. Every time I see

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that happen it pisses me off as much as it did 40 years ago... cannot be having that – there's nothing superior about an academic compared with Beth, absolutely nothing

Jess: But it's worrying, it's... I will tell you this one (sorry!)... a friend of mine was working in the Student Union coffee bar and I went in there and she says, "Oh, did you read that book I lent you?", and I said, "Oh yes, and yes I did" and we were having a conversation about it and she said, "Oh, I've got another book that you'd really enjoy" and the colleague I was with turned around and said to her, "Goodness me, what are doing reading all these books?", I was just kind of flabbergasted that someone would think, "you work in a café therefore you can't read books".

Mason: It just still makes me as furious as it did 40 years ago, because it's a constructed mentality and one of the questions would be, "How do you get creative writing or academic writing, which constantly challenges and sees through that folded lie", that's one of the folded lies that Auden's talking about, that somebody working in a different way doesn't have profound thoughts, doesn't theorise the world, doesn't see the world with as much clarity as some of these old fumble-bums [sic] that are academics, 'cause frankly I've met a lot of vernacular folk who are a bloody sight smarter than some of the people occupying academic positions... I mean, we could go on about that...

Jess: Hmm... no I agree and that it is very affirming um... and we're going to go back now to the, to the writing process, um... when you first sent your work off for – I mean, you've kind of answered this question already – your first experience of getting feedback, did any of those have a kind of... was it a largely positive feedback or did you have any experience where you thought, "Oh maybe this isn't going to be for me"?

Mason: [sigh] I suppose my first um... my first writing actually was, was for a PhD at [name of university and course] and I had two supervisors who both absolutely loathed working class students and just gave me absolute hell throughout the three years, they just wouldn't value anything. You could see that they had the view that we've just been talking about, that "what the hell's this gas fitter's son doing here, with his horrible accents, his Teddy Boy clothes (I was a Teddy Boy at the time)... how could he possibly be doing a PhD?" You know?

Jess: And how did that feel? I mean, you've said that you've never, that you've always felt that you've been able to deal with the academy on your own terms pretty much, but that must... did that undermine you, did that rock you a bit?

Mason: It was an agonising period, in that sense it did but it never shook my belief in my own intellectual capacities, to be honest with you, to be absolutely pompous, it did not shake that, I went through it. So that's the first bit of writing that was invalidated, um... academic procedural writing, which I hated. I went off to the back end of [name of place] to teach... actually teach kids in the estate where Jo Orton grew up to give you a literary tough overspill estate called the [inaudible] estate,

radical comprehensive school, best years for finding a voice they were, um... I was looking for a way to link at that time, I think, my internal exploration with a social project and that social project at that time was, you know, good times as I was saying earlier to find a social project linked to yourself, which comprehensive schooling the rest [sic] and immediately began to harness a voice with a social project and within a year I started to write about what I was doing with the kids and again, applied writing um... about urban studies and all sorts of other stuff, how you connect humour in the classroom, how you're embodied in the world, how you do what I've just described... how do you, how do you value all those kids and all their knowledge, which is not valued by the system? It's always been my thing, so I started to write, it just poured out of me in those years when I was a school teacher. I used to write in the evenings um... and wrote loads and loads of stuff, probably wrote more freely and easily about what was going on then, than I ever have done before or since and then um... by chance, actually, I mean, Maria and I had got married, she was a nurse in the village um... we moved to [inaudible] where I got another job in another interesting school and one day somebody said, "Have you seen that advertisement for Urban Studies at Sussex, um... as a two year researcher?" I said, "I'm not really interested", but I sent off an application, came for an interview and was offered a job. Then I started to do a PhD on something I really wanted to do and it wasn't because it was a PhD, I wasn't really wild about that, although I suppose there was some commitment to getting a further degree and that, to answer your question, that became my first book, that was a PhD with a very, very good supervisor um... at [inaudible], who's really excellent I'd say, a really affirming, thoughtful, unselfish academic and really a good experience. I mean, I was working at the time and I was working on a project so I did my PhD in three years, whilst I was working full-time um... and while starting a family as well so it was fairly tough time

Jess: Gives me lots of hope...

Mason: Yeah, you can do it, you can do it but yeah... so that became my first book and um... that did... the book went well. It's still in print actually and that's 27, well 1982 so that's quite a long time ago and it's gone through five, six different editions so my first book was reaffirming for me um... and within a year I'd been offered a professorship on the basis of it from a soft money, I was a research assistant that went straight through...

Jess: Straight in?

Mason: Yeah, and I think it was, to be honest, I look back and it was on the basis of that book...

Jess: And with the book did you feel that you were able to write in your own voice? Were you thinking of your kind of readership, were you thinking of, "I've got to write in a certain way in order to make sure this is right?" Or have you always been able to write in your own voice?

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Mason: No, I think that's a good question. I think it would be wrong to claim that's in my voice. I think the stuff that I wrote some of which got published when I was in [inaudible] was in my own voice... that was vernacular and writing um... but no, because it's, because it, you know, it was written for a PhD I had to adopt an alien voice in a way so, and to some extent that would always be true of applied writing I have to say, I mean, it's one of the reasons I probably write poetry and other... and journals is that that's actually where my voice, you know, my undiluted, internal voice is um, but...

Jess: But you don't publish in that voice?

Mason: Well, I do sometimes. I mean, I was just thinking, I was just thinking um... I don't know if I've got it but I think I have actually, but sometimes I write stuff like that, like bits out of journals and I use a lot of my journaling you see in my writing so if I was to give you one example... shall I give you an example?

Jess: Yes do. That would be great

Mason: Let me just quickly... extraction from a diary, 1973, and I'll go back to my old accent, "It was a staff party and each member of staff was asked to entertain for 15 minutes. The contributions were predictable, shop windowing the various talents of the professional community. The music teacher played a short piece on the cello, the English teacher read some of his own poems, a group of teachers presented a short play highlighting many staffroom jokes and rumours, the head made a short morale boosting speech and so on... shades of my speech day. In the middle however the light had gone down and a rock 'n' roll band started playing, heavy saxophone, subversive lyrics, some of the most troublesome pupils were playing on drums and guitar... three of the cutest girls were singing "Ooh", whilst at the side and there was singing, "Oh, my God", a teacher. After two songs, one of Little Richard and one of Larry Williams, the curtain closes. The school staff talk on in embarrassed whispers. It's as if an alien has visited. The tribe close ranks. The authenticity and excitement of alternative culture has been glimpsed then rapidly purged from memory. The staff party continues..." and I go on, it's a journal, you see?

Jess: That is...

Mason: Dark stuff, hey?

Jess: Well, actually quite sad as well, the idea of this teacher seeing... doing something that must have really inspired and motivated the students as well and for it to be greeted with this awkward reaction is tragic

Mason: Don't it ring true though, don't it?

Jess: Hmm... it does. Oh, I'm conscious of time, oh my goodness I really have been talking about... you were talking about the supervisor, I think at Sussex. Do you use... now do you use critical friends or do you give your work to other people

to read for feedback or do you, are you always quite confident to get on and do it without getting feedback?

Mason: You've guessed the answer haven't you, yeah?

Jess: Well, but has that always been the way?

Mason: Mmm...

Jess: Yeah, I'm starting to hate you a tiny smidgen now...

Mason: Yes, arrogant, pompous old fart! It has always been the way, I don't know... I've always been my own um... harshest critic, I suppose, and I've always trusted that, um... but it's not that I'm insensitive to feedback [*laughter*] but it's just that it's somehow not relevant

Jess: Do you think that you have a, that you always have an emotional link with what you're writing or are you able to be quite objective because this idea of it being quite exploratory and about it being about your place in the world and how you see things as well would make me think that there must be a kind of emotional link and yet there are other times when you talk about it and I think maybe there aren't?

Mason: I think there's a huge emotional link yeah. I would have thought for me it's um... it's massive emotional labour really, if you want the truth. It's psychological and emotional unpacking, unblocking um... so no I don't... I mean, I think I have a... again I think it's gender-driven, I have a cold, clinical rather masculine side to the way I do things but I think I have another side, I wouldn't call it feminine but it's highly, highly emotional and I think I'm a pretty emotional person actually um... in that sense so I regard it, a lot of it as emotional labour, yeah

Jess: That's interesting 'cause the only person who said it's just a job was a woman [*laughter*] so um... with that in mind, when you read pieces of academic writing for journals, do you read them and have a kind of sense of personal enjoyment or do you have a sense of what good writing is and that's the criteria you're looking for when you read other people's academic work?

Mason: I think it's something being said about the world, which is emotionally engaging and that you think will be emotionally engaging, so I think a lot of the criteria would be emotional actually since you've introduced it I think there's a strong element of that. Um... if a thing moves you and if the project moves you um... and of course if it's well done, I wouldn't suspend academic criteria so to speak

Jess: Right

Mason: Outsiders, um... yeah, definitely... I'm not interested in mainstream

Jess: Because they're the best writers?

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Mason: Well, because... I mean, I think there are two reasons, one of course is a social, socio-political project of trying to sponsor disadvantaged people (to put in over holy terms), the second one is that belief that the undiluted, the more undiluted vernacular voice is the emotionally engaging voice, not the overlaid, academic, dispassionate, de-contextualised, abstract voice which has no interest for me or most other people. In other words the process of becoming an academic is the process of purging the emotional, the personal and the meaningful in favour of the academic, the de-contextualised and the abstract. Who would want to become such a person I ask myself?

Jess: Some people do

Mason: Hmm... not thee, not me...

Jess: Yep. With that in mind, is there ever... do you ever read something and personally think, "Oh, I really like that but it wouldn't get into the, to the journal"? And what might be the reasons? Would it just be technical – that academic yard stick if you like?

Mason: Yeah. I mean, I think one of the things I haven't perhaps spelled out enough but is alongside this, um... writing... I mean, I do engage a lot actually, I mean, I'm on 27 editorial boards, I run four series of books, I ran for 25 years a large publishing company, [inaudible] Press...

Jess: No wonder you have to write in your sleep [*laughter*]

Mason: So, so to answer your question all of that is in a sense trying to honour the original process, which is if somebody um... writes something I value it will find its way out somewhere through that process. If the journals won't accept them I'll make bloody sure a publisher accepts them, so I've got a book at the moment on... somebody who's written a very poetic piece on life stories and human flourishing it's called um... and I'm really putting my mind to getting that out, 'cause she's written something with huge passion and I'll sweat blood to get that out because it's beautifully written, completely beyond academic criteria but passionate, passionate, emotionally engaged important stuff

Jess: So it's more that thing of being... I don't like to call you a gatekeeper but as a journal editor, publisher, you know it's that thing of rather than actually keeping, keeping the people on the margins out it's finding a way to let them in?

Mason: Absolutely, a key part of the role...

Jess: But that should be a key part of the role but you... relatively [*speaking*] I would think and this might be a naïve statement but I would think you were relatively unique in being a gatekeeper who's like that... I think the perception is that the gatekeepers are there to keep the barriers high

Mason: I think that's absolutely true indeed

Jess: I'm going to bring it to, well there's [sic] only two questions left. Do you feel that support for writing and writing development is as available at the University... I mean, you've kind of said how, that you know, how you see it, how it should happen but do you feel, you know, in terms of your own writing um... but do you think that there is that writing support and encouragement there?

Mason: Actually I'll give you an answer you might not expect, which is, I think Brighton's pretty sensitive about providing info structure, providing workshops, providing creativity moments – it scores pretty well actually

Jess: Hmm... but finding the time and space to write is really difficult and that, that can be a real hindrance on people's confidence and motivation to write but you don't feel that, that's a problem?

Mason: No, I don't but I'm mean – I'm sure I'm in a privileged position...

Jess: Is there anything you think could be done in order to support writing development but are there any other things you could think of that the academy could do?

Mason: Yeah. I mean, it seems to me one of the features of new university culture, which um... which makes it more difficult to encourage writing is firstly obviously a new university has come late to research culture generally so there's a sort of um... there's a sort of un-knowingness about research culture – how do you get people writing, reflecting and thinking because it's a terribly challenging thing to do? I mean, the last thing I would do would be to talk in the way I've talked to you about writing because um... to say this is how I write would be supremely unhelpful for most people in my view because it's just saying, "Well, for me it does [happen] relatively easy, I have an internal conversation and I'm quite privileged" Those are three messages I would never want to give to a new researcher because um... I know they'd be coming at it from a different place and I think I'd be able to empathise with that

Jess: Yeah, but I think there are things that you've said about um... of finding the confidence, of finding the voice to speak from the edges I think is actually very, um... inspiring. I think it's something that you can aspire to and not to worry about conforming to what we think the academy is looking for, what we think the journal editors are looking for but actually to try and deal with things on our own terms as well as being rigorous, as well as achieving these high standards.

Mason: I think, I mean all of that comes like, first find your voice would be my, basically my advice to anybody, first find your voice and probably find it as consistently with your vernacular internal self and your social project as you can. Later, much later think about how do I academicise [sic], dehumanise, de-contextualise and so on with this, because that's what you'll have to do but if you do that from a position of strength it doesn't cost you much, if you think from the beginning you've got to work your way up to an academic voice it's quite the wrong process, the sequence is the opposite – first find out who you are, what you want to say

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Jess: That's the end of the interview so, unless you've got anything that you that you'd like to add or anything that's occurred to you... but thank you so much, that was fantastic, I've really enjoyed it, I hope we can have another conversation like this when there's not a recorder [*laughter*]

Mason: No, of course we can, it would be nice

Jess: But thank you very much, that was terrific, thank you

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