

In a different voice

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Let me start with a poem. It is titled “Samfunnsforskning”, or ”Social science research” in English. I’ll read it first in Norwegian, since my guess is that a fair part of the audience understands Scandinavian languages. Then I will read an English translation.

Hun prøver å tenke fort
men damen venter
damen smiler vennlig og har pene klær
hun prøver å se et annet sted
mens hun tenker
sola kryper inn av døra som en katt
det er mars
naboen går i melkebutikken
naboens barn dypper fjeset i smeltet snø
damen venter
damen fra et sted med et langt navn
damen har rett til å spørre folk en hvilkensomhelst morgen i mars
med sol
damen kommer
har blyant og blokk og rett
og smiler
hun prøver å tenke fort
mars renner nedover kinnet på naboens barn
jaja sier hun
lukker solen ute
og damen inn.

And then, the English translation:

She tries to think quickly

but the lady is waiting
the lady has nice clothes and a kind smile.
she tries to look elsewhere
while thinking
the sun steals through the door like a cat
it is the month of March
the neighbour goes to the dairy
the neighbour's child dips his face in the melting snow
the lady is waiting
the lady from a place with a long name
the lady with a right to ask people questions
any sunny morning in the month of March
the lady is coming
the lady has pencil and pad
the lady is right and she smiles
she tries to think quickly
the month of March is seeping down the cheek of the neighbour's child
very well, she says
shuts the sun out,
lets the lady in.

The poem was included in my first volume of poetry, published in 1968. At the time I was a student of psychology at the University of Oslo. The curriculum that we were taught was mainly about experiments with white rats running in labyrinths and American college students learning and remembering nonsense syllables. In addition, we became acquainted with some very general theories about group processes, a dash of attitude measurements and a tiny bit of Freud.

As part of my education, I was assigned the task of being assistant to one of the researchers at the department. My job was to interview mothers and fathers of teenage children in a working class area of Oslo on their attitudes to and practices of socialization: What was their view on spanking as a method of correcting naughty children? Should a teenage boy be allowed to grow long hair? By asking questions of this kind, we hoped to establish whether the authoritarian personality, in Adorno's sense of the word, was frequently found among working class parents.

We had sent a letter of information, with the official letterhead of the Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, to our prospective interviewees before I turned up on their doorstep. Since this was before the days of informed consent, we did not wait for them to reply to our letter before paying our visit. I sometimes sensed that the man or woman before me would have preferred to shut the door in my face. But they very seldom did.

So the lady in the poem, who comes from a place with a long name, has pad, pencil and a right to know, was I. I obediently completed the task I had been given, but my uneasiness grew. The poem was the result of that uneasiness. It put into words a feeling that had to do with relations of power and class in the process of doing social science research. Such topics were not much discussed at the Department of psychology in the late sixties. Later, the issue of power relations became standard in textbooks on qualitative interviews.

I have been asked to talk about the relationship between my experience as a writer of fiction and as a social science researcher. Are fiction and social science two completely different languages, expressing conflicting practices, producing separate kinds of knowledge? Or are the problems that we have to grapple with in fiction relevant to social science research and vice versa? Since there are probably more social science researchers than writers of fiction in the audience, I will present some reflections on how practices in fiction, might prove fruitful in social science as well. The reflections are prompted by my own experience.

I will start with the topic that I have already touched upon: uneasiness as a kind of divining rod, indicating where it might be worth while to start digging.

Then I will proceed to reflect on the position of the writer. My third topic is informants as creative storytellers. Finally, I will say some words about whether “to show or to tell”.

The uneasiness that prompted my poem had to do with power relations between researcher and researched. As mentioned, this topic is now regularly discussed among academics. Today, researchers are expected to follow an elaborate set of rules concerning research ethics. Great emphasis is put on protecting vulnerable groups from being exploited or hurt in the research process. Given the history of science, also social science, there are very good reasons for warnings against what overzealous researchers may do, unwittingly or not, to people with less power of definition and lower social status than the researcher. How come then that the uneasy feeling from the poem sometimes returns, however strictly I try to follow the rules of ethic?

Perhaps the position of the ethically conscious and responsible researcher doing everything possible to be considerate to vulnerable informants is just a little too comfortable? May the ethical stance partly be a cover for a patronising view of some people as weak and fragile, when in fact they may have to be unbelievably strong to be able to survive the kind of life they lead? Do we cast ourselves as the natural protectors of the people that we are researching? Do we tend to rob them of some of their autonomy by deciding for them what they will and will not be able to cope with?

It may be reason to warn that unreflective class privilege comes in various versions – both as arrogance and as paternalism.

Feminist researchers have analysed how gender is done and negotiated, and how gendered power is often reproduced in the research process, not least in the interview relation. We have few parallel analyses of how *class* is done and negotiated, and how class power may be reproduced in doing research, for example in research interviews. I suspect that class habitus is not irrelevant to the figure of the ethically responsible researcher interacting with his/her less fortunately situated subjects of research. Perhaps we are doing class as well as ethics during such meetings.

Sometimes we may also ask whom we are protecting by our careful and considerate approach to our informants. I had to ask myself this question after having interviewed people born during World War II, with German occupant soldiers as fathers and Norwegian women as mothers. In the post-war years, many of these children had a hard time, being regarded as the unwanted and even dangerous legacy of a hated enemy. What they experienced in their childhood sometimes had psychologically crippling effects that might last a lifetime. The research on German-Norwegian war children was done in collaboration with Eva Simonsen. We conducted life history interviews with a sample of 110 people.

At the outset, we were very conscious that the interview might prove to be painful to the informants. It might bring back memories long buried and trigger off psychological processes difficult to control. A committee appointed by the municipal authorities of the city of Bergen had recently investigated possible maltreatment of children in orphanages in the fifties, sixties and seventies. Some of their informants, former residents of local orphanages, had committed suicide after being interviewed by the committee. It was speculated if the interview had pushed them over the edge and made them take their own lives. So, I had every reason to be careful in my contact with German-Norwegian war children, whose childhood experiences might be expected to be every bit as bad as those of the orphanage children.

I *was* careful. So careful, in fact, that I suspect that I in some instances discouraged my informants from telling me important experiences, experiences that were important to them and important knowledge to society. I am referring to experiences of sexual harassment and violation. I never asked my informants directly if they had been victims of such acts. If they themselves hinted to experiences of this kind, I did not automatically follow up with probing questions, but left it to them to continue and be more specific. I did so to avoid forcing people into telling what they were not ready to tell, I did not want to overstep their limits. However, later I have had second thoughts. How did the informants interpret my restraint? Perhaps they believed that I was not very interested to hear that part of their story, that I found it irrelevant and not worthy of being included in serious research. Or perhaps they found me unperceptive and lacking in empathy, unable to tune in to their invitation. At worst, they might have interpreted my passivity as a sign of disbelief. In some cases I received telephone calls or letters after the interview, where I was told some part of what I had been too protective to ask about.

I now think I may have hurt some of my interviewees by my well-meaning but perhaps slightly condescending protectiveness. And I am quite sure that I lost some important stories. So whom did I really protect? I protected my own self-image as an ethically conscious researcher, who does not trample on the feelings of vulnerable people. And I protected the Norwegian society from knowledge of some very uncomfortable facts.

The divining rod of uneasiness tells me that we have still some way to go before we understand the workings of class and power in social science research. For me, the realisation that something disturbing goes on in the research relation started with a poem. However, it takes more systematic analysis to bring it further.

The divining rod of uneasiness may mark other places to dig as well. In 2005 I published a novel on a topic related to the research I had done with Eva Simonsen on German-Norwegian War children. During the war about 200 of these children were sent to Germany by the organization SS- Lebensborn. Lebensborn was running maternity homes in occupied Norway for women that were pregnant with German soldiers. The 200 children in question were judged as being of excellent Aryan quality, fit to be adopted by German families. However, many of them ended up in orphanages in their new home country. At the end of the war, Norwegian authorities were not too eager to claim these children back. An ill planned and haphazardly executed repatriation started in 1947. Many of the children had experienced an unstable existence, being moved from place to place, and some were deeply traumatized. They remembered nothing from Norway, and spoke only German. My novel is

about the homecoming of these children, seen through the eyes of Emilie, a Norwegian social worker who is running a temporary institution established to receive these children, teach them Norwegian and organize their permanent placement, with their biological mothers, with adoptive families or in children's homes.

A central theme in the novel is the relationship between Emilie and one of the children, a boy named Heinz. Heinz does not speak. His body is not responding to Emilie's hugs and caresses. Even his eyes do not communicate – he has the gaze of an ermine, impossible to read and interpret.

Emilie is a real heroine. She works day and night for the children and gives them all her love and caring to heal their wounds. She realises that Heinz is very badly damaged by whatever he has experienced in his short life. She tries and she tries to help him, and she tries and she tries to love him, until she finally has to admit to herself that she is unable to love this child. He gives her no sign that she matters to him, and she cannot deal with his unresponsiveness. In a flash, the verdict goes through her mind: It must be brain damage.

Later I have realised that what I have tried to capture in the relationship between Emilie and Heinz is the most painful, and perhaps most enduring fact in the history of child saving, child protection and care: our inability to help the children that have suffered the most. The more they have suffered, the more probable it is that they will experience new rejections from the people whose job it is to help and heal them. Very often they are sent from one place to another, with still a new label as goodbye present: too difficult, relationally damaged, evading care, or whatever diagnosis is nearest at hand. In the novel "The Homecoming" I have pointed – not to the extent and depth of these children's damages, but to the need of adult helpers to be responded to, receive gratitude and be loved back. These needs are continually denied gratification by just those children that we ought to help and love the most. Perhaps we are just unable to take that denial.

Later, when I was writing my forthcoming book, titled *The stepchildren of society*, this painful fact came back to me. *The stepchildren of society* is not a work of fiction, but a book based on social science and historical research, some done by me and a lot done by other researchers. The topic is how society has treated its stepchildren, that is marginalized children of all kinds. While working with this book, I continually ran into parallels to Emilie's painful moment – when she realises that she is unable to love the deeply damaged, unresponsive and ungrateful little boy Heinz, and reaches for a label that legitimizes her own defeat.

Why are we so often unable to help the children that need our help most? Is it because our diagnostic apparatus is not sufficiently refined, our methods and techniques of treatment

not sophisticated enough? Perhaps. But the uneasiness is still with me. Perhaps we ought to turn the gaze away from the children, their damages and defects, and focus the adults, our frustrated needs and what they do to our relationship to “the stepchildren of society”.

2)The position of the writer

Old novels tend to have an omniscient author. He or she knows everything about the actions, thoughts, motives and feelings of all the fictional persons, and occasionally comments on them in small asides to the reader, asides like this one: “Poor Georg! Dear reader. Before you totally condemn him, we would like to intervene with some words in excuse for his behaviour!” With this comment, Norway’s first feminist novelist Camilla Collett in 1855 tried to make the reader more mildly disposed towards Georg, the principal male character of her famous novel *The Governor’s daughters*. Today, this style of writing is considered very old-fashioned. The author is expected to choose a viewpoint, usually the viewpoint of one of the principal characters, and try, through her writing, to create the illusion that we are inside this person’s head and sees the world, the other characters and all that goes on in the novel from the perspective of the chosen person. The more different the chosen person’s life, experience and circumstances are from those of the author, the more difficult and demanding this undertaking is. The illusion may collapse, and with it, the novel. In my own novel *The Homecoming*, the viewpoint is with the adult social worker Emilie and not with the five-year old war-damaged boy Heinz, and this is not accidental.

Also in social science, “the omniscient knower” has been subjected to critique. The allegedly neutral and objective researcher, who is able to establish the true facts, unhampered by the partiality, passions and prejudices of the people that are under study, has for a long time been under attack. He or she has a generalized gaze, seeing the world from no particular vantage point, as if floating freely in space. This style of researcher performs “the God trick”, says feminist anthropologist Donna Haraway. But researchers are not gods. They are persons rooted in specific circumstances, historical, geographical and social; they occupy positions in systems of class, gender and ethnicity, all of which condition their experiences, thoughts and feelings, and colours the spectacles through which they see the world. The result is not omniscience and privileged access to truth, but positioned knowledge. Researchers should be conscious of their position, and reflect on how it influences their perspective.

Fiction and social science have chosen different roads of departure away from omniscience. While the novelist tries to inhabit *another*, albeit fictional person and create

convincing subjectivities, the researcher grapples with his/her *own* subjectivity, striving to understand how it is shaping his/her way of knowing.

In 2000, I published a novel called “Bird of Paradise”. The principal characters are Hjalmar and Jørgen, two boys who are inmates of a large institution for the mentally retarded. The book describes their lives from early childhood until mature adult age. In the short, introductory chapter, I comment on my own position as a writer:

“The story takes place in the dark, hidden rooms of society, where we shut away those that do not belong among us. (...) But I belong among us. In consequence, I am unable to give voice to the principal characters of this book. I can’t even speak *on behalf of* them, only *of* them. Without difficulty, I could have spoken on behalf of several of the subordinate characters, for example the young woman who was loved by Hjalmar, and returned love with disgust; or the competent psychologist, who, in her zealous efforts to achieve improvements, was just about to do irreparable harm. If I had to, I could even have spoken on behalf of the ambitious and visionary psychiatrist that ruled the institution.”

Reading this now, I recognize that the position in which I place myself, is more similar to the researcher’s than to the novelist’s. I do not venture to convincingly create the subjectivities of Hjalmar and Jørgen, two boys that lived their lives at the lowest possible floor of society’s hierarchy, two boys that were defined out of normalcy and into inferiority. I admit, and explicitly comment on the limitations that my own position in society places on my capability to know, understand and identify. In this way, I warn the reader: I am not an omniscient god, just an honest writer trying modestly to do my best.

In the novel, I also comment on the difficulties involved in imparting knowledge and experience upwards, from those of low to those of higher standing in society. I quote: Knowledge and experience from below “confronts the top-down blindness and deafness that is the incurable flaw of normalcy. There may be a seeing and hearing spot in this blindness and deafness. To hit these spots, however, knowledge and experience from below will have to shrink to almost nothing. Let’s take an experience like a rose. To get through, it would have to peel off both the petals and the thorns./.../ Did Hjalmar and Jørgen understand what they were up against? Or did they, expectantly, dress in fabrics patterned like feathers of paradise birds, but were met with silly cries that they had nothing on?”

As the reader may have noticed, there are no roses in this book. And no birds of paradise. Even the author is staring blindly from above. However, let me at least write the *possibility* – the possibility of roses, the possibility of birds of paradise.”

Top-down blindness and deafness is the incurable flaw of normalcy – that is my contention in the novel. This flaw makes it very hard to imagine the possibility that roses and birds of paradise might exist among the deviant and defective, among the bearers of innumerable diagnoses. It makes it very hard to understand how it feels to be at the receiving end of the various measures of help, treatment and control that people we define out of normalcy are subjected to. And it makes it very hard to accept that what we intend as blessings may be experienced as violations by the receivers.

Top-down blindness and deafness exist among lay people and politicians, among practitioners and administrators in the health and social services. It even exists among researchers.

So what do we do? The honest and reflective researcher, conscious that her knowledge is conditioned by the position she occupies in time and place and in the social hierarchy, dutifully reports on this in her writing, to avoid being accused of trying to perform the “God trick”. The reflection may also include the traditions and concepts of the researcher’s scientific discipline and the way they pattern what she is able to see and catch, as well as the wider cultural discourses she is influenced by. Perhaps she also comments on her institutional affiliation, her source of financing and the conventions that directs the kind of work she is creating, be it a doctoral thesis, an article in a peer-reviewed journal or whatever.

This reflective stance is very praiseworthy. It gives us insight into the process of production of scientific knowledge and opens our eyes to the constraints of that process. However, does it necessarily bring us more insight into the lives and experiences of people who are defined out of normalcy or worthiness and into some category that continues to carry a stain, no matter how often its name is changed?

I do not deny the value of reflection, not at all. To do something about the problem that I have called top-down blindness and deafness, we have to recognize its existence. The rejection of the God trick and the reflection on the positioned and conditioned character of our knowledge has helped us do that. However, I sometimes wonder if it has also turned our interest more towards ourselves at the expense of our research subjects.

Perhaps top-down blindness is really incurable, as I state in my novel. However, it may be possible to widen the seeing spot. I am not convinced that more and more sophisticated reflections on the position of the researcher are sufficient to achieve that.

To create a convincing character from whose point of view the story is told, the novelist has to have detailed and sensual knowledge. She has to strain her imagination and

empathy to the utmost and have an ardent will to understand the kind of person she is trying to bring to life. She may fail. But if she succeeds, the result may make us see, feel and understand in an intimate way

Researchers have moved from denying into accepting and reflecting on the limitations of the knowledge that they produce. We cannot fully transcend our own perspective. All the same, I wonder: Do researchers have something to learn from novelists? Do we need some of their boldness in using imagination and empathy, some of their passionate interest in their characters, some of their will to come painfully close? Not in exchange for scientific knowledge and reflection, but in addition to. Perhaps such boldness is what it takes to meet one of the most difficult challenges in social science research: to widen the seeing spot in the top down blindness.

3) The informant as a creative story-teller.

As mentioned, Eva Simonsen and I conducted life story interviews as part of our research on German- Norwegian war children. Life stories are necessarily retrospective and reconstructive, or better, constructive. Even if we covered the whole life span, we were primarily interested in the childhood years of our interviewees, who were in, or nearing their sixties at the time of the interviews. Our research task was to establish what it was like to grow up as a war child in important arenas like school, neighbourhood, family and institutions. Retrospective interviews of the kind we carried through raise difficult questions, both in regard to the accuracy of memory, and in regard to the relation between life as *lived* and life as *told*. Much research demonstrates that remembering is a creative process. Stereotypes and doxic patterns, common cultural themes, images and models borrowed from literature, movies and popular culture are employed, consciously or unconsciously, in shaping the remembered past – both *what* is remembered and *how* it is remembered. Personal memory exists in an easy or strained dialogue with collective memory. Remembrance and story-telling is furthermore important in the construction of personal identity and relations to others: Of an, in principle unlimited amount of memories, primarily those of relevance to the individual's construction of personal identity and relations to others in the present may actually be remembered.

Retrospective stories cannot be trusted as true and simple renderings of what happened in the past. During our interviews, we got several reminders of this. Some of the stories our interviewees told, seemed to be too good to be true. Many interviewees were very apt at telling colourful anecdotes. One man told us that once in his youth he went to take a course in

a part of Norway far from his own home. The course was successful, and in the evening this man, Simon, went to the nearest hotel to eat, drink and celebrate. Outside the hotel his attention was caught by two teenagers, playing on the lawn. An old man was sitting on a bench, shouting to the teenagers in German. The teenage boys and the old man were obviously tourists. At that time Simon always took a close look at elderly German men – what if this man was his father? This episode happened long before Simon started to search for his father in earnest. Many years later Simon again visited the hotel where he had seen the elderly German man with the two teenage boys. He leafed through the guest book, and found his fathers signature on the bottom of a page. When he turned the page, he saw his own signature from his former visit – on the top of the new page! His fathers signature and his own, separated only by the turn of a page.

When Simon was a child, his mother forbade him to talk about his father, and she told him nothing about him. After his mother's death, Simon started, rather reluctantly at first, to search for his German family. When he finally got into contact with his family in Germany, he learnt that his father had died the year before. The anecdote of the two signatures vividly expresses and intensifies the feeling of loss: So close – and yet so distant!

Another man, Stein, had a very hard time at school, being harassed by both teachers and co-pupils. He still does not know how to read and write. Despite his illiteracy, he has managed to earn a living, partly as a sailor, partly as a joiner. This achievement he attributes to the practical training he received in his childhood, from his grandfather and his two maternal uncles. Stein seems to regard his strength, stamina and ability to cope as a legacy from his male relatives on his mother's side. In Stein's story, his male relatives appear almost like monuments to the strength and dignity of the working man. Their strength is dramatized through this anecdote: When Stein was six years old, his grandfather worked on the other side of the fjord, where a road was under construction. At that time, the summers were warm and lovely. Stein remembers that his grandfather came swimming home across the fjord, a distance of two kilometers. He was swimming with his clothes on his head.

The literal accuracy of anecdotes of this kind may certainly be questioned. However, what if interviewees telling the story of their life employ methods that are not so different from those of the author of fiction? The writer of fiction tries to create episodes that vividly express the salient themes and issues of the novel. And this is how we interpreted the stories that were too good to be true: We saw our informants as creative storytellers, using colourful anecdotes as condensed and vivid expressions of salient themes and issues in the way they experienced their lives. As such the anecdotes had great value, and constituted important clues

in the interpretation of the life stories. There may be more truths than the literal truth, not only in fiction, but also in social science research.

4) To show or to tell.

“Show, don’t tell” is often presented as one of the commandments that should not be sinned against when writing fiction. Instead of telling the reader that the protagonists are crushed by sorrow or consumed by anger and hatred, you should describe their actions, behaviour, and sensations in a way that makes the reader recognize and identify with the characters’ state. It is hard not to sin against this commandment when writing. To show rather than tell takes keen observation and very particular knowledge, in addition to the words that make others see and know what the writer sees and knows.

Telling is so much easier. May this be the case in social science as well?

I once held a course in psychology in cooperation with a small psychiatric institution for young people. Participants in the course were partly university students in psychology, partly the employees of the institution. In one of the first lessons, the chief psychologist described the young patients of the institution, to give us from the university a picture of their clientele. When the psychologist had finished her presentation, one of the women working at the ward in daily contact with the patients, turned to her and said: “I do not understand whom you are talking about.”

The psychologist had spoken in the language of her discipline, with its share of technical concepts, generalisations and diagnostic categories. For her non- psychologist colleague, designations like borderline and weak ego structure did not translate into the young people she knew from her work in the ward. Every day, she tried to get these young people out of bed in the morning. She tried to make them keep their rooms reasonably tidy, and to make them tell her what was the matter instead of screaming and throwing things at her. She strove to convince them to give other people a chance to prove that they meant well instead of immediately including every new acquaintance in the large and steadily growing camp of the enemy. Borderline? Weak ego structure? The psychologist had told, but she had certainly not shown.

I do not contest that professionals and researchers need specialised concepts. And we need to make generalisations and abstractions. Sometimes, however, I feel that such concepts and abstractions serve to hide rather than present the subject matter we want to talk about. I am reminded of some critical voices that were raised against Basil Bernstein’s famous theory

on class differences in language: According to Bernstein, the middle class speaks in an “elaborated code”, characterized by a more complicated and varied structure, a more logical construction and a higher level of abstraction than the language of the working class. The “restricted code” of the working class makes it difficult to think in logical terms and to grasp abstract concepts. This “restricted code” is responsible for the school failure of working class children. Bernstein’s theory has been very influential, and has inspired many practical efforts to improve the school achievements of underprivileged children.

The linguist William Labov, in a critique of Bernstein’s theory, remarks:

“It is true that technical and scientific books are written in a style which is markedly ‘middle-class’. But unfortunately, we often fail to achieve the explicitness and precision which we look for in such writing; and the speech of many middle-class people departs maximally from this target. (...) The accumulating flow of words buries rather than strikes the target. It is this verbosity which is most easily taught and most easily learned so that words take the place of thought, and nothing can be found behind them.”

I shall not venture here to express absolute verdicts on the respective merits of Bernstein’s and Labov’s views, though I have to admit to a certain sympathy with Labov. Some middle class people, not least academics, seem to be as unable to think in concrete terms as working class people is said to be unable to think in abstract terms. If you say to them: “I do not understand. Could you please give me a concrete example of what you are talking about?” they offer their abstractions in a slightly different manner. While writers of fiction are encouraged to “show, don’t tell”, academic teaching and writing sometimes adheres to the opposite thesis: “Tell, don’t show.” I must confess that I am deeply suspicious of knowledge that is very difficult to exemplify in a concrete way. One may easily wonder what, if anything, is to be found behind the elegant, abstract formulations.

I am *not* issuing a postmodernist appeal to tell only particular stories, since every kind of generalization is also a violation, suppressing differences and making someone or something invisible. Science is not feasible without generalisations. However, sometimes lofty generalisations and abstractions may be an easy way of hiding, not least to the researcher herself, the lack of concrete and in-depth knowledge.

Researchers often discuss the difficult task of conveying their research to practitioners. Technical language and academic jargon may be a hindrance to communication. In my view, it is not only a question of getting the message of the researcher through to the practitioner.

We should also regard meetings between researchers and practitioners as a test of our knowledge. I do not say that only knowledge that is immediately useful in a practical context is of value, far from it. But our knowledge should *make sense* to people in the practical field.

In my experience, researchers are not necessarily very good at making recipes for “How to do it”. We are better at pointing to dilemmas, conflicts of value, truths that are taken for granted, but should be questioned and reflected on, conceptions and practises that live on under new names and new disguises from one historical period to the next. Researchers are not immersed in daily, practical problems that have to be solved *now*, we do not live with the imperative to *do something*, whether or not we can be sure that what we decide to do will help or harm. As researchers, we are allowed take a step back and ponder what goes on, and use our training and ability to identify general patterns and overarching structures. However, if we are not able to show concretely how the dilemmas we point to, or the taken –for-granted truths we criticise are active in the daily work of practitioners, we may do well to question our generalisations. Research should be able, both to tell and to show.

I sometimes take my master students in criminology to the National picture gallery, which is located in the near vicinity of our institute. Before entering the picture galleries, we make a stop in the hall, and I ask the students to draw a daisy on a piece of paper. When asked to draw a daisy, nearly all of us will first draw a small circle, which is then surrounded by oblong petals, placed evenly around the circle. After this little exercise, we go to look at a painting by the Norwegian artist Harald Sohlberg, named “Flowering meadow in the North”. The painting shows a meadow full of white daisies, glowing in the northern summer night. When we look close, we see that very few of Sohlberg’s daisies resemble the little circle evenly surrounded by oblong petals. Every daisy is different, and seen from various angles as they bend and bow.

What we tend to produce when asked to draw a daisy, is the general idea, or even stereotype, of a daisy. To paint his picture, Sohlberg had to have intimate, concrete knowledge of daisies, and a passionate interest in all their various apparitions. By filling his canvas, not with replicas of the general idea of a daisy, but with an abundance of difference and concrete detail, he has created an image that strikes the onlooker as a universally valid representation of a flowering meadow in a northern summer night.

What I try to communicate to my students by taking them to see Sohlberg’s picture, is the importance of looking closely, of trying to push aside the stereotyped daisies of the mind and seek concrete and detailed knowledge of the phenomena they are studying. Sometimes our academic concepts and abstractions function like the stereotyped daisy. We think we

know what a daisy is, and forget to look. And if we do, we will not be able to show, only to tell in a very meagre way.

For my presentation, I have borrowed the title of Carol Gilligan's well known book *In a different voice*. What Gilligan tries to demonstrate in her book, is that men and women tend to differ in their ways of moral reasoning, and that the one kind of moral logic should not be deemed superior to the other. Perhaps we need both ways to make full blown moral judgements.

Fiction and social science represent different voices and different gazes, and we need both to know the world. In my view, neither should give up their specific ways and identity. All the same: Perhaps we should venture to trespass on the grounds of each other more often – to search for the birds of paradise and the daisies that we might find there.