Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain:

Lifting the veil on primary academisation

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This research will examine the impact academy conversion has had on a primary school in England, relived through the eyes of the school's Headteacher. It will consider the process of transformation as a journey, beginning with the plans, hopes and intentions of the school leadership team as they first considered a change in legal status through to the lived in reality of running an academy and how this compares to the initial promised freedoms and optimistic hopes.

Using the film 'The Wizard of Oz' as a vehicle to drive the narrative onwards, the characters and their story are interwoven with lived-out experiences and unpacked through an autoethnographic methodology. This process of reviewing academisation through the lens of research participator offers a new contribution to a growing field of research into the impact of government academy policy on the English education system. Viewing the journey from state school to academy through the uneasy psychoanalytical bedfellows of Lacan and Jung enables underlying tensions and powerful archetypal imageries to be explored but not resolved.

Threaded throughout the thesis is a recognition of the presence of neoliberal policy behind current Department for Education (DfE) policy (the man behind the curtain) alongside a critique of the quasi-religious rhetoric spun around the push for schools to 'convert'. This thesis aims to raise more questions than those it answers, recognising the tension that always already exists between those who believe in the existence of one truth and those for whom truth is a relativist matter.

Introduction

This thesis will examine the impact academy conversion has had on a primary school in a deprived coastal town in the south of England, relived through the eyes of the school's Head teacher. It will consider the process of transformation as a journey, beginning with the plans, hopes and intentions of the school leadership team as they first considered a change in legal status through to the lived in reality of running an academy and how this compares to the initial promised freedoms and optimistic hopes. The 1933 film 'The Wizard of Oz', based on the 1900 story by Frank L. Baum, is employed as a vehicle to drive the narrative onwards[1]. The characters and their story are interwoven with lived-out experiences and unpacked through an autoethnographic methodology. This process of reviewing academisation through the lens of research participator offers a new contribution to a growing field of research into the impact of the government academy policy on the English education system. Viewing the journey from state school to academy through the uneasy psychoanalytical bedfellows of Lacan and Jung enables underlying tensions and powerful archetypal imageries to be explored but not resolved.

In this picture we see Dorothy and friends at the point of recognising that the Wizard of Oz, in whom they had placed all their hope and trust, is not a wizard at all but an ordinary man operating machinery from behind a curtain that created the illusion of an all-powerful entity. What we can't see – what is just off to the right of the curtain – is Dorothy's pet dog, Toto,

[1] The Wizard of Oz was the theme I used for my presentation at interview when I applied for the role of Head teacher at Yellow Brick Primary and shaped the vision I shared in those first days as leader.

who dragged the curtain to one side thus revealing the fakery the friends now confront. Symbolically we have a representation of heart (Tin man), mind (Scarecrow) and courage (Lion) partnered with Dorothy's strong desire to return home. Toto can be seen to represent an aspect of Dorothy – her inner wisdom perhaps or her soul – which serves to expose the fantasies of a system set up to perpetuate dreams and force her to confront reality once the veil is lifted. The metaphor expressed here represents a summary of the essence of my research. I hope to recreate the story of a journey that started from a place of hope and innocence and, through a series of tests and challenges, culminated in a more enlightened understanding of previously accepted realities. The veil I seek to lift (or the curtain I wish to drag aside) is heavily embroidered with unquestioned 'truths' around education, including what is promoted as universally good by a neoliberal Department for Education (DfE) that strongly favours blanket academisation of our schools.

Contribution to knowledge and practice

Very little literature exists that examines the journey from state primary school to academy from an inside perspective. More literature is beginning to emerge around the pressure on primary schools to convert (Mansell, 2016; Faris, 2022) and discourse exists critiquing the suitability of this change of status for schools that introduce children to their earliest formal educational experiences. Sharing this process of transformation from a bricolage of personal recollections, journal notes, policy documents and private correspondence of a Head teacher invested in academisation offers unique insight in and reflection on this system change.

Another contribution my thesis will make is through the methodology employed. Autoethnography has not yet been used to examine the journey of a school towards academisation. Reflexively analysing this process as an insider who lived through the experience and felt the impact of the change of status will add to knowledge and hopefully contribute to more considered consultations for future primary schools. I was drawn to autoethnography as it offered a hearts and minds approach to research that appealed to my desire for congruency (Sparkes, 2007; Bochner, 2014) and because I felt I had a relevant and

timely story to tell – conditions that sit within Tracy's (2010, p.840) first criterion of having a 'worthy topic'.

Equally important was the opportunity theory presented for unwrapping the layers of perceived and contested truths that have formed around the academy agenda. Building on and extending the diverse psychoanalytical concepts of Lacan as applied to education and exploring Jung enabled a deep introspection on the personal impact of the process (through the four discourses) and the ripple effect of the strong subconscious, archetypal images that form part of the academy agenda. Using Tarot as an additional visual hook underpins the Jungian imagery and provides another unique lens.

Research aim

Much of the writing around academisation in English schools focuses on the political and temporal impact within a society where neoliberal values have silently permeated accepted understandings of how schools are led (Gunter, 2011; Benn and Downs, 2016; Kulz, 2017). There have been bird's eye view accounts of the government's agenda to change the legal status of all schools (Beckett, 2007) with analysis of the reasons why and lamentation for the loss of autonomy in state education (Shah, 2018). There have been interviews with staff on the ground in schools that chose to academise and accounts of those who have turned their backs on this decision despite pressure from their closest group of peers (Rayner et al, 2018). Policy has been critiqued (Ball, 2011) and data comparisons made between schools pre and post conversion (Wrigley, 2011). More recent journal articles reference primary school autonomy (Boyask, 2018 and Faris, 2022) and the limited difference this makes to learning outcomes (Eyles, Machin and McNally, 2016), the differences between pre and post 2010 academies (Eyles, Machin and Silva, 2018) and the loss of legal and financial autonomy for academies within a MAT (West and Wolfe, 2019).

What is noticeable in the available literature is a lack of voice from those at the heart of decision-making. There does not appear to be research sited inside a school that is changing status, or that considers questions such as:

- What hopes and challenges are faced by a school considering becoming an academy? What set of circumstances impact on the decision to convert?

- How is the shift in status managed and how do subsequent policy changes unfold over time as a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) grows and more schools join the group?

Considering this led to a deep reflection on the experience I lived through as a Head teacher of a converting primary and founding member of a new MAT. As I noticed the policy shifts, changes in practice and subtle binding mechanisms of power as they infiltrated each school, I realised that research on the academy process from within the system was needed. Further questions occurred to me very early in this journey:

- Is it possible to create a MAT based on open, transparent and morally congruent values and ensure these values are lived into being as the MAT inevitably develops and grows?

- What are the hidden influences that operate the backroom machinery of the MAT and determine the direction of travel?

- What is the impact of the decision to academise – not on performance data, written policy or politics, but on the people involved: school leaders, teachers, children and communities?

In summary, my motivation to write this thesis and my overarching research aim lies with the human impact of the Government's academisation agenda. I hope to reveal the road to academisation as travelled, with a clear mapping out of key landmarks and potential hazards to avoid, in order to enable schools to make a better-informed decision about their future direction. My writing is peppered with moments of reflexivity, as I recall how the journey unfolded and reflect in the present moment on the impact of each past event. Think of it, if you will, as a 'Trip Advisor' review of the academisation process, with the intention of providing guidance from a place of experience before the suitcase has been packed.

Chapter 1 - An impending storm

Winds of change

In the film, 'The Wizard of Oz' we first meet the central character, Dorothy Gale, an orphan living a humble life with her aunt, uncle and pet dog Toto on their Kansas farm. These first scenes are shot in monochrome: a reflection of the greyness and humdrum monotony of Dorothy's existence. She longs for change and dreams of escape from a world where her bullying neighbour, Miss Gulch, threatens cruelty to her beloved pet. As Rushdie notes in his book on the film, Dorothy's surname denotes a force to be reckoned with:

> Dorothy has a surname: Gale. And in many ways Dorothy is the gale blowing through this little corner of nowhere. She demands justice for her little dog while the adults give in meekly to the powerful Miss Gulch (2012, p.17).

The use of wind as a metaphor for change continues with the impending storm that gathers pace around Dorothy, who sings dreamily about a land she has heard of and longs to fly to, a land that exists beyond the rainbow, a land where 'skies are blue and the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true' (Langley et al., 1989, p.39). She is wistful and portrays an innocent yearning for a better life than the daily grind she currently experiences. We can see the dark clouds gathering behind Dorothy, who is currently oblivious to the force of the storm that is about to impact her, even though '[i]t is out of this greyness – the gathering, cumulative greyness of that bleak world – that calamity comes' (Rushdie, 2012, p.17). As

Dorothy sings, she leans on the wheel of a cart – a symbol of The Wheel of Fortune[2] that spins its slow cycle, leading inevitably to a change in circumstance: what goes up must come down and what has descended to the bottom must, in time, rise again.

The lack of colour at the start of the film is relevant to this chapter as it depicts bygone moments of time, captured like archived images lacking in sentient emotion. As Head teacher of a successful community primary school, I allowed my head to turn in the direction of academisation, curious about the freedoms it proffered. Like Dorothy, I became caught in an iridescent daydream of a better future and, with my head in the clouds, did not think it necessary to look over my shoulder and really study the skies that held such dark promises. Instead, I now research the trajectory of academisation in retrospect, wishing I had had the foresight to do this before yet also recognising that travelling through the eye of the storm shaped my ability to understand things differently.

A step back in time

Yellow Brick Primary School, the focus of this thesis (and at which I was Head), converted to academy status and formed part of a new Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) in September 2016. In the English education system, a Multi-Academy trust is a group of schools that have come together to form 'one legal entity, with one set of trustees' (West and Wolfe, 2019, p.74). For Yellow Brick Primary School, the school name, uniform, logo, and leadership titles remained the same and the intention to make a significant legal transition without impacting on the day-to-day organisation of the school was viewed as having been successful. The main anticipated change included the source of funding, which would come direct from the Government instead of via the Local Authority (LA):

> Academies are publicly funded but, unlike maintained schools, they are independent of local authorities. They have more freedoms, for example in setting staff pay and conditions and determining their own curriculum (House of Commons, 2018, n.p.).

[2] The Wheel of Fortune is the tenth card in the tarot deck, representing the constancy of change alongside the whimsical impact of chance on each life as it unfolds. The concept of tarot as a symbolic medium for highlighting and interpreting key events in this thesis is explored further in Chapter 6.

Academies were introduced by David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education (1997-2001), under the Labour Government in 2000 as 'city academies' with the original intent of tackling social injustice. City academies were schools that became 'owned and run by not-for-profit private trusts (exempt charities) that register as companies with Companies House and are subject to company law' (West and Wolfe, 2019). Sponsorship was originally sought from businesses to provide £2 million per school, with the rest coming from Government. Hardly any sponsors paid this in hard cash but in kind, for services to the schools (Beckett, 2007). By September 2002 there were 3 academies in England and by 2004, 17. They were all secondary schools. The then Labour Government set a target of 200 by 2010, by which time that indiscriminate wheel of fortune had turned once more and we had a Conservative-led coalition Government in place. What did they make of the city academies agenda?

The growth of academies across England can be seen to represent the privatisation of local schools by stealth, as articulated by Benn based on the coalition government's educational reforms:

> Probably the most significant development in the new schools' revolution is the massively expanded role it will give to the private sector … Several companies already run schools in England and many more provide important services to them. With the new free schools and academies, the door is wide open to the expansion of the market. Yet one would scarcely know it from public debate on education. Unsurprisingly, little reference is made … to the growing private control of public education, or to the cost of this to the taxpayer who is, in effect, underwriting the latest round of privatisation of state education (2012, p.25).

In Kultz's view, post 2010 academisation, 'altered the rationale behind New Labour's original policy, shifting funding away from poorer areas and creating an opening for wholesale privatisation' (2017, p.12). This change in legislation opened doors to the new freedoms of academy status for all outstanding primary schools (followed by those graded 'good' in 2011), who could choose to 'convert' - a new legal term (West and Wolfe, 2019) - to academy status. These 'converter' academies differed from their poorer cousins (the 'sponsored' academies) with the former representing high-performing, stable schools and the latter, failing schools who require support from a sponsor to enable them to raise

standards (Eyles et al., 2017). An air of celebration and references to champagne corks popping accompanied press reports of the first primary school conversions in 2010, underwritten by a deeper suspicion of Government motives linked to changes in school funding, governance and accountability (Tickle, 2010). The school featured in *The Guardian's* article on early primary convertors (Goddard Park Community Primary School) had achieved an inspection grading of 'outstanding' from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) whilst serving a community with a high proportion of disadvantaged families. The Head teacher, who at that time chaired the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), countered challenges to the view that academisation was a selfish act for advantaged schools based on financial gains and argued instead for the collaborative benefits to schools:

> [The Head teacher] is convinced that in a time of austerity, local authorities' capacity to serve schools well is likely to be reduced; he says schools can learn, with support from more experienced colleagues, to commission services better. He doesn't have carte blanche – his governors, he says, will hold him tightly to account and meetings are planned to work out evaluation and reporting criteria (Tickle, 2010, n.p.).

A glance at the school's current website tells a tale of continued success. The same Head teacher is in post and academic results are strong. This is an example of a stand-alone converter academy (a single academy trust) and, as such, it has full access to freedoms linked to budget and curriculum that schools who converted as part of a MAT are not fully privy to. Indeed, those schools that form a MAT 'no longer exist as legal entities and cannot – at the initiative of the head teacher or local governing body – leave the MAT' (West and Wolfe, 2018), but more of this later.

A neoliberal dream?

Academisation could be considered a hybrid monster that occupies space between education and industry – claiming to capitalise on the virtues of both whilst drawing on the strengths of neither. It draws in hopeful yet hapless schools that become caught between this modern-day Scylla and Charybdis. Will schools pull together, row quickly as a team and

pass through the strait unscathed or will they veer too close to either beast and end up crushed by the many gaping jaws of one or sucked into the swirling depths of the other? It frequently falls to school leaders to navigate their way through the legalities and political sensitivities linked to changing the status of their schools whilst clinging on to a belief that this is a journey towards the moral good. Like the proverbial Good Shepherd, school leaders take on responsibility for their flock and are judged on how well this is managed:

> As an educational problem, the paradoxical equivalence of all sheep generates a dilemma that remains with us to this day. The care of all and each, the holding to account of educator to his actions as viewed through the lens of his pupils, the assumption that he will if necessary be their sacrificial victim, haunts education still. For the shepherd and educator whose *raison d'être* is to guide and protect, whose salvation depends on the success of his good work, this paradox becomes a source of considerable unsettlement (Allen, 2017, p.67).

It is this drive to care, to guide and to protect that sustains leaders as they steer their schools towards a change in status. With the time and energy the 'care of all and each' takes, it is unsurprising there is little room for deep research prior to considering academisation.

An underlying concern around covert privatisation continues to resonate today within a context where school leaders choosing to academise do so with little or no awareness of the neoliberal ideology that permeates their decision. Much of this unawareness is situated in neoliberalism's hegemony and our acceptance of it as the 'common sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (Harvey, 2005, p.3). For the purpose of this thesis, neoliberalism refers to the creeping market forces that work in the shadows to shape our environment and world view. Hidden within those shadows operate those individuals who *are* aware of the power they can accumulate as they race to build empires of docile and compliant schools. Reay puts this across more bluntly:

> English education is being reconstructed to fit the values of an elite, mostly privately educated group of men with free-market, small state beliefs, and neo-liberal values of competition, self-reliance and individualism (2022, p.134).

In Lacanian terms, neoliberalism operates in ways that reflect the 'big Other'. It exists behind the scenes and is always present:

> [T]he big Other can be personified or reified in a single agent: the 'God' who watches over me from beyond, and over all real individuals, or the Cause that involves me … While talking, I am never merely a 'small other' (individual) interacting with other 'small others': the big Other must always be there (Žižek, 2006, p.9).

With this view of neoliberalism as behaving rather like an omnipotent, invisible deity, we become the unwitting members of the congregation, accepting capitalism as the norm and living 'always "on the clock," always accruing (or squandering) various forms of financial and social capital' (Kotsko, 2018, p.6). Again, Harvey pinpoints what makes a neoliberal society tick whilst casting a sideways glance at the large, financially-driven corporations who promote this ideology:

> Neoliberals are particularly assiduous in seeking the privatization of assets … Sectors formally run or regulated by the state must be turned over to the private sphere and be deregulated (freed from any state interference) (2005, p.65).

An inevitable consequence of academisation is the deregulation of schools. The redirection of funds for academies has impacted negatively on Local Authority budgets, leading to less direct involvement in schools and more, 'business-like relationships of supply, consumption or brokerage' (Boyask, 2018, p.109). Academy schools, as companies and charitable trusts, are no longer controlled by LAs (Greany, 2015) nor are they cared for by them. Benn and Downs articulate ten ways in which LAs actively support their schools, including coordinating admissions, offering a range of services, auditing accounts, holding schools to account whilst also offering them protection. Without the hub and expertise of the LA, schools can miss out on vital assistance based on a 'detailed knowledge of the local scene' (Benn and Downs, 2016, p.38). Indeed, this splintering of relationships between academies and LAs adds to the patchwork effect of our current education system and leads, Reay argues, to a crisis point:

> The policy of academisation … is essentially a policy of privatisation, but, as yet, without the legal right to make a profit, handing over the running of previously state-run schools to the private sector. It is also simultaneously a process of corporatisation in which schools are increasingly run like businesses rather than public services (2022, p.135).

Schools, like businesses, appear to have greater choice than ever before in terms of procurement of services and seeking value for money. Where the LA is not seen to be delivering a quality provision, Head teachers and Governors in both maintained and academy schools can look elsewhere for core services. The days of local authorities acting as the main hub for operational and educational school support appear to be numbered.

The growth of the academies programme since 2010 has led to an increasingly fractured system of schooling across England, with parents of primary children facing a choice between state-maintained community primaries, church schools (including voluntary aided or voluntary controlled), faith schools (including Roman Catholic), free schools, special schools, independent (fee paying) schools or academies (stand alone, part of a Multi-Academy Trust (or Chain), sponsored or convertor) (Ball, 2018). This choice can seem bewildering and yet in reality is limited depending on where children live: not all categories of school are geographically accessible or reputationally desirable. As Burgess et al. (2011, p.531) observe, 'using proximity as the main criterion to determine access to most schools affects pupils' probability of securing a place at a particular school', particularly when the local school is oversubscribed (Eyles et al., 2018). Understanding this array of educational establishments is not an easy task and, alongside considering Ofsted rankings, league tables for test results and the school's local reputation, it becomes easier to see how academisation has, on the whole, been accepted (or assimilated without question) as part and parcel of the landscape on offer. As incisively described by Ball, this is our current educational state of play:

> Rather than a system we have … a rickety, divided, unstable, and often ineffective, but nonetheless overbearing, educational apparatus. This apparatus is currently held tenuously together by a regime of testing and league table reporting that puts pressure on schools … [who] are incited to compete with one another to drive up

> student performance and extract maximum outcome value from students. This is the basis for what coherence there is, a form of performance management derived from business practices rather than educational principles (2018, p.208).

It is beneath the mists surrounding and concealing such neoliberal ideologies that business practices posing as excellence in education are enabled to take root and grow. Pondering on the resigned acceptance of academisation across England (notwithstanding some well-publicised campaigns to prevent individual schools from having to convert - see www.antiacademies.org.uk), I wondered how it transpired that academies, a new breed of school, became embedded in our collective understanding of what a school *is.* Which led me to Jung.

A collective unconscious

Stepping into the psychoanalytical world of Jung's theory of the collective unconscious corresponds with another moment in the first pewter-coloured scenes in 'The Wizard of Oz'. Having decided to run away from home to safeguard Toto, Dorothy meets the mysterious Professor Marvel by the roadside. When he consults his crystal ball, Marvel instructs Dorothy to 'close your eyes, my child, for a moment … in order to be better in tune with the infinite …' (Langley et al., 1989, p.46). The film script clearly depicts Marvel as a quack. He rummages in Dorothy's basket and bases his foresight on a photograph he finds there. However, his grasp of Dorothy's situation accurately perceives her emotional state without the need for psychic devices:

> PROFESSOR MARVEL … you're … you're … *running away!*
>
> DOROTHY How did you guess?
>
> PROFESSOR MARVEL Ha, ha! Professor Marvel never guesses – he *knows*! Heh, heh! Now, *why* are you running away? (Langley et al., 1989, pp.44-45).

The script continues with Marvel 'knowing' why Dorothy has chosen to flee (nobody understands or appreciates her) and choosing to employ his fortune telling 'gift' to redirect her to a place of safety ahead of the storm. It is in these empathic exchanges that the real

alchemy occurs. Marvel successfully reads Dorothy's turmoil (teenage angst?) and reveals a richer intuition and understanding, beyond his present personal circumstance, with which he is very much in tune. For Jung, this example of deep knowing reflects the collective unconscious:

> I have chosen the term "collective" because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals … and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us' (Jung, 1968, pp.3-4).

What Jung is describing here are the universal, primitive patterns of thought, feelings, behaviour or representations (both conscious and unconscious) that share commonalities with all who are 'capable of consciousness' (Jung, 1968, p.4). It is within this shared, collective unconscious that archetypes reside. For Jung, an archetype is a hypothetical model that represents a collective understanding of a form:

> The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear (Jung, 1968, p.5).

Archetypes can be represented symbolically and are often understood intuitively. They frequently share imagery that holds meaning across time and cultures. An example of this is the archetype of the mother, which has a universal meaning yet a deeply personal interpretation for every one of us. So, what has this got to do with the nature of schools?

When we think of a school, an image may come to mind of a generic building, rather like the ubiquitous clip art icon of a symmetrical schoolhouse with a bell and a line of children waiting patiently to go inside. We may experience instead a range of emotions linked to our personal experience of school and the accompanying pictorial memories, like a slide show of past events. These may be positive, warm remembrances or shadowy pools we would rather not disturb. Just like 'mother' will stir a myriad of unique responses within us linked

to that one universal concept, 'school' also exists as an archetypal pattern of energy that we each have a relationship with:

> The concept of the archetype, which is an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere' (Jung, 1968, p.42).

When we consider the categories of school currently servicing the educational needs of English children, we have those that fit tidily into our accepted, instinctive understanding of what a school is and those that do not. Take for example the independent (fee-paying) school. This may suggest, depending on your personal experience, a notion of privilege: images of rote learning with children obediently seated in rows wearing blazered uniforms within magnificent buildings on landscaped lawns that ooze tradition and heritage. Shift to a large, urban comprehensive. What do you notice? Now a village primary school? Or an inner-city junior school? Each of these school types will enter our conscious thought with accompanying insights and assumptions based on a conflation of information harvested over our years of existence and, referencing Jung, springing from a deeper unconscious knowing of what each of these represent as a 'prototype or primordial image' (1968, p.75). And what if we apply this theory to academies? What archetypal images come to mind?

Academy as an archetype

Let us start with the name: Academy. Examining the etymology of academy leads us to the Greek *akadēmeia*, referencing the grove where Plato taught his students. This place of learning was named after an ancient hero, Akademos, who earned the right to freedom of speech (including hubris without revenge, should he dare speak ill of the gods) within the confines of this garden gifted to him in return for doing the great sun god, Apollo, a favour. I find a curious irony in this myth, which Brin refers to as, 'the earliest allegory about Free Speech' (1998, n.p.) and from within which the first seeds of democratic expressions of shared knowledge, openness and debate were dispersed. It seems as if the ancient gods are again up to their usual tricks: naming schools 'academies', promising increased freedoms without retribution whilst snorting in delight as the mortals they toy with slowly recognise the Trojan Horse this represents.

Shah suggests that in the UK, 'for the majority of people, the term 'academy' will conjure up an image of excellence and elitism' (2018, p.217). Glatter goes further and suggests the private school sector is an influencing factor on the English education system:

> Some of the brands, notably 'academy', 'foundation' and 'trust', evoke a sense of traditionalism, solidity and individuality and imply, like private schools, control by the owners or trustees and the market …' (2011, cited in Gunter, 2011, p.161).

Beckett mockingly wonders what aspirational titles subsequent governments may foist upon our schools, noting the 'creeping gentrification' of these names and putting a punt on 'conservatoires' (2007, p.10). Yet, as Shakespeare wrote in Romeo and Juliet, 'What is in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.' Does it matter what is said on the tin if the contents match? It depends on whether you are willing to lift the lid and look beyond the label. The decision to stamp schools as academies can be seen as a deliberate effort to add spin to the process. 'Spin, or less pejoratively news management and presenting government policy' (Seldon, 2007, p.82) formed a crucial role in the New Labour government strategy (c.1994 – 2010) and was employed to mask the undesirable elements of public-facing policy with clever rebranding. Think of it as akin to a political Fairy Godmother waving her magic wand over Cinderella's rags and pronouncing a 'happy ever after' ending based on the sparkly new dress and glass slippers. She looks like a good princess, so she must be one. Image matters in the marketing world and academies, as schools-as-businesses, buy into the allure of the glossy brochure, the shiny corporate building and the glimmering rhetoric of spin. More importantly, so do many of their customers. As Beckett recognised:

> The trouble with writing about academies is that they are shape-shifters ... Every time you think you've understood exactly what they are, and can form a view about it, the government shifts the goalposts (2011, cited in Gunter, 2011, p.xx).

Such chameleon-like abilities serve a two-fold purpose. One is that academies cannot easily be pinned down. They represent a merging of state and independent systems that leads to 'the normalisation of the private provision of education for all' (Gunter and McGinity, 2014, p.18). Another is that they act like mirrored surfaces, reflecting back onto the observer their

expectations around what constitutes a good education and offering access to a utopian dream of fee-paying school standards funded by the taxpayer. Allen challenges us to consider what this notion of good within education is:

> In a pre-modern context, the educational good is postponed yet affirmed. It seduces but never delivers. It is as fervently believed as it is cloaked, operating a system that ties its pursuers to an educational path along which hope is forced but never realised. It ensnares the educated and those about to be educated. It attaches its victims to an educational promise that remains forever empty (2017, p.57).

All such dualities are useful in the context of creating an 'academy' archetype and the drive towards a desperate but never realised hope echoes Lacanian lack. By intentionally interweaving the visible, symbolic aspects of an academy, the cloak Allen describes, (state of the art buildings, branded signage, slick marketing banners, 'business wear' uniform) with long-established patterns or traditions linked to schooling (formal, didactic learning, strong discipline, drilled respect, fear of authority), we can accept this newcomer without prejudice because its blueprint *already exists* within our collective psyche. For Clarke, the blazers, ties and zero tolerance are the blueprint of a neoconservative regime (2022, p.3). Within this example, Jung's understanding of archetypes overlaps with symbolic identities in Lacanian theory:

> [T]he symbolic order is the structure supporting and regulating the visible world. As the realm of language, it structures our experience, providing not only the words we use to describe ourselves and our world, but also the very identities we take up as our own (McGowan, 2007, p.3).

Words act as valuable currency in the creation of academisation as a system. How academies are described (both in their own literature and by the media) builds their identity whilst also serving as a form of sheep's clothing, reassuring parents that this type of school is not only desirable but comfortingly familiar. Rizvi and Lingard discuss such social imaginary as 'a way of thinking shared in a society … a common understanding' (2010, p.34) which is embedded in everyday life and resonates strongly with Jungian archetypes:

> A social imaginary is thus carried in images, myths, parables, stories, legends and other narratives and most significantly, in the contemporary era, the mass media as well as popular culture. It is through this shared social imaginary that relations and sociability among strangers within and across societies become possible (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p.34).

And yet a dichotomy exists. Some academies are simply more desirable than others. With the 2016 Education and Adoption Act, 'all schools rated "inadequate" by Ofsted … have to become an academy' (Shah, 2018, p.219). At the same time, schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' continue to choose academisation in a bid for greater freedom, the promise of more capital and a move away from perceived Local Authority control. Yellow Brick Primary School sits within this category.

The power of image

At the time of writing, 39% of English primary schools are academies (Plaister, 2022) educating 40% (over 1.4 million) of our youngest children. Out of the 6,822 open primary academies listed in March 2023, almost a quarter are sponsored (DfE, 2023). Judged as failing schools with low academic attainment, the sponsored academy is reputationally the poor relation of the convertor, yet they share the same family name. Awareness of the subtle differences between categories of academy may not be fully appreciated by parents but they are understood by the schools themselves. Ironically, although they are perceived as impoverished, sponsored academies have access to larger start up grants than their converting cousins. DfE guidance for potential sponsors outlines grants ranging from £70K (for a fast track primary) to £110k (for a fully sponsored school) and explains that '[t]he funding will be paid directly to ATs who will then decide how best to use the funds to deliver their project. Any unspent funds will be transferred by the AT to the academy's bank account upon opening' (DfE, 2016a, p.4). Academy Trusts (ATs) who agree to take on a failing school can spend this grant on set up costs (up to £25k, which matches the grant converting schools receive) and on school improvement interventions. The sub-categorisation of schools requiring sponsorship are divisions allocated by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)[3].

[3] RSCs were rebranded Regional Directors in 2022.

These are, ‘fast track’, ‘intermediate’ or ‘full’ sponsored academy. The categorisation of the school is determined by how much support the RSC believes the school needs to secure improvement’ (Browne Jacobson, 2016). Those schools classed as requiring full sponsorship are awarded the largest grants, with access also granted to an additional ‘Environmental Improvement Grant’ (£40k for primaries):

> Environmental improvements are light capital works intended to have an impact on pupil learning spaces and to make a visual statement that the ‘old school’ has become an academy. Funding for environmental improvements is primarily intended to be used as light refurbishment works that make an immediate impact only (DfE, 2016a, p.20).

The power of image underpins this need to titivate school buildings in order to create the right impression of what an academy should look like and is considered critical enough to encourage the DfE to open its purse strings. The described ‘light refurbishments’ include:

> New signage external and internal to show that the predecessor school has become an academy … Refurbishment of the reception areas and student entrances … Improvements to learning spaces … or to communal resource areas such as the library … Improvements to shared spaces, particularly dining areas and toilets … Redecoration and new finishes to improve the general appearance of the buildings (DfE, 2016a, p.20).

This list focuses heavily on the public and shared areas of the school. The terms of the grant will not allow for major structural works or urgent health and safety or maintenance issues. These remain the responsibility of the ‘maintaining authority’, which could be the school itself, the Local Authority or the Diocese. The impression created is one in which the DfE provides money for new academies to create an expensive façade, one that will cover up the ‘old school’ and its associated weaknesses, in the hope that an external, physically visible transformation will lead to improvements within the school that ‘will be of greatest benefit to pupils’ (DfE, 2016a, p.21). It is again a glass slipper strategy: placing faith (and tax-payers’ money) in the power of the make-over and praying that, when the clock strikes twelve, the illusion lingers and the rags of yesterday are not revealed. Again, a contrast exists between

schools who have no choice but to academise and those that choose to. If your school is already judged to be successful, has a strong staff team, supportive governors and parents and happy children who make progress in learning, then why bother changing? To answer this question we must return to Dorothy who, having been blown there by a tornado, finds herself preparing for a journey in the colourful Land of Oz.

Chapter 2 - Follow the Yellow Brick Road

An empty vessel

In order to unpick the process of consultation prior to converting to academy status and analyse the impact of the winds of change on the school community (including the staff, children and leaders) I will draw on the unlikely combination of change management theory and Lacanian concepts around desire. I have no personal investment in theories of change management yet find them an interesting insight into the corporate world of schools-as-academies and how leaders are expected to assimilate the language of the business world into education practice[4]. The consultation process was the start of our journey towards academisation and represented a time of great optimism for school leaders and community members. Different opinions were considered, and expert advice followed, culminating in the legal conversion of Yellow Brick Primary School from maintained to academy status. It represented a time of innocence, of hope and of faith when, like Dorothy, I faced making an important decision and felt I needed to rely on the guidance of those around me (when perhaps that little voice of wisdom within might have been better heeded):

> Armed only with her look of wide-eyed innocence, she must be the object of the film as well as the subject, must allow herself to be the empty vessel that the movie slowly fills (Rushdie, 2012, p.28).

[4] An interesting part of my recent study for the National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership (NPQEL) is the huge emphasis placed on learning how to run schools as businesses; it is the training designed for future CEOs.

Rushdie's description here resonates strongly with the role I played as Head teacher within the conversion process. At times I was the object, the pawn being moved across the chess board whilst avoiding upsetting the Bishop (particularly important when the Church of England became involved). At other times I became the subject: the person speaking and being spoken about, dealt with and portrayed to the DfE in order to be considered a *good enough* leader of a *good enough* school for the privilege of receiving academy status. And, at all times, the 'empty vessel': hearing no evil, speaking no evil, seeing no evil and allowing no preconceived beliefs to interfere with the new knowledge being written on my perfectly blank slate. This emptiness is what Lacan would consider to be an important element of fantasy, realised through attempting to become that which others desire, within an overarching aim of fulfilling what is yearned for personally:

> The original question of desire is not directly 'What do I want?', but 'What do *others* want from me? What do they see in me? What am I for those others?' (Žižek, 2006, p.49).

Here Žižek articulates the role of desire in Lacanian theory as something external, something beyond oneself that is yearned for: the approval of the other. Through meeting the assumed needs of those we wish to please we believe our sense of inadequacy will be mollified. We cannot ask what we want or need to fulfil our independent desires. We can only hope to know that what we are (or who we appear to be) fulfils the wants and needs of others. We are only ever a mirrored surface upon which a fantasy unfolds. The gap therefore between the desired goal of academisation and a need to meet others' desires (in order to be granted academy status) created a tension that became the tightrope upon which I tried to walk. Ultimately, taking those first few steps towards becoming an academy seemed to lead to a solid path of processes and procedures coupled with a multitude of meetings and paperwork that combined to serve as a distraction from the sheer drop that would be revealed should I dare glance down at my feet. Unlike Dorothy, fancy footwear was not the order of the day for the journey ahead. I was going to need a head for heights, a strong sense of balance and an understanding that, this time, safety nets would not be provided.

A technicolour fantasy

Returning momentarily to the film, we find ourselves at the point where Dorothy's ruby slipper-clad feet take their first tentative steps on the yellow brick road towards the Emerald City. In the original 1900 book, Baum chose the colour silver for his heroine's shoes. As Rushdie explains, 'Baum believed that America's [economic] stability[5] required a switch from gold to the silver standard, and the Shoes were a metaphor of the magical advantages of silver' (2012, p.16). This allegorical interpretation resonates with the current educational shift in England from an established silver standard (a democratic, Local Authority model, common to and accessible by all) to that of desired gold (a more selective academies system with schools run on a business model). As is suggested by Jahangir, '[t]he possible implication is that gold alone cannot be the solution for the problems facing the average citizen' (2009, n.p.). Equally, how can we be sure that the government's push for academisation of all schools will provide the panacea for the issues we face in education today? Issues which include the ever-widening gap in progress and achievement between those labelled disadvantaged or vulnerable and those who are already immersed in a culture that enables (entitles?) them to succeed.

Nevertheless, in the film Dorothy finds herself wearing 'the immortal jewel-shoes' (Rushdie, 2012, p.16) and we know we are now in a different world than that of dreary Kansas, where Dorothy is surprised to find herself celebrated as a heroine for (albeit accidently) killing the Wicked Witch of the East. As Rushdie states, '[w]e have reached the moment of colour' (2012, p.32) and what an intense array of colour there is, as the film makers 'clearly decided they were going to make their colour as colourful as possible' (2012, p.36). All of this marks Dorothy's entry to a new, brighter, better world than the vast greyness she has just left behind and links neatly back to the importance the DfE places on painting, primping and polishing all public areas of a school that is reborn as a new academy (2016b, p.20). Equally it echoes Lacanian thought on desire and the role of the gaze:

[5] At the time of Baum writing The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, America had just surfaced from a period of depression and many farmers and industrial workers faced large debts (Scarecrows/ Tin Men). A return to the use of silver for valuing the dollar alongside the recently introduced gold, would have enabled this debt to be reduced (Jahangir, 2009, n.p.).

> In Lacan's conception of desire, the gaze is not the vehicle through which the subject masters the object but a point in the Other that resists the mastery of vision. It is a blank spot in the subject's look, a blank spot that threatens the subject's sense of mastery in looking because the subject cannot see it directly or successfully integrate it into the rest of its visual field (McGowan, 2007, p.11).

The slick surface appearance of the neonatal academy cannot be mastered. It represents a mirage, a shimmering vision of an archetypal ideal of what a quality education should look like. Appearance matters and the subject's gaze must be directed towards the shiny surface and away from the truth within. Interestingly, Rushdie notes that Munchkinland (home of the Munchkins who welcome Dorothy to Oz) looks remarkably well-maintained for a land that has been under the rule of a wicked witch:

> [M]aybe the Witch of the East wasn't as bad as all that – she certainly kept the streets clean, the houses painted and in good repair, and, no doubt, such trains as there might be running on time (2012, p.43).

The Munchkin community also appears to be remarkably happy and unafraid of any evil dictator. A parallel that comes to mind here is of the Local Authority and the relationship Yellow Brick Primary School enjoyed with them prior to change of status. It would be easy to demonise the LA and celebrate their slow demise, joining in a refrain of 'Ding, Dong the witch is dead' (Langley et al., 1989, p.58) at the point of academisation. But how accurate is this negative portrayal of Local Authority oversight of schools? Are they really the wicked witches, abusing power and coveting control at all costs? Or do they represent an orderliness underpinned by strong structures and a deep knowledge of their communities? Benn issues a stark warning against the demise of the LA role:

> The loss of local authority involvement is literally incalculable. Centralised planning of school places; important powers of scrutiny over which schools are taking what pupils; expertise and guidance on a range of important school issues … these

> collaborative elements will wither away if the local school landscape becomes shaped by naked competition (2012, p.176).

More recently working once again within a Local Authority context I can access and appreciate the benefits of participation in a democratic organisation with a central hub of expertise available to support schools and communities. I can equally sense a growing frustration relative to the slow and ponderous processes that determine decision-making and the impossibility faced by that central team when meeting school needs across a geographically wide and diverse landscape. Even though there appears to be no technicolour option for a happy ever after, at least there is true autonomy as Executive Head teacher across three rural schools.

Let us turn our attention once more to the ruby slippers, those symbols of power and (as is later revealed) of protection, that pass from the feet of the dead witch to Dorothy. What makes the Witch of the West so desperate for them? As the Good Witch Glinda advises Dorothy, '[k]eep tight inside of them – their magic must be very powerful, or she wouldn't want them so badly!' (Langley et al., 1989, p.62). For me, these slippers embody the essence of a school, the combination of energies that support the structure of a school's core yet appear to be obscure, intangible and ultimately desirable. Often referenced as 'culture' or 'ethos', without this essence a school might become a shell devoid of sparkle and magic, an empty gong following foisted-upon rules and systems and echoing loudly what is shouted down from the top. Clarke describes the features of such gong-like leadership in academies thus:

> [T]he impact of neoliberal performativity has been redoubled by the rise of less-frequently commented upon neoconservative cultures of authoritarian leadership and hierarchical management, with their associated practices of discipline, punishment and control (Clarke, 2022, p.1).

At Yellow Brick Primary School these were the features I wished to avoid. I was invested in protecting the effervescent elements and I hoped academisation would afford us this shield. This was the desire that drove me just as the ruby slippers, once they become attached to

Dorothy's feet, propel her onwards, skipping, towards the Emerald City and ultimately to her awakening. They also link us neatly back to Lacan and his theory on desire.

Desire

What is it within us that fuels our desires and provides us with the energy we need to move towards a longed-for destination, in contrast to a sense of dissatisfaction with our current experience? Where does this sense of internal lack originate from and is this a universal emptiness? Are we collectively always striving to reach something better than that which we currently know? For Dorothy, her focus was firmly on the need to return home to Kansas. Her lack is based on a sudden appreciation of the importance of her family and a strong desire to reunite with them. With Lacan, we again recognise the gap that exists between what we think we desire and the reality of our experience:

> When one obtains any object that appears to promise the satisfaction of desire, one inevitably discovers that "that's not it." Or, to put it in other terms, the moment when the subject would see the gaze directly would be the moment when the gaze would cease to be the gaze (McGowan, 2007, p.23).

For McGowan, the way out of this disappointing scenario is to imagine another reality and fantasise about 'an otherwise inaccessible enjoyment' (2007, p.23). Dorothy's desire rests on not just becoming reconciled with her family but on being understood by them and being taken seriously. She has become a representation of the orphan child archetype (and she literally is an orphan), abandoned and therefore constantly seeking the idealised fantasy of a perfect home, with a loving family who treat her with respect. For Jung, '[t]he child motif represents not only something that existed in the distant past but also something that exists *now*' (1968, p.162). This difference between the (past) Dorothy from Kansas and the (present) Dorothy we meet in Oz reflects the Lacanian 'gap between my direct psychological identity and my symbolic identity (the symbolic mask or title I wear, defining what I am for and in the big Other)' (Žižek, 2006, p.34). Dorothy is at once the vulnerable orphan-child seeking reconciliation and belonging and the symbolic heroine on a quest for enlightenment.

It is no surprise that Rushdie sees Dorothy's time in Oz as a coming of age, or a stepping into consciousness:

> The journey from Kansas to Oz is a rite of passage from a world in which Dorothy's parent-substitutes, Aunty Em and Uncle Henry, are powerless to help her save her dog Toto from the marauding Miss Gulch … into a world where the people are her own size, and in which she is never treated as a child, but as a heroine (2012, p.10).

Dorothy must learn to wear the symbolic mask of the heroine that she has been assigned and face challenges that will test her resolve. Miss Gulch threatens Dorothy's beloved pet but the greater threat is to her view of the world as a fair and just place. Dorothy must learn to navigate such threats whilst holding onto her fantasy of reaching a source of supernatural power that will enable her to return home where she belongs, with Toto (her alter-ego), by her side.

The first steps

When I first considered turning my face in the direction of academisation, I had up until that point been content with leading a school under the guidance of the Local Authority and did not agree with the Government's academy agenda. I had lived through the stigma attached to teaching at a Grant Maintained School[6] (National Archives, accessed 2019) as a Newly Qualified Teacher in 1995 and recalled the snubbing and snobbery that I encountered when meeting colleague teachers from Local Authority schools. This ostracization existed as the additional money granted to schools who opted out of their Local Education Authority was perceived by remaining schools as a privilege that left their purses rattling. A strong feeling of déjà vu did not escape me when I met with the Head teacher of our feeder secondary school late in 2015 and listened to him explain the rapid isolation his school would experience if he did not bite the bullet and seek academy status, as his was the only remaining Ofsted rated 'good' secondary within our region who had not converted. This is

[6] Grant Maintained Schools opted fully out of local government control and were funded directly; they were part of the 1988 Education Reform Act, which gave school governing bodies autonomy over decision making linked to finance and appointments (West and Wolfe, 2018, p.10).

where my understanding of past events causes me some discomfort, as I now see more clearly through the rear-view mirror of recollection than I did through my naïve contemplation at that time. The difficulty, he articulated, was that the school had previously halted an application to convert under his predecessor due to staffing complications. He also had to consider the Government's intention that all schools would become academies by 2020 (DfE, 2016b). He now found himself in a position where he could pick up the thread as a sole convertor and stitch a single hem or look at doubling the cotton and creating a stronger overlock in partnership with another school. He was, in short, proposing the creation of a new Multi-Academy Trust incorporating my primary school.

What was I thinking as I listened to this suggestion, delivered ever so subtly? Was it to throw my lot in with the big boys and sacrifice my school on the altar of academisation? I would be dishonest if I did not admit to feelings of flattery (Why my school? Were we special?) alongside a strong desire to help, to be of service to a colleague I liked and was beginning to trust. The argument that all schools were going to have to change shifted my thinking and represented a threat to the stability of an educational landscape I had grown to love. I felt simultaneously torn yet curious about the possibilities on offer that could lead to a better deal for my school. Clarke's writing on the Freudian idea of disavowal précis this dichotomy:

> Disavowal involves a form of double consciousness in which we simultaneously see and don't see, remember and forget, acknowledge and deny. Disavowal is a pervasive psychosocial process that typically arises in response to a perceived threat to unity (2018, p.4).

I left the meeting having promised nothing yet deep in thought about the potential implications for the future stability of my school.

The decision I made to lead our school through the academisation maze was ultimately one based on multiple influencing factors. Our school was well-connected locally, situated between two equally strong secondaries and enjoyed an excellent relationship with both, whilst serving a mixed socio-economic community. Interactions with the Local Authority

were positive and I was trusted as Head teacher to get on and lead the school with minimum interference – a twice-yearly visit from an unreservedly supportive improvement partner and similar attention from a budget monitoring perspective. There were niggles relating to our geographical distance from County Hall (the seat of local government power) in that schools closest to this central base seemed to enjoy more perks, such as first access to cash for specialised projects. A negative view of Local Authority 'control' was not a deciding factor in our conversion. Indeed, I can now agree wholeheartedly with Benn and Downs' observation that 'local authorities do not control schools. But central government attempts to do so' (2016, p.30).

Reflecting retrospectively upon the consultation process for Yellow Brick Primary School illuminates the well-placed hopes and intentions I held as Head teacher within this specific temporal, socio-cultural and political context. Autonomy and freedom through academisation were prizes offered in contrast with the presumed shackles of Local Authority control. But what if one set of manacles have simply been replaced with another, shinier, more corporate pair? What if, like Dorothy, I was chasing a fantasy of increased liberation and greater understanding, spurred on by hope, faith and a belief that academisation was the only valid option for our school at that time? As Boyask succinctly notes, '[i]n the fragmented [educational] environment, the promised autonomy of the academies programme may prove illusory' (2016, p.110). It may indeed.

Undertaking a consultation with staff, parents and the local community was, at the time of our conversion, a recommendation:

> Your governing body must consult formally about your school's plans to convert to an academy with anyone who they think will have an interest in your school changing its status. This will include staff members and parents, but you should also involve pupils and the wider local community (DfE, 2015, n.p.).

An intention of consultation is to reveal all possible pitfalls and provide stakeholders connected to the school with a concise and honest summary of the potential impact of academisation on the school's future success. Current legal guidance for schools from the National Governance Association (NGA) suggests consultation should 'be undertaken when

proposals for the subject of the consultation are at a formative stage … should provide enough information to those consulted to enable them to comment intelligently on the proposals … should allow enough time for those consulted to enable them to properly consider the proposals' and that 'consultation responses should be specifically considered by the decision maker when deciding whether or not to implement the proposal' (NGA, 2019, p.12). In reality many academy conversion consultations are little more than a nod in the direction of inclusive involvement and occur once the horse has bolted and the decision to become an academy has already been made by the Governing Body. This is often not a democratic decision-making process involving communities but a presented inevitability.

For Yellow Brick Primary School, the process of consultation followed by school leaders was as transparent as it could be, based on an understanding of the contextual reasons for conversion at that time. There was a sense of inevitability given the Government's position on converting all schools, which Gunter and McGinity recognise:

> Fabricated urgency combined with a 'there is no alternative' to academies based on a liberation narrative, which interlinks with traditional professional values of doing your best for the children, or at least getting hold of a reform and making it work in ways that prevent too much damage (2014, pp.11-12).

Conversations within Governing Body meetings at this time echoed these sentiments. We should take hold of the reins and continue to lead our school for the good of the children and the community. Waiting too long could lead to forced academisation, which was viewed as synonymous with a complete loss of identity and control. Our thinking at that time chimes with research led by Rayner et al. (2018) into academisation as a system redesign. Their research included interviews with senior leaders at St Clement's School, where it was noted that '[t]he first contradiction for the head teacher and his team was that they saw voluntary conversion as an opportunity, but forced conversion as a threat' (ibid., p.156). What is interesting to note on reflection is that we did not consider academisation per se (rather than the style of conversion) as either an opportunity or a threat but as a fait accompli. We were, in effect, choosing what we believed would be the most autonomous route. Yet again, Rayner et al. (2018, p.156) highlight this misconception in relation to St Clement's:

> The second contradiction related to autonomy. The rhetoric about freedom from LA control is countered by the fact that membership of a MAT entails new controls and accountabilities. The MAT may influence the ethos and the curriculum of each member school.

Based on the strong position Governors felt our school was in as the first converting primary (and indeed the vital key to enabling the secondary to create a MAT) we believed we would retain a high level of autonomy within the fledgling MAT structure and would be in a position of strength when it came to shaping policy and ethos. This perception filtered through the messages shared during consultation meetings and created an appearance of confidence that helped to sell this new vision for the school.

Regardless of misgivings about having to academise, the consultation process we followed formed part of this institutional change and had a positive impact on our experience of academisation, as potential barriers were identified and lines of communication opened and honoured. Yet, how can we be sure that the rhetoric employed during the consultation process (although genuinely felt at that time and articulated with honesty) was not just a Machiavellian example of words serving to veil the facts? Closer analysis reveals a lack of rigorous research into the pros and cons of academisation and an acceptance of the popular belief that academies have more control over their finances, staffing and curricula than their maintained counterparts:

> It is common for the Department for Education (DfE) to repeat the claim that academies have more autonomy than other schools because they are not under the 'control' of local authorities and even more common for the press to echo this claim, as if this is undisputed fact (Benn and Downs, 2016, p.24).

The context that led to the transformation and the impact on Yellow Brick Primary School in terms of organisation and internal policy can also be considered through theories of change. As Gunter and McGinity explain, '[a]cademisation is about closing a school and reopening an academy, it is therefore about cultural and professional change, and speaks to identity issues that impact on the practice of teaching and learning' (2014, p.5). Just like Dorothy with her dual identities, Yellow Brick Primary School was facing a transformational journey where the

symbolic mask of academisation would eventually cover the core essence of the school, namely the culture and ethos that made it unique.

Fantasy or strategy?

Returning once more to the image of Dorothy leaning on her symbolic wheel of fortune, we consider the revolutions that occur as part of life and in response to living. We cannot escape change and yet we often work very hard to guard against it in an effort to protect what makes us feel secure. We cling onto a fantasy of better days to come and try to make ourselves believe this is possible if we have the right plans in place. This was the case with the decision to embrace change and convert to academy status: it was a strategic move designed to avoid being done to or becoming the victim of 'top down' change. Shah sees the Government's current drive for academisation as a Theory E (top down) change that is radical in that it is being achieved 'without "real" public debate or clear evidence for the success of academies' (2018, p.216). Another aggressive model is Theory E change (Beer and Nohria, 2000) which is hard in that it involves staff losing their jobs and drastic economic cuts. Both change theories can be associated with academisation. The consultation on change of legal status at Yellow Brick Primary School danced lightly over the surface of the heavier elements of Theory E change in that there was open discussion around the reasons for academisation but no substantial debate. For example, during the meeting held with staff members in December 2015, questions were raised around pensions, the TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)) process, the potential size of the MAT and conversion timelines, the board of trustees and their representation of member schools and the role of each school's governing body. The following pertinent question and response shows again the ignorance around potential pitfalls linked to changing the school's legal status:

> Q. What would be a good reason for not joining the MAT?
>
> A. If the academisation programme were to be scrapped (Personal minutes, 2015).

The answer I provided at that meeting was situated in the belief that the Government would forge ahead with the forced academisation of all schools and that the only way to ensure

autonomy of any kind would be to jump before being pushed. Indeed, this point was emphasised during the staff consultation:

> The Head explained that the proposal was about equal partnership. The Head added that in considering joining the MAT, we would be in a position to help shape the trust (Personal minutes, 2015).

Another formula for managing organisational change that can be considered here is Kotter's (1996) eight stage process. This widely used linear sequence of actions does not dovetail neatly with the described academy consultation process. Although some elements of this process (Step two: creating a guiding coalition, Step three: developing a vision and strategy, Step four: communicating the change vision) may be aligned, Step one: the need to establish a sense of urgency does not fit as this was already in situ due to the Government's agenda for academisation based on their deep mistrust of local governance of schools. The school's change of status occurred because external, powerful factors created a need for re-evaluation and flexibility within the organisation. It was not due to a constructed or fake crisis leading to a sense of urgency: it was rougher than that. To specifically link a different change theory, Grundy's major types of change (Senior and Swailes, 2010) include 'bumpy' and 'smooth' incremental changes alongside discontinuous change. This 'bumpy' change characterised the start of the academisation process for our school. After a reasonable period of tranquillity post 2014 (when a new National Curriculum and assessment without levels were introduced), jarring by the shifting political environment occurred as the Conservative Government announced the academisation of all UK schools by 2020 in the White Paper 'Education Excellence Everywhere' (DfE, 2016b). Indeed, the title of this paper explicitly links the concept of academisation with the notion of excellence without actually determining what this excellence represents:

> The title of the White Paper conjures up a sense of reaching the rainbow's end – of achieving a harmonious and 'full' state of affairs in which failure, scarcity and disadvantage have become things of the past. Yet tellingly, education is never defined or debated in the documents, in terms of its aims and purposes (Clarke, 2018, p.6).

Clarke links this White Paper to the seductive qualities of Lacanian fantasy and the power of political rhetoric to draw us in and make us believe in the possibility of 'harmonious fullness' (2018, p.2). Within change theory, the edict to academise all schools was a trigger linked to proposed government laws and regulations (Dawson and Andriopoulis, 2017) that never reached fulfilment: it remained a fantasy. As an external 'driver' (a neoliberal term implying uncontrollable forces and diminished human agency and responsibility), this edict preceded a number of internal changes for our school –although not all were apparent immediately. An example of such internal factors that challenged the culture of Yellow Brick Primary were MAT policies and procedures that had to be applied indiscriminately across all schools. This did not happen until post-academisation, when the practicalities of managing a larger organisation took hold, of which more later.

Considering how the concept of academy was structured and came into being leans on what Clarke names as 'reality as structured by illusion' (2018, p.4). Employing techniques drawn from business change management provided this structure and a semblance of solidity was constructed. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis (Hayes, 2018) was used as a tool for change to consider the implications of academisation and to form the basis of responses to questions raised through consultation. A simple SWOT template was completed and shared with Governors and enabled this group of decision makers to 'see' the issues faced and the available choices. It must be understood that, at that moment in time, the Government was fixed on academisation for ALL schools. Choice, therefore, did not hinge on academy status versus maintained status. As this extract from the consultation minutes show, it rather pointed to moving immediately and being an early adopter (Rogers, 1995) or waiting and running the risk of losing any hope for autonomy:

> The Head explained that the Multi-Academy Trust proposal had been discussed by governors at a meeting on Monday night. Governors felt strongly that we are a good school, becoming stronger, and gave serious thought to this proposal. Governors wished to protect what we have and did not want to risk being forced into conversion, where we would have no choices about when, where and with whom this would be. Governors had therefore approved submission of an "expression of interest" in becoming an academy. This would then allow the secondary school to

> proceed with the application to form a Multi-Academy Trust. Governors had also approved permission to start the consultation process which had now started with this staff meeting. The Head explained that a consultation letter would be sent out to parents tomorrow explaining the school's situation, together with the proposal document to form the Multi-Academy Trust (Personal minutes, 2015).

As leader, I had to sell the vision for becoming an academy to stakeholders. If I did not believe in it and pour passion into it, it would be very difficult to gain the support and following of governors, staff, pupils, parents and the community. This ties in with what Hayes discusses in relation to acquiring and exercising power and influence: 'Change recipients are more likely to follow their leaders when they perceive them to be competent and able to deliver benefit' (2018, p.187). Added to this was a need for trust. Stakeholders trusted the articulated message in part based on a track record of competence and in part because it was delivered from the heart. As the first four of Hayes' (2018) seven key leadership tasks illustrate, sense making, visioning, sense-giving and aligning were in play during this initial consultation stage. I was presenting an option that identified perceived threats and opportunities whilst articulating a vision for a better future. Showing how the school community could pull together to avoid the risk of losing our core identity was key in enabling sense-giving and winning commitment. Alignment came through the congruent message shared and how this was delivered – face-to-face, with a clear vision for success that presented academisation as a necessary change in order to preserve the status quo. By the time the then Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, delivered the message that there would be a U-turn on blanket academisation in May (*The Guardian*, 2016) Yellow Brick Primary School was already well-advanced on its own journey to conversion.

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

The consultation that followed with parents and members of the local community focused more heavily on the potential impact of the proposed changes on children, the curriculum and wider school links (a concern as the focus school fed to two high schools in two different Local Authorities). Considering the new structure we were proposing from a pertinent point of view – that of the child - underscored the need to present a solid vision of success. We needed to sell change as non-change thus creating an illusion of familiarity. According to

Hayes (2018), the fifth and sixth key leadership tasks are to enable change by removing obstacles whilst recognising and responding to concerns raised by those who will be affected by the change. The following extract from the Q and A summary document produced post-consultation highlights how such concerns were raised, addressed and assuaged:

> **Q. What will change?**
>
> A. Very little will change for the children and their learning. The main changes will be of status and of funding – which will come directly from the EFA (Education Funding Agency) and not via the LA (Local Authority). We can retain the same name, uniform and staffing structure.
>
> **Q. What will the impact on the children be?**
>
> A. The children will not notice much of a difference. The day-to-day running of the school, the teaching and learning, the curriculum will all remain as they are.
>
> **Q. How will transition between schools be affected and links with other schools?**
>
> A. Transition will not be affected. Our school will continue to work closely with the same range of secondary schools and feeder settings as now. Parental choice as to where their child attends after Yellow Brick Primary School remains the same – a parental choice (Personal documentation, 2015).

It is ironic to reflect on the fact that a huge volume of strategic and administrative work, of which consultation was one small part, was undertaken in a bid for the school to remain unaltered. Part of the illusion we were under was that this could be achieved, that we could construct a new school system without it impacting on our established way of being. A point recognised by Gunter and McGinity highlights the busyness that is the business of change:

> [T]here is much activity around academies but little action. By this we mean that people are committed and busy in the creation and establishment of the idea and reality of academies (2014, p.14).

This is certainly true of our school's experience. An extract from an interview transcript with a colleague researching academy governance reveals the pressures endured during the first two years pre and post academisation:

> Interviewer: So, I guess one of the things is, what has becoming an academy enabled you to do that you couldn't do before?
>
> Subject: Hours and hours of more work! (laughs) With very little change within the school. The business manager and I joke about it, but the increase in workload for myself and the business manager is phenomenal. We spent two years without really having a personal life, because we were constantly working, and it didn't impact on the staff and it didn't impact on the children. When we academised, nothing changed. We worked incredibly hard so that nothing changed. We're struggling at the moment not to feel quite bitter about that. We did it because we believed we would retain our autonomy, and we feel that is being eroded (Personal interview transcript, 2018).

This is where maintaining momentum and sustaining the change, Hayes' (2018) seventh and final key leadership task, comes into play. Regardless of the long working hours, lack of weekend or evening leisure time and feeling constantly 'on call', the school as an organisation had to keep moving forwards. Work-life balance did not exist and, like the aforementioned tightrope walker, I had to develop a steady gaze and continue to determinedly place one foot in front of the other, ignoring tensions in the rope and occasional wobbles. Like Dorothy, I had to don the mask of the heroine and face the challenges head-on, including navigating the route to conversion and establishing agreed Articles of Association and a Scheme of Delegation[7] documents which would form the legal backbone of the newly created Multi-Academy Trust. All the work that went into ensuring things stayed the same for our school did little other than kick up a dust storm that provided a veil for an unvoiced purpose for creating the MAT: to establish a little empire and gain control of local schools. With so much to think about, my desire became focused on gaining more knowledge and information in order to comprehend the changing nature of my role. I was now operating firmly within the discourse of the university, which we explore more fully in the next chapter.

[7] The Articles of Association define the director/trustee responsibilities and contain rules about running the MAT. The Scheme of Delegation details who has decision making authority within the organisation.

Chapter 3 – If I only had a brain

The Scarecrow – a Jungian psychoanalysis

I begin this chapter with an analysis of the character of the Scarecrow, the first companion Dorothy meets on her journey along the Yellow Brick Road. This is a light and playful moment in the film as the Scarecrow's acrobatic antics surprise and delight Dorothy and supplement her early sense of optimism and hope. Within the scene where they first meet, the Scarecrow's character reflects the mood of the moment. He is like a ray of sunshine illuminating Dorothy's path, yet he is a troubled soul. He believes he does not have a brain in his head, only straw, and desires nothing more than to be able to think. Still, the scarecrow is something of an enigma. He bases his claim for a lack of intelligence on the fact that he cannot scare crows: he is no good at his job. Nevertheless, when Dorothy tries to help him down from his stake and cannot figure out how to release him he successfully suggests how she should do this. Time and again throughout the film we hear the Scarecrow lament his stupidity whilst witnessing acts of ingenuity that he alone is unable to recognise as proof that he can think. He will only believe this to be true of himself when the Wizard presents him with tangible symbols of intelligence: a Diploma and the coveted title of Doctor of Thinkology.

Looking firstly at the Scarecrow from a Jungian perspective we can recognise within his character elements of the Trickster archetype, an ancient personification of the more unpredictable elements of human behaviour, including (at best) buffoonery, clowning

around and simpleton-like behaviours and (at worst) evil and malicious acts that cause suffering. Jung describes the Trickster thus:

> He is the forerunner of the saviour, and, like him, God, man and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness' (Jung, 1990, p.263).

For Jung, the Trickster represents one shadow aspect of the collective unconscious. We remain unaware of his existence and it is this unawareness that allows the Trickster to continue to perform his tricks. We hand over our conscious control through the mistaken belief that we have grown wiser than our ancestors and no longer believe the primitive myths they shared (Jung, 1990, p.267). Jung articulates this tension between our holding onto a perceived higher intellectual status and a letting go of a meaningless myth that we fail to find meaning in, describing it as a situation where 'two contrary tendencies are at work: the desire on the one hand to get out of the earlier condition and on the other hand not to forget it' (Jung, 1990, p.268).

For our Scarecrow this tension is evident as the film unfolds. We initially find him, like the saviour figure, hanging from a stake in a field with arms outspread in order to communicate contradicting directions. This echoes what Jung says of the Trickster, '[h]e is so unconscious of himself that his body is not a unity, and his two hands fight each other' (Jung, 1990, p.263). In short, the Scarecrow is both physically clumsy (he continually loses his stuffing and cannot stand up straight) and remarkably agile (he can whirl, bend and lean precariously without really falling over). Like the Trickster, the Scarecrow presents as 'on the one hand superior to man because of his superhuman qualities, and on the other hand inferior to him because of his unreason and unconsciousness' (Jung, 1990, p.264). In spite of a strong sense that the Scarecrow has many talents lying just beneath his straw stuffing, he does not deliberately deceive Dorothy; he wholeheartedly believes he is incapable of having a useful thought. Still, we are immediately made aware of the potential for a deeper wisdom than his clowning conceals. In response to Dorothy's exclamation that he would not be able to talk without a brain, he retorts, '[b]ut some people without brains do an awful lot of talking, don't they?' (Langley et al., 1989, p.66). An astute observation.

A Lacanian perspective

So, what has this got to do with the parallel journey we are on: that of conversion to academy status for a popular English primary school and the creation of a Multi Academy Trust now involving further primary schools? Before exploring this link, I wish to delve further into psychoanalysis of the Scarecrow from a Lacanian point of view. It is already noted that the Scarecrow is lacking a brain and the desire that drives him towards the Emerald City is the hope that this lack will be appeased by the Wizard. The key Lacanian concept that resonates here relates to '[t]he insistent attempt of the drive to reinstall an original situation … Every drive pulsates around an original loss and thus around an irreversible lack' (Verhaeghe, 1998, p.3). It is this lack that provides the energy, the focus, the force of will needed in order to reach the object of desire: it is what drives us. For Lacan, the word desire is significant in that it is more perpetual in its presence than the Freudian equivalent, wish. A wish can be granted and fulfilled. Lacan's point is that desire is never satisfied; we are always left with a feeling of lack, of emptiness, that pushes us onwards once more (Lacan, 2004). For the Scarecrow, this desire is rooted in what he hopes to become, which in Lacanian terminology is the 'manque-à-être' or the 'want-to-be' (Lacan, 2004). Yes, the Scarecrow is a fantasy figure, a hybrid human and, as previously argued, an archetypal representation of the Trickster. Nevertheless, he experiences the same sense of lack that 'is related to the division between the self, or identity, individuals consciously articulate and who they are as a function of unconscious desire' (Driver, 2018, p.621). What we have here is a mismatch between the Scarecrow's description and understanding of self and what he *really* is. In Lacanian terms, words cannot convey an accurate representation of who or what we really are. Language is inadequate in that some sense of self is always left behind; there is always more to learn and always something absent within the domains of our existing knowledge. Lacan articulates the realm where this inadequacy or slippage resides, as the 'real', or 'that which is lacking in the symbolic order' (Lacan, 2004, p.280). For Lacan, the symbolic order represents how we express ourselves through a language that is based on the use of signifiers, which aim to describe what we wish to articulate yet can never fully achieve, leading to further lack (Driver, 2018).

Lacan's description of how signifiers connect to the universal knowing that exists, and has always existed, prior to any human conscious awareness of it, resonates with Jung's understanding of the collective unconscious:

> Before strictly human relations are established, certain relations have already been determined. They are taken from whatever nature may offer as supports, supports that are arranged in themes of opposition. Nature provides – I must use the word – signifiers, and these signifiers organize human relations in a creative way, providing them with structures and shaping them (Lacan, 2004, p.20).

The recognition of opposing forces is also important here. We know of these through Jung's exploration of light and shadow within an archetypal pattern or energy. The Scarecrow as Trickster carries within him a juxtaposition of fool and sage, of martyr and saviour, of the primitive and the civilised. Yet he is also a hollow man with an empty head. Rushdie sees this as relevant to our connection with the characters as they appear in the film, '[p]erhaps it's because they are hollow that our imaginations can occupy them so easily' (Rushdie,2012, p.51). Lacan sees this hollowness in us all:

> [T]he very kernel of our personality is an empty space: peeling off layer after layer of identification in search of a substantial kernel of one's personality, one ends up with a void, with the original lack' (Verhaeghe, p.12).

For Lacan, descriptive signifiers fail to fully realise the subtleties that create tensions within each word. They aspire to represent meaning yet they always slip. The language we use is never enough, yet we need signifiers to provide the structures and frameworks for the world in which we live. When I began to consider the structures and frameworks that underpinned the newly constructed Multi Academy Trust (Scheme of Delegation and Articles of Association) a recognition dawned around the inevitable lack in the language used. There was an inherent impossibility in creating documentation that accurately articulated the shared understanding of everyone present. We each had our own understanding of what was important and what should be included in these key documents, yet this could not be precisely pinned. We were a group of arguably intelligent educators, yet we trusted the

social bond created by our psychological contracts[8] more than the words typed on the page. Like the Scarecrow, we exposed the duality of our foolishness and wisdom at a pivotal moment in our journey. The more words (signifiers) we employed in our quest for a clearly documented foundation for the MAT, the further away we slipped from the clarity we sought.

A symbolic order: the Scheme of Delegation and Articles of Association

The Scheme of Delegation (with the appropriate acronym 'SoD') is a document that includes information on the decision makers within a MAT, whilst the Articles of Association detail the rules for running a MAT alongside defining the trustee (director) responsibilities. The latter document was a priority for school leaders as it formed part of the paperwork required by Companies House (for registration as a new company/charitable trust). A draft Memorandum of Association (a legal document signed by trustees agreeing to establish the new company) was also required. Both the draft Memorandum and Articles of Association were to be checked by the Department for Education (DfE) before conversion to academy status could be approved. Like any converting school, we were assigned a Project Lead at the DfE, whose task it was to navigate us through the complexities of the conversion process. We also employed a specialist solicitor (using the conversion grant of £25k) as additional legal processes involving land and title checks were required. To contextualise this, a tremendous amount of time, energy and intellect went into understanding these documents and their significance; time, energy and intellect that had hitherto focused solely on the provision of education for our children. Recognising and interpreting new signifiers was a challenge and we were faced with learning how to read and assimilate this new symbolic order. As Driver explains (referencing Fink, 1995, p.137), with Lacan, this is not an impossible task:

> [C]rucial to Lacanian thought is the idea that while we cannot step out of discourse, we can learn to understand what kind of discourse we are employing or what kind of

[8] Psychological contracts are a model for understanding what is at the centre of employer-employee relationships and lie beyond the actual legal contract of employment. They represent the less tangible aspects of employment relationships and 'originally had roots in psychoanalysis with an emphasis on how unconscious needs affect this relationship' (Driver, 2018, p.618).

> discourse is being employed by others and how each discourse provides various positions toward lack and commensurate losses of jouissance (2016, p.3).

These concepts of lack and jouissance need to be unpicked. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, each of us struggles with a 'fundamental lack' that relates to a 'division between the self, or identity' (Driver, 2018, p.621). We try to explain this lack using connected words (chain of signifiers), yet these also contain a lack as the subject continuously submerges/re-emerges between the gaps in what we try to articulate (Verhaeghe, 1998, p.12). We lose our identity through trying to describe it because we are reaching for the approval of the Other (where the signifiers originate) and therefore unconsciously create an image of ourselves that we believe matches what the Other desires. We become a divided or split-subject:

> The important thing about the divided subject is that it has no essence, no ontological substance, but, on the contrary, comes down to a pre-ontological, indeterminate non-being which can only give rise to an identity, an ego, in retrospect' (Verhaeghe, 1998, p.14).

Jouissance can be interpreted as the bitter-sweet pleasure laced with pain that is felt when we realise our desires cannot be and never will be met. We are disappointed when our perpetual striving for something (some object, some symbol, someone) that we believe will complete us results in a continuous state of tension: '[f]rom every symbol, or signifier, there is something missing, namely the real that individuals desire. Real desire, however, is unconscious and therefore impossible to know or fulfil' (Driver, 2016, p.6).

Applying this to the position of our group of Head teachers and the shared wish to demystify this new symbolic order of legal speak, we consider our mutual desire to create a structure that would stabilise the future of each respective school as the force that simultaneously united us and drove us on towards the goal of establishing a new MAT. Yet each of us as Head teacher had an independent wish and a unique reason for committing to the process, part of which remained hidden or unconscious, even to ourselves at that time. Equally we each had an identity, or ego, that we tried to project (and protect) using signifiers that never quite did the job. Although weekly Head teacher Board meetings took place, these were mostly informal yet intensely productive periods, with each school leader caught in a tension

between desiring the recognition and approval of the other and an unwillingness or inability to acknowledge what might be lacking in the proposed partnership.

Further complications surfaced when the Church of England became involved in the drafting of the Articles of Association, which had to accommodate the religious character of local C of E schools should they choose to academise and join the MAT. This became politically sensitive, with Governors at Yellow Brick Primary School expressing deep concern at any proposed church involvement with or influence on the Articles of Association. A collective fear was stoked, based on potential interference in our status as a community school, and concerns over being forced to adopt a religious character. It also introduced a further layer to the symbolic order: that of the social, cultural and linguistic influences of the Church of England. When the Articles were approved, a delicate balance between Church and community control had been agreed. The Members (who ensure the trustees are doing their job) were to include both community and church representatives (with an agreed reduced Diocesan representation). An arrangement was in place to ensure the Articles were worded carefully with protections built in to preserve the unique character of each school (Academy timeline document, 2015). The Company's object, as outlined in the agreed Articles of Association, was to establish, manage, develop and maintain Academies 'other than those designated Church of England' and 'Church of England Academies' and highlighted that 'in relation to each of the Academies to recognise and support their individual ethos, whether or not designated Church of England' (Articles of Association, 2016). The groundwork was therefore in place to enable the fledgling MAT to welcome smaller C of E schools into the fold. Alternatively viewed, the foundations for a future empire had been established:

> Given the increased focus on academisation, I now fear that we are returning to a system that values empire building. With the renewed energy devoted to academisation, I have already received four personalised letters from CEOs attempting to persuade me to direct my school (which is a large non-academy) to join their MAT, or with offers of meetings with the senior trust team. There are new incentives being promoted, such as trial joining a MAT before conversion (Faris, 2022, p.3).

During this period, although clear and transparent communication was viewed as vital, a disconnect occurred. What we thought we were agreeing to resulted in something other. Lacan would no doubt laugh at my surprise in recognising this; as Verhaeghe points out, Lacan 'starts from the assumption that communication is always a failure: moreover, **that it has to be a failure,** and that is the reason why we keep on talking' (1995, p.81, original emphasis). The problem lies in the difference between language and speech. Language provided us with a structure: the new symbolic orders we were learning contained the signifiers relevant to the law and the Church. Importantly however, the words we used (our speech) served to generate meaning and create our identities. We were fluent in the signifiers of education and leading schools and not in legal speak or diocesan dialogue. The more we thought we understood, the further away we were from understanding. With so many voices now contributing to the discourse, the Scarecrow's observation referenced earlier springs to mind. With all that talking were our brains ever perfectly aligned as we articulated a vision that could not be fully secured because the words were not, and never could be, enough?

The Scarecrow and the discourse of the university

Discourse for Lacan can be understood as a formal system 'independent of any spoken word', that exists pre-speech and so determines speech (Verhaegue, 1995, p81). There are four types of Lacanian discourse each creating the possibility for a different social bond between participants. The social bond is here considered as 'the connection among people that makes, for example, the striking of constitutions (or any other form of social contract) possible. It is the necessarily prior link among people that *allows* them to arrive at and agree upon mutual value commitments' (McSwite, 2006, p178). The four Lacanian discourse types are those of the master, university, hysteric and analyst (Lacan, 1977; 2004; Verhaegue, 1995; Sharpe, 2006; Driver, 2016; Clarke, 2019). Within the context of the Scarecrow and his desire to have a brain the discourse of the university affords us an opportunity to consider the persistent pursuit of knowledge in relation to conscious and unconscious lack. For Lacan, the subject who seeks to replenish their internal void through accessing more and more learning recognises deep within the theories, ideas and books they consume there lies a hope that, one day, there will come a point when the Holy Grail of

illuminated understanding will be grasped. Inevitably this is an illusion and the grail another phantom, hovering just beyond reach, promising enrichment and delivering disappointment. The deeper into learning and theory the subject dives in their quest for understanding the further away from any chance of an epiphany they are. Ultimately, there is a recognition of a need for an expert beyond the self to turn to for affirmation:

> The university's discourse involves educating and interpellating subjects, promising them direct access to satisfaction through knowledge. Yet the university's discourse simultaneously depends on the support of a 'master' whose covert authority underpins the supposed agency of knowledge (Clarke, 2019, p.75).

For our Head teachers, confronted with a plethora of information to read, internalise and interpret, turning to the legal experts offered structure as we struggled to understand (and contextualise for each school) the framework to which we were or would be beholden. We were simultaneously giving birth to a new organisational identity whilst recognising that our legs were in stirrups: something that should have felt natural and co-creative was restricted and bound by that which had gone before. In Lacanian psychoanalysis the time spent in the womb pre-birth is the only time we ever feel complete and the only place where lack cannot haunt us (Verhaegue, 2001 cited in Driver, 2012). Paradoxically, the conscious subject does not truly exist in this state and remains unaware of such bliss (Shepherdson, 2008). In these pre-natal moments before academisation we were unaware of the secure position we were already in with each school blissfully ignorant in its respective amniotic sac. We were future-focused and confident in our ability to create something better: a new organisation with a shared vision and shared values and an identity we could equally embrace. For Driver, organisational identity can be considered as 'the narrative construction of the organization's central, enduring and distinctive characteristics, a conversation that is socially constructed and can include internal and external stakeholders' (2001, p.10). Crafting the Articles of Association and Scheme of Delegation involved such a narrative construction. Each Head teacher and Chair of Governors took part in social conversations as internal stakeholders; the Bishop and solicitor contributed from an external position. We thus found ourselves fully engaged in a discourse of the university, underpinned by the Master, believing in the

power of information and knowledge shared whilst opening ourselves up to the threats involved:

> [T]he university discourse is always at risk of falling prey to the illusion that it can rise above illusion. As such, it can be instrumental in hiding and further cementing mechanisms of domination (Driver, 2016, p.11).

Which fantasies of domination were entertained, and by whom, as we developed our social bond and trusted the truth of the written word? What was it that we could not see resting between the lines of each clearly articulated and transparently shared document? Were our heads filled with straw or had we fallen prey to illusion? As Head teacher of Yellow Brick Primary School I accepted that the Board of Trustees would sit above our current leadership structure and take responsibility for many of the overarching strategic decisions that impact on school life. I read and approved the Scheme of Delegation, the document that detailed how much power was re-delegated back to the school's Local Governing Body (LGB) and Head teacher. I saw the main change that would really impact on how the school was led was the removal of the LGB's autonomy as a decision-making body (Scheme of Delegation, 2016). Yet I approved the document that meant it could no longer determine the fate of the school it helped to lead: it could only suggest changes for approval by the Board of Trustees. I had given away our power.

At that time, we Head teachers joked that the partnership evolving between our schools was no longer akin to getting into bed with one another; it had become a binding marriage. There is truth in the comparison: it is difficult to unfasten the legal knots that bind schools who join a Multi Academy Trust. You need to have a spectacularly poor Ofsted result leading to special dispensation from the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and another MAT on hand willing to accept your school before divorce of any kind can be considered:

> Once a school joins a trust, there's no going back: its reserves and buildings are absorbed into the legal entity of the trust. … The only way out is in the case of serious failure (*The Guardian*, 2018, n.p.).

With constrictions inherent within each MAT's Articles of Association and Schemes of Delegation this leaves no room for optimism for the failing school. As leader of Yellow Brick Primary School I embarked on the process of changing the school's legal status to retain and protect our individuality and autonomy. What I did not recognise was the underlying influence of neo-liberal politics on education policy as lived through our conversion experience:

> [T]he discourse of the university, as manifested in neo-liberal education policy, deploys a defensive strategy, involving a strange sort of 'anti-politics' that, while steeped in ideology, nonetheless disavows its own political nature' (Clarke, 2019, p.74).

This 'anti-politics' and disavowal can be translated as both a collective lack of responsibility in ensuring we fully understood the meaning glinting just beneath the surface of the words on the pages we signed and a blindness to the actual politics we engaged in as we attempted to rise above these and create something new. Knowing now that the chains of signifiers employed could never fully represent what we believed we were fashioning leads me to question the faith held in what was promised and how that did not and could not fully translate into what we built.

The road to Damascus

The latter reference to faith causes me to reflect on the quasi-religious language linked to academisation that peppers my writing thus far. This resonates most significantly with the process of conversion, a journey from one state of being to another. Like Saul on the road to Damascus a blindness occurred only later followed by a realisation that meaningful change must take place. In effect, we Head teachers had our 'eyes wide shut' (Clarke, 2018), simultaneously seeing the policy trajectory we had engaged in and remaining blinkered as to the inevitable direction of travel. As Clarke explains:

> [M]y contention is that engaging with the fantasies and disavowals that work to preclude recognition of the contingent, contested and conflictual nature of education

> policy, might enable us to see it, if not with eyes that have been fully-opened, then at least with eyes that are only partially and intermittently shut (2018, p.3).

This biblical episode is a pertinent example within this context. Saul was a persecutor of Jesus' followers, determined to stamp out the newly formed Christian church. He has been framed as a negative force who became enlightened through his interaction with the Divine before transforming into the apostle Paul. As Jung writes:

> Saul owed his conversion neither to true love, not to true faith, nor to any other truth. It was solely his hatred of the Christians that set him on the road to Damascus, and to that decisive experience which was to decide the whole course of his life (2001, p.232).

Jung goes on to consider the link between psychotherapists and clergy as they ponder the 'question of good and evil' (2001, p.232). A similar dualism is created between the forces of good and evil through academisation. Schools that remain with the Local Authority and the old way of doing things are seen as bad and those who see the light and choose to covert to Academy Status hold the moral high ground. Policy makers within Government seem to channel such ideologies and fervently champion a belief in the inherent goodness of academisation. This born again evangelism aligns with Kotsko's argument for a political-theological paradigm within neoliberal policy:

> Under neoliberalism, a set of core convictions about how the world is and ought to be … informs both a theory of governance and a theory of human nature, meaning that neoliberalism represents an account of the sources of legitimacy for our social institutions and of the moral order of the world (2018, p.33).

Returning to the image of academy schools as an unconscious archetype, we recall the alignment with an essence, an ephemeral quality that represents the greatest and good of a bygone era in schooling. This produces a misplaced expectation of an ability to recreate a sense of exclusivity within the budgetary and policy constraints of the current education system. This results in 'tensions between the official, idealistic, but fantasmatic, face of education policy discourses and the often disavowed violence and domination inhering in

and resulting from education policy when it attaches itself to fantasies' (Clarke, 2018, p.3). The abiding battle for supremacy between good and evil filters through and attaches to the archetype of the Academy, seated within the subconscious mind. For Jung, the lines between light and shadow were infinitely less defined and more of a conflation between opposing forces, '[y]et the shadow belongs to the light as the evil belongs to the good, and *vice versa*' (Jung, 2001, p.42, original emphasis).

We can become aware of this tension just as in a dream we can recognise that we are dreaming yet remain unable to control the direction we take within that dream, 'our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see' (Lacan, 2004, p.75). McGowan relates this to our being unwilling to see anything that makes us uncomfortable, for 'when we see things going in the direction of trauma, we necessarily turn away' (2007, p.12). This raises a question around how much of our inability to see was a deliberative choice to avoid potentially awkward issues? Had we created a collective blindness prior to conversion in order to cope with the process of change? In short, were we dealing concurrently with what the conscious mind thought it knew but chose to ignore and what the subconscious mind arguably recognised but nevertheless failed to reveal?

Repent or regret

An interesting interpretation that reaches further than Lacanian discourse theory is articulated by McSwite in relation to the social bond:

> We all believe that (or at least act as if) what is true and good can be determined, even though we realize [sic] that it cannot be finally and completely defined. We must do this in order to sustain consciousness itself, which is, of course, carried through the venue of language. *This is the necessity that binds us to each other in the most fundamental way'* (2006, p.179, original emphasis).

Language is thus the vehicle for expressing a recognisable social normality. This allows us to keep up appearances whilst also, importantly, holding something back. Through withholding elements of ourselves that we choose not to articulate we become rebels as we refuse to submit to the domination of language (McSwite, 2006, p.179). Whether or not this refusal is

fully conscious or part of the slippage between what things are and how they are described can be considered. Driver (2018) explains how we each become enmeshed in Lacan's imaginary order as our egos attempt to assuage the unease around our inability to accurately describe who we are or what we want. This was my experience as I contributed to discussions on how the MAT would be structured operationally. I wanted to be on the Board of Trustees to continue to contribute to the MAT's development from within. This desire led to inevitable disappointment when the Trustees were revealed and did not include any of the Head teachers other than the newly elected Director. Again, I turn to Driver to enable expression of the sense of dissatisfaction felt at that time:

> Rather than articulating who we really are, we instead reiterate misrecognition, alienation and otherness and not our own but others' desires, or, what Lacan calls, the Other (Lacan, 1977, p.214). We chase this Other and yet only arrive at nothingness (2018, p.621).

The Other I was chasing was an understanding based on the unwritten contract shared in the earlier days of building the MAT, where there had been a camaraderie and a strong mutual sense of moral purpose. This had formed part of the social bond that existed in the time before the legal documentation was produced. As McSwite advises, 'proceed with prejudice, with doubt of anything that has been standardised – which is to say, made official on the basis of abstraction' (2001, p.498). Had I known then what I know now I would have followed this guidance.

The question that plays on my mind these years on post-conversion, is: was it truly better to act and repent, than take no action and regret? (Machiavelli, 1988). Considering the optimism and hope that emanate between the lines of the early consultation documents, a strong sense of moral leadership and a taking control of the school's destiny were apparent. Responses were made to the national political context and I chose to steer Governors towards promised autonomy and freedom via academisation. To decide not to act *at that time* ran the risk of missing out on an opportunity to be a creative force within a fledgling MAT and to work to protect the strong ethos and excellent education already established in the school. To return to the question raised by a parent during consultation and my response:

Q. As the school is already achieving such excellent results, why change?

A. We are proud of our excellent results and recognise that we are not currently in a position to be forced to convert at this stage. We also recognise that schools are perceived as being only as good as their last Ofsted report/set of results and our current position could change if results drop. We want to be proactive in determining the future of our school as we do not wish to become part of a large, national academy chain, which would strip us of our identity, our community focus and our freedom to be the school we are. This is why we are consulting on changing our status now – to protect what we are rightly proud of and to preserve our autonomy. We will continue to work hard on delivering excellent results and believe we can do so in partnership with schools which become part of the MAT (Personal minutes, 2015).

There are always elements of remorse for choices made at the wrong time and absolution sought for the impact these have had on a school and community. Equally, there could have been regret for not having converted and being forced, later, to join an organisation with no voice at all in the process. I return here to the Scarecrow and his desire to be able to think in a manner that would be recognised and validated. I see the Scarecrow as an innocent at heart whose engagement with the discourse of the university is driven by his lack. The '*a priori* emptiness' of each Lacanian discourse (Verhaeghe, 1995, p.82) reflects the hollowness of our Scarecrow's head, ready to be filled with new information. This is how I felt at times when faced with a growing mountain of data, hoping my interpretations were sound. As McSwite observes, '[a]bsolute faith in anything is probably dangerous' (2006, p.177) and I stand guilty as charged of having a head full of straw and a heart filled with optimism and trust.

And what of the Trickster, our Jungian archetype? The interplay between good and evil, darkness and light, sinner and saint existed within both the developing MAT and within each of us who contributed to its growth. Such tensions are what define us:

> [W]hat is inferior or even worthless belongs to me as my shadow and gives me substance and mass. How can I be substantial if I fail to cast a shadow? I must have

> a dark side also if I am to be whole; and inasmuch as I become conscious of my shadow I also remember that I am a human being like any other (Jung, 2001, p.35).

When looking back, will it be the context, intention and reasons behind the changes made that tip the scales of justice towards a favourable judgement? Or will reflection on my early hopes for a growing MAT be considered unforgivably naïve? Let us continue our journey and meet the Tin Man, who would most likely approve of any decision made, if it sprung solely from the heart.

Chapter 4 - If I only had a heart

A hollow discourse

Hollowness, as we have touched on with the Scarecrow, is a theme that unites the four companions who travel together to hopefully encounter the Wizard of Oz. It is also key to Lacanian discourse theory which is serendipitously categorised into four containers or, as Verhaeghe describes them, 'nothing but empty bags with a particular form which will determine the content that one puts in them' (1995, p.82). We are all empty in that we experience a lack. For some, it is a lack based on an insecure sense of intelligence (like our Scarecrow) that leads to a relentless pursuit of knowledge: this sits within the discourse of the university. For others, the lack represents a need for power, recognition, control or something that just cannot quite be articulated. This is the master discourse that must be obeyed (Clarke, 2019, p.53) and whom we shall meet in our next chapter. For others still, the lack resides within a longing to be loved and to become the object of the other's desire. Here, the discourse of the hysteric takes hold. It runs riot with our emotions as we try to please the object of our desire whilst concurrently fulfilling our own deepest needs – a mismatch that leads to criticism and despair. This discourse will be the focus of the present chapter, explored through the character of the Tin Man and his optimistic search for a heart. Of Lacan's four discourses, the final discourse, that of the analyst, is unique in that it takes a

step back from the unremitting tumult of daily life to listen and to observe. The analyst has no answers yet can choose to reinvent a situation by creating a new reference point of 'master signifiers' and thus lead to some form of relief from the status quo (Clarke, 2019, p.132). This final discourse and the related role of the analysand (or client) features in the latter chapters of this thesis.

It is these underlying and unyielding deficiencies that provide us with the drive to reach out beyond ourselves for something that we hope will fulfil our desire for completion. For Lacan, this will never happen. We can only hope to come to terms with the hollowness we encounter and learn to live within a state of perpetual desire, knowing that this is as good as it gets. Much of our suffering stems from our inability to let go of the desire that propels us towards an ever-receding, illusory goal. In this, we find a connection to the Platonic myth of the split-aparts, the pre-humans with two faces, four arms and four legs who caused Zeus to fear their potential power and led to him halving them permanently. This resulted in a sense of loss so acute that they spent the rest of their existence searching for their missing other and only believing pure joy could be experienced when reconciled. This feeling of emptiness and a desire to be complete was thus expressed by Plato, with a more optimistic tone than Lacan, as the possibility of fulfilment through reunion with another dangled before us like Tantalus' grapes. There is something universally appealing about the existence of another who is already primed to connect with and understand us and it is precisely this form of fantasy that leads to tension within the discourse of the hysteric. The hope that there is a preordained someone or something that is waiting just out of reach who can fulfil our needs and desires and all we must do is present to them as their missing half leads to a dangerous sense of dissatisfaction as, time and again, expectations fall short. Our Tin Man with his hollow insides represents this primordial yearning to feel loved and to be loved in return.

There is an apposite moment in the film during the scene where Dorothy and the Scarecrow first happen across the Tin Man. Dorothy oils the rusty figure and, once he begins to move, exclaims 'you're perfect now' to which he responds 'Perfect? Oh, bang on my chest if you think I'm perfect. Go ahead – bang on it!' (Langley et al., 1989, p.73). Dorothy dutifully raps his tin chest and listens to the resulting echo that indicates an emptiness, a lack. The Tin

Man is bereft of a heart and assumes this means he cannot feel, as the lyrics of his solo reveal:

> *I'd be tender, I'd be gentle*
> *And awful sentimental*
> *Regarding love and art*
> *I'd be friends with the sparrows*
> *And the boy who shoots the arrows,*
> *If I only had a heart* (Langley et al., 1989, p.74).

This assumption is an illusion, as Rushdie explains, '[t]he Tin Man can weep with grief long before the Wizard gives him a heart' (2012, p.51). There is, within the Tin Man, an inherent inability to recognise the qualities that give rise to the suggestion of an emotional centre due to an over-reliance on the need for physical evidence. I recognise within myself a similar search for meaning and desire for authenticity through writing this thesis autoethnographically. As the story unfolds the Tin Man reveals he is capable of great and selfless acts of love yet needs a ticking token from our Wizard to believe in his own capacity for feeling emotion. Similarly, autoethnography represents for me an opportunity to explore a kaleidoscope of feelings and lived experiences that shift in response to positionality and allow subtle movements through time, space and a range of lenses. It is as if the written words might become a representation of heart, mind and spirit and offer a description or understanding of these intertwined energies – 'might' because language inevitably fails to fully capture the representations we envisage. Here the Lacanian concept of the objet petit a is relevant as it provides a sense of the surplus understanding or knowing that cannot be put into words, as McGowan explains:

> The objet petit a doesn't fit within the world of language or the field of representation. It is what the subject of language gives up in order to enter into language, though it does not exist prior to being lost (2007, p.6).

Additionally, the objet petit a drives our desire, our longing, for that which remains unseen. Like a planet circling the sun, remaining on a fixed trajectory that will never bring us closer to

the centre of gravitational pull, so too are we compelled to encircle the thing, the object we desire, without ever reaching it. We must learn to accept that, in the words of McGowan:

> The only satisfaction available to the subject consists in following the path (which psychoanalysis calls the drive) through which it encircles this privileged object (2007, p.6).

This pull towards a central object of desire mixed with tension around never reaching fulfilment echoes my approach to autoethnographic writing: the importance of each inter/intra-action must be reflected on not just from the centre where I stand as author-researcher but equally from the outside, as an observer looking on. Just like Dorothy, on the 'perfect spiral' start of the Yellow Brick Road (Rushdie,2012, p.22), I move incrementally forwards, one foot in front of the other, one eye on the past. Thus considering my research through a theoretical lens, my intention to hold a self-reflexive and fluid stance (Anderson, 2006) will allow a range of theories to be applied to the information uncovered rather than forcing what is found into one theoretical box.

The heart of the matter

An autoethnographic approach was chosen as the principle framework for this thesis as the experiences drawn upon lend themselves to a written narrative that could also be 'about the business of recognising and articulating the multiplicity of histories that exist within any past event' (Spry, 2011, p.499). I hope to achieve a similar immersion in text that Bochner suggests when he writes '[m]y aim was to gently invite readers to go on a voyage with me, one in which we would be discovering and making something together' (2014, p.13). It is also important for me to hold an authentic line when recording remembered conversations, reflecting on meetings held and recounting events that occurred on the Yellow Brick Road to academy status. One such recollection, which offers a striking paradox alongside our Tin Man's empty chest, links to a description Trustees regularly employed when discussing our progress as a Multi Academy Trust with new governors or members of staff. Reference would be made to the amount of work that had gone into creating the Trust and how it was frequently reminiscent of building a plane whilst flying it. At the time, in my position within

the centre of the events studied, I latched onto this phrase and used it in staff meetings and presentations to underscore the hamster-wheel effect of leadership during academisation. Only now, looking back on that time and space with a more analytical lens, can I see that the aircraft we were building could never be complete. Furthermore, it was a technical impossibility to conceive of such a thing! The heart it claimed to have, the engine fuelled by authentically lived values, was missing. The token reference points were present in the rhetoric around community and collegiality but we were sitting in a tin shell that could never reach beyond the rainbow. The difference between the Tin Man and our fledgling MAT was in the positionality of each: the MAT believed it had a heart and was unaware of its own lack; the Tin Man believed he was already empty yet was unaware of his own abundant core.

What of emotion versus rationality when reflecting on past experiences? Is it possible to get to the heart of a matter yet remain detached from the outcome? How can moral authenticity be nurtured through the process of autoethnography? When exploring the case for romanticism in ethnographic narratives, Marvasti and Fairclough's description of authenticity as suggesting 'a sense of moral responsibility' (2013, p.328) rings true:

> [E]thnographic texts have become fertile ground for the crossbreeding of innovative literary and traditional scientific approaches in an attempt to better apprehend the authentic moral subject (2013, p.329).

Marvasti and Fairclough go on to assess the self-absorption of those they term 'emotionalist' ethnographers, a critical nod in the direction of evocative autoethnography. This dewy-eyed introspection does not suit the style I wished to develop as a native researcher who simultaneously worked in whilst reflecting on the field of study. Anderson (2006) compares the evocative and analytic styles of autoethnography, seeing evocative as a descriptive literary approach whilst the analytic is described as a rigorous self-reflection that remains both introspective and outward facing. Although I confess to a pull more towards the literary bent of the evocative, in practice I desire a balance between or deliberate synthesis of the two styles. I recognise that it is important to include myself as researcher in the study, thus avoiding the 'tendency to downplay or obscure the researcher as social actor' (Anderson, 2006, p.376). It is equally important to recognise the impact I have had as both observer and participant:

> At a deeper level, reflexivity involves an awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants. It entails self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others through examining one's actions and perceptions in reference to and dialogue with those of others (Anderson, 2006, p.382).

This analytical reflexivity is one of Anderson's five key features, as is being visible as narrator within the text, the other three features being complete member researcher (CMR) status, dialogue with others beyond self and a commitment to theoretical analysis (Anderson, 2006, p.378). It also ties in neatly with Kamberelis and Dimitriadis' Chronotope IV[9] which focuses on power, knowledge and defamiliarisation in relation to dominant or every day modes of understanding. Additionally, it suggests the significance of researchers first looking at their data before thinking about theories, rather than shoe-horning their collected information into a pre-determined model (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis citing Wittgenstein, 2005, p.53). Such an understanding of a forced copulation between theory and data can only lead to a bastardised outcome, as it implies an isolation of each prior to contact. There is more of a symbiosis between the two to consider: thoughts about theory attract snippets of data and vice versa, leading to a union of both that is difficult to separate.

Considering this concept of union reminds me of a postcard I wrote for a newly elected Trustee in the earliest days of MAT formation. The postcard featured an excerpt from Kant and stated what I felt at the time was important for us co-creators to bear in mind:

> Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me* (Kant, 1788, p.161, cited in Guyer, 2007, p.1, emphasis added).

At that moment, writing a good luck message to the Trustee, I believed it possible to establish a family of like-minded schools based on sound moral judgements and high aspirations. I thought we could navigate the balance between an idealistic vision and a grounded reality and hoped we would retain our individuality as schools without the need for conformity to a centralised locus of control. The indicators I based my hopes on

[9] Chronotypes being a set of 'normalising frames' within which research is read and practiced; they are akin to paradigms.

included a firm trust in the Trustee's integrity (built over years as my professional mentor and governor on our school's local board), the knowledge that neither Trustee nor Director were accepting payment for their services (this appeared altruistic) and faith in the social and psychological contract I thought had been established. Driver connects the employee psychological contract with identity work and employs a Lacanian lens, noting that:

> [I]dentity work may be driving psychological contracts to a much greater extent than previously thought. It advances the idea that they are drawn on as discursive resources for the narrative construction of identities as an ongoing process of producing and reproducing selves, driven by the impossibility of fulfilling underlying, unconscious desire (2017, p.618).

Reflecting back on that time the 'imaginary self' I was unconsciously creating was aligned with both my deeply held desire to make a difference and a need to be recognised for doing so – not in terms of public acknowledgment but in relation to the regard in which I was held by those colleagues I now counted as my closest peers. If the psychological contract is based on the employee's understanding of unspoken assurances between themselves and their employer, then the separate self that emerged to fit within the idealised role of Academy Head teacher is an identity that sits within the imaginary, aligned with the ego. Here Gioia's suggestion that '[b]efore entering the field, each researcher needs to understand themselves in relation to their worldview, their background, and their desire to do this research' (2013, p.148) is relevant. Just as 'know thyself' was engraved at the entrance to the Delphic oracle, it is my responsibility as researcher to identify and own my internal motivators, inner values and long-held belief systems as these undoubtedly impact on how each event is read and interpreted. But what of the unconscious motivators and desires that contributed to this imaginary professional identity? Sifting through recollections and records of that time enables me to view myself and the position I held as an opportunistic complete member researcher (CMR). This, the first of Anderson's five key features, afforded me a spot that enabled a simultaneous participation in and examination of events as they were unfolding (opportunistic because I already worked in the field of study prior to choosing my research focus). This is not all plain sailing, as Anderson reflects, 'being a complete member does not imply a panoptical or nonproblematic positionality' (2006, p.380). I cannot assume that, because I was a member of the organisation going

through the same processes as other members, that my thoughts, feelings and interpretations were like those of my peers. Nor can I guarantee that any knowing of myself is accurate or close to the essence of who I am as, like Alice in Wonderland, I am not who I was yesterday. Rather I should endeavour to remain on my toes and react reflexively in relation to the research process, bending like a reed in the river instead of holding fast to any one theory or interpretation:

> Autoethnographers should illustrate analytic insights through recounting their own experiences and thoughts as well as those of others. Furthermore, they should openly discuss changes in their beliefs and relationships over the course of the fieldwork, thus vividly revealing themselves as people grappling with issues relevant to membership and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds (Anderson, 2006, p.384).

Anderson's description of the 'fluid rather than static' echoes Barad's intertwining or ethico-onto-epistem-ology (2007) or how we are always already connected energetically with those we interact with. Anderson's further exhortation for autoethnographers to 'be involved in the construction of meaning and values in the social worlds they investigate' (2006, p.384) highlights the unavoidable entanglement of researcher and the researched. Allowing space and time to consider the recounts of others is something I must remain vigilant about if I wish to avoid 'author saturation' and instead achieve a dialogue with participants whilst retaining a balanced view (Anderson, 2006, p.385). This segues fluidly into Spry's pondering on the link between autoethnography and historical contexts, which reflects Dorothy's spiral pathway:

> If autoethnography is knowledge forged collaboratively without a policing of disciplinary boundaries, then it may, in turn, become our history as well, always moving us forward, backward, in circle, or all at once. (2011, p.502).

However, Spry argues the case for 'performative autoethnography' and wonders about Anderson's dismissal of an evocative approach as being incompatible with that of a realist, claiming that 'good' autoethnography is, '… theoretically grounded at its outset and methodologically heuristic in process and product, advancing itself as a praxis of inquiry as it performatively *does* analysis' (2011, p. 501).

Spry sees the performative stance as one that is aesthetically crafted as an 'epistemologically embodied art' (2011, p.507) and one which is deeply rooted within the body, with writing a physical representation of this. I can visualise the embodiment within what is written of the 'politics, power and privilege' (2011, p.507) Spry references and can pay heed to the need for care ethically and morally when selecting experiences to share. Indeed, the ethical process undertaken in relation to writing this thesis ensured I focused on the power I held as researcher in the field. What I choose to represent, what I choose to ignore and how I choose to narrate this story are matters of power I cannot ignore. My ethical stance as researcher was reviewed and challenged by the University's ethics committee, who made it clear that my thesis could not be 'hermetically sealed' and would therefore need to be written creatively and with care for the characters portrayed and the sensitivities shared. This extract from my 2019 ethics application, subsequently approved by the committee, details my intentions:

> A narrative style will suit this research to allow for the creative unfolding of a story that links to reality yet is shared as a work of semi-fiction. Ethically it is necessary to hide behind such a device, as the people, places and problems that will feature in my research need to remain protected. I want to apply an 'ethics of care' (Tracy, 2010) to the whole writing process. This will involve a vigilance around what can be written and what must not be shared and a need for constant reflexive appraisal of the memories, recounts, conversations and situational data I will draw upon for my thesis. I intend to run decisions past my internal sense of morality and ask myself 'Will this cause harm?' before committing pen to paper. This chimes with Marvasti and Fairclough's (2013) understanding of writing authentic ethnographic narratives that contain this sense of moral responsibility. As a member-researcher (Anderson, 2006) I have the advantage of inside knowledge of working practices and the responsibility to protect the identities of colleagues and peers who have not consented to the inclusion of my recollections involving them. I must also remain mindful of the varied interpretations that exist and the associated images and metaphors that arise through my recollections (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009) and pay heed to the stories I choose to tell, as these can have ethical and moral repercussions (Spry, 2011).

As Ball reflects, when writing about his own experience of having his presumed anonymised work identified:

> [T]he distortions inherent in any kind of observation must be admitted. Access to a world of fleeting, overlapping, contradictory, murky, incoherent realities demands selective attention from the fieldworker (1984, p.78).

To protect identities, memories have been recreated with details blurred, characteristics altered, places unnamed. Personal minutes have been condensed to brief summaries and responsibility accepted that these are my versions of events. They are not described from the place of the other, as I cannot access those lenses. However, I can be mindful of them and the impact my retelling might have on others who were part of these moments in time, or 'slices of life' (Ball, 1984, p.83).

Nevertheless, I remain drawn to a hybrid evocative-analytic approach that knits together different elements drawing from the seemingly opposing schools of autoethnographic thought. Equally, through employing a psychoanalytical lens to that which is observable and hidden, conscious and unconscious, contingent on lack and desire, I hope to get to the heart of the matter: is it possible to expand a Multi Academy Trust and retain the integrity and moral vision that existed at the start?

A system redesign

The hearts and minds approach to research that autoethnography affords appeals to my desire for congruency (Sparkes, 2007; Bochner, 2014) and enables me to share my part in a story that is both relevant and timely – conditions that sit within Tracy's first criterion of having a 'worthy topic' (2010, p.840). Equally important is the opportunity research presents for unwrapping layers of perceived and contested truths that have formed around the English academy agenda. Gioia explains how traditional ethnographic studies involve the researcher immersing themselves in the community they are studying and noticing the everyday patterns, similarities and differences that exist. She further describes what these variances could represent:

> The differences observed between community members is one layer, differences between the researcher and the researched is a second layer of examination, and

> the reflexive writing we do cuts to the core of our own differences in thinking about events that unfold in the field' (2013, p.146).

The reflexive part of this analysis, including thinking about 'events that unfold', fit the model I had in mind of a study of reality that opens up opportunities to question the accepted 'truths' that hold fast within our education system, thus described by Alvesson and Sköldberg:

> Empirical research in a reflective mode starts from a sceptical approach to what appear at a superficial glance as unproblematic replicas of the way reality functions, while at the same time maintaining the belief that the study of suitable (well thought out) excerpts from this reality can provide an important basis for a generation of knowledge that opens up rather than closes, and furnishes opportunities for understanding rather than establishes "truths" (2009, p.9).

In practical terms, stripping away the strata of accumulated understandings and assumptions that form the foundations of the current academisation agenda requires a sharp eye for the fossilised remains of the varied forms of school system change the English government has displayed then discarded. Excavating policy documents, research papers and newspaper reports has enabled some of this buried knowledge to see the light of day whilst my time 'in the field' as Head teacher adds to the rigour of the study (Tracy, 2010).

The focus on Yellow Brick Primary School's academisation as a transformational journey represents a 'worthy topic' (the first of Tracy's eight "Big-Tent" criteria) in that it can be seen as 'relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative' (2010, p.840). Although the Government removed the demand for all schools to change their legal status from maintained to academy by 2020 (Adams, 2016), there remains an intent towards blanket academisation, more recently confirmed by the Secretary of State for Education in his speech to the Confederation of School Trusts (Gov.uk, 2021)[10]. This is raised by Rayner et al. (2018) as a fait accompli. Schools may not have to go through a legal conversion process to separate from Local Authority control; they simply evolve into academy-like institutions through the adoption of commonly accepted corporate systems and policy-enactment:

[10] There has been another u-turn since, with explicit blanket academisation by 2030 appearing in the DfE 2022 White Paper before being removed in 2023.

> [A]lthough the immediate conversion of all schools into academies was paused in May 2016 (DFE 2016), it remains a political objective. Our data show that such an objective may be achieved without policy directives, as activities and practices can realise academisation by non-academy schools (Raynor et al., 2018, p.158).

The shift this represents for school leaders and teachers is not necessarily a seismic one. It is more of a tiptoeing towards assumed best practice as lauded by established MATs with far-reaching networks at their disposal. Teaching school status and the development of alliances that provide continuous professional development (CPD) for serving staff and initial teacher education for those wishing to join the profession can influence how preferred 'activities and practices' are absorbed into the collective understanding of what constitutes a good school. This aligns with how Rayner et al. see academisation: it is so much more than a legal process that changes the status of a school, it is a 'system redesign' that occurs at a strategic level without the full involvement (and perhaps awareness) of those who bring policy into practice at the chalk face, the 'policy actors' (2018, p.144). It remains hidden behind all the legalities and policy initiatives that accompany the change process. This view interests me as it chimes with Shah's critique of the language employed by Government to describe academies as being 'a skilful use of *hidden* power' (2018, p.224, emphasis added), an example of which is the way that academisation is presented as the panacea for failure within education, '[t]he effect of *invisible* power results in the acculturation of citizens to the belief that academisation is the only solution for *failing* schools' (2018, p.224, emphasis added). I would go further than Shah and claim that academisation is widely, yet unconsciously, accepted as a quick fix for raising aspiration, standards and results regardless of the lack of supporting evidence (Wrigley, 2011, p.144). The drive towards academy status is underpinned by neoliberal ideologies including market forces that many people are just not aware of. I had not looked on the academy agenda as a form of back-door privatisation until I began my doctoral studies, thus opening Pandora's neoliberal box and revealing all associated ills (yet still holding onto hope). Neoliberalism exists beneath the surface level of consciousness, ever-present yet rarely visible. It pedals freedom and autonomy yet delivers constraints linked to performance targets, metrics and economics. For Brown, neoliberalism is a 'governing rationality' that:

> [D]oes not merely privatize – turn over to the market for individual production and consumption – what was formally publicly supported and valued. Rather, it formulates everything, everywhere, in terms of capital investment and appreciation, including and especially humans themselves (2015, p.176).

The lack of widespread awareness of the powerful influence neoliberalism has in our society leaves people vulnerable to such formulation. Jung describes how 'many millions of people' are susceptible to shared collective interpretations of unconscious archetypes or symbols and provides the rise of fascism in the early 20th century as an example of such a pervasive archetypal 'lunacy' (1980, p.48). Minnich documents the same mindlessness that enables acts of extensive evil to occur through the general population deliberately turning a blind eye or following orders without thought of the consequences (2017). The devastating lunacy of the rise of fascism underscores the capacity for the domination of the masses through a lack of awareness or a set of false promises that mask an unpalatable reality. Kotsko highlights the shadow side of the promised and assumed freedoms inherent in a neoliberal system:

> [N]eoliberalism emphasises not market exchange (which presupposes equality) but market competition (which necessarily entails inequality, since there must be winners and losers) (2018, p.89).

Market competition is the blood that pumps through the veins of academies, regardless of how altruistically motivated the founding principles are. If we are unwilling or unable to examine the driving forces that exist beneath the surface of the academy agenda we risk a growing sense of dis-ease leading to a disconnect between hearts and minds.

What lies beneath

Thinking of power as existing beneath the surface draws on Foucault's representation of the ubiquitous nature of power (1979). Alvesson and Sköldberg describe how, for Foucault, power 'does not allow itself to be localized and fixed' (2009, p.252), rather it permeates the ether, simultaneously bestowing grace on the leaders and the led, '[h]ence institutions do not create power. Their role is to organise or, as it were, "hang" already extant relationships of dominance on a more comprehensive instance' (2009, p.252). In my role as Head teacher the recognition that I had given away our power as a self-governing primary school came too

late. It was more of a slow realisation, a post-hoc recognition, that crept into my conscious mind at moments when I continued to make autonomous decisions that were subsequently questioned by the Director. One example involved renewing a lease agreement for school photocopiers, previously a standard action undertaken on a three-yearly basis as Head teacher. The procurement of any such contract was to now be directed through the Head of Operations, which lengthened the process considerably. Another involved a potential safeguarding issue involving children from my school and students from the Director's, with the older students engaging the younger children in inappropriate dialogue via social media. After speaking to the Director about this, I drafted a letter to parents explaining the situation, including mentioning the year group of the older students, and offering advice for supporting their children's online safety. The Director vetoed my letter as it mentioned his school by name. This was to avoid our primary parents recognising that some students at the high school were not behaving appropriately: this could put them off sending their children there. In a competitive market, where pupils equal pounds, my letter had to be rewritten in a bland and vague manner so as not to jeopardise future transition. Underscoring the safety concerns were secondary. Image mattered more.

For academy schools it can be argued that decision making lies ultimately with the Trustees or the individual Governing Body and that school leaders act as gatekeepers to the knowledge that enables powerful changes to occur. Through this Foucauldian lens we can see how stakeholders have just as much power should they open their eyes and recognise how to access and employ it (Foucault, 1988). Indeed, the primary school used as an example in Rayner et al. reneged on their decision to convert as 'the resistance by staff and their threat of resignation was the most significant factor in ending governor's agreement to the conversion plan' (2017, p.157).

It is now interesting to note that schools who chose to convert (rather than being forced to for 'failing') readily define themselves as 'converter academies' in their marketing literature and recruitment advertisements to differentiate themselves in the public eye from their poorer relations, the 'sponsored academy'. Converter academies are 'successful schools that have chosen to convert to academies in order to benefit from the increased autonomy academy status brings'; schools graded 'outstanding' by Ofsted have pre-approval to convert' (politics.co.uk 2019). This is another subtle indication of the divisive nature of the

English academy agenda: academy schools are compared with each other and subsequently judged to be better or worse, or as Hall and Pulsford note:

> A prominent feature of such an ecosystem is the diversification of school types, emerging within national contexts that seek to improve school standards via increased choice of provision, via competition (2019, p.243).

Not content with the labels awarded to schools by Ofsted: Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, Inadequate (Ofsted, 2019, p.38) our primary schools are further catalogued as either community (Local Authority run), foundation/voluntary (often Church or Faith linked) or academy/free (funded directly from the Government) (n.d., Gov.uk). Little wonder that members of the public assume indifference to yet another academy conversion. It is difficult enough to unravel what each label means. And why bother? What really matters to many parents is a place in a local school where their child can make good progress and enjoy their precious primary years. Yet what matters most to parents is not the priority focus of a neoliberal-laced education agenda, even if it is the mask it dons. What lies behind the mask of freedom-through-choice is a primary education system redesign (Rayner et al., 2018) that espouses collaboration and community whilst recognising and rewarding competition:

> Thus, central to the neoliberal re-engineering of the primary school terrain is the importance of market-based logistics that pit members or factions of communities against each other in pursuit of improved standards and efficiency: pupils, teachers, parents and schools must compete. Such competitive individualism and individuation instilled in contemporary educational cultures weaken social ties and limit the possibilities for a shared sense of purpose and collaboration (Hall and Pulsford, 2019, p.244).

For Yellow Brick Primary School, an Ofsted grade of 'good' ensured a position as a convertor academy. Within our fledgling MAT we sat alongside another primary (requires improvement) and a secondary (good) with a third 'good' primary waiting in the wings to join. We set out with complete collaboration and cooperation in mind and yet wished to retain autonomy as Head teachers in our own schools. This was an illusory aim. As Clarke illustrates:

> [J]ust as the signifier gives the illusion of autonomy and agency, so discourse creates a sense of social cohesion and coherence, enabling us to forget and encouraging us to ignore the alienation and alterity, fragility and fallibility, denials and divisions that constitute both the subject and society (2019, p.44).

The words employed as we discussed our emerging roles coupled with the social contract we had unconsciously created allowed us to view those early months as a Multi Academy Trust through lenses that were probably pink. It is true that we were in the same ship as a Trust which inevitably placed us in competition with other ships around us. Soon it became evident that, when storms hit, those collaborative values became secondary to orders from the captain and a more competitive will to survive surfaced.

The Tin Man, the hysteric and me

It could be considered a pity that hindsight only affords us with an opportunity to find some deeper meaning after an event. Revisiting the past and reflecting sagely seems somewhat simpler than developing an ability to read intuitively how the future will unfold. Like Prometheus stealing fire from the Olympians to share with mortal men we can sometimes regret decisions made even when done so with the best of intentions. Considering my then positionality as Head teacher participating openly in the restructuring of established leadership hierarchies, this guidance from Seneca now resonates:

> I shall put myself under observation straight away and undertake a review of my day – a course which is of the utmost benefit. What really ruins our characters is the fact that none of us looks back over his life. We think about what we are going to do, and only rarely of that, and fail to think about what we have done, yet any plans for the future are dependent on the past (2004, p.140).

But which self was I keeping an eye on? The established Head teacher of a good school? The hopeful leader of a new academy? The cooperative colleague supporting the vision of our Director? Or the person playing out each different role and feeling increasingly divided as the balance of power shifted? My inner self was becoming ever more fractured as I attempted to 'construct an imaginary self, as a conscious attempt to construct a preferred identity' (Driver, 2015, p.622). I desired to win approval for doing the right thing in my role as Head teacher yet struggled with knowing the rules of play. Expectations tilted on a daily

basis and I found myself trying to forge ahead on a pathway barely visible due to shifting sands. Time to reflect was indeed future-focussed as we hurried to meet last minute deadlines imposed by the Department for Education as our MAT was scrutinised for a range of efficiencies. As the pressure mounted, my inner voice became progressively critical of the move away from our initial values towards hoop-jumping to please the DfE. The discourses were turning and we were entering into the realm of the hysteric.

I recall a meeting where a colleague Head teacher within the MAT questioned the Director about these values. We were now at the point where members of the MAT central administration team attended our weekly Head teacher meetings. Agendas were formulaic and everyone had an allocated time to speak: a far cry from the early intimate days of Head teachers speaking frankly and without prejudice. The discussion focussed on displays of values seen in other MAT schools and on their websites. We wanted to create something similarly visible and the Director was challenged to articulate what our core values were as a MAT. He couldn't respond. In the early days this would have presented an opportunity for discussion and reflection but we were on another trajectory now. This demand for an answer was felt by the Director as a moment of humiliation as 'the master is supposed to know … and produce the answer' (Verhaeghe, 1995, pp.92-3). It places the exchange firmly within the discourse of the hysteric, with my colleague as hysterical subject insisting on revealing a truth that cannot be verbalised:

> Structurally, the hysterical discourse results in alienation for the hysterical subject and in castration for the master. The answer, given by the master, will always be beside the point, because the true answer concerns object *a,* the forever lost object, which cannot be put into words (Verhaeghe, 1995, p.93).

The resulting alienation for my colleague occurred via a requested private meeting with the Director, where a harsh dressing down was delivered with a strong suggestion to support the MAT leadership without raising questions that might lead to a public 'castration' when the Director cannot answer them. This incident deeply troubled me. I had also questioned our lack of clear values and the shift perceived since meetings became more corporate and less supportive, yet I had not had my wrists slapped. My colleague shared that the threatening tone of the meeting reduced him to tears and had revealed a side to the Director that was not previously visible. It was clear that a more ruthless 'master' was

emerging. And yet we still had to create a set of values that reflected what we wanted others to believe the MAT encompassed! The sense of unease this created within me pushed me further away from the desire to be a part of what was unfolding. Like the Tin Man, I could not feel any heart within the hollow words we were crafting. Again, Verhaeghe pins this in relation to the hysteric's provocation of the master and their 'never-ending battle': the more the master is questioned the more signifiers are produced in response, none of which ever verbalise the 'final truth' (1995, p.93). What seemed to matter most was the surface appearance. If what was described on the tin did not quite match the contents, that was now acceptable. As long as no one opened the tin …

The cracks that were appearing internally, although hairline, were enough to destabilise my loyal trust in the Director. What my colleague had shared reaffirmed the risks of being part of a larger organisation that now owned each member school and consequently had control of us as school leaders. It also revealed insecurities within the Director, who appeared to struggle with the role of master in the moment of the shared exchange and was unable to provide any answers. This wobble did not shift the balance of power and as McSwite reveals:

> *[P]ower is real;* institutions can act legitimately and authoritatively and very negatively. Punishment for not supporting social institutions can be severe (2003, p.193, original emphasis).

Trust was being replaced with confusion and an underlying sense of fear. I too had become divided, a split subject, which Lacan places at the centre of the hysteric's discourse. I needed to know that what we set out to create was possible. This desire to find an alignment between our original vision and what we now appeared to be living into being drove me to question and challenge the direction of travel. We had moved from the Scarecrow's search for knowledge and a shared discourse of the university, a discourse that conceals the 'divided real subject of the unconscious' (Driver, 2016, p.7), to the demanding, confrontational and critical hysteric which enables the split subject to take centre stage. Like the Tin Man, Lacan's hysteric seeks love. The Tin Man's search leads us to recognise that 'we already possess what we seek most fervently' (Rushdie, 2012, p.51); this desire is easily satisfied with a representation of a heart. The hysteric, on the other hand, is never satisfied with symbols and remains stuck in a storm of unrequited desire:

> Specifically, the hysterical subject keeps asking for answers about whom he/she is and what he/she desires and when given those answers cannot find the real and therefore rejects them (Driver, 2016, p.7).

An example of the hysterical subject surfacing occurred during a meeting I requested with the Director to challenge a decision the Head of Operations had made in relation to Yellow Brick Primary School. My recollection of this frank conversation formed part of a transcribed interview held in February 2019 with visiting academics[11] researching the English MAT system:

> I received an email over the summer holidays from the Head of Operations saying, "We know that you've built up a really good reputation with this company, but as a Multi Academy Trust we've secured a really good deal with *this* company, so cancel all the work that you've got with those, and *this* company are now going to deal with all of the bits for improving your premises." I was so mad, because that came without conversation. An email from somebody who isn't a Head teacher and doesn't understand the pressures of a primary school. So that was one of the occasions where I messaged the Director and said, "We need to meet for coffee. This is unacceptable. Please don't let your team treat us in that manner. If you want me to be a puppet Head teacher and to stop thinking strategically for the good of my school, then I will do that, but if you want me to continue in the way that I have been, running and managing and leading this school, then give me my autonomy and please grace me with some discussion before you make a decision that affects my school." He just said "understood", but I was livid. I was really, really cross. And that was just a tiny example of how we feel that things have been taken away from us. And we're not seeing much benefit back (Personal interview, 2020).

The Director naturally replied in agreement with the latter but the words did not match the underlying intention. The reality I thought we were dealing with was in fact what Lacan terms the imaginary:

[11] Professor Bob Lingard and Dr Greg Thompson shared their transcript of the interview held in 2019, agreeing to my using extracts within my thesis. This will be referenced as 'Personal interview, 2020' as the email and transcript were received in January 2020.

> [T]he imaginary provides an illusion of completeness in both ourselves and what we perceive. In order to accomplish this, it dupes us into not seeing what is missing in ourselves and our world (McGowan, 2007, p.3).

I could not, at that point, see that a puppet Head teacher was precisely what the Director wished for and trusted his assurance that I would be consulted on any future decisions that would impact Yellow Brick Primary School. I was, as hysteric, asking 'Who am I? What do you want me to be?' (Wajcman, n.d.). The answer I received was not good enough, nor could it ever be. I desired autonomy as Head teacher: the Director assured me that this was secure. The lack was evident in the decisions that had already been made to override independence. My demands brought this lack uncomfortably close to the surface for the Director, who could never fulfil this desire. The new structure of the MAT would not allow it:

> Here the castrating dimension of the hysteric's game becomes evident. Pushing man towards knowledge [*pousse-à-savoir*], she also pushes him towards failure [*pousse-au-manque*]: the man involved with her always finds himself stupid [*manque-à-savoir*]. But the erratic quality of the hysteric's discourse derives more from the structure which necessitates hysteria than from the hysteric who asks to be interpreted in terms of the structure (Wajcman, n.d.).

As long as we remained locked within the discourse of the hysteric we would continue to yoyo between seeking the truth of who we were and rejecting all suggestions that did not (and could not) reveal that truth. We had created an imaginary structure that was 'at once visible and illusory' (McGowan, 2007, p.3). Our identities were intimately entwined within this structure and surfaced through the words we were assigned to describe our roles. Like the character of the Tin Man in the original book by Baum, it was as if we had come under some enchantment and had steadily replaced each part of ourselves with a replica made of tin, until we stood there as empty shells able to think but without a heart. And as the Tin Man wisely explains:

> But once I had brains, and a heart also; so, having tried them both, I should much rather have a heart (Baum, 2019, p.39).

With the heart missing from the Multi Academy Trust, the desire to be a part of it was rapidly waning. Nonetheless, would we have the courage to recognise this and fight for what we valued? Alternatively, would fear keep us in our respective boxes? As we travel on and meet the Cowardly Lion, these themes will be explored.

Chapter 5 - If I only had the nerve

A culture of fear

Stealing Furedi's 2006 title for the start of this chapter draws attention to the hidden effect fear as a factor had throughout our academy journey. As Furedi points out, fear operates as an unseen influencer, its power amplified by its invisibility, as 'the very fact that a problem is not visible invites us to speculate about its intensity' (2006, p.47). One of the prime reasons for choosing to convert to an academy was fear of being taken over by a large academy chain, forced to change everything we valued as a community primary school, which might weaken our strong community links and change our school identity[12]. This anxiety was rooted in the Government's proposal of academisation for all schools (DfE, 2016b). Should we fall foul of Ofsted and lose status as a 'good' school, we could be assigned a sponsor and hand over control of the school's destiny, as this extract from early consultation minutes shows:

> Governors wished to protect what we have and did not want to risk being forced into conversion, where we would have no choices about when, where and with whom this would be. Governors had therefore approved submission of an "expression of interest" in becoming an academy' (Personal minutes, 2015).

[12] Working today as a Schools Adviser, many primary Head teachers of 'good' schools cite this same reason for pursuing conversion, even though the Government again removed the directive for blanket academisation by 2030.

A personal experience of a large academy chain raised my awareness of how corporate educational organisations could become. I had studied for my National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) through one such organisation (which we shall name *'purple place'*) and the cult-like feel of the seminars and presentations left me feeling cold. Other trainee Head teachers from within the chain appeared to have memorised scripted responses to questions raised by course leaders, who held fantastic titles such as 'Chief Executive Principal'. For example, when asked where our ideal first headship would be, '*purple place'* employees responded enthusiastically with 'wherever we are asked to lead' and showed willingness – no, eagerness - to relocate or travel distances to take up a directed post within the organisation. They appeared to have no autonomy of thought and, like *Stepford Wives* of school leadership, were operating in a 'hands up, pick me!' culture of performativity:

> Performativity is a culture or system of 'terror'. It is a regime of accountability that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change. The performances of individual subjects or organisations serve as measures of productivity or output (Ball, 2008, p.49).

In the shared example trainee Head teachers recognised the high level of productivity that would be needed when embarking on a career within '*purple place's'* organisation. They had listened, alongside me, to a serving Head teacher explain the salary bandings for their leaders were different (lower) as *'purple place'* offered headships 'with stabilisers' provided by the head office team, who arranged everything from the behaviour policy, uniform, HR policies and curriculum, to enable Head teachers to focus on leading teaching and learning. They reasoned that pay could be less than colleagues in maintained schools, who had responsibility for all strategic and organisational matters. No-one questioned the super-inflated salaries that matched the sparkling titles of the leaders presenting. All of this confirmed my belief that converting to academy status as a sponsored academy was akin to selling your soul[13].

[13] I had a similar sense of discomfort when, at the final NPQEL face-to-face event, Head teachers were asked if we had secured a promotion since starting the course. When I explained I had instead stepped away from Headship to a post that offered a better work-life balance, the course leader visibly blanched. My response did not fit the script.

What is difficult to untangle, looking back at that time and at subsequent experiences within our growing MAT, is how pre-determined the decline from an atmosphere of open collegiality to one of micro-managed autocracy was. Stepping momentarily into the shoes of the Director, was there always a game plan in mind that ensured all paths led eventually to one system, one leader, one school design? Or did that happen in response to increasing pressure from the DfE and its preference for a 'one size fits all' model? In moments of personal conversation with the Director I voiced my concerns around a growing feeling of unease at being squeezed into a box that stripped our schools of independence. He would agree and explained that we were now so closely scrutinised by the DfE and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) that we had little choice other than to follow instructions, pass their 'tests' and hopefully gain enough trust to create some distance. Then we would be free to return to our original vision of autonomy within a shared partnership. These thoughts and feelings are evident in a further excerpt from the transcript of the interview I did with research academics[14] two years into our MAT journey:

> Subject: That's where one of the benefits of academisation has been a real source of strength: you've got colleagues you can speak frankly to about the pressures, and you can support each other and share resources, and that has developed over the past two years. That's been really, really good. But the downside is that as a newly-formed, baby MAT, we're like one step removed from the DFE, so you know, my personal experience is, as a good school on the edge of a large geographical local authority, we were left to our own devices. People would pop in a couple of times a year and check the results at the end of the year, "Yeah, you're still good," and leave us alone. We did what we felt was best for the school. We don't have that freedom or autonomy anymore. Everything is monitored, and everything is measured, and we're all having to justify so much more, because the Director has to have it to give to the DfE.
>
> Interviewer: It's one of the interesting things for us, the way that – correct me if I'm wrong, but part of the attraction of the academy is the opportunity to be –

[14] As previously stated, Professor Bob Lingard and Dr Greg Thompson shared this transcript from our interview in 2019.

> Subject: Yes! Autonomous! (laughs) It doesn't exist!
>
> Interviewer: Do you feel cheated, in a way?
>
> Subject: Not cheated; just more pissed off, really! (laughter) We still, behind closed doors, we still believe that if we can find a way to give them what they want, and jump through the hoops, we will be able to do what we really believe in underneath, but there are so many hoops to jump through, and keeping the standards high, and keeping everybody happy with diminishing resources. I mean, the finances – don't even get me started. It's really hard (Personal interview, 2020).

What strikes me, reading this now, is that I was still hopeful two years in despite the warning signs. No money, no freedom, no autonomy and I laughed it off as I still believed we could make a difference and subvert the system by creating something compliant enough to get the DfE off our backs. Such subversive complicity appealed. I believed in the strength of the partnerships we shared, particularly as primary colleagues, and reckoned we could achieve our goal of refusing to comply fully with DfE requirements, as 'the most powerful form of refusal is one that is expressed from a position within the system that is being refused' (Marcuse, 1964, cited in McSwite, 2003, p.184). Exploring this process autoethnographically further unleashed within me a desire to set the record straight and share the realities we faced as school leaders forced to walk the tightrope that spanned local community needs and national political contexts. This became arguably even more pertinent when the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, announced renewed interest in every school becoming an academy (Gov.uk, 2021).

So, what of the finances? The promise of additional funding was another reason for the decision to convert. School leaders were under the impression that the hidden 'top slice' of money retained by the Local Authority (prior to funding schools) would be a worthy addition to impoverished budgets. This did not materialise. In 2015, when our journey began, schools were given a one-off start up grant of £25,000 to cover all conversion costs. This paid for the legal fees associated with the change in status and left only small change. An additional pot of money was dangled like the proverbial carrot, promising £75,000 to two or more primaries who converted simultaneously as part of a MAT. This 'Primary Chain

Academy Development Grant' (DfE, 2016a) was duly applied for and submitted prior to the April 2016 deadline:

> The Primary Academy Chain Development Grant can be used flexibly over the course of two years. It is intended to provide financial support to enable new clusters of primary schools to build and formalise their partnership, enabling them to achieve their shared vision of improved results, better outcomes and significantly improved standards more quickly (DfE, 2016a, p.2).

We found ourselves unsuccessful as the formal conceding of academy status had been delayed due to a backlog at the DfE and this grant was only eligible to schools who were already in receipt of their Academy Order. Our attempt at locating the promised pot of gold yielded no joy yet we had begun a process that would expect us to provide improved results, better outcomes and significantly improved standards nevertheless. Meanwhile a flurry of operational policies created by the Director and reviewed by the Head teacher Board reflected the statutory demands of academy financial management.

Academies, unlike maintained schools, cannot go over their allocated budget as there is no Local Authority with contingency money to bail them out. Academisation of schools 'needs to be seen in the light of the 'learning economy' – serving a desire for market competitiveness and a skills-based agenda' (Shah, 2018, p.218). Combine the change in funding to a monthly (from a quarterly) system with a General Annual Grant (GAG) funding stream that did not cover staffing costs, there was much to worry about behind the scenes in the early days as an academy. These internal changes were brought about by larger, external forces (Dawson and Andriopoulis, 2017), leaving the school leadership team to balance the books and keep their growing financial concerns away from the rest of the staff and parents. Managing the money within the constraints of academy policy represented a layer of bureaucracy that added to an already stretched administrative workload for me as Head teacher and for the School Business Manager. The financial pressures that were starting to accumulate contributed to an irreparable schism between what we purported to value and where the energy and focus truly lay. As Benjamin Franklin said, 'time equals money' ([1748] 1961, p.304) and we had unwittingly stepped into a landscape where this

equation would be measured, judged and used as another performative benchmark. With fewer resources and higher expectations, something had to give. I had no idea at that time that that something would be me.

Courage

The Cowardly Lion is the last of Dorothy's companions to join the party. Although he is the undisputed King of the Forest, he doubts his ability to rule as he fears everything around him. He lacks courage and yet repeatedly engages in acts of bravery to safeguard his friends. These acts are subconscious reactions to external threats, yet he does not value his intrinsic valour until presented with a tokenistic medal for courage. The Cowardly Lion reminds me of the tensions that developed after the initial gloss of conversion had dulled and new restrictions concurrent with being part of a MAT surfaced. As leader of a successful school I used my voice to argue against policies that went against the initial vision shared but this was as successful as the Cowardly Lion waving his clenched fists whilst shouting 'put 'em up, put 'em up!' (Langley et al., 1989, p.78). Never a 'yes' woman, I had no fear of speaking my mind and going against the status quo and thus offering a pocket of resistance. In terms of Lacanian discourse, I was waking up to the reality that the words we choose to use and those we omit render us 'not only colluders but also rebels' (McSwite, 2006, p.179). I was committed to speaking openly within the circle of trust I believed existed as part of our social bond, which Sharpe defines as 'the underlying resonance of interpersonal connection that *makes it possible* for people to reach agreements and form social contracts' (2001, p.501, original emphasis). My direct and often critical analysis of MAT policy and practice was not always regarded as a professional strength in an institution that valued the public persona more than the portrait of truth hidden in the attic. There was a misalignment occurring between what I tried to articulate in relation to that which we were building and what the Director was quietly developing for the MAT. This mismatch in expectation, understandable as we were conversing within 'the realm of the Real' which cannot be signified (Sharpe, 2001), produced a further lack that could never be fulfilled:

> [W]hat we lack has become submerged in our unconscious and who we are as subjects of the unconscious cannot be accessed through language. Therefore, trying

> to articulate consciously what our unconscious desires are only leads us to imaginary constructions which invariably fail as our unconscious asserts itself and tells us that this is not "it" again or, as Lacan put it, we are confronted again that what we want or who we think we are turns out to be "a gift of shit" (Lacan, 1977, p.268, cited in Driver, 2013, p.411).

These imaginary constructions resonate with the Jungian persona and represent the outward facing mask we wear to interact with and survive within the social worlds we inhabit as we battle to 'keep up appearances' (Garfinkle, 1967, cited in McSwite, 2006, p.179). It links the ego (how we see ourselves) to others we encounter. The shadow is a part of our psyche (soul, mind, spirit) that forms the undesirable portrait concealed within our individual unconscious, a portrait composed of the elements of ourselves that we do not like or feel ashamed of, or 'because the shadow is so disagreeable … it has to be repressed into the unconscious' (Jung, 1990, p.265). Indeed, each part of ourselves that we recognise as, what Lacan terms, the 'gift of shit' is added to our shadow. This shadow can be so well-camouflaged that we remain unaware of its presence, yet we are unconsciously impacted by the influence it wields over our thoughts and behaviours. In Jungian psychoanalysis part of our growth towards becoming whole involves recognising and facing our shadow thus illuminating the guidance it offers. Our Cowardly Lion is terrified of his own shadow until, as Rushdie reminds us, 'Dorothy's capture by the Witch brings out the Lion's courage, though he pleads with his friends to "talk me out of it"' (2012, p.51). For Lacan, on the other hand, we can never be whole. Indeed, the best we can hope for is a recognition and acceptance of our incomplete state: we are always lacking. From both Lacanian and Jungian perspectives, regardless of their differences, we need courage. Courage to accept the inevitability of our future as a perpetually unfulfilled subject or courage to face the depths of our internal struggle with the shadow we hide.

Courage can be defined as an ability to face up to our fears or endure physical pain or hardship. In the Cambridge online dictionary, we read that courage is 'the ability to control your fear in a dangerous or difficult situation' and also 'to be brave and confident enough to do what you believe in' (accessed 2020). Showing pluck and valour in testing times resonates strongly with the archetypal energy of the hero.

Heroism as a motif[15] has been represented across time and cultures and forms part of the collective unconscious in that we all know. It can relate to a myth or story around a hero figure who fights for the common good or rescues the downtrodden or performs seemingly impossible tasks to complete a quest or challenge. When we call to mind the hero archetype we may think of corresponding qualities such as bravery, skill, resilience, determination and independence. There is often a superhuman element to heroic deeds celebrated in ancient narratives, which Jung relates to the hero's descent from both divine and mortal parents, the 'dual birth' motif (Jung, 1990, p.68). Yet what of the archetypal tragic hero, such as Oedipus (whose story fits the 'well-known incest motif frequently met within hero myths' (Jung, 1990, p.69))? What can they teach us about courage? Shepherdson lists the elements associated with such an untimely hero as one who 'blindly and in stubborn self-assurance goes beyond the proper limits of human judgement, with the best intentions, only to find out that he has unwittingly committed a terrible crime' (2008, p.69). The courage of the tragic hero rests not on the deeds performed when in power but in the strength of character needed to face the Erinyes (Furies) that hound them until their crimes have been avenged. For through these terrible acts of hubris (be it incest or murder) the hero is forced on a journey of discovery through suffering that leads to eventual rebirth, an important part of any sacred transformation experience (Jung, 1990, p.128). As Shepherdson reminds us:

> [L]et us recall that *hubris,* the Greek word that is so often translated as "pride" or even "sin," has nothing to do with these Christian notions. *Hubris* means violence. *Hubrizdo* means to commit an act of violence, but in a special sense, which belongs not to the sphere of human will, or to the exercise of brutality, but to the singular and more essential character of the tragic hero as such (2008, p.77).

Lacan, in his reflections on Sophocles' *Antigone,* might see this peculiar hubristic quality of the tragic hero as the thing that separates the heroic from the ordinary, yet he also recognises the path of the hero as part of the journey we each undertake:

[15] Jung uses the term 'motif' to describe repetitive patterns within the unconscious that share a meaning (1990, p.183).

> "Last time," Lacan says: "I opposed the hero to the ordinary man, and someone was upset by that. I do not distinguish between them as if they were two different human species. In each of us the path of the hero is traced, and it is precisely as an ordinary man that *one follows it to the end*" (SVII, 321, emphasis added) (Shepherdson, 2008, p.79).

Our Cowardly Lion appears to be anything but heroic: when he comes face-to-face with the Wizard, he 'faints dead away' (Langley et al., 1989, p.101). It is precisely this 'anti-heroism' that Rushdie celebrates, as it is Dorothy's friends 'apparent lack of Great Qualities, that makes them our size, or even smaller, so that we can stand among them as equals' (2012, p.51). Yet Jung views the ordinary as the undoing of the hero, as '[h]e can cope with the greatest perils, yet, in the end, something quite insignificant is his undoing' (1990, p.167). This leads to more questions than answers in relation to the journey of Yellow Brick Primary School. Could the road to academisation be seen as a heroic path of transformation, by an ordinary school leader, if *followed to the end*? Was there, within this developing school system, an Achilles' heel that exposed an inherent weakness or blind spot? Or did something insignificant cause the unravelling of the original vision of a community of schools with shared values? Could this be a tale of a heroic overcoming of obstacles or, depending on the lens you choose, a tragedy waiting to unfold?

Restoking the fire

In January 2019 academies and free schools made up 32% of English primaries and 75% of secondary schools, educating more than 4.1 million pupils (DfE, 2019). In 2021 these percentages increased to 37% primaries (26.2% convertor and 9.6% sponsored) and 78% secondaries (47.7% convertor and 22.3% sponsored) (Gov.uk, 2021a). There are an additional 328 primary schools in the pipeline to become academies and the then Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, affirmed that 'the government's vision is for every school to be part of a family of schools in a strong multi academy trust' (Gov.uk, 2021b). Williamson believed that 'strong multi academy trusts are the best structure to enable schools and teachers to deliver consistently good outcomes for all their pupils' (Gov.uk, 2021b) but what evidence does this belief rest on? There have been many dissenting voices

raising awareness of the problems present in the promised land of academisation (Beckett, 2007; Gunter, 2011; Benn and Downs, 2016; Shah, 2018); the rivers of milk and honey that flow through these landscapes do not enrich children's learning any more than their differently-funded maintained counterparts. As Benn and Downs summarise in their myth-busting chapter on academies raising standards:

> For all the investment and all the loudly claimed benefits of academy status the evidence – once they are compared to similar schools and without equivalents – shows that improvements in academies are less than in maintained schools (2016, p.92).

If this was the case in 2016, where do we currently stand? Looking at the 2019-2020 Ofsted annual report we see a different data set to that which Williamson nailed his pro-academy mast to, as when comparing the overall effectiveness of schools we find:

> The grades also vary by type of school. For instance, 91% of local authority maintained schools were judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection compared with 80% of academies (Gov.uk, 2020a).

What is more revealing is the subsequent catalogue of justifications that are listed to account for this (potentially unwelcome) statement in favour of local authority maintained schools:

> However, in some cases, the latest available grade for an academy relates to an inspection of the local authority school that preceded it, or before it joined its current MAT. It is difficult to make fair comparisons between different types of schools for several reasons, including because:
>
> - sponsor-led academies often replaced a struggling school
> - we do not inspect new academies until their third year, so some have not yet been inspected as the new school
> - outstanding schools (which include many converter academies) were historically exempt from inspection

- there is a range of different inspection frameworks under which schools have been inspected (Gov.uk, 2020a)

Surely these comparisons work both ways? *All* schools have endured inspection under a range of different inspection frameworks (over 21 since Ofsted was established in 1992) with the focus of inspection shifting. *All* outstanding schools have been historically exempt from inspection. *All* struggling schools require support, be it from a local authority or through an academy sponsor. I find the reference to the predecessor school curious as this school legally ceases to exist upon conversion. Yes, Ofsted will refer back to the last inspection grade but this could be one of four; there is an implication, through the use of 'however' at the start of the paragraph, that the preceding local authority schools were graded below good. This was not the case for Yellow Brick Primary School.

It is hardly surprising that the Secretary of State wishes all schools to become academies. Alongside removing the threat of successful, yet politically diverse Local Authorities supporting schools in their area, it also enables the buffering role of the LA to be removed so schools become directly answerable to Government and therefore serve one master. It is also interesting that, in the same Ofsted document, it is reported that the numbers of academy conversions have slowed from an increase of 800 in 2018/2019 to 510 the following year. This is not, Ofsted state, a consequence of Covid-19. It is more likely that the 'gradual stabilising of academisation is largely a continuation of longer-term trends' (Gov.uk, 2020a). This indication of schools potentially losing interest in becoming an academy might have worried Williamson enough to revisit the academy agenda and restoke the fire, promising schools a 'try before you buy' approach which will allow them to 'temporarily partner with a strong trust, to experience the benefits that being part of a trust would offer them, their pupils, and their wider school communities' (Gov.uk, 2021b).

I wonder what has caused schools to settle with their current status and avoid voluntary conversion? Could it be that good schools continue to function well and support children's learning without the need for such a drastic change in status? What would the motivation to academise be for a school that is thriving, when there are no apparent financial benefits and it is not yet a forced issue? Perhaps questions like these have encouraged Williamson to

turn up the heat. The challenge for school leaders and parents is to remain alert and not be lulled into a false sense of security by the enticing rhetoric included in Williamson's speech where the following words feature prominently: *'schools, trust, strong, academy, support, family'* (word cloud analysis/Gov.uk, 2021b). This policy-speak sits within the category of 'political warrant', which linguistically justifies policy as being for the good of society and in the best interest of the public (Hyatt, 2013). Drawing on Cochran-Smith and Fries' (2001) categorisation of warrant (reasonable grounds for action or belief), Hyatt further explains the link between political warrant and that of accountability (which focuses on performativity measures):

> The political warrant … can be closely rhetorically linked to the accountability warrant, but is usually couched in more general, evocative and positively evaluated terms, such as freedom, social justice, inclusion, social cohesion, or family values' (2013, p.839).

In the chain of signifiers linked to the drive to academisation highlighted above, the focus is on representing a vision of our schools-as-academies becoming unfailing bastions, upholding family (and British) values within a growing network of mutual support and trust. What is not revealed is the spectre of neoliberal policy: there can be no true collaboration; there can be no trust; there can only be competition and only the strong will win.

Master and servant

Turning once more to Lacan, the discourse of the master surfaces as we consider the hierarchy of power that provides a spinal structure to the academy system and the measures of success that are employed within this framework:

> The discourse of the master relates to hegemony, to key signifiers that structure knowledge and understanding. In educational discourses in England the current reverence towards signifiers such as 'standards', 'improvement targets', 'performance' and 'evaluation', indicate their hegemonic position in such discourses (Brown et al., 2006, p.117).

It is true to say that the data that governs academy performance is equally applied to all state funded schools in England. The information that attracts greater scrutiny in our schools is reified by Ofsted and their current focus for school inspections[16]. In truth leaders in academies, more than in LA maintained schools, serve more than one master. They work to meet the expectations of Ofsted inspectors linked to the Education Inspection Framework (EIF) alongside providing benchmarking criteria required by the Regional Schools Commissioners (RSC), who 'provide oversight and scrutiny of academy trusts' performance, in line with the established framework for academy trusts' (Gov.uk, n.d. a). Academy leaders find themselves tightly bound to a dual set of expectations that work to displace them as chiefs with control over their school's destiny. Instead of leading, they find themselves pinned into position as subjects without autonomy dominated by the caprices of the masters who rule. Clarke equates this shift to the influence of neoliberal market forces:

> In essence, the market becomes the overriding master signifier organising and articulating various previously disparate fields of knowledge in line with its logics and with institutions and individuals all required to serve the needs of the master market or suffer the harsh consequences (2019, p.54).

For schools and academies, failure to meet the standards required by Ofsted triggers involvement by the RSC, who is responsible for both intervening in schools and academies that are deemed inadequate *and* offering support to schools and academies that Ofsted judge to require improvement. This example does not cover the full remit of power that the Secretary of State has bequeathed to eight RSCs. Under the umbrella aim of working 'with schools to ensure they are supported to improve and to address underperformance' (Gov.uk, n.d. c) RSCs, reporting to the National Schools Commissioner, are the movers and shakers behind the scenes of the academy agenda. They emerged in September 2014, initially to oversee the growing number of academies in England, with this role quickly expanding (Durbin et al., 2015). Or, to put it another way:

[16] A current example would be the focus on subject 'deep dives' which drive terror into the hearts of teachers with responsibility for leading specific subjects regardless of their personal experience or expertise in that area.

> [RSCs]were imagined on the back of a metaphorical fag packet as a solution to the "missing middle tier" as the emasculated local authorities were forced to withdraw from the education landscape (Dorrell, 2017, n.p.).

These are not elected individuals responsible to or representing the regions they operate within. They are civil servants, three with CVs that include substantial school leadership experience and the chief of whom boasts a TEFL qualification with experience of teaching English in Spain. With salaries ranging from £90k (Full Time Equivalent) to £144,999 (Gov.uk, 2021c) they are held to account by Head teacher Boards made up of 'up to 8 members – 4 elected by local academy headteachers, 2 appointed by the RSC and 2 are co-opted with the agreement of DfE ministers. All HTB members have equal status' (Gov.uk, 2020b). They do not include Heads of Local Authority schools.

Lacan's discourse of the master is inescapable within these contexts. What we are experiencing currently within the English education system could be classed as the 'pervasive presence' of the master's discourse that promises 'the impossible, in terms of its claims to remedy, or fix, the incompleteness and instability of the social field' (Clarke, 2019, p.49). We have detected already the deceptive assurances made through the much-heralded freedoms that academy status bestows. What experience reveals instead are the relentless machinations that operate within the apparatus of the academy system, itself underpinned by the master discourse, which 'addresses itself to an other to make the other work and deliver value to the master' (Driver, 2016, p.9). The value the master seeks lies in 'lost objects' of desire whilst the true split subject remains hidden from view. It is in the interest of the master to maintain this concealment as the real split subject and truth will only resurface when the domination of the master discourse is disrupted and wavers. Such control mechanisms, combined with the pressure placed on academy leaders by the dual expectations of Ofsted and the RSC, raise the question: Who are schools there to serve? We are frequently reminded, via vision statements and aims on websites, that it is the children and students who come first.[17] At Yellow Brick Primary I championed the same

[17] Vision Multi Academy Trust - Aims and Visions (visionmat.com); Outwood Grange Academies Trust; Vision & Values – Children First Learning Partnership | Inspiring Excellence Together | Based in Staffordshire (childrenfirstlp.org.uk)

belief: the children's interests were at the heart of each decision made. The reality was more of a juggling act. Keeping higher academic standards and results, tighter financial controls and Ofsted expectations aloft left little time for truly focussing on what the children needed. The pressures for us primary Head teachers were great and, we felt, not fully appreciated by the Director:

> Interviewer: Do you think it's difficult for the Director, who has secondary school experience, to understand primary schools within that context?
>
> Subject: I think it's very difficult, and I think a lot of these systems have been structured around how a secondary Head teacher operates, because, for example, this week we got an email on Monday: four documents that had to be completed. Quite heavy documents, assessing, evaluating teaching and learning last year, and summarising percentages that needed to be in, ready for our meeting tomorrow morning. That just totally disregards the rest of our job. I think for a secondary head there would be heads of department to delegate that to. I think there is a lack of understanding that everything that lands in our in-box we have to personally deal with because we don't have that level of support. So, yeah. But we do argue our case! Try to get that across. But yeah, it's very difficult. As it's hard for us to get our heads around the secondary system, particularly the changes in assessment and stuff. We're learning. We are learning. And you know, we're in the Ofsted window, so that adds another pressure, doesn't it? (Personal interview, 2020).

This extract highlights several growing realisations that were, until that point, non-articulated and therefore unexamined. We see a lack in contextual understanding between the Director and the primary Head teachers, with an inability to appreciate the difference in roles and competing demands on time. We see the role of the Director emerging as master, dictating structures and operational arrangements whilst demanding unified compliance. We see the primary heads trying to adjust to their unexpected role as servants and attempting to realise the latest set of performative measures, to keep the master secure in his position as the one in the know. So, what would Lacan make of this dynamic? The social bond now emerging between Director and colleague Head teachers displays the Director as master-

signifier, 'pretending to be one and undivided' whilst desiring the subjects to be one and undivided with him (Verhaeghe, 1995, p.89). The master discourse will never enable such unity, thus rendering this desire hopeless, as the master does not recognise his own pretence: he is already internally divided. What is more, he is not the one with the knowledge he craves:

> One of the most interesting things about this discourse is the relationship between master-signifier at the place of the agent and the S_2 at the place of the other. This implies that knowledge is also situated at the position of the other, which means that the other has to sustain the master in his illusion that he is at one with this knowledge' (Verhaeghe, 1995, p.91).

As I said at the time, we tried to learn to meet the growing expectations for details, documentation and data but the communication between us was irrevocably flawed. The Director, as master-signifier, was unable to express his desire as 'this truth cannot be completely verbalised … hence a perfect communication with words is impossible' (Verhaeghe, 1995, p.85). We could therefore never fully meet the Director's demands as his internal desire could not be fully articulated. There would always be a mismatch. What is more, we were slipping slowly into the discourse of the hysteric as we argued against the growing restraints placed upon us by the Director:

> As such, the discourse of the hysteric goes hand in hand with the managerial practices of audit (grounded in mistrust that what needs to be done is actually getting done) and performativity (making sure that we are perpetually doing more in the face of the impossibility of doing what needs to be done) (Clarke, 2019, p.107).

This was never going to end well. The trust between us that had formed our Trust was waning.

Business as usual

If academisation is not about improving schools for our children, what is it about? The topic of academisation highlights an educational context that is rapidly sliding blindly towards a privatised education system:

> Academies drastically blur the welfare state demarcations between state and market, public and private, government and business. Indeed, they are one part of an evolutionary policy 'moves'… which contribute to the ongoing de-construction of the welfare state education system and the reculturing and re-invention of public sector institutions (Ball, 2011, p.147).

This 'drastic blurring' can make it difficult for school leaders and governing bodies to see the slick trajectory towards an education as business model that accelerates once the decision is taken to academise. This is not a form of privatisation that turns schools into for-profit institutions but a change in the function of education as 'control of the education process itself' becomes a matter for economic scrutiny (Wrigley, 2009, p.25). Reflecting on that moment in time as we converted, we were so excited by the prospect of custom-building a secure future for our school that such doubts did not register. We truly believed we were doing something good, something that would have a lasting impact on the children and community we served. Even the rhetoric employed by the then Secretary of State for Education, Justine Greening, in our funding agreement letter, was congratulatory:

> Academies form an integral part of the Government's education policy to raise attainment for all children. I am delighted that Yellow Brick Primary School recognises the benefits academy status will bring …
>
> Your academy will now have the opportunity to use the freedoms and flexibilities of academy status to share best practice and work with others to bring about sustained improvements to all schools in the area. I would like to thank you for your commitment and wish you every success in the future (Personal correspondence, 2016).

Again, we have 'freedoms and flexibilities' highlighted as a key advantage to becoming an academy. This is a fundamental facet of neoliberalism: sell the dream of individual freedoms and choice and surreptitiously include the constraints associated with increased market competition (Kotsko, 2018). I must not fall into a sense of melancholy when reconsidering the choice made at that time, nor judge my decision based on the understanding I now have. It is in the nature of neoliberalism to remain just out of reach and it is rarely visible, which lends it a foreboding air. As Kotsko neatly puts it, '[n]eoliberalism loves to hide' and what is more, 'one can never assume that the educated public is already acquainted with the force that has deeply shaped public policy and economic outcomes for a generation or more' (2018, p.11). Moreover, there appears to be an easy acceptance of each new education policy within schools, and a discomforting lack of individual thought about or drive to discover what is motivating these policy makers. This unthinking state of autopilot is a risk we must avoid if we wish to retain control of our minds and make decisions that align with our morals (Minnich, 2017, p.39). Written policy is another representation of power and needs to be analysed as such:

> If language is invested with power relationships then an understanding of power is central to an understanding of language use, particularly in the way in which the control of this shaping power can be used as a tool for influence and authority (Hyatt, 2013, p.839).

School systems in England find themselves under increased scrutiny, with publicised inspection reports, performance data league tables and financial benchmarks comparing schools within similar contexts. Such information sharing is not a bad thing: it is useful as a leader to understand how you can make improvements and for parents to make informed choices about where to educate their children. However, with school budgets heavily reliant on pupil numbers, attracting families is key to survival, particularly for many small primaries. As Kulz notes, middle class parents are at an advantage as they understand the education-as-business model and know how to manipulate it to ensure their offspring gain places at high-achieving schools; this 'deeply ingrained neoliberal market logic' leads to an aspiration for places at promoted academies (2017, p.141). Those who can choose schools with better Ofsted grades and higher results, those without such capital can find themselves

stuck with local schools fighting for existence. This adds a further strain within an already fractured system:

> Unfortunately, the unrelenting pressures on MATs to prove that their model is the best one, is a key pressure within the highly marketized system of English education. And leading to lack of collaboration between MATs, as one MAT CEO put it: 'MATs don't share, they compete against each other' (Baxter, 2018, n.p.).

Now we begin to recognise the impossibility of the situation schools in England face. Collaboration and cooperation are the twin talisman proffered to prospective new academies; this too is part of the neoliberal fantasy. How can we genuinely work together in a context dominated by market forces, where competition is inevitable and striving to be the local school of choice is every leader's wish? Even within a MAT there are winners and losers, with good and outstanding schools sitting prettily above those who require improvement, or worse. A personal example of this internal inequality was reflected in the financial commitment expected from each of our schools as payment towards the cost of running MAT central services:

> Interviewer: What's the top slice from your budget that goes to the Central?
>
> Subject: They've just revised that now. We started off by paying 4%, and I think ours has increased to 7% ... but I know that we are now paying an additional 4,000 pound a year, because we're a Good school. The schools that are Requires Improvement are paying more, because they need more support. That's the formula.
>
> Interviewer: So, a school that requires improvement, that school, its top slice would be more than 7%?
>
> Subject: Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: What was the top slice in the old local authority?
>
> Subject: They never told us that. We never knew.
>
> Interviewer: So it could have been more.
>
> Subject: It could have been. We had no idea. (laughs) (Personal interview, 2020).

I recall my colleague who led the primary school graded 'requires improvement' balking at the difference in fees and arguing that, as a school, they had not had any additional support from the MAT that was different to the other primaries yet had continued to make improvements internally. These pleas fell on deaf ears: the proof that they were in need was written in their Ofsted report. In actuality, the ensuing inspection graded that school 'good' – evidence that the work of the Head teacher and his team had paid off, without additional support from MAT central. We were no longer respected as individual schools who had chosen to create the MAT as equal contributors. We were now a source of finance, a means of marketing the MAT to support its growth and a potential talent pool to underpin plans for expansion. Disenfranchised and ultimately disenchanted, my colleague subsequently resigned to pursue a career in leadership outside of education. This could be viewed as an act of desperation by a Head teacher ground down by the unrelenting nonsense surrounding educational leadership within a Multi Academy Trust. Alternatively, it could be seen as an act of courage, a metaphorical middle finger to MAT central, telling them that their increased reliance on micro-management and competitive performativity as a means of control does not work. Instead of fearing the future and morphing into a mannequin who follows orders without critical thought, my colleague took the reins and changed direction – thus retaining a sense of dignity and self-respect. A 'feel the fear and do it anyway' moment, indeed. How many more casualties would there be as the academy machine ground on? Who were the MAT leaders there to serve? The next chapter attempts to illuminate both the shifts in power and personal transformations that occurred.

Chapter 6 - If the wizard is a wizard who will serve

Bell out of order – please knock

Revisiting the film, 'The Wizard of Oz', our four friends finally reach the Emerald City and try to penetrate the imposing gates to see the Wizard. They are dazzled by the city's great beauty yet surprised to find they cannot get in. They try the bell (it works) and an angry man tells them to read the notice: the bell is out of order. When they follow his instructions to knock, he acquiesces and listens to their request to see the Wizard, yet his response is bad news for the friends:

> DOORMAN *(so shocked he almost falls)* Oh – oh - the Wizard? Ah -but nobody can see the great Oz! Nobody's ever seen the Great Oz! Even I've never seen him!
>
> DOROTHY *(guilelessly)* Well, then, how do you know there is one?
>
> DOORMAN Because he....ah… b – I – oh – *(unable to think of a good reason)* You're wasting my time! (Langley et al., 1989, p.88).

It is only when Dorothy's ruby slippers are pointed out that our quartet are granted access, at last, to the city of Oz. This part of their journey represents a time of confusion and disarray. Just like in the film, within the MAT there were authority figures who held power and acted as gatekeepers yet sent mixed messages around school leadership that resulted in inconsistencies in practice and silenced questioning. Awkward conversations took place as potential conflicts of interest were raised and irregularities questioned – of which more later. There was a deep feeling of unease and a 'divide and conquer' strategy appeared to be

being played out, with the primary Head teachers privately wondering who to trust and speaking tentatively only to each other. As Head teacher, I was in the middle of a maelstrom with subtle shifts in power playing out around me. One such moment occurred during my mid-year performance review, part of a formal process of accountability that involves members of the Governing Board, the Director and an external Adviser from the Local Authority. My annual targets (two professional, one personal) had been agreed prior to October 31st, as is standard practice in schools, and my progress towards these was being considered. One Governor, who was part of the procedure, argued against the validity of my third target and emailed to express his opinion, suggesting it looked weak and irrelevant in relation to the School Improvement Plan (SIP)[18]. This email led to a series of meetings and further email conversations where my performance objectives were stripped bare and re-evaluated, with a conclusion reached by the Director, Governors and Local Authority Adviser that my third target be linked somehow to behaviour management in schools with my doctoral research being a part of this. I was incredulous and responded with the suggestion that we change my target entirely so I could focus on my research independently of school. After all, I was funding and participating in the doctoral studies under my own steam.

The impact of these interactions was not visible at the time; it slowly gained purchase as my position as Head teacher quietly unravelled beyond the boundary of my awareness. The Governor who objected to my target, also objected to my response, seeing my resistance to my research being tied to quantifiable objectives as unreasonable. The Director, although initially supportive of my study, sided with the Local Authority Adviser and wanted a smoothing over of the ripples caused. I understood from this that any requests for help would be brushed aside as the focus was on looking good. Just as in the film the friends are taken to a beauty parlour to brush up prior to their appointment with the Great Oz, our school leaders were expected to toe the party line and represent the MAT through pristine results and perfectly turned-out data. Image was everything yet represented nothing:

[18] A document that is updated annually to reflect the key areas for improvement across a school.

> All window-dressing and good feeling is tied up, in other words, with a form of institutional inertia, where large corporations adapt to changing circumstance by managing their image rather than questioning their content (Allen, 2017, p.9).

The passport to the Wizard for Dorothy was her ruby slippers – a symbol of her innate, yet unrealised, power. By contrast, for me, my passport to the ear of the Director had been my compliance and unquestioning support. Yet there had been a subtle shift over time relating to my understanding of the context within which I worked. Engagement with literature linked to my Doctorate in Education raised questions about neoliberal ideologies and disturbed my previously trusting view of our country's education system. My own immersion in theory was drawing out a new understanding and providing me with a range of perspectives to apply to my role as a leader. This shift had not gone unnoticed and tensions surfaced both within Yellow Brick Primary School and at MAT Board level as I sought ways to align this cognitive dissonance and achieve congruency with what I was learning and what I was expected to live. I had become more reflexive in my thinking and, like the Scarecrow, I suddenly realised I had a brain:

> Thinking is how we make sense of what is happening, what is before our eyes, in our memories, in our hearts and bodies. It is the activity of consciousness, of awareness, and we cannot develop consciences that attune us well to the world and others if we are unaware of – inattentive to – our thinking (Minnich, 2017, p.47).

In our parallel journey to that of Dorothy, we reach a place where the academy dream unravels more quickly. As if waking from a poppy-induced sleep, the three primary headteachers noticed and discussed inconsistencies in vision, increasingly restricted leadership autonomy and misplaced values. It became a weekly ritual to meet for coffee before the lengthy MAT leadership meetings took place and unpack the relevance of the progressively more performative demands made on our time and how we could manage these without falling from grace. We were teetering on the edge of the abyss of what Kotsko terms an 'ontological danger', a product of neoliberalism, whereby we lose all notion of ever having wanted to lead autonomously:

> Specifically, neoliberalism threatens to undo our sense that human beings are creatures who can collectively rule themselves, and more insidiously still, to make us forget that we ever could have wanted to do something so improbable (Kotsko, 2018, p.43).

Our prior attempt at contesting the Director's lack of clarity around our MAT values had left our fingers burned. Yet, as Pain writes in his handbook for new CEOs '[e]thics and values are not something we write down and then leave behind while we are busy leading' (2019, p.30), a salient point that our fledgling Director appears to have missed. Unfortunately, the 'pervasive presence' (Clarke, 2019 p.49) of the Master discovered our weekly rendezvous (which had not been intentionally clandestine) and, once again, my colleague was the target for his wrath. He was told that the meetings were not inclusive and did not reflect the spirit of our working together. Arguing that it was the only time we could find as primary colleagues to discuss how MAT demands could be translated into practice for our schools held no sway. Inviting the Director to meet with us as we had coffee was also rejected. It was as if the Director had allowed his personal feelings to be hurt, as he recognised our shift away from the collegiality we had once shared, yet he could not accept that his demand for increased formality and accountability at MAT meetings plus a focus on secondary school issues had caused this splintering. What followed was an uncomfortable meeting with the Director, his PA, our HR Director and we three primary Heads, without the presence of the secondary Head teachers who were considering joining the MAT. The Director asked incisive questions about our thoughts around the shifting relationships within MAT central and between us as school leaders. I recall answering these directly and unequivocally and watching him flinch in response to my brutal honesty. I was fully in my stride as the Lacanian hysteric, questioning and critiquing the status quo (Clarke, 2019). One colleague Head, who remained silent throughout, commented afterwards that she had sat through the meeting 'holding onto her awkward balloon' as the conversation had touched many a nerve for those in the room. As Pain reminds us:

> It must be remembered that the CEO's behaviour, the way in which they manage their key relationships internally and externally, how they use the resources at their disposal, and how they place an onus on long-term success and reputation in

> contrast to short-term quick wins, sets the tone for the rest of the organisation (2019, p.29).

We had reached our destination: we had created a viable MAT and the Director had plans for its growth and expansion. Yet it was evident that there was a missing link between the values-based organisation we wished to be a part of and the lived reality. We, as primary colleagues, were raising issues and concerns but were being shut up and shot down. Still there remained at the core of each challenge the growing awareness of a transformation taking place that was not part of the original plan.

Academy as Alchemy

Dorothy's vision was clear: she wanted to return home. Her absolute faith in the power of the Wizard to provide her with the means to achieve this reflects a childish naivety or, to be kinder, an innocent hope. She has to believe in an external magic that is greater than herself, as her personal power has not yet actualised:

> In the end, ceasing to be children, we all become magicians without magic, exposed conjurers, with only our simple humanity to get us through (Rushdie, 2012, p.59).

Identifying the Wizard as a magician-like figure leads me once again to consider the imagery of the tarot and the interpretations this holds. Tarot has been used as a tool for divination and for the development of self-awareness since at least the Renaissance, tapping into the subconscious through the portrayal of archetypal images that resound with each of us in a unique way. Tarot 'offers a resonant story of the human journey as told through a universal and symbolic language' (Hundley, 2021, p.19). We can begin to understand what each card represents if we allow our intuition to respond to what we see. Much in the same way as research is an interpretation of a context from the stance of the researcher (and is therefore influenced by the researcher's prior experiences and current filters), tarot pulsates with and responds to the energy of the interpreter:

> The imagery and symbology of Tarot may appear the same for everybody. Each of us, however, sees and recognises them in a very personal way. The mindful perception of the Tarot pictures helps us to discover and to understand in which way the personal point of view is specific, different and important (Fiebig, 2021, p.506).

Here, the Jungian archetypes that pervade the imagery of the tarot dance in the doorway to the realm of the Lacanian imaginary, whereby 'our way of understanding the world always already implies an idea of ourselves, our identification' (Neill, 2013, p.336). As we earlier considered the aura of acceptance surrounding academies and their presence as an archetype, we begin to understand 'academy' as a subject within Lacan's symbolic register of understanding. Whatever the chain of signifiers are that tie academies to the symbolic order (e.g. discipline, expectations, results, quality, outstanding), within the imaginary academies rely on being 'a reflected image, one that comes back by way of mirrors and the perceptions of others' (McSwite, 2001, p.244). Similarly, we recognise in tarot cards different characters and contexts that map onto our world:

> We mistake what we find with what we would take ourselves to be. We paint an image of ourselves in our imagination and we paint ourselves into the image we construct in our reception of the other's words (Neill, 2013, p.336).

Replace 'words' with 'pictures' and the misrecognition that occurs through our discourse with the tarot is laid bare. We imagine we interpret the meanings of the cards but the words we conjure will always fall short. We are the infant Lacan describes, gazing into the mirror and recognising not himself but 'his ideal ego, that point at which he desires to gratify himself in himself' (1977, p.257). We are, in reality, living a fantasy.

The twenty-two major arcana cards in the tarot deck follow a trajectory, a story revealed, that mirrors the narrative of each of our lives. Each card acts as what Lacan named a '*point de capiton'* which is 'a moment of coalescence and coherence' (Neill, 2013, p.337). Such moments create anchor points in the psyche and, within the tarot deck, these moments represent universally recognised life experiences. The Magician is the first card, card number one, yet it follows The Fool. Every life journey begins with a stepping off into the

unknown (The Fool) followed quickly by a need to acquire the tools necessary for survival in the wider world. The Magician is a master-manifester and is portrayed with his wand alongside each of the symbols that represent the four suits of the deck: a sword (for intellect, representing air); a cup (for emotions, representing water); a stave (for creative energy, representing fire) and a pentacle (for wealth, representing earth). This Magician is an alchemist, who can transform these combined elements into ether, the classical quintessence or 'breath of the gods' (Dean, 2015). Like the 'super heads' who are parachuted in to turn around failing schools, the Magician could be seen as reminiscent of the ideal managerialist and technocratic leader. Drawing this card can represent time for action and success, thanks to the Magician's powers. It can also symbolise transformation and the opportunity for creating new beginnings. Indeed, Jung notes the relevance of tarot as potential tools for transformation, writing '[i]t also seems as if the set of picture cards in the Tarot cards were distantly descended from the archetypes of transformation' (1990, p.38). For Dorothy, the journey she undertakes through Oz is a transformational experience, a coming of age, a realisation that the reflections we see are not true representations of all we perceive. For Yellow Brick Primary, the journey through academisation laid bare the leap of faith taken, as represented by The Fool, leading ultimately to a deeper understanding of the road travelled.

Jung explored the concept of alchemy, initially favourably yet latterly relating the work of alchemists to 'devilry and conspiring with dark forces' (Morell, 2021, p.114). Like alchemists, academy leaders and founding CEOs believe they can breathe new life into educational institutions that have become base, lacklustre, impotent. They have faith in the process of academisation and trust that a physical renovation will lead to a deeper spiritual revolution, that the soul of a school can be bargained over, won and transformed. It serves as a powerful imagery, this academy as alchemy, this search for purity in a landscape of dross. It creates an energy, a life-force of its own, which drives the academy machine onwards.

First linking the symbolism of alchemy to his theory of individuation, Jung explored the possibility of alchemy as a model for personal transformation:

> The alchemical integration of opposites, which is key to the integration of the *Self*, approaches at its highest level the *Mysterium coniunctionis* and an expression of the sublime reminiscent of theological mysticism. In effect, Jung and his followers compromised the ontological integrity of the alchemical schema by translating it into a symbolic model for transformative self-improvement (Morell, 2021, pp.113-114).

For Jung, the symbolic world intertwines with that of the archetypes, which includes the archetypes of transformation, 'typical situations, places, ways and means, that symbolize the transformation in question' (Jung, 1968, p.38), alongside those that portray personalities. As colleagues, we had already stepped off into the abyss when we embarked upon our archetypal quest for academisation. We were chasing a dream, an enigma, a promise of an alchemical conversion from ordinary school to extraordinary academy but without the appropriate tools. We were equally faced with a deeper, more personal alchemical transformation than originally planned. The archetype of the academy resonates with this energy of transformation and, on reflection, the archetypes we had become as academy leaders were also imbued with the same force. We had begun to reflect the business-like energy of the MAT and were expected to represent this in how we dressed and how we sold the benefits of being part of the organisation. The academy archetype has a dynamism that is chameleon-like, ready to shape-shift and become whatever you think it should be. We can never pin down these archetypes of transformation. They are, in and of themselves, ambiguous. Yet we nevertheless push ourselves to find out what they represent:

> The discriminating intellect naturally keeps on trying to establish meaning and thus misses the essential point; for what we can above all establish as the one thing consistent with their nature is their *manifold meaning*, their almost limitless wealth of reference, which makes any unilateral formulation impossible (Jung, 1968, p38).

We were stuck between two worlds, separated by a veil, trying to establish what was real and what was fantasy. Just as the Magician in tarot is a representation of the Roman god

Mercury (who uses his caduceus[19] to lead souls to the underworld) we were hoping for a guide, an expert, a wizard-like figure, who could lead us safely home. This would not be possible. As Jung describes, the more we questioned and tried to find meaning in what was unfolding, the more elusive the understanding we desired became. Lacan would recognise this as the interplay between the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. It also resonates with the Lacanian split between being and meaning and how this stymies the possibility of ever securing a foundational understanding, as each signifier relies on other signifiers for their definition which can never be reached. Instead there continues an endless process of difference and deferral without closure (Clarke, 2019). What we were witnessing and trying to articulate was the imaginary, which is 'at once visual and illusory' (McGowan, 2007, p.3). It acted like a veil between us and the symbolic order, which held the structure and identities we recognised in the world we could see. Yet we were tripping over the boundaries inherent within language and the inadequacy of words in relation to what we were experiencing:

> The Lacanian real is the indication of the incompleteness of the symbolic order. It is the point at which signification breaks down, a gap in the social structure. By stressing the importance of the real, Lacan doesn't proclaim an ability to escape language … instead, he affirms the limitations of language – language's inability to say it all or speak the whole truth (McGowan, 2007, p.3).

So, whilst for Dorothy the Yellow Brick Road slowly and certainly spirals towards Oz, we continued to twist and turn within this kaleidoscope of our own creation: unsure of the direction; uncertain of the destination and ultimately unprepared for the internal alchemical revolutions that were already underway.

The discourse of the analyst

It must have been distressing for Dorothy to realise that the great and all-powerful Wizard of Oz was not prepared to help her without first demanding a favour. There is nothing altruistic about our Wizard. He is an opportunist and will respond flexibly to chance without

[19] The caduceus is the wand entwined by snakes carried by Hermes to indicate his role as the messenger or herald of the gods.

committing much of himself to anything or anyone. This shape-shifting ability to extemporise and adapt resonates with Clarke's description of Lacan's fourth discourse: that of the analyst:

> The discourse of the analyst is a space of listening rather than an invitation to preach, hold forth or offer pronouncements. It is an invitation to 'play by ear' (Johnson, 2014), to improvise rather than to perform in accordance with a predetermined or memorized script (2019, p.126).

Perhaps the Wizard serves as a reflective surface, a mirror-man, teaching Dorothy to look first at herself before searching for answers elsewhere. Perhaps Dorothy, following her gaze, can see through this representation of self and realises she is already fragmented, refracted, incomplete. She needs her fantasy of the Wizard as the 'big Other[20]' to hold the answers she seeks. Or perhaps the Wizard is nothing more than an empty container, unable to offer wisdom or guidance, which is Rushdie's conclusion: '[w]e must learn the futility of looking for solutions outside ourselves. We must learn about one more hollow man: the Wizard of Oz himself (2012, p.51).

We must consider, how does this hollowness reveal itself? What is this Wizard's lack? Or more appropriately, what does this Wizard desire? It is not as distinct as the missing brain, absent heart or lost courage that we have considered (although there is an argument for the Wizard being bereft of all three). Furthermore, is this lack of desire a necessary element of the Wizard's persona? Just as Lacan discusses how psychoanalysis may be considered a science, as might alchemy, he also pondered on the desire of the analyst, wondering what this could be:

> What must there be in the analyst's desire for it to operate in a correct way? Can this question be left outside the limits of our field, as it is in effect in the sciences – the modern sciences of the most assured type – where no one questions himself as

[20] Žižek describes the virtual nature of the big Other, explaining 'it exists only in so far as subjects *act as if it exists'* (2006, p.10, original emphasis).

> to what there must be in the desire, for example, of the physicist? (Lacan, 2004, pp.9-10).

Lacan describes the importance of purity within the soul of the alchemist (2004, p.9), presumably to avoid any potential contamination of the alchemical process caused by any interference from the alchemist's unconsciously impure intent. In this manner, the desire of the analyst cannot be ignored or 'left outside our question' (Lacan, 2004, p.10) as it is already part of the process of analysis. So how better do we understand this desire and the impact it might have on the process of psychoanalysis? If our analyst is no more than a finger pointing to the moon, a listening ear, a receptive vessel, how do they help the analysand find what they seek and what drives them to do this?

Lacan recognises that the role of the analyst can only be played by someone for a short time in support of another as 'it is impossible to *be* an analyst' (Verhaeghe, 1995, p.96). The role of analyst transmutes in time with the subject, unable to offer answers but held in high regard by the subject as the one with all the answers, leading eventually to a resolution based on self-discovery, as Verhaeghe explains:

> It reminds me of several folk tales and fairy tales in which the beloved one, the object of desire, can no longer talk for one reason or another, so that the hero has to create a solution in which essentially he is confronted with his own being, unknown to him before (1995, pp.96-7).

I experienced one such analyst moment during my final months of headship at Yellow Brick Primary School. I had developed a strong professional bond with one of the Trustees years before. She had served on our Governing Body and we met regularly to problem solve and trouble shoot as I cut my teeth on all matters relating to school leadership. The Trustee was related to a member of the teaching staff at Yellow Brick Primary and there had always been an unspoken agreement between us that we would not discuss this relationship in either a personal or professional context. There were times when this was challenging, as I did not find this an easy situation to manage due to the power interplay (colleague related to superordinate), but we navigated this as best we could.

As I was reading the Trust Board minutes one day, I spotted an issue that had been raised by the Trustee in relation to part-time staff and their contractual obligations, seeking clarity around these. She declared an interest (her relative was a part-time employee) and outlined the areas the Board should consider revising alongside Human Resources (HR). I was surprised as none of these issues had been raised with me directly prior to the Board Meeting, although they were directly linked to staffing at Yellow Brick Primary. I asked to speak to her about this and wondered why she had not raised this with me in person prior to taking it to the Board. I explained how I had always valued our open and professional discussions and would have preferred an opportunity to consider this in advance of it becoming a MAT concern. She candidly reminded me that her role was no longer that of supporter to one Head teacher of one school, rather her loyalty was now to the Trust and to the Board. With that one statement, I was dismissed as mentee and my understanding was clear: I could no longer turn to the Trustee for guidance. Like Dorothy, I needed to traverse the fantasy and face the facts: no 'big Other' was waiting in the wings with a balm for all my cares. For good or for ill, it was time for me to look within and have faith in my own judgements or ignore that quiet voice within to my peril.

Academy as theology

As my research into academies deepens, it becomes impossible to ignore the growing sense of quasi-religious rhetoric that emanates from the Department for Education around academisation. Considering HM Government's 2022 white paper, we find words such as 'enshrined' (2022, p.17), 'transformational' (2022, p.23) alongside the reference to conversion previously highlighted in Chapter 2. There is an ambition, within the paper, to create 'a flourishing school system' with a need for 'parents, teachers, community leaders, social workers, local authorities, professionals and children themselves to *come together as one*' (2022, p.4, emphasis added). Clarke pinpoints such rhetoric to 'the rise of authoritarian cultures in education' which 'also bears the traces of—and needs to be understood against the background of—neoconservatism and its preoccupation with notions of family, nation and tradition' (2022, p.3). This ambition seeks to knit together the current collage of school types into one happy family, MAT led system of education. The *coming together as one* suggests a unity, a harmony, a perfect alignment of vision and values rather like the

congregation of a church community. For Lacan, religion can also signify a unity and consists of an operational element (the sacraments) and an element that exists beyond:

> Ask the faithful, or even the priests, what differentiates confirmation from baptism – for, indeed, if it is a sacrament, if it operates, it operates on something. Where it washes away sins, where it renews a certain pact – I would put a question-mark here – Is it a pact? Is it something else? What passes through this dimension? – in all the answers we get, we will always find this mark, by which is invoked the beyond of religion, operational and magical (Lacan, 2004, p.265).

Here, we can sense the sacramental nature of the academy conversion process, a ritual that 'operates on something' and invokes a magical transformation from plain Jane school to academy swan. Equally, we can visualise an image of the DfE cleansing the sins of failing schools and offering renewal, rebirth and restoration for those who must move 'beyond' to what Lacan sees as oblivion (2004, p.265). Forgive us our trespasses?

Unlike the current Church of England vision, which advocates 'no conflict between parish ministry and becoming a more mixed ecology church' (2020, p.2), the DfE vision for academisation leaves little room for such diversity. We have progressed from the dichotomy between Local Authority and academy; the white paper now makes it possible for Local Authorities to establish their own trusts:

> Local authorities will be able to establish new multi academy trusts where too few strong trusts exist, enabling high performing schools with a track record of local partnership to formalise their relationships and add expertise and capacity to the trust system. These trusts will be regulated in the same way as any other trusts, and we will ensure safeguards are in place to effectively manage any potential for conflicts of interest both for the trust and the local authority – including limits on local authority involvement on the trust board (DfE, 2022, p.48).

The move towards including Local Authorities indicates a recognition of a lack of capacity for developing enough MATs with the ability to support a large number of primary schools, particularly in rural areas where smaller schools often have fewer than 50 pupils. Limiting involvement on the Trust Board renders the Local Authority impotent in terms of strategic direction, which castrates the potential for any real impact once the MAT has been

established. Equally challenging for schools will be the ability to meet the 'high performing' and having a 'track record of local partnership' criteria. What does this mean in practice and how many schools are likely to reach these benchmarks? The White Paper acknowledges the issue around rural schools in paragraph 138 and seems happy to delegate these to the Church and Local Authorities. Given that the ideal size for a MAT is described as at least 10 schools or 7,500 pupils (DfE, 2022, p.47) the problem of small schools with meagre resources rises to the surface. Which ambitious CEO, tied to a new and rigorous regulatory approach (DfE, 2022, p.49) will want the hassle of nurturing large numbers of small primary schools across a wide geographical area? It will not add up: due diligence will fail or more small schools will face closure, classed as unviable.

Turning to the Church of England, it is interesting to note that, in some Dioceses, Church of England schools can only join a Church of England MAT as this protects church assets and a Christian ethos[21]. Many stakeholders in community schools are used to the rhetoric of vison, values and ethos. Just search school values and you will be inundated with examples of how these permeate websites and how, as Kulz describes:

> The ethos takes on religious dimensions as a doctrine teachers can invest in and export to other deprived areas as truth, combining the language of church and market (Kulz, 2017, p.62).

The Catholic Church demand the same commitment to joining single-faith (Roman Catholic) MATs. This insistence of the Churches on Church MATS as the only option for their schools raises the spectre of Beckett's words on faith in academies; when writing in 2007 he warned:

> The Christian churches, with falling attendances and crisis of confidence, have grabbed the chance massively to increase their importance in British education. The city academy programme is making Christian churches vastly more powerful in education – and cutting out other faiths, as well as secular schools (2007, p.67).

[21] However, community schools without a religious character can join a Church of England MAT, subject to due diligence.

This was written 16 years ago, prior to the first bout of government planned enforced conversion that u-turned in 2014, yet the fear of greater Church involvement in a greater number of schools remains, particularly when ownership of land and buildings is considered.

Another way of looking at this, within the context of the Government's 2022 White Paper, is that the Church of England is embracing its role as the Good Shepherd, gathering all the small and undesirable schools (the ones with high overheads and declining numbers on roll, mostly rural) and creating opportunities for survival in this new dawn of competitive schooling. For some schools, the Church offers protection, sanctuary even, as the world of education as we know it continues to revolve within a model of marketisation. We see this in the language that has become so familiar in education today, succinctly described as 'neoliberal buzzwords' by Kotsko:

> Consent of the governed becomes stakeholder buy-in, public policy is reduced to the implementation of "best practices" etc. – and education's promise of self-cultivation and personal growth is replaced by the endless accumulation of human capital (2018, p.44).

But what of human capital, of human souls? Accumulating either, or both, is part and parcel of an acknowledgement that educational policy has evolved to reflect the needs of the global market, as Rizvi and Lingard explain:

> There is thus a global shift towards a neoliberal values orientation, manifested most clearly in privatization policies … In education policy discourses, this has involved a reorientation of values from a focus on democracy and equality to the values of efficiency and accountability, with a greater emphasis on human capital (2010, p.72).

Tied in with this is the concept of freedom and our own free will. How do we find ourselves in a situation where we are being blindly led to worship at the altar of a capitalist God? No chains are visible, no ropes bind us to this new neoliberal religion, yet the fear of non-conformity, of failure, of ridicule or of simply missing out leads us to bow our heads. The greater that fear and the closer it moves towards terror, we find within ourselves, 'a hollowed out state that can leave us politically passive, obedient, docile' (Minnich, 2017, p.77). Yet more hollow figures submissively following a Yellow Brick Road in a bid for the fantasy of freedom?

Returning to Rushdie's analysis of The Wizard of Oz, we find the opposite - a complete lack of religion:

> There is not a trace of religion in Oz itself. Bad witches are feared, good ones liked, but none are sanctified; and while the Wizard of Oz is thought to be something very close to all-powerful, nobody thinks to worship him (2012, p.13).

There is something comforting in this statement by Rushdie, something that seems to be absolutely right for the context of our current UK education system, which appears to be teetering on the edge of a seismic shift and hell-bent on creating a fully MAT led system (DfE, 2022b). Removing religious rhetoric from the academy agenda, removing the need for omnipotent CEOs who are alternately feared and worshiped may leave us space to recognise the intrinsic worth of schools as places that reflect their communities, led by people who care deeply for those communities. Just another naïve fantasy, perhaps? Nevertheless it remains a fact that, within our patchwork arrangement of academies, Multi-Academy Trusts, Faith Schools, Free Schools, Maintained and Independent Schools, there are bad leaders who are feared and good leaders who are liked, yet no one system of school organisation should be sanctified[22].

Building an empire

There is no doubt that pressure on MAT leaders and CEOs to grow the number of schools they lead and by default, the number of pupils on roll, exists. Ambition School Leadership (ASL) note that different MATs seek different routes to sustainability, with some aiming for 15 schools as a tipping point towards expansion and others seeing that number as the final destination:

> The process of growing to a sustainable size tends to be seen in two ways. Some MATs aim to "build capacity before growth", for instance by expanding the central team before recruiting further schools … Meanwhile, a larger number of MATs appear to feel that growth supports central capacity (ASL, 2018, pp.43-44).

[22] Indeed, the union representative who guided me through the process of resigning, shared his experience that there are good Local Authorities and good MATs to be found, just as there are bad ones; what makes the difference in both is the quality and integrity of leadership.

The feeling persists that the current educational landscape in England exists as a reflection of the business world, where the domination of large corporations drive out competition and set the rules of the game (Crouch, 2011). The analogy of a giant Hungry Hippos game, with greedy CEOs gobbling up as many schools as they can, is tempting to make, affirmed by one larger than life CEO who recommended:

> Heads should be powerful empire-builders crafted in the guise of gun-slinging action heroes. He did not believe in distributed leadership, but instead felt that heads should enjoy exercising dictatorial power (Kulz, 2017, p.62).

What is unnerving is the heights to which that particular CEO rose and the influence he wielded after his reign at 'Dreamfields'; his acclaimed public success supported a generation of copycat school leaders focused on honing this leadership style. Peacocks in suits.

The reality for MATs wishing to expand is more of a slow process, with the new Regional Directors (replacing Regional Schools Commissioners since September 2022) as key players in deciding which schools will convert when, why and with which MAT. Leaders have to balance out the desire to grow with the practical financial commitments of running a number of schools and the figures are not always favourable. Taking on a school that has strong academic results and a tightly managed budget will not have the same impact as a school forced to academise because it is judged to be failing the children and community it serves. The Department for Education recognises these challenges and yet remains keenly focused on moving all schools through to academy status, focusing first (in 2022 – 2023) on Education Investment Areas (EIAs) and Local Authority Trusts[23]. However, where there can be more rapid movement, this is encouraged:

[23] In this first phase, our priorities are:
• Education Investment Areas (EIAs), including Priority EIAs, where we will introduce an area-based approach to commissioning trusts. These are also the areas where we will focus new powers of statutory intervention in underperforming schools, subject to the outcome of consultation and parliamentary approval. Area based commissioning will see us working closely with local partners to establish a coherent local organisation of schools based on strong trusts, per our guidance on building strong academy trusts, and addressing problems of sustained underperformance.
• Test and learn projects – a small number of projects to set up new LA-established MATs where they are needed; or to respond to local demand to complete the journey to a fully trust led system; or progress at scale, for example in areas where there are large numbers of rural primary schools (DfE, 2022, p.3).

> The pattern of school structure and organisation across the country is mixed. In some areas, the great majority of schools are now academies. The White Paper announced that, subject to parliamentary approval, we will introduce new powers enabling the Secretary of State to bring an LA's maintained schools into the academy system where requested by an LA. In these areas, there is an opportunity to move more quickly to a fully trust led system (DfE, 2022, p.8).

It is unclear what these new powers are, however the DfE do confirm that there will be opportunity to 'move at scale' for Local Authorities and Dioceses who have secured the 'in-principle agreement of schools'; discretionary funding will be available to support this 'where the scale of that activity is exceptional' (DfE, 2022, p.8). This will no doubt free up CEOs to invest in central resources to ensure schools within the Trust are supported to show equally rapid improvement. But will this investment pay off?

The Director of our Multi-Academy Trust took the decision to recruit a central services team before looking to expand. A Director of Human Resources and Operational Manager were the first to be appointed and their salaries were paid for through the budget percentage each school contributed to the MAT. A Chief Financial Officer was needed and an internal appointment was made, with the former Business Manager of the High School finding himself liable for his prior role plus this significant additional responsibility. With the central team established the Director was keen to bring new schools on board, and so began a series of courtships designed to woo leaders with promises of better services than the Local Authority could provide. As this extract from an interview at that time demonstrates, the dynamic of our weekly heads' meetings began to change once the need to recruit new schools was on the agenda and two local secondary heads were invited to participate:

> Interviewer: So when you say another two schools joined the Trust (and) there's a concern that the emphasis or the values of the trust might be changing. Where does

> that come from? Is it the schools themselves that are causing a change in direction at the level of the Trust? Is it just the size?
>
> Subject: The size. I don't think it's the schools themselves. I think the dynamic around the table has changed because we've been joined by two secondary heads, so the balance has shifted. And it's more even. We're now three primaries, three secondaries. All is good. But the tone of meetings has shifted. If you think that we were creating this Multi Academy Trust as we were running our own schools and as we were trying to do everything you have to do as busy head teachers, there was quite a relaxed atmosphere. We were quite jovial. We'd take the mick out of each other. We were building and creating policies, and making things up to work and to fit, and that element, the softer side of those relationships, can't really exist around a barter table anymore. It has to be much more formal. So I think something has been lost there because we can't just really say, "I think that idea is utter rubbish. Let's consider this." There's that formality and that self-consciousness which makes it quite difficult. I know that the three primary heads, we feel that our hands have been tied and that we have to toe the line and jump more, and that more directives and orders are coming through. We're like, "Woah! When did this shift take place?" (Personal interview, 2020).

The interview this extract is taken from led to my making a significant faux pas in one such meeting. As part of our weekly feedback to the Director, each headteacher would report on their schools and any additional activities they had been involved in that might reflect well on the MAT. At the meeting following my interview, which included the secondary heads the Director was intent on influencing to join our MAT, I reported on my taking part in some research linked to academisation in the UK led by Australian academics (Lingard and Thompson). The Director was intrigued and asked what sort of questions I'd been asked. I responded with a brief summary and highlighted the final question in particular, which had been, 'If you could advise the Australian Government, who is interested in this kind of thing, if you could give them one piece of advice, what would it be?' I can flinch now at my openness when I reflect that my advice was:

> Look at ways of encouraging schools to collaborate openly. To have a shared system so they can meet the needs of their direct community, but still maintain links with whatever your local authority system is. Don't go down the corporate route. Don't sell our schools to business. Keep education separate' (Personal interview, 2020).

The Director raised an eyebrow as he asked if I meant for the Australian Government to avoid academisation as an option altogether? Even as I saw my primary Head teacher colleagues cringe in their seats, I confirmed this was the case. I had answered with honesty but honesty was not the currency in play. The look on the Director's face confirmed that I had let the MAT down through missing an opportunity to sell the academy dream to our guest Head teachers. It was clear back then how the landscape was changing and MATs needed to be a viable size to survive and avoid merger. Losing two potential secondary schools, with higher numbers on roll than our nearest primaries, would not be forgiven. Our Director was intent on building his empire and numbers mattered. We were witnessing the first of Jennings' signs of ethical collapse: a pressure to maintain those numbers and fear and silence. As she identifies '[a] little fear of the CEO is not a bad thing. The fear of telling the CEO the truth is (Jennings, 2006, p.7). My colleagues had already felt that fear and had learned to keep their counsel. I remained tied to my truth and had not yet begun to filter what I thought before I shared it. If I only had a brain I might have realised the power such words could hold. For good or for ill, I was on the home straight and a final lesson was about to be learned.

Chapter 7 - There's no place like home

You've always had the power

The above picture is an image taken from the start of the film, yet the quote: 'you've always had the power' is from the end. We can see the Wicked Witch of the West as she tries to remove the ruby slippers from Dorothy's feet. She knows the power these slippers hold yet Dorothy is, at this moment, unaware of what her new shoes represent. The Witch is repelled by the force of Dorothy's power, seen here conducted through her enchanted shoes. What Dorothy did not know at the start of her journey was that she alone held the power to grant her desire from the moment she stepped into the slippers. Only at the end of the film, when Dorothy believes all is lost and she will never again see her family and friends, does the Good Witch Glinda reveal how to get back home to Kansas:

> **Dorothy**: Oh, will you help me? Can you help me?
> **Glinda**: You don't need to be helped any longer. You've always had the power to go back to Kansas.
> **Dorothy**: I *have*?
> **Scarecrow**: Then why didn't you tell her before?
> **Glinda**: She wouldn't have believed me. She had to learn it for herself.
>
> *SCARECROW and TIN MAN look inquiringly at DOROTHY.*
>
> **Scarecrow**: What have you learned, Dorothy?

> **Dorothy**: (*thoughtfully*)Well, I—I think that it, that it wasn't enough just to want to see Uncle Henry and Auntie Em — and it's that — if I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with!
> (*timidly to GLINDA*)
> Is that right?
> **Glinda**: (nodding and smiling) That's all it is (Langley et al., 1989, p.128).

And so, with a similar sense of nostalgia, we return to Yellow Brick Primary School and hope to complete our cyclical journey from innocence through betrayal to understanding. Like Dorothy, what I did not know at that time was I too always had the power. Yellow Brick Primary School was working well: we had a dedicated and talented team of staff; a robust and creative curriculum; were judged as good by external advisers; had a carefully balanced budget and we were strongly supported within the community. As Faris accurately notes, 'Head teachers of stand-alone schools are uniquely placed, and they are given the authority and power to make staffing, budget and curriculum decisions (relatively quickly) based on the needs of their school, at the time, in order to move standards and quality of education forward' (2022, p.2). Change was not necessary and the desired freedom and autonomy were already available. Alas, we could not see our inherent potential for success. We had become trapped in a trajectory towards promised redemption, anticipating an emancipation that could never come:

> But the ideal form remains, and serves as a distraction from the real success story here. As we forever attack schools for failing to come up with the goods, for failing to deliver the salvation they promise, we refuse to see how the school has been more catastrophically successful than any cathedral; not in offering us salvation, but in making us forever beholden to that offer (Allen, 2017, p.72).

Forever beholden indeed. Yet, just as Glinda explains to the scarecrow that Dorothy had to learn it for herself, the journey to academisation and the resulting lessons learned have led me to this place, this time and this desire to share the knowledge with other Head teachers, so they don't lose what they already have in search of something that appears to offer more.

Within this desire for others to learn from this story is a kernel of recognition that, again, such a desire (in the Lacanian sense) can only lead to lack. We are each of us individual and capable of making choices. This includes choices made without deliberate thought that can lead to what Minnich terms 'habituation', or people's use of 'conventions and clichés and procedures and regulations to replace their own consciences, to serve their own ambitions without qualm, to ignore realities that might derail them' (2017, p.123). When we proceed without thought in this manner, when we fail to pay attention to the consequences of our choices, we can more readily be directed and exploited by others. Forti further emphasises the importance of remaining vigilant to the seduction of an easier, more peaceful life and the risks this represents:

> [T]he desire to be free once and for all of all conflict in order to continue to live in tranquility actually makes us slaves of a utilitarian logic, which leads us to accept the identity that someone else imposes on us. It leads us to 'choose' to become what those who save want us to become. This is how we consent to making ourselves into a stable, fixed identity: making ourselves into something objectivizable, employable, useable, and replaceable (2015, p.233).

Considering this journey as one of transformation and revolution, when viewed through the varifocal lens of the professional and personal, I want to raise questions around the future of academisation based on lessons I have learned in retrospect. As researcher, I remind myself that I am positioned both 'within and outside' the period of time I am recalling; I am both '*apart from* and *a part of* the study' (Bochner, 2014, p.131, original emphasis). My final year in post as Head teacher of Yellow Brick Primary School revealed a sequence of events obscured by the shadows of neoliberal ideology that could only be articulated with clarity once I had resigned and begun to reflect on what I had experienced. Just two years had passed since the Academy Order had been granted and many changes had taken place. The original hopes articulated at the start of the journey had begun to fray at the seams. 'There is no autonomy in policy' became the chosen mantra, supplied by external advisers and swallowed whole by senior leaders in their respective schools. Clarke sees this affirmation as a given in what he terms as the 'neoliberal-neoconservative academies', where an authoritarian style of leadership demands 'complete adherence to its values and vision, as

well as to the detailed policies and protocols it articulated to realise this vision' (2022, p.5). Rather than embracing greater freedom of choice we instead faced further constraint and the burden of individual responsibility should progress falter:

> The market similarly mobilizes free choice only to subdue and subvert it, "responsibilizing" every individual for the outcomes of the system while radically foreclosing any form of collective responsibility for the shape of society (Kotsko, 2018, p.140).

This is precisely what a teacher interviewed by Clarke experienced as 'low autonomy, high accountability' within the academy by whom she was employed (Clarke, 2022, p.5) and is a strong example of an authoritarian need for complete control. Such a lack of independent thought, whereby teachers and leaders follow policy without the courage to critique a growing list of non-negotiables, leads to what Reay terms as 'a pervasive governance of the soul in which pupils and teachers have internalised the judgemental, fear-laden, metric-driven, assessment-obsessed culture of English schooling' (2022, p.134). No longer, in education, are we aiming to win hearts and minds; we are now engaged in a battle for souls. No longer are we, as educators, resident in that Platonic grove. That original academy where Socrates claimed himself to have no knowledge yet, through questioning, encouraged others to think for themselves 'about how each one, differently, makes wiser or more foolish decisions about how to lead a life depending not on what is known, but on how well, how thoroughly s/he has thought about things' (Minnich, 2017, p.121). We have moved towards valuing only knowledge at the expense of thinking.

Reflecting on the initial purpose of embarking on academisation, I recalled a vision where taking hold of the reins through purposefully pursuing a change in status would lead to autonomy, freedom and a preservation of what made our school unique. Holding onto this ghost of Christmas past, and misidentifying it as a key to the future, prevented the clank and rattle of neoliberalism's ball and chains from being heard and blurred the true purpose of academisation:

> In the ongoing shift from a public service to privately run provision, English education is rapidly losing any sense of commitment to the common good,

> universalism, and an obligation to educate for democratic citizenry over and above preparation for the labour market (Reay, 2022, p.134).

In those early days this belief in a more secure future drove the chariot onwards with a revolutionary zeal. Even when workload felt unsustainable, the pace of change galloped forwards relentlessly and we were forced to run simply in order to stand still. Yet, as Allen highlights, '[b]elief in the promise of education was a prerequisite for one's subordination to it' (2017, p.19). We thought we were the charioteers; we did not recognise ourselves as draft horses. I had no idea at that point in time that, just as Dorothy unsuspectingly sealed her fate when she stepped into the ruby slippers, I had raised the lid on a veritable Pandora's Box. Yet, just as Dorothy realised at the very last moment the power those slippers held, hope remained within the box as a salve for humanity once all known evils had escaped into the world.

But what of hope? Does it ever really manifest? Lacan would argue not, that rather desire exists and leads to a form of hope in search for fulfilment; a fulfilment that remains always just beyond our reach. 'Desire, more than any other point in the range of human possibility, meets its limit somewhere' (Lacan, 2004, p.31). We humans live in this perpetual cycle of chasing dreams, a false hope, a fantasy, only to find disappointment and disillusion when we realise there is no such thing as actualisation. The closest we can ever be to happiness is through acceptance of this illusion and the closest we can be to joy is through experiencing the bitter-sweet pain of jouissance, 'that primordial suffering, that punishing enjoyment to which the subject clings' (Shepherdson, 2008, p.165).

Slipping into the unconscious

The daily grind that is the business of running a school continued at Yellow Brick Primary and pressure to dance to the tune of the MAT began to trickle down to staff on the ground. Money was tight and staff were conscious of school not being able to afford some classroom essentials whilst the school that housed the MAT central team had won a bid for impressive building works and looked, in comparison, to have little or no money worries. Tensions began to creep in with external advisers employed by the Director conducting lesson

observations alongside school leaders leading to increasingly high levels of stress. This is characteristic of the Lacanian Master's discourse, whereby, 'this field is organized by the requirements of the master signifier that demands of education that it aligns itself with the calculating, measuring and evaluating norms of managerialist performativity' (Clarke, 2019, p.56). Such observations and measures, as quality assurance, exist within the English education system and are part of any school leaders' role. What shifted was how this information was used. Rather than being a tool for improvement and an opportunity for coaching, teaching considered weak was jumped on and support plans established to formally monitor performance, thus creating a 'miasma of fear and mistrust' (Reay, 2022, p.133). Yet none of this was occurring behind closed doors. The monitoring process was open and transparent in so far as it could be. It was the more confidential aspects of staff performance management that caused this undercurrent of mistrust and fear, leading to some staff embodying the Lacanian hysteric: paranoid, provocative and demanding.

An example of this occurred when an interim teacher showed significant signs of underperformance through lesson observations and standards of work in pupil books. This was noticed by the Deputy Head and an external adviser and an informal support plan was established (with HR guidance and approval) to seek improvement. At the same time, several separate parental concerns about the teacher were raised and had to be investigated. None of this contextual information could be discussed beyond the Head teacher's office and so, when the teacher in question publicly shared a different reality based on her perception of being victimised, it stirred feelings of anxiety in the small group of staff who were already uncomfortable with the changes enveloping them. Furedi points at this 'diminished sense of control' (2006, p.75) when writing about causes of panic, including between colleagues:

> In the same way, changing practices at work mean that relationships between colleagues can no longer be taken for granted. The new preoccupation with harassment and bullying indicates that work is now seen as a place where one is at risk (2006, p.76).

The risk Furedi points at is two-fold: there is the risk to the employees who feel fear of falling victim to bullying or harassment and there is the equal risk to leaders of being

accused of such acts when they have just been doing their job by holding people to account. This risk was personally emphasised when an otherwise pedestrian series of events (in the context of managing staff performance) unfolding around the interim teacher took on a greater significance when she became the catalyst for the unleashing of frustrations centred on a growing disenchantment with my leadership. Subconsciously, I had sensed glimpses of unease for a number of months and had approached HR for guidance on how to manage the tensions building amongst some colleagues as they cloistered within clandestine corners. As Sun Tzu advised, '[w]hen troops are seen whispering amongst themselves in small groups, the general has lost the confidence of his men' (1992, p.32).[24] I had indeed lost the confidence of this group of staff, who viewed my lack of visibility in school as evidence of a lack of leadership[25]. The intervention of the HR Director resulted in a collation of concerns from relevant staff and an agreed action plan.

The nature of the concerns raised with HR around communication, meeting dates and part-time subject leadership responsibilities (alongside headteacher presence as highlighted above), were conflated to create a sense of calamity and not seen as the inevitable impact of pressure to conform to the broader MAT agenda. Just as Clarke identified, '[t]he discourse of the hysteric derives its oxygen from a sense of crisis' (p.118), there occurred a dawning recognition of a gently marinated malice that led to a constructed reality at odds with anything I had previously known or imagined. I had sensed disquiet and worked with HR to face this head on, hoping to reach a solution. Indeed, one teacher had written an email to me expressing concerns around the negativity emanating from a group of staff, including the Trustee's relative, and the impact this was having on her:

> On occasion, I've walked through classrooms or past conversations featuring combinations of certain staff members where the conversation stops abruptly or sometimes is openly complaining about the decisions made in school. I feel

[24] Ironically, my copy of 'The Art of War' was given to me by the Trustee when I became Head teacher, with the inscription 'It's not a war but strategy and tactics! Kindest regards for a great career ahead.'

[25] When this thesis was under review, I was questioned on whether the calamities that occurred during my Headship were in fact due to neoliberal influences or were they just a case of bad leadership. Indeed, following my resignation, the same thoughts plagued me and severely impacted my mental health and sense of professional self-worth. It was only 6 months later, when I returned to work as an Interim Head teacher, that my leadership was commended by staff, leaders and Ofsted in a school that thanked me for rescuing them. In reality, they rescued me.

> unwelcome when they do this and it puts me off going into the areas I know these staff members will be in. I also struggle to respond to leading questions from these members of staff at times. They sometimes ask my opinions on matters they feel strongly about linked to school decisions. For example, they might say 'don't you think ...?' to push an opinion and open up a negative conversation. No matter how non-committal I am, I sometimes feel as if they have taken my answer and assumed I agree with them (Personal email, 2019).

This email was shared with the HR Director and was not addressed. To add fuel to the fire, the timing of a meeting to inform the interim teacher that her post would not be extended beyond her contracted period ripped through any semblance of cooperation and brought the wrath of the hysteric down atop my head. The academy dream I had nurtured was fast becoming a nightmare.

Uneasy bedfellows

In the months preceding my resignation, I would catch myself repeatedly questioning what I would do if I did not have a job. It became a niggle, a worry that I would voice only to be reassured that it would be an incredibly unlikely situation. Yet the anxiety persisted. It could be argued that my unconscious mind knew, based on subtle perceptions, that trouble was brewing. As Barad reminds us, '[w]e … are always already responsible to the others with whom or which we are entangled, not through conscious intent but through the various ontological entanglements that materiality entails' (2007, p.393). When we are thus entangled energetically, we absorb and interpret information oftentimes before the mind can process it.[26]

Barad's portrayal of entanglement resonates with Jung's description of intuition as being 'perception via the unconscious' (1968, p.282). But what of a perception gained through an awareness within dreams, or nightmares? Can a level of consciousness exist within the unconscious unfolding of a dream? Jung suggests so:

[26] Barad writes about how brittlestars intra-act with their environment and avoid predators as an example of how 'recognition need not entail cognition' (2007, p.380).

> Certain dreams, visions, and mystical experiences do, however, suggest the existence of a consciousness in the unconscious. But, if we assume a consciousness in the unconscious, we are at once faced with the difficulty that no consciousness can exist without a subject, that is, an ego to which the contents are related. Consciousness needs a centre, an ego to which something is conscious (Jung, 1968, p.283).

Jung goes on to explore the idea of fragmented or traces of personalities existing within the unconscious, which he defines as both the anima/animus[27] and the shadow, which 'personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself … for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies' (Jung, 1968, p.285). When interplay exists between the conscious and unconscious we experience a gradual sense of noticing the revelation of a vision without being fully able to control or actively participate in this unveiling; we are rendered passive observers. For Lacan, the unconscious opens and closes and so we cannot fully see it, it is 'a process of "bèance causal", a gap with a causal function, in a typical movement of opening and closing' (Verhaeghe, 1995, p.84). Reviewing the experiences that constituted my final weeks at Yellow Brick Primary School, did I in that moment imagine a sense of foreboding snapping at my heels? Or have I since constructed that as part of the narrative retelling? What I do recall is a sense of walking through a waking dream, not quite sure of the path I followed, uncertain of who to trust or what to believe. McGowan pinpoints this precisely when he writes, '[i]n the dream state, our faculties of critical thought disengage, and we accept the experience as it presents itself' (2007, p.12). I had little choice but to accept what was ultimately exposed and was forced to face the shadow side of my psyche as it became defined by others. Like Dorothy waking from an opium-induced slumber, I was drawn back to the path that had been laid before me, uncertain of the end point yet nevertheless thrust onwards.

On the other hand, Lacan accepts that a subject does exist within the dream world and links the position of the subject to that of follower, not director, 'that, in the final resort, our position in the dream is profoundly that of someone who does not see. The subject does

[27] 'A man therefore has in him a feminine side, an unconscious feminine figure – a fact of which he is generally quite unaware. I may take it as known that I have called this figure the "anima," and its counterpart in a woman the "animus"'(Jung, 1968, p.284).

not see where he is leading, he follows' (2004, p.75). In the ethereal realms of reverie we find our two psychoanalysts at either side of a vast lake, both gazing into the same swirling waters of the unconscious and both perceiving something separate from the other. Like the silvery reflection of the moon on the water's surface, there can only exist for one, shadow, as the other sees light. We can imagine, swirling in the depths of this lake, Jung's collective unconscious as inhabited by archetypes, 'these figures [who] show the most striking connections with the poetic, religious, or mythological formations', personifications which, at any moment, may 'irrupt autonomously into consciousness as soon as it gets into a pathological state' (Jung, 1968, p.285). For Lacan, the unconscious mind has a linguistic structure and order; it is not a chaotic, misty territory that lingers beneath the surface of consciousness:

> The unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language (Lacan, 2004, p.149).

Lacan's unconscious consists of signs and signifiers which attempt to label but never fully pin meaning on anything experienced. Signifiers reside within the symbolic order, which is 'the order of all regulative symbolic productions: culture, law, and, ultimately, language itself' (McSwite, 2001, p.244). They represent the closest link to Jung's archetypal energies as they connect to a universal knowing, as through language we try to make sense of the world around us. If we accept the Jungian collective unconscious as pictorial and the Lacanian unconscious as linguistic, we can accept that both realms are ultimately representational. For Jung, the archetypes form symbols without becoming symbols yet this, Lacan warned, can lead to the risk of making such archetypes appear real. In his analysis of Freudian concepts leading to Lacanian theory as 'a major breakthrough' in psychoanalysis, Verhaeghe proposes:

> A second and even more important disadvantage has to do with the content of myths and the possibility that this content will be psychologized, which means that it

> becomes a substantial reality. That is what happened with Jungian and postjungian theory (1995, p.78).

Verhaeghe views the step away from mythology towards greater structure as a positive move as it allows for a 'level of abstraction' (1995, p.79) that does not align with any one image, leaving space for wider interpretations. The disadvantage with Lacan, Verhaeghe suggests, is his analysis can be dull, '[c]ompared to the Freudian solution, with the myths and age-old stories, the Lacanian algebraic structures are boring, tedious even … they completely lack the ever-present attraction of the Imaginary order that is pre-eminent in those stories' (1995, p.79).

What we can recognise and accept is the existence of a perpetual tension between the theories of Lacan and Jung. With Lacan, we enter the realm of the four discourses, where power, energy, tensions, desire and lack all inevitably lead to disappointment and where in the end, acceptance that life is a gift of shit[28] is the only path to release from torment. For Jung, a symbolism rooted in myths and stories populates the collective unconscious alongside the quasi-religious archetypes. There is hope for fulfilment if we can recognise and reconcile with our shadow side. Ultimately, neither found what they were seeking:

> Jung and Lacan devoted their lives to finding the "truth", and in the end both concluded that their theories had failed them (Morell, 2021, p.119).

Regardless of the imbrication between these psychoanalysts and their theories, in both dreams and in waking life we, as the subjects, attempt an articulation of what we perceive and inevitably we, like Jung and Lacan before us, fail.

The Tower

[28] (Lacan, 1977, p.268, cited in Driver, 2013, p.411).

The Tower is one of the most feared cards of the Tarot deck, with its striking imagery of destruction and devastation. A tall Tower stands, its turret struck by a bolt of lightning, as two figures plunge to probable death to avoid the licking flames which threaten to engulf them. When the Tower is present in a reading, as a card from the major arcana, it will link to a significant and unexpected life event, '[w]ith the Tower, the carpet is pulled from under our feet, something is destroyed, and what seemed fundamental and solid dissolves against our will' (Barbier, 2021, p.160). Just as we considered Jung's unconscious perception as intuition earlier, here the Tower acts as a catalyst to our conscious world to wake us up and make us pay attention when we are at risk:

> Normally the unconscious collaborates with the conscious without friction or disturbance, so that one is not even aware of its existence. But when an individual or a social group deviates too far from their instinctual foundations, they then experience the full impact of unconscious forces. The collaboration of the unconscious is intelligent and purposive, and even when it acts in opposition to consciousness its expression is still compensatory in an intelligent way, as if it were trying to restore the lost balance' (Jung, 1968, p.282).

This, for me, relates to the Lacanian discourse of the analyst, in that a careful balance must be struck between listening to the analysand and noticing what they cannot see or are unaware of without slipping into the discourse of the master and telling them what to do about it. For Lacan, The Tower would represent more of an opportunity to tear down a structure that no longer serves so a new one can emerge:

> [R]emaining in the discourse of the analyst requires an ongoing dialectic between centring and decentring, something akin to a continual twisting of the kaleidoscope so that fresh patterns and new possibilities continually come into view (Clarke, 2019, p.129).

Using the Lacanian perspective, there is more agency for the analysand; they are not being 'done to' and have the option to accept and embrace change even if it has the potential to be devastating, knowing it will lead to 'new possibilities'. In my Tower moment, at Yellow

Brick Primary, it took time to recognise the benefits of the eruption that occurred. Indeed, the rapid force and pace of change left me blindsided.

Following the realisation that the news had been shared that the teacher (who had been underperforming) would not be staying on, I was caught off guard by a colleague in my office at the end of one Friday and subjected to a torrent of verbal accusations. The tirade that occurred included telling me that I was a terrible Head teacher, hated by all staff, as I treated people appallingly. Shouting and flushed, this colleague accused me of not caring about anyone. This bombardment left me feeling shaken, shocked and vulnerable, as no one had witnessed this occurrence. Once she left, I immediately called HR for guidance.

Reflecting on this today, I can instantly recognise the classic Lacanian hysteric, who 'for all its vehemence and passion also speaks from a place of division, trauma and confusion, typically employing tones of outrage in its biting invective as part of its protests and complaints' (Clarke, 2019, p.128). In that moment, I did not recognise this. I only felt the impact of raw wrath and wondered what on earth had triggered such behaviour. I can equally recognise that this is an incomplete account, as it only shares my recollections and not those of my colleagues. As Driver explains in her writing about the stressed subject:

> Whenever we narrate our subjective experience and thereby consciously attempt to say who we are and what we want, our rhetorical constructions also deflect disruptions, discontinuities and breaking points. These discontinuities surface unconscious desire that is not satisfied by whatever 'it' is that we thereby pursue (2014, p.92).

For Driver (2014), drawing on Lacan (1977), the 'it' within this context are the stressors at work that are frequently defined as a lack of having, yet underneath lies a deeper lack of being. In the example shared, the deeper lack of being for my colleague could be a lack of being heard, or a lack of being in a position of control. My own lack in that moment could be described as a lack of being aware of how my leadership was perceived by some colleagues. I would have said that my leadership style was collegiate and democratic, that I wanted staff to feel respected and part of the decision making process. What this disruptive exchange demonstrated was that I had been deflecting signs of a deeper unrest and

unhappiness within the team and what I thought I was and thought I wanted, turned out not to be 'it'.

There followed a period of intense awkwardness at work, where I felt I could not trust anyone I worked with. Like Dorothy trapped in the Wicked Witch of the West's tower, awaiting her final judgement, I reached out to those in power in the hope of a sensible solution. The Director said he could not get involved, as he needed to remain impartial should a formal complaint occur. I approached my union, the National Association for Head Teachers (NAHT) and was advised that I must address the unprofessional behaviour demonstrated and hold the colleague to account for her 'insubordination'. Interestingly, the union representative I spoke to said calls of this nature were becoming increasingly common, with teaching staff refusing to comply with professional standards and instead attacking the Head teacher's leadership. This relates back to Furedi's (2006) culture of fear in the workplace and to the sense of Head teachers feeling unsafe and expendable within MATs as described by Faris (2022, p.5). Additionally, I turned to the HR Director for guidance and support, and it was suggested I set a date for a meeting with the colleague to address my concerns around her professional behaviour and invite our Chair of Governors to attend, as the HR Director would not be in attendance as this was an informal meeting. I duly followed these instructions with a growing sense of unease.

I approached my colleague to suggest an informal meeting to discuss how she had spoken to me the previous week and she agreed on the condition that two other members of staff accompany her. This resulted in a total of six people, including the Chair of Governors, attending an intended informal conversation about professional behaviour. What actually occurred at the meeting was a complete about-face, with my colleague shifting the focus from her behaviour to mine. Reading the minutes now, I can see a pattern emerging of me trying to hold her to account for her actions and her responses deflecting this and replacing it with an instance of how she thought I had been unprofessional. The members of staff who also attended were repeatedly asked to confirm my leadership inadequacies as listed by my colleague. The purpose of the meeting was successfully derailed and I could not move towards holding my colleague to account for her earlier tirade.

As the meeting concluded, the other members of staff added their concerns and opinions to the list my colleague had shared. At this point, the meeting felt as if it had been constructed with the aim to unseat me. Other instances of subtle yet visible inconsistencies sprang to mind, where I had experienced a sense of something being off kilter: one member of staff repeatedly barging into my office without knocking (as if trying to catch me out); morning briefings being held with the Deputy Head ignoring my presence on site; the Schools Resource Management Adviser (SRMA)[29] who visited to look at an integrated curriculum model[30] with admin staff and who noted publicly that my pay grade was too high for the size of school I led. As these recognitions slowly swirled to surface within my memory, one of the members of staff in the room confirmed my fears that I had not had her trust for some time and added her knife to the ones already protruding from my back. Describing how morale was at an all-time low and how some staff found me intimidating, she underscored the points raised by my colleague and added some of her own. In terms of Lacanian discourse, this was the point at which the hysteric castrates the master (Verhaegue, 1995), and I was forced to recognise myself in the position of master.

I was incredulous as I listened, having only three weeks earlier received a text message from the same member of staff thanking me for my support with reconciling the budget as she had been concerned the lack of funding would negatively impact staff morale, which was currently high. I could not square what I was hearing with the daily reality of life in the school yet understood some sort of folk devil was being constructed with my leadership at the centre. The Chair of Governors was equally stunned and described the meeting as an ambush. Minnich references how we can re-categorise and be re-categorised by others and how this can render us vulnerable to manipulation by authorities:

> These are usually small scale re-creations of ourselves in relation to others, but they can be turned to the doing of good or bad things, or, initially and perhaps until it is too late, just as readily to evil. They can also practice us in maintaining self-respect

[29] SRMAs are employed by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to provide financial reviews of schools and identify areas for increased efficiency. The SRMA who visited our school introduced herself by explaining she was a substantive Head teacher whose husband was employed as an SRMA. She recognized that she could do the same and applied. She was not a finance specialist.

[30] An integrated curriculum model links curriculum and finance to look at cost efficiency.

> when we are awake, aware, thoughtful enough to recognize when it is crucial this time *not* to recalibrate our sensitivities (2017, pp.177-8).

I again turned to the HR Director for guidance and support and was advised not to approach the Director or colleague Head teachers as they may be needed for an investigation. Not trusting what I had experienced or the advice given, I left school that evening in a state of shock and on the Sunday, to preserve my self-respect, decided to resign.

Crystal ball gazing

Before we look forward and try to see into the future we must first reflect upon the past. In doing so, we may find answers to the questions thrown up by the collapse of a system we thought we could trust. The weeks following the ambush meeting rolled into the end of the academic year and I liaised with the Director and HR Director via my union representative as the terms of my stepping off were negotiated. Returning to the tarot, Barbier notes, '[w]ith the Tower, you lose some foundational parts of yourself at the least expected time, but once you're past the surprise, there is great wisdom to be found' (2021, p.160). In retrospect, the decision to step off the Yellow Brick Road of Headship and take time to reconsider my career, was one such moment of wisdom. External voices may have suggested I was being foolish in walking away from a permanent, well-paid job without putting up a fight. Similar to the Cowardly Lion, they judged that I did not have the nerve to 'put 'em up'. In truth, I knew it was an impossibility to return to a place of work where I had been so deeply betrayed. How could I work within a system I did not trust and whose values no longer aligned with my own? I could not be an unthinking member of the workforce or part of an organisation 'who do not question, do not push toward reflection' (Minnich, 2017, p.212). At a final meeting at the Director's school, I met with the MAT Improvement Partner (an ex-Ofsted inspector) and outlined in brief what I had experienced. His comment to me was, 'Do you think this would have happened if you were Head of a Local Authority school?' Within this one question lay an implicit recognition of the unchecked power generated within MATs, made more potent by 'an erosion of democratic input into schooling at the local community level that mirrors the erosion of democracy within' (Reay, 2022, p.130). Clearly my experience is not unique, as Faris indicates:

> If MATs are the future of schools in England, and the DfE continues to push for its 2030 target for all schools to join MATs, then it will need to address MATs' reputation that they treat head teachers unfairly and disposably (2022, p.5).

Such crystal ball gazing and speculation on what will or will not work within a fully Trust-led system is unlikely to make a difference because it is the people within, and how they interpret policy, who hold the power to make or break our schools. Returning to Dorothy's encounter with Professor Marvel and his flimflam fortune telling abilities, his gazing into a crystal ball revealed nothing his bare eyes and common sense could not tell him, yet he dressed it in magic and thus created a sense of liminality. This same intention to move across, between and beyond boundaries as a process of transformation begins, falters and then restarts resonates with the process of academisation as explored in this thesis. Tracing this narrative onto Baum's (1900) story 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz', enabled this sense of fluid movement and provided a hook upon which to hang the subtleties of a process of change that is simultaneously visible and hidden and simultaneously revolves and spins forwards.

Back to the beginning

Choosing the well-known tale of a young girl's journey through the magical world of Oz to represent the road travelled during the academisation process (and the creation of a new Multi-Academy Trust) enabled these shared experiences to be described as part of a journey into an unknown territory undertaken by a group of friends, each of whom searched for a missing piece of themselves that they hoped might lead to happiness. It was this lack and their innate desire for completion that drove them onwards, past the many obstacles thrown in their path and towards the elusive Wizard residing, with all the answers, in the heart of the Emerald City. This reference to lack and the voraciousness of desire reflects a Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective:

> Desire is thus a double-edged sword. On the one hand, our relentless quest for satisfaction renders us vulnerable to the seductions and predations of an insatiable capitalist machinery … On the other hand, our fidelity to the stubborn singularity of

> our desire can be a source of resistance to coercion and conformity (Clarke, 2019, p.24).

For the friends who journeyed towards Oz, the focus of each was not a capitalist desire (or a search inspired by material possessions), but a quasi-spiritual quest for fulfilment. For Dorothy, the wish was to return home; the Scarecrow sought a brain; the Tin Man looked for a heart and the Lion desired courage. Their teamwork and tenacity had seen them through various trials and delivered them to the Wizard's sanctuary. For our school leaders who chose the path to academisation, the promised advantages of holding such status fuelled their desire: more freedom, more autonomy, more money and more control. Indeed, their 'stubborn singularity' sprang from a need to protect their respective schools and they only agreed to undergo a status change in order to remain operationally the same. This chimes perfectly with Clarke's understanding of the seductions that spring from a capitalist landscape within education. However, can this 'resistance to coercion and conformity' hold fast against the battering winds of educational change that force a battening down of hatches? Does the Wizard, in his closeted infinite wisdom, really have a clue what is going on?

Considering the revolutionary wisdom of our wizards of the English education system (the DfE), it would appear not. We seem to be caught in a never-ending tailspin as Government policy makers fail to make up their minds about the future of our school structure:

> The government's target for all schools to be in or preparing to join multi-academy trusts by 2030 is officially dead, with another key white paper [sic] pledge for councils to set up their own trusts also axed (Dickens, 2023, n.p.).

With five Education Secretaries since the launch of the White Paper in March 2022 (Dickens, 2023) is it possible to realise a future where schools are left to focus on their children and their communities, free from interference from Government? Ball does not think so:

> We continually misread school as a site of opportunity and possibility, and we are always disappointed. The essence and raison d'être of the school is in fact normalisation, categorisation and exclusion (Ball, 2022, n.p.).

This unholy trinity that Ball offers as the purpose of the school is further compounded by the school as academy. As the DfE operate behind the curtain of policy that drives the academy machine and neoliberal dream, we are left wondering where the real power lies. Could it rest with the civil servants who make or break schools, the Regional Directors (formally known as Regional Schools Commissioners) who swoop in, like the Wicked Witch of the West, with their giant sand timers measuring the diminishing lifespan of a failing school? Or does it lie with individual CEOs, those builders of empires who see themselves as being like Glinda the Good Witch, benevolent and benign? Faris thinks power should not belong to them:

> Head teachers talk to me about the benevolence of their CEO, and CEOs themselves attempt to highlight the freedom they give to the staff. However, it is not about the level of freedom that MATs choose to give their heads of schools; the fact that it is the CEOs' to give in the first place bothers me most (2022, p.4).

Similarly, Rushdie pondered on the true source of power in The Wizard of Oz, suggesting that '[t]he power centre of the film is a triangle at whose corners are Dorothy, Glinda and the Witch. The fourth point, at which the Wizard is thought for most of the film to stand, turns out to be an illusion' (2012, p.43). Just as the Lacanian Real blows a hole in the middle of the Symbolic Order (Žižek, 2006b), the illusory Wizard represents what Žižek terms the 'raw Real':

> [I]f what we experience as 'reality' is structured by fantasy, and if fantasy serves as the screen that protects us from being directly overwhelmed by the raw real, then *reality itself can function as an escape from encountering the Real*' (2006a, p.57, original emphasis).

Our fantasies (dressed as reality) create the curtain that hides the Wizard in order to protect us from what we might face should the drapes be wrenched asunder. Žižek (2006a) points to a 'traumatic Real', a state we turn away from in conscious life yet presents itself to us in our dreams (ibid). We need to awaken to avoid this encounter and maintain the fantasy of the reality we have created. For Dorothy, the awakening occurred when Toto, her pet dog, drew back the curtain and revealed, not the Great and Mighty Wizard, but a fake and phony man using pyrotechnics to create 'the screen that protects'. Toto's role is pivotal in forcing

Dorothy to face reality and thereby ensuring her protection. Toto becomes a physical representation of Dorothy's inner wisdom, a talisman of guidance and protection. His irritation of and capture by the evil Miss Gulch at the start of the film triggered Dorothy's desire to run away from home. At the end of the film, Toto reveals the Wizard's lack and then prevents Dorothy from flying back to Kansas in Professor Marvel's hot air balloon, thus ensuring Dorothy discovers the power she holds within. These interruptions, triggered by Toto, are the disruptions of the Lacanian analyst that enable change and ultimately acceptance. Once Dorothy realises she is stuck in an imaginary order of powerless young girl, she is free to construct 'a rather different self, one that can move on and become more open to different experiences' (Driver, 2018, p.631).

Placing Head teachers in the remarkable shoes of Dorothy, we can but wonder at the illusions pedalled by the Great and Mighty DfE and hope enough school leaders wake up to the fact that they too have always had the power. Or is it too late – do we have too many leaders of schools who will remain compliant and follow, like sheep, the diktats of the DfE? Do school leaders really lack recognition that the academy strategy promises little more than shit rolled in glitter, or to put it another way, '[t]he melancholic underpinnings of contemporary education are hidden in part by attempts to appear positive' (Allen, 2017, p.99)? Do they choose to remain tethered to the chariot that promises freedom? Can they not see the road they gallop relentlessly towards leads only to enslavement, as the whip drives them on? It remains uncertain whether this compliance springs from free will or is rooted in fear. For some it could be fear of failure, fear of finger-pointing, fear of loss of face when results do not reach the expected standards. For others, the additional existential fear of loss of employment if directives are ignored, leading to a loss of income, loss of status and the shame and pain this brings. For others still, not jumping on the academy bandwagon represents a simple fear of missing out. Yet hope lingers, Pandora's persistent survivor, and some Head teachers are speaking out about facing the pressure to join a MAT:

> [N]ow is the time for us in the system to decide what we value, not for the sake of autonomy for individual heads or the pursuit of power for power's sake, but in the belief that communities deserve local leaders who have the agility and freedom to make decisions for the schools in the community that are beneficial to the education system as a whole (Faris, 2022, p.5).

On reflection therefore, what would I do differently if I knew then what I know now? What can be learned from this autoethnographical journey? Story, as a vehicle, has ultimately enabled me to achieve a sense of catharsis:

> Story suggests that there is a possible path to the resolution of desire – a way of ameliorating its fundamental deadlock. The very forward movement itself of story invokes the fantasy of escape from the repetition of desire (McGowan, 2007, p.84).

Through the sharing of this narrative and the recreation of a moment in time, I have re-experienced flashes of pain yet gained instances of greater clarity; I have experienced Lacanian jouissance. I now profoundly understand that it can never be possible to realise the desired freedoms academisation promises and that chasing a fantasy is futile. I hope to have reached the stage thus described by Jung and can close the pages on this chapter for good:

> Every stage in our psychic development has something peculiarly final about it. When we have experienced catharsis with its wholesale confession we feel we have reached our goal at last; all has come out, all is known, every anxiety has been lived through and every tear shed; now things will go as they ought (2001, p.46).

Finally, we return to Dorothy, back in her bed at the farm at the end of the film. Back in the place it all began, the place she tried to run away from and the place she now acknowledges as where she wants to be. Dorothy, as analysand, has learned the lesson that chasing your desires does not lead to joy or fulfilment. Only acceptance that there will always be an inevitable lack can lead to peace of mind:

> As one might guess, the termination of a Lacanian analysis is not a happy, friendly event. The analysand is pushed into a tragic view of the world, one that makes the social order appear absurd, is refused what he or she wants (and even has it denigrated), and is given instead something to carry away (awareness of the sinthome) that can only be an ironic source of enjoyment. Indeed, it is not inaccurate to say that what the analysand carries away is a powerful sense of duty, a duty to bear an impossible desire and to keep ones-self alive in order to pursue it (McSwite, 2006, p.183).

And if in the end there must be an acceptance, like the analyst suggests, that other Head teachers will need to find this out for themselves and discover, through their own journey, the lack that exists at the end of the rainbow, then the 'impossible desire' is wishing they would see the hollowness that lies at the centre of the academy agenda and recognise the puppet wizard operating pyrotechnics behind a gossamer veil. Inevitably, this impossible desire leads to impotence. Like watching the film and shouting at the screen, trying to warn the characters of some disaster or other, there needs to be recognition they cannot hear and therefore cannot listen. Their lessons are their own to be learned.

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